

CHAPTER SIX - DEMAND FOR CHILDCARE VIEWS OF STAKEHOLDERS PART TWO

6.1. Parents/carers

6.1.1. Focus groups

11 focus groups with parents and carers were held in summer 2007 – with the help on some occasions of Coda Consultants and Rosemary Lamport.

Many thanks to the parents/carers who took part and to the colleagues/partners who helped with the arrangements. See Appendix F for further details.

Set out below is the report on the findings of these discussions.

Report on focus groups of parents/carers

6.1.1.a. Introduction

The household survey of parents was complemented by 11 focus groups and three telephone interviews, to get a more in-depth view of the issues.

An interpreter was available at the three focus groups with black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. A template was used for each meeting (see Appendix E).

The groups were held between July and September 2007. The table below shows the number of participants at each group. A total of 88 parents were consulted through these groups and three through telephone interview.

Target group	Numbers of parents participating
Parents of children with disabilities/SEN	24 (9, 9 and 6)
Three groups held in different settings to include parents of under and over fives	
Parents from BME communities	
• Somali	8 + 1 from Mauritius
• Turkish	9
• Latin-American/Spanish speaking	6
• Congolese Telephone interviews	3
Young mums	6
General	
• Parents' Forum	9
• Group at Hungerford primary/ Goodinge Children's Centre	13
• Group recruited from household survey	7
• Group recruited mainly from household survey	5
Total number of parents	91

In addition, household surveys were carried out by a Bangladeshi community link worker and a Somali link worker – findings were incorporated into Chapter Five.

6.1.1.b. Use of childcare

Parents were asked what childcare they currently used, why they used it and whether this use (or non-use) was likely to change.

Types of childcare used

- The parents used a mix of provision, largely depending on the age of their child/ren and their circumstances.
- Many under fives children were in full or sessional daycare; parents of the latter were less likely to be working or studying full time, and were also using drop-ins. Mostly the

childcare was in children's centres or community nurseries rather than private provision.

- Out of school services for disabled and non-disabled children – after school and holidays – were all used, but many parents found regular use difficult to afford.
- Some parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) had direct payments to employ childminders, many made use of childminders on an occasional basis.
- Nannies and aupairs were not widely employed.
- Most saw family and friends as essential backup.
- For some parents, trust was an issue – they did not want to leave their children with a stranger/s.
- There was generally little knowledge of childcare provided outside the borough, as most parents wanted childcare close to home, but it was something considered by those working or studying further away.

Reasons for using childcare

- This varied across groups: While to be able to work was important to most parents (and studying to a lesser extent), it was not the key determinant for all.
- Important too were the social aspects – routine, stimulation, interaction with others (for both parent and child).
- For parents of disabled children, respite – for the child, the parents and siblings – was paramount.

Likelihood of change

- Parents generally did not expect their needs to change, especially if they were current childcare users.
- A few parents said they would like to go back to work or study at a later date; some thought that finding suitable childcare might be a barrier to this.
- Parents of disabled children foresaw problems when their child got older, e.g. accessing suitable breakfast, after school clubs and holiday schemes.

Quotes on use of childcare:

“I need it to keep my job!”

“As a first time parent, I wanted my child to be able to interact with other children.”

“I use childcare to let my children experience activities and sports at lower cost.”

“Active kids need extended school.”

6.1.1.c. Important factors in choosing childcare

The groups considered a list of factors and then were asked to identify the four most important.

The factors were: safety and security, close to home, close to sibling's school, close to work, close to place of study, at home, qualified staff, atmosphere, quality of facilities, opening hours and days, catering for special needs, Ofsted-registered, costs and charges and meeting cultural and religious needs (this last one was asked at most but not all groups).

The top ranked factors were as follows:

Safety	top in all the groups asked (11)
Qualified staff	in top four in 9 of the 11
Costs	in top 4 of 7 of the 11
Atmosphere, close to home/work, Ofsted registered also ranked highly (4 apiece)	

Summary of discussion about each of the factors:

Safety and security

- This factor was, as might be expected, paramount in every group, though in some it was “taken as read” and there was not a lot of further discussion about it.
- For many parents, it was tied into discussions about qualified staff; others considered food safety and trust relevant aspects, alongside physical safety.

