

Oxfordshire County Council

Executive Summary for the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment



January 2008

1. Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006 requires every local authority in England to conduct a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. The aim of this Assessment is to provide Oxfordshire County Council with the information it needs to identify gaps in the market and plan the steps to secure sufficient childcare. In this context, 'sufficient' means having the right type and volume of childcare to meet the needs of all parents/carers in the local community, but with a particular focus on meeting the needs of families with disabled children and those who are in work or who are seeking work.

The Assessment identifies gaps in childcare in relation to:

- Types of childcare available
- Age gaps
- Affordability
- Opening times
- Flexibility
- Geography
- Families with disabled children
- Families in work
- Families seeking work

On what evidence is the Assessment and Executive Summary based?

- Analysis of the supply of registered childcare.
- Analysis of demographic and socio-economic factors that may affect the demand and ability to pay for childcare.
- Consultation with parents/carers: 1,341 responded to a questionnaire about childcare and 27 participated in focus groups. In addition, 28 children were consulted via focus groups.
- Consultation with childcare providers: 507 questionnaires and 25 focus group participants.
- Projections of the number of childcare places required, using four different scenarios, up to 2010.

2. Gaps in the types of childcare

- The main gap in the type of childcare available is in relation to holiday provision. Parents/carers report that holiday provision is less likely to fully meet their needs. Data on supply shows that there is a much higher number of children per place during school holidays than during term time (3.9 compared to 2.6). Matching demand with supply suggests that a rate of at least 3.3 children per place during school holidays would be needed.
- The overall stock of childcare within Oxfordshire appears healthy. Nearly 75% of providers are planning to be offering childcare in 5 years or more time. In addition, 12.3% have plans to increase the number of places.
- There is evidence from consultations with parents/carers that more childcare is required. Parents/carers would like 13.6% of respondent children to attend more formal childcare. This is the fourth highest improvement suggestion. The main types of childcare that parents/carers would like to access are after-school clubs and breakfast clubs.
- Increasing the number of places is likely to benefit: households where all parents/carers work full-time; where at least one parent/carer is studying or training; where at least one parent/carer is seeking work; and where annual income is under £12,000. Parents/carers with children aged 8, 9 or 10 years old; and with disabled children are also more likely to benefit.

3. Age gaps

- Only 5.3% of those who do not use childcare say that it is because there is nothing suitable for the age of their child.
- Responses from parents/carers suggest that provision for children aged 5 years and over should be a priority: childcare is less likely to be meeting needs, and is more likely to require improvements; in particular in relation to quality, location, choice, and provision during school holidays.
- Parents/carers who use childcare highlight a number of improvement suggestions for children of different ages. The key area for improvement for 0-2 year olds is affordability and for 3 and 4 year olds flexibility. 8, 9 and 10 year olds would benefit most from childcare being available at different times and being able to access more or different types of provision. 11, 12, 13 and 14 year olds and 15, 16 and 17 year olds are less likely to have their overall needs being met.

4. Affordability gaps

- There is general agreement across stakeholders in Oxfordshire that childcare should be more affordable and that this is the priority for improvement. For instance:
 1. 17.7% of parents/carers who do not use childcare say that this is because it is too expensive.
 2. Childcare for 26.7% of respondent children could be improved by being more affordable. This view is supported in focus groups with parents/carers.
 3. Cost was seen as the main barrier to take-up by childcare providers in focus groups and in the questionnaire.
- Data on supply shows that the average hourly rate for full day care in Oxfordshire is £3.24 which is above South East and England averages of £2.80 and £2.70 respectively. After school clubs are more expensive per hour compared to the regional average (£2.84 compared to £2.40) as are holiday schemes (£2.36 compared to £1.60). Sessional care hourly costs are in-line with regional averages (£2.26 compared to £2.20) but are above the England average (of £1.90) and childminder costs are in line with regional averages (£3.50 per hour compared to £3.40).

- With 15.1% of providers reporting that they have plans in place over the next 18 months to significantly increase fees, the gaps in affordability are likely to continue, if not widen. In addition, childminders are most likely to report a plan to increase fees suggesting a disproportionate impact on those who currently use childminders.
- The following groups are more likely to highlight affordability as an area for improvement for their children: parents/carers from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds; households where all parents/carers work full-time; households where at least one parent/carer has irregular working patterns; households where at least one parent/carer is studying or training; households with only one child; parents/carers using childcare for a child aged 2 years and under.

5. Gaps in opening times

- Only 5.0% of respondents who do not use childcare highlight opening times as a barrier to uptake.
- Of those who do use childcare, 15.6% of childcare could be improved by being available at different times.
- Priorities for improvement in opening times are: 8am to 6pm (43% of requests); 7am to 8am (27% of requests); after 6pm (23% of requests); and before 7am (7% of requests).
- Improvements to opening times are more likely to benefit children in: households where all parents/carers work full-time; households where at least one parent/carer is studying or training; households where at least one parent/carer is seeking work; households with only one child; and age band 8, 9 and 10 years old.

6. Gaps in flexibility

- Only 5.3% of those who do not use childcare say that this is because provision is insufficiently flexible.
- However, flexibility is the second highest improvement suggestion from parents/carers who currently use childcare. The childcare for 17.0% of respondent children could be improved by being more flexible. Childcare providers agree with this, giving flexibility of provision the lowest

rating (alongside affordability and number of places).

- Responses in parent/carer questionnaires and focus groups suggest that an improvement in flexibility would particularly benefit respondent children aged 3 and 4 years and, to a lesser extent, those aged 2 years and under and (from focus groups) those who used nursery provision.

