

Early Years and Extended Services

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment – Executive Summary

Duties within the Childcare Act 2006 require Local Authorities to shape and support the development of childcare provision in their area (so far as reasonably practicable). The aim is to enable parents to find childcare that meets their needs locally and make real choices about their lives.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment will enable the Local Authority to identify gaps in the market and, in consultation, plan how to support the market to address these gaps. It will form part of the overall needs assessment, consultation and preparation for the Children and Young Peoples Plan and will address the current level of supply and the demand for childcare within Herefordshire.

The authority pro-actively sought to survey Providers, Service users, Parents, Employers, Planners and Schools and worked with a partner to consult countywide with parents. The authority details in the assessment its current understanding of the market and its gaps; this understanding was further shaped by the outcome of further supply and demand mapping and the outcome of consultations.

The findings are, briefly, as follows:

- Two thirds of respondents use childcare at present however the pattern across the county varies area to area
- Non users of Childcare tend to have lower income levels
- Users are likely to be employed (or self employed) and work more than 16 hrs weekly
- Non users are less likely than users to want to be in work
- Non users are likely to have only children over 5
- Over 40% of all non users of childcare were able to fit the care of their children around their work hours, these families are referred as “Adaptors”
- Few families saw a lack of childcare as preventing them from working, they made do with what was available and greater choice would only allow them to adapt in a different manner
- Each family has an ideal pattern of childcare and in the main those with younger children (0-5) are most happy with the pattern they already adhere to. Those with over 5’s would like to move away from the use of

friends and relatives to formalised after school clubs – this is the greatest area of unmet demand

- Parents appear to understate the need for childcare as informal care is rarely seen as childcare – there is therefore a latent demand to be explored
- 72% of respondents use NEF places within Herefordshire, however the LA is funding over 85% of eligible children
- Quality of childcare is seen as the most important factor for over 75% of respondents
- At least 25% of respondents had childcare needs outside of “normal working hours”
- Parents of children with special needs see the lack of respite care as their priority, accessing childcare as a general issue was not seen as high on their agenda as many feel expected to stay at home as cares; childcare is therefore “not needed”

Based on these findings the assessment concludes that actions for Herefordshire are based on the following theme gaps that have been highlighted by the report:

- Out of School provision for 8-14 year olds coupled with demand from parents for early morning and early evening care highlights a gap across categories which, if filled, will support parents who work and parents who wish to return to work.
- Variable hours care particularly for 0-8 years of age. Parents who work part time demand a more flexible pattern of care for their children. This may mean different days each week or a pattern of care alternating weekly.
- Holiday childcare for all ages in all areas
- Cost of childcare countywide appears underestimated by parents particularly those who have younger children, however it is not high on parents list of priorities when accessing childcare
- Nursery Education Funding (3 and 4 year old) take up is >85% countywide although some sub local authority areas are lower. There is no indication that children are not accessing NEF because of lack of places, however, if the PVI settings expand their NEF capacity to meet demand the capacity for non-NEF places is diminished.
- Issues surround the extension of hours from 12.5 weekly to 15 as both PVI settings and maintained settings require extension of staff hours. Those settings running in leased buildings may have difficulty extending lease hours.
- Rurality and transport issues are raised by parents and settings as a restriction upon parents and their ability to maintain care for their children outside of school hours and to return to work, increase hours at work or study
- Some Wards in certain Children’s Centre areas have less than 800 0-14 year olds in them and based on the ratios detailed in the text settings in these areas, unless subsidised hugely, would have sustainability issues

- Care for children with special needs/disability is an issue, which the LA must explore more fully over the coming period. Parents of children's with disability did not in general highlight particular gaps. What was apparent was that the whole sector appears closed to them because of the position in which parents find themselves
- Individual sub-local authority areas have gaps in supply which development work by the Early Years and Extended Schools team will work to close
- Neighbouring Authorities do not see gaps in the sufficiency of childcare from their interactions with parents but local employers do see a need for flexible hours care.
- There remains a need to consult further with parents of children with disability and children regarding childcare sufficiency and plans will be made over the coming period (prior to the next Assessment publication date of March 2010) to pursue this avenue as a priority.

Herefordshire Council will need to prioritise the need to close the above gaps within its action planning for Childcare Sufficiency, which will be carried out once the assessment has been ratified via consultation with partners and public.

The duty to secure sufficient childcare locally re-enforces partnership with the private and voluntary sectors and expands and clarifies the role of the local authority as strategic leaders in facilitating the childcare market. To enable the identified gaps to be closed the LA will play a strategic role in "commissioning" services locally using effective local planning and partnerships, fairness of funding, regulation via Nursery Education Funding agreements and requirements placed on financial assistance, Business support, long term and one off financial support to groups or parents, extended services in and around schools and formal commissioning of services.