Close to home work/study/schools etc

- Parents generally felt this was important, and that childcare should be a maximum of 20-30 minutes (on foot/by public transport) from wherever they were, be it home, study or work. This was so they could respond quickly to problems/emergencies. They also didn’t want their children having to travel for a long time.
- As children got older this became less of an issue, but the logistics of siblings in different places came into play (especially for bigger families).
- For a smaller number of parents, proximity was not an issue and they would be prepared to travel to get what they thought was the best childcare.
- Few had considered using out of borough childcare.

At home

- This was not generally seen as a preferred option and did not generate much discussion.

Qualified staff

- Qualified staff was closely tied in with safety, and came second in the ranking of factors.
- Experience too came into discussions on this point and some groups discussed the relative merits of qualifications versus experience: experience was sometimes considered to be of equal, if not greater importance.

Atmosphere

- This was another key issue for parents and while it did not generate huge debate, it was highly ranked.
- Parents felt this was something they could only judge for themselves.

Quality of facilities

- Here too parents felt it was something they needed to check out first.

- Outside space for children to be able to play was an important aspect for many of the groups.

Opening hours and days

- Although not at top of list (equal fourth), flexibility and hours generated a lot of discussion in the groups.
- Parents felt their childcare should accommodate parents' own commitments, their routines as well as external givens like working and college hours.
- Parents also wanted their childcare hours and days not to be fixed and to be flexible enough to respond to changes in circumstances.

Caters for SEN/disabilities

- This factor did not figure particularly highly in the ranking, only ranked in top four in one of the SEN groups, for the others it appears to have been 'taken as read'.
- Parents in the three dedicated groups and in some of the other groups nevertheless had much to say about facilities for disabled children (see section H).

Ofsted-registered

- This was important to most parents and equal fourth in the ranking.
- While a key factor, parents felt it was not necessarily a guarantee of quality or safety/security.
- Some saw it as a key issue when looking for a childminder, others that it would be important if something were to go wrong.

Costs and charges

- Parents felt this was a key factor, it was ranked third behind safety and qualified staff.
- It was an issue for parents in all of the groups, but not always the prime consideration when looking for childcare.
- For some, the cost of childcare was seen as prohibitive and a barrier to using it.
- Parents felt there should be more support for them to afford childcare - it was particularly difficult for large families.

Catering for cultural/faith needs

- This was an additional factor included in the discussion in some groups. See the points made below under BME groups in section 6.1.1.h.

Quotes on important factors in choosing childcare:

"Continuity is more important to the child [than proximity]."

"I am prepared to go anywhere in the borough to get the right services."

"Cheerful staff with right attitude."

"Most important my children are happy; I want them to have a nice experience."

"Atmosphere – you can sense it when you walk in."

6.1.1.d. Satisfaction with childcare

Where time allowed, the same factors were considered to gauge parents' views of quality and satisfaction of the childcare they currently used.

On the whole, parents were satisfied with their childcare in terms of the key factors.

There was some comment about the lack of space and outside facilities in some childcare provision, which led into a discussion about play facilities in the borough.

Quotes on satisfaction with childcare:

"My children are excited by their day – almost don't want to go home."
"I chose community nursery with good outdoor space."

6.1.1.e. Barriers to childcare

Barriers to accessing childcare included:

- Getting a place/waiting lists
- Flexibility
- Cost of childcare
- Language barrier for some in the BME groups – both accessing work/study and information about childcare
- Lack of knowledge of some agencies, e.g. JobCentre Plus
- Parents felt more support to access childcare should be available
- Working Tax Credit was seen as putting people off rather than supporting them

Quotes on barriers to childcare:

"You need to be on the waiting list for two years."
"As a single parent, I can only afford after school or breakfast club – not both."
"As a full-time working parent, I feel marginalised – taxed for childcare No benefits and outgoings not taken into account!"
"[Working tax credit] a minefield."

6.1.1.f. How parents find out about childcare

Ease of finding

Many parents did not find it easy. Some who had done so said they had to do a lot of research and be resourceful.

Channels used:

- going to libraries, council/Children's Information Service (CIS)
- approaching nurseries directly
- through friends or other parents/word of mouth
- referrals from professionals and voluntary organisations were important.

- agencies like JobCentre Plus and careers advisors had pointed people in the right direction, but parents felt they could/should have done more
- health workers: GPs and health visitors mentioned: some felt there could be better coordination with the latter because of their key role with all parents of young children

Quotes on finding out about childcare:

“Difficult to find the time to look for it – if I’m not at work, I’m looking after the children.”