7. Gaps in geography

- Overall the location of childcare is viewed positively within Oxfordshire:
 1. Only 3.9% of those who do not use childcare say that this is because it is in the wrong location.
 2. Parents/carers generally agree with the statement that 'childcare is well-located'.
 3. Childcare for only 5.6% of respondent children could be improved by being in a different location.
 4. Location and accessibility was given the second highest rating (after quality) by childcare providers.
- Improvements to the location of childcare are more likely to benefit households with disabled children and those only with children aged 5 years and over.

Views of children on childcare

As part of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, children were asked their views about childcare in the county. The views of 28 children were collected via focus groups. In summary:

- Children liked engaging in activities with their friends which they perceived as 'fun', including a range of physical and more sedentary/indoor pursuits.
- All attended the after-school club as their parents/carers worked, and most children said that their parents/carers had chosen the service for them.
- Although most children had positive experiences and comments about the club that they attended, most could cite a place that they would rather be, if they were given the choice. This could include their own or a friend's homes, or engaging in other formal activities (e.g. sport).
- Children listed a number of proposed improvements to the clubs including the purchase of additional equipment and games, but also being treated with a greater deal of respect, autonomy and fairness.

8. Meeting the needs of disabled children

- The childcare for 45.5% of disabled children does not fully meet needs.
- Parents/carers are less likely to strongly agree that they are satisfied with their current childcare or that it caters for their disabled children's needs.
- Childcare providers give provision for disabled children one of the lowest ratings.
- Responses to the questionnaire and focus groups highlighted the following areas for improvement:
 1. Choice of childcare: parents/carers would like better choice of childcare and would like this to be affordable and high quality. Childcare providers would welcome more support and funding to help them cater for disabled children.
 2. Parents/carers would like more opportunities for their disabled child to attend formal childcare. Childcare providers report that they need further support and advice in catering for disabled children.
 3. Respondents are more likely to request improvements to the location of childcare.
 4. Information and advice: parents/carers reported that finding childcare was time consuming, stressful and frustrating. Childcare providers agree and suggest that services for disabled children should be better marketed and that the number of providers should be expanded.
 5. Affordability: childcare providers highlighted that it was unfair to pass on to parents/carers any additional costs incurred in supporting a disabled child. They suggested that further support be given to enable childcare to be appropriate but affordable.

9. Meeting the needs of families who are in work

- 69.4% of those who use childcare do so in order to work.
- There is overall satisfaction amongst working families with childcare. Childcare providers support this view. There may be a gap in provision for families where at least one parent/carer works irregular

hours: this group is more likely to report that their childcare needs are not being fully met.

- Generally, households with at least one parent/carer in employment do not want their child to attend more childcare. The only exception to this is households where both parents/carers work full-time.
- There are differences between working families in the improvements they would like to see made:
 1. Affordability: households where all parents/carers are working full-time and those where at least one parent works irregular patterns are more likely to request improvements in affordability. In focus groups, childcare providers agree that working families would benefit from more affordable provision.
 2. Opening times: households where all parents/carers are working full-time are more likely to request improvements to opening times.
 3. Other suggestions for improvements from childcare providers included: increasing the length and flexibility of hours and provision of more breakfast clubs and after-school clubs. Provision during school holidays (especially half-term holidays and over the summer) were highlighted as areas for improvement.

10. Meeting the needs of families who are seeking work

- The childcare for 52.8% of respondent children in households where at least one parent/carer is seeking work report that their childcare is not fully meeting their needs.
- In addition, 45.6% of children in households where at least one parent/carer is studying or training report that their childcare needs are not being fully met. This latter group is also less likely to have their needs met over the school holidays: 86.0% report that their needs are not being fully met over the school holidays.
- There is general agreement between these two groups of parents/carers about the improvements they would like made to childcare in Oxfordshire:
 1. Both would prefer to use family and friends for their childcare, but also want

their children to attend more or different types of childcare.

2. Both would like provision to be available at different times.
 3. Parents/carers who are studying or training would also like provision to be more affordable.
- A different emphasis in relation to gaps came across in focus groups with parents/carers and with providers. The main view here was that childcare needs to be more flexible, to enable parents/carers to attend courses and/or search for work. Affordability was also highlighted as a key issue, as well as the need for more childcare places attached to studying/training courses.
 - Recent proposals for Welfare Reforms (*Ready for work: full employment in our generation*, 2007, DWP) will put an increasing emphasis on supporting lone parents with older children into work. Localities with the highest number of lone parents are: Banbury, Bicester/Kidlington, and Witney/Eynsham/Woodstock.

11. Projections

Four scenarios were created to look at changes in the number of places that might be required by 2010. The overall findings for Oxfordshire are presented in the box below. Please note that changes in the number of places are based on 2007 supply.

Scenario 1: Each locality in Oxfordshire has the county-average number of children per place

Term-time: 127 fewer places required
School holidays: 179 extra places required

Scenario 2: Averages are maintained with projected population changes

Term-time: 185 extra places required
School holidays: 386 extra places required

Scenario 3a: 3%, 5% and 8% uplifts in number of places required

Term-time: 851, 1,295 and 1,960 extra places respectively
School holidays: 834, 1,130, and 1,574 extra places respectively

Scenario 3b: uplift in number of places required dependent on response to questionnaire question on "I would like my child to attend more childcare"

Term-time: 1,398 extra places required
School holidays: 1,196 extra places required