“A central booking system would help.”

“I do not think this borough is proactive enough.”

“They have NHS records – why can’t they contact every new parent, even prospective parents. Health visitors could do it.”

6.1.1.g. Awareness and use of the Children’s Information Service (CIS)

All of the groups were asked whether they knew about the council’s CIS, whether they had used it and, if so, what for.

Target group	Heard of CIS?	Used CIS?	What used for
Parents of children with disabilities/SEN	2 out of 6 6 out of 9 5 out of 9	1 or 2 in each group	Facilities for disabled children
BME communities			
• Somali	5 out of 8/9	unknown	General info
• Turkish	1 out of 8	1	Info on nurseries and teacher training
• Spanish-speaking	3 out of 6	unknown	
• Congolese	3 out of 3	unknown	
• Young mums	2 out of 6	Not really	
• General			
• Parents Forum	8 out of 9	unknown	Variety of issues
• Hungerford primary/ Goodinge children’s centre	5 out of 10	Most unable to say	General info on childcare
• Group recruited from door to door survey	6 out of 7 parents	unknown	General info on childcare
• Other central group	3 out of 5	unknown	General info

- 49 parents (56%) knew of the CIS: from the website, stalls around the borough etc, and recognised the publications shown at the groups
- On the other hand, not all recognised the name of service until shown the material
- Generally positive comments – the material was thought to be informative and the staff helpful
- However, one or two parents said they did not rely on the information because they felt it went out of date quickly (e.g. SEN directory)
- There were also some concerns about gaps in information, e.g. not enough about what was on offer for disabled children
- Some parents had used the CIS for related issues like training in childcare themselves

- Paper information was seen as more important than the website for some groups – in particular bilingual information for minority groups, especially newly-arrived families and including how the system works as well as lists, etc

Quotes about Children's Information Service:

"CIS list excellent."

"Why didn't all these improvements happen seven years ago – I need another baby to get all the facilities."

"Why can't the council approach parents direct – they should have a 'shop front'."

6.1.1.h. Issues for particular groups

This section covers the issues that came up for particular groups of parents.

SEN parents:

- Felt the specific nature of care required restricted their options – this included after school and holiday care which was not widely available to their children
- Some discussion in the groups about the importance of mainstream childcare (e.g. for Down's Syndrome children) versus the need for specific services for those with high needs such as autism who were particularly vulnerable
- Felt their options were restricted and they were less likely to be able to work: they might have to travel across the borough to access specialist provision and even then it might not be flexible enough or give them sufficient hours
- Parents discussed existing provision in some detail. Most comments were very positive. However, there were some concerns raised:
 - specialist aspects e.g. staff not administering medication or being able to accommodate specific eating/sleeping regimes
 - staffing numbers and levels of experience of key workers (in early years settings)
 - that Child Protection issues sometimes caused problems for staff in dealing with disabled children
 - that wider age ranges should be catered for and needs of siblings without SEN should be considered
 - about potential cuts to services
 - that play areas were 'risky for children' (e.g. dog fouling) and provision with outdoor space was an issue
 - the lack of holiday provision: for example, parents are not able to access a holiday scheme all summer or both weeks at Easter
- Generally the parents felt that their child's special needs had made finding childcare more difficult, including finding places for children with high needs, finding places for older children, the 'attitude' of some nurseries – and the cost (no government support).
- Professionals e.g. social workers/key workers and community groups were particularly useful when it came to finding suitable childcare.

Quotes from SEN parents:

“My child is oxygen-dependent – very difficult to find suitable childcare.”

“I want my child to interact with able-bodied children.”

“As a single mum I would need a job with 2 months off per year – I only get 3 weeks at this play scheme – it limits life.”

“Holidays are the worst – a nightmare.”

“I wouldn’t mind paying towards the cost.”

Young mums

- They were mostly parents of babies and toddlers and not keen to leave them in childcare (for example, until they could talk). Those with older children were more likely to be looking at this option – with a potential return to study as the most likely future reason for needing childcare.
- If they did want to take up childcare, they saw experience as being more important than qualifications and felt that knowing parents already using a childcare provider was a key additional factor.
- They were concerned about cost and the length of time it took to find suitable childcare. It may be too late once found – in particular to fit in with college places as timetables are not given out in advance.

Quote from young mums:

“[Grandparents] only people I trust to look after the children.”

“Of course charges are important – it’s a struggle to get by anyway.”

“You need someone to help you find childcare, as it is difficult.”

BME groups:

- They were on the whole less likely to be using formal provision, out of school as well as under fives, with exception of the Somali homework club which was widely used.
- Somali parents in particular foresaw a future need for childcare as they wanted to be able to work in the future – but for many of the BME groups language was a barrier to getting into work.
- Extended families were relied on for childcare. For those with large families, costs of formal childcare were a key concern.
- Cultural and religious factors came up in all of the groups and provoked quite a lot of discussion but were only rated significantly in the Somali group: some parents felt recognition of cultural and religious events for example was very important, others felt it could be difficult to accommodate such a wide range of needs and could be segregating and counter-productive.
- Parents thought respect of culture as well as religion was important and felt childcare providers should take a wide view of the issues.
- Generally ethnic minority groups found it more difficult to find childcare; community organisations and link workers were key contacts to finding out what was available.
- Spanish, Turkish and Somali groups wanted information on childcare in both languages, and also extra language support to make the next step.

Quote from BME groups:

“If my English good enough, I will need childcare [to work].”

“I do not want childcare to be segregated or exclusive.”

“Very difficult to find information.”

6.1.1.i. Conclusions: Sufficiency issues***Enough childcare places in general***

- Most of the parents who attended the focus groups who wanted childcare were able to get it if they wanted it – but not all.
- Parents were able to use a range of mainstream out of school provision and activities for over fives: breakfast/after school and holiday clubs/playschemes, including those targeting specific groups like the Somali homework club.
- Finding places for younger pre-school children, particularly babies, seemed to be the most difficult: parents cited a range of issues including long waiting lists for individual nurseries and hours offered being not enough to enable them to work.
- This seemed to be a borough-wide concern and not specific to any particular locality.

Enough places for SEN/disabled children

This came up in both the three dedicated SEN groups, but parents of disabled children also participated in a number of the other groups.

- Views on this tended to depend on whether parents were looking for mainstream or dedicated childcare.
- There was a consensus however that holiday provision was not enough as no parent got full cover at Easter and during the summer (the schemes not running for the full time, and very limited weeks available to many parents).
- Before and after school provision for disabled children was also seen as inadequate.

Flexibility

- Childcare which accommodated parents' commitments (especially work, study and fitting around their other children) was especially significant, and parents generally sought greater flexibility than was currently available.
- Specific issues included being restricted to drop children off at a set time, to being able to fit around medical appointments, to more long-term flexibility in terms of parents' changing childcare needs.
- Flexibility for parents of disabled children was seen as variable, with parents' options limited by location of special needs provision with the skills to look after the children.

Places accessible

- Waiting lists were a frustration and concern for a few working parents for whom there was still not enough childcare.

- Finding out what was available and suitable in the first place was often quite difficult.
- Accessibility for most groups was generally tied in with flexibility of hours and affordability.

Quality

- Those using formal childcare seemed generally satisfied with the quality of the care provided, despite some individual concerns from some parents on particular SEN issues. There were some very positive comments about current provision.

Affordable

- This was an issue for many parents and was raised as a potential barrier in most of the groups.
- For many parents of SEN children, the childcare was free or paid for by a direct payment from the Social Services and some felt making a contribution was not unreasonable.
- Others were paying for their own care and struggling financially, and for some it remained a barrier to exploring future career and childcare opportunities.
- For some, Working Tax Credit was seen as a hindrance, not a way of increasing affordability.

Inclusive

- The idea of mixed provision rather than specialist provision (except for some high needs disabled children) was preferred by parents.
- As an issue, it did not come up specifically in the groups, though parents were keen where possible for their special needs children to be accommodated in mainstream schools/nurseries.
- Inclusivity in respect of religion and culture provoked some discussion and some divergent views, but generally was not seen as a major factor, with the exception of the Somali group.
- Non-English speaking parents though did see language as a barrier for them in finding out about and accessing existing childcare.

Knowledge and information about supply of places

- This was wide-ranging across the groups.
- Professional input was the key to finding out what was available for parents with particular needs e.g. language, with SEN children, young mums.
- Knowledge and use of the CIS seemed to be quite variable: most seemed familiar when prompted with CIS publications but use was limited and many felt they needed more support e.g. to navigate their way around the childcare and tax credits systems.

6.1.2. Consultation on charging for childcare for children under five 2007 - Summary of responses

Between March and May 2007, Islington Council consulted residents and parents of children using maintained and voluntary sector under fives provision on proposals to fund the expansion of early years childcare (opening new children's centres and providing 500 new full daycare places for working parents). This was a three pronged strategy, with an increased subsidy from the Council, more support to access tax credits and the LDA provider subsidy (CAP) and also through a new charging policy with fewer income bands and some increases (the first real increase for four years).

The consultation approach was a combination of:

- questionnaires (286 returned - 75% were parents using childcare)
- 13 focus groups mainly in children's centres, with users and non-users of childcare
- 8 specific meetings with stakeholders, including parent groups and childcare providers.

In terms of childcare sufficiency and parents' ability/willingness to pay for childcare, the key findings were:

- most residents felt that the cost of expanding childcare should be shared between council tax payers and parents - only a minority of parents agreed with that and most were unhappy about having to pay more
- respondents generally agreed that the council should continue to prioritise places for parents working or studying full-time
- respondents generally agreed that families on higher incomes should pay more and that families from outside Islington should not be subsidised unless they were key workers in Islington
- parents of disabled children felt the extra costs of disability should be taken into account
- there was general pressure to phase in the increased charges

As a result of the consultation, it was agreed:

- that the increased charges would be phased in and would not affect children already in the provision.
- The charges would be on a banding system so higher earners would pay more.
- Places not wanted by Islington residents would be offered to non-resident keyworkers.
- The council would help parents to claim working tax credit and encourage providers to access other subsidies.
- There would be a new 25% discount for disabled children (in addition to existing sibling discounts).

This consultation seemed to show, in terms of affordability of childcare, that:

- Parents generally agreed with the principle that higher earners should pay more and that the childcare of parents on low income should be subsidised.
- There was considerable anxiety among many parents at the prospect of paying more.
- Both parents and residents felt that the council should continue to lobby central government for more direct government financial support.

6.2. Children and young people

6.2.1. Introduction

Three specific consultations were held with children, one with under fives and two with over-fives at two area Listen Up meetings. Listen Up is the Council's participation project for children and young people in Islington. Many thanks to the children, young people and staff who helped with or took part in these discussions.

These took place between April and June 2007.

6.2.2. Findings - over fives

The profile of the children attending the meeting at Drayton Park Extended School was:

- 11 children, all with parents who were working or studying, just under half came from single parent households
- All had experience of childminding (generally pre-school)

Four children took part in the other group at the south area meeting.

The main points made by the children at the two meetings were as follows:

- Many would like to see more adventurous sporting activities laid on (eg rock climbing, ice skating, basketball), and a number were keen on the idea of an art room.
- Some felt they were getting too old for such schemes and would like to go to something more akin to a youth club.
- The children all used parks and playgrounds (though not without supervision and they were not happy with the idea of going unsupervised).
- But they wanted to see more of them - and with better facilities: basics like clean toilets and drinking fountains, but also adult staff on hand who would be identifiable and could help children and their parents to make best use of what was available.
- Most had spent time at a playcentre either after school or in the holidays, and had enjoyed their time.
- However, they also liked it when their parents took time off to be with them during their holidays (which most did on occasion).

6.2.3. Findings – under fives

In June 2007, key workers at Fortune Park Children's Centre discussed childcare with 50 children aged three and four.

The (self-declared) profile of the children was:

- two-thirds were four year olds
- more than half said they had brothers, fewer had sisters, some of whom also attended nursery
- two thirds had working mothers, slightly more had fathers who worked
- a quarter of the mothers were at college, only a handful of fathers

The children had lots to say in response to questions about their childcare. The key points were:

- The children typically mentioned three or four things that they liked about the nursery: playing was stated by most of them as the main thing they liked, followed by things like going outside, painting and drawing, 'friends' and bikes.
- The children mentioned various things they would change; from 'nothing' to doing more or less of particular activities e.g. reading, going outside.
- Nearly half said they went to after-school stay and play, and more than half attended the Saturday session.
- Their family (including extended family) were the main form of other childcare (over three quarters).

6.2.4. Developing integrated services for young people aged 11-19¹

Extensive consultation of young people, as well as collating responses from other consultations, took place in 2007 for this project. Some key messages of relevance from the Draft Needs Assessment (November 2007) to positive activities for young people up to 14 years (18 with disabilities) were:

- Young people were increasingly spending less time in family situations and more with their peers.
- Around 30-45% of 13-19 year olds in Islington were accessing a positive activity, either through school, a leisure centre, youth provision or targeted schemes of positive activities.
- On average a child or young person would travel three quarters of a mile to an adventure playground or youth provision, and 86% preferred to visit just one scheme.
- Young people wanted up-to-date facilities – “don't stick us in a community hall”.
- There was need for better mapping, information and publicity about activities across schools.
- Young people wanted the council to consider territorial issues in location of services.

6.3. Childcare providers

6.3.1. Annual childcare supply survey

The Childcare Supply Audit 2007, sent to all childcare providers during spring and summer 2007, included not only questions about their provision (supply), but also some questions around demand. Note, the analysis below includes very few responses from over fives' providers and none from childminders - there is scope for more consultation with providers during 2008. Many thanks to those providers who did respond. The headlines were:

Main barriers to childcare appeared to be (in order of frequency):

- Parents can't afford a place
- Parents can't find a place for under two year old
- Parents can't find vacancies
- Parents can't find a place for two or three year old

¹ For further details, contact Rachel Egan, Strategy and Commissioning, on 020 7527 7026

All the above were most prevalent in the private, voluntary and independent nurseries, though affordability was also thought to be a barrier for parents accessing holiday and after school provision (but cited for far fewer parents).

Also important (though not as frequent):

- Can't find a place which fits their work pattern
- Not confident about quality of childcare
- Can't find a full-time place

What providers needed most in order to expand their provision:

- Larger, more suitable premises
 - Additional funding
 - Business/marketing support
- Additional staff was not cited that often, and even less, training.

6.3.2. Voluntary sector providers' meeting March 2007

At a meeting of the grant-aided nurseries and playgroups held in March 2007 (attended by about 60 providers), there was a brief presentation on the childcare sufficiency assessment encouraging providers to complete their annual CIS audit, including the demand questions. Also, providers were given the opportunity to add to or amend comments they had made at a previous discussion about unmet needs and barriers to childcare at a similar meeting in autumn 2005, when Islington was doing some analysis of childcare and demand.

Set out overleaf are the comments made in autumn 2005, with comments made in March 2007 added in boxes.

What do you think are key barriers to parents accessing childcare?**Comments in autumn 2005**

- **Affordability:** wages low and children of unemployed parents losing out; baby places very expensive and unaffordable for low-income families. Many parents can't even afford the basic £43.00. Tax credits not sufficient.
- **Information:** lack of knowledge about the services available, complexity – providers are confused about what a children's centre is, let alone parents; parents not knowing where to start; information needed about different types of childcare – language. Parents need confidence to choose.
- **Lack of availability of flexible places:** parents want part-time places (e.g. Tuesday to Thursday) – difficult for nurseries to provide.
- **Holiday provision** – needed for students and others
- **Difficulty of filling places of older children quickly when they move to schools** – leaves providers with a period of time without income
- **Special educational needs** – parents of SEN children can be reluctant for them to attend playgroups
- **Language barrier (understanding English)** - have Turkish, Iranian, Somalian and Asians and a large range of other community groups – many BME groups excluded

Comments 15 March 2007:

- Working Tax Credit seen in a bad light – some parents avoiding claiming it. Also the time lag in tax credit claims being processed means delay in money coming in to nurseries.
- Lone parent advisor highlighted the fact that nurseries ask for initial deposit/fees in advance as a barrier to parents starting work
- Need for childcare for parents in transition to work, including crèche for parents learning English, and childcare for homeless families so they can attend appointments

What childcare services are parents asking for that you are not able to provide (what are most in demand)?**Autumn 2005 comments:**

- **baby places** – one group said most demand is for 6-month olds – always waiting list
- **holiday care** – including for students
- **before and after school care (up to 6pm) and 'inbetween' times** – including for older siblings
- **huge demand at Finsbury Park Homeless Families for free care (children-in-need)**
- **more flexible collection time at end of day** – 6pm very difficult, especially for someone working at the provision and who has to collect their own children by 6pm
- **SEN services** –in relation to physical disability
- **Childcare at weekends**
- **Babysitting**
- **Longer part-time sessions** (sessional playgroup) – not possible due to premises availability. Parents like the informal smaller groups that sessional playgroups provide.

Comments 15 March 2007:

- Childcare for children under two – parents going back to work or study earlier
- 5-14s
- lack of free activities for children aged five and over

What are the key challenges to you in delivering childcare in the next five years?**Autumn 2005 comments:**

- **Funding** – maintaining it - lack of certainty about funding and grants. Difficult having to bid from LBI for funding on annual basis. Feeling LBI moving goalposts to set up sessional playgroups to fail.
- **Premises** – suitability and availability for under fives
- **Effective marketing**
- **Recruiting qualified staff** – especially now Ofsted saying ‘working towards’ a qualification not enough
- **Getting staff qualified** – cover
- **Understanding and managing changes in children’s centre agenda**
- **Idea of integrated working actually working and for benefit of children**
- **Maintaining effective management committees** – high turnover - once they have got understanding of what they need to do and the issues, they then move on as children leave setting.
- **Heavy and growing responsibility of management committee members** – complexity of information they have to grapple with, without resources or training, and at a time when their jobs becoming increasingly hard and often not 9 to 5, and they want to spend time with their young children before they go to bed.
- **Uncertainty about future with national and local developments** - development of children’s centres may be a threat to viability of voluntary sector

There were no further comments to this question in March 2007.

6.4. Survey of employers

6.4.1. Background

We attempted, with the help of Work Is (Regeneration Department) to link in with about 30 local employers with whom they had working relationships, and invited these employers to a breakfast-time focus group. Unfortunately, only about three were interested in attending and none returned the survey form we had sent them. So we commissioned a company (Coda Consultants) to carry out a telephone survey with seven local employers² on behalf of the local authority in September 2007. They were generally large organisations with an average workforce of about 1,000 employees. We are very grateful to the employers who took part.

The following are the key findings - the full report is in Appendix G.

6.4.2. Key findings:

6.4.2.a. Work-life balance policy

Most had a policy in place. Five offered childcare vouchers. All offered flexible leave arrangements. Other family friendly practice implemented included extended leave, term-time contracts, additional maternity leave and sabbaticals. However, annual leave could be restricted either at certain times of year or to meet specific project deadlines.

6.4.2.b. Information on childcare

Four of the employers had heard of the Children's Information Service (CIS) and regularly accessed it. They were mostly looking for information on childcare, but one had used it for information on tax credits, one for information on childcare vouchers. The website was the preferred medium for using the CIS. Most employers were willing to contact the CIS for information to include in a staff induction pack or to signpost their staff to the CIS.

6.4.2.c. Barriers to childcare

Cost was the only barrier identified. One employer had had difficulties recruiting a member of staff due to that person not being able to afford their childcare. Another reported that the cost of childcare had been a barrier to recruiting staff (low-paid work).

6.4.2.d. Shift working

At least six employers required shift working, outside 9.00am to 5.00pm, and the general expectation seemed to be that staff would make their own childcare arrangements.

6.4.2.e. Conclusions

Generally these employers were engaging with the work-life balance agenda and childcare was not a significant recruitment or retention issue. However, it should be noted

² The employers were: Almeida Theatre; Capita Symonds; Homes for Islington; Kier Group Islington; London Borough of Islington; Sainsbury's; Whittington Hospital.

they were generally large organisations able to sustain such support without putting their viability at risk.

Further thoughts:

- generally these employers were engaging with the work-life balance agenda - their support was mainly childcare vouchers, information and flexible working, no on-site childcare. Note they were large organisations generally which could sustain such support without putting their viability at serious risk.
- childcare was only a recruitment issue for one employer and a retention issue for another (supermarket)
- shift working was prevalent - most staff were presumably making their own arrangements to cover their childcare needs
- Further work needs to be done with these and other employers to maximise opportunities to give their employees information about childcare and about help with paying for it - CIS to liaise further.
- Further work needs to be done to build relationships and support with smaller employers - Islington has a large number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

6.5. Staff in partner organisations

16 responses (mostly by means of an interview but on two occasions through completion of a questionnaire) were received from partners and officers with a strategic or developmental role in childcare. This provided an opportunity for such key people from within the council and outside, including voluntary sector umbrella groups, the Primary Care Trust, the National Childminding Association, JobCentre Plus and [Cambridge Education@Islington](#) (formerly CEA@Islington), to input to the assessment. See Appendix H for the list of participants: many thanks to all who took part.

The following are the key points made in terms of childcare sufficiency:

6.5.1. Significant gaps in childcare for working and studying parents

- Provision available to suit parents' working patterns (atypical hours increasingly common), including part-time, flexible and throughout summer holidays.
- Affordable childcare for lower to middle-income families (who barely benefit or who cannot benefit from childcare element of Working Tax Credit)
- Childcare in one place or very close for children aged under and over five and tailored for different ages – difficult for families to juggle needs of their children.
- Provision for children with SEN/disabilities – particularly after school and holidays and including within mainstream, and for young people aged 13 plus.
- Childcare for students who cannot get childcare/funding for childcare during college/university holidays, or for students aged 19-22/23 who cannot access 'Care to Learn' funding.
- Childcare for people undertaking basic skills, English as a second language (ESOL) classes, online centres training.
- Holiday provision, particularly in south and east of borough.

- Changes in welfare, with lone parents with the youngest child aged 12 in October 2008 being required to seek work, following by lone parent with youngest child aged 10 in October 2009 and with youngest child aged 7 in 2010, are likely to lead to increased demand for initially positive activities and then by 2009 for childcare.

6.5.2. Significant surpluses in childcare for working and studying parents

This was a difficult question in that vacancies do not necessarily mean oversupply. Parents not using particular childcare could be due to a range of issues, including cost of places and difficulties with tax credits, hours open not suiting their working/studying hours, perceived rather than evidenced judgement of a type of childcare, lack of information about childcare available or information not reaching families.

Possible surpluses (but needs further investigation):

- childminder places
- nursery places – mostly high cost places in private sector, places for 3 and 4 year olds not in nursery classes at primary schools, some sessional places
- some out of school places – especially breakfast clubs (very variable occupancy)

6.5.3. Significant barriers to families accessing childcare

- Cost was most often cited as most significant barrier, including the issues under 6.5.1. above about students and tax credits. Suggestion that claiming childcare element of WTC so complicated, it put people off applying, particularly for holiday schemes.
- Hours open and flexibility also cited often.
- Guilt/uneasiness about not staying at home to look after your child (twice cited)
- Quality – varying views on how much of an issue this was.
- Transition from education/unemployment to employment – need for childcare to be able to work, but need work to be able to pay for childcare (catch 22). Need for funding for the 'journey to work' from (if necessary) basic training, vocational training, job-searching, settling-in to childcare period as well as for first few weeks of work.
- Better information on childcare, especially for first time mothers ("Where do I start? How do I know what's best for my child?"). Also to particular BMEs, including key influencers of such communities, such as Somali community.
- Childcare for SEN/disabled children – doubts about how much available and that parents are comfortable to use it. Also very difficult to juggle work with frequent medical appointments.
- Voluntary sector – capacity of volunteer management committees to take on their heavy responsibilities and pressure this puts on managers.
- Lease issue for voluntary sector - repairs and maintenance, fundraising, and so quality and sustainability
- Fear of coming off benefits/being worse-off if working, even with tax credits – particularly likely for parents starting work for first time or returning to work after a long time.
- Sheer difficulty of balancing work and a family life
- According to JCP - work with mostly lone parents seeking work - cost and flexibility of places (not available early morning, evening and weekends) were key barriers.

During the course of this consultation, a lot of useful information was also gathered about the projects the partners and staff are involved in that have relevance for developing childcare, such as transition to work projects, Play Strategy and New Deal for Lone Parents. These will be fed in detail into the childcare market management strategy planning.

6.6. Training providers

A small number of training providers who also provide nurseries would have been consulted via the annual childcare audit 2007.

In addition, as part of a survey carried out in July 2007, the CIS asked 11 local training providers³ offering courses relating to childcare / working with children and young people, the following three questions relating to childcare.

Is childcare provided for trainees?

Out of the 11 providers: six offered childcare on site, but not for all courses, and places tended to be limited. One of these providers had two on-site nurseries.

Three providers did not provide childcare on site, but referred to funding being available. One offered funding for breakfast club and after school as the programme was aimed at lone parents with school-aged children. The other two said the students had to find their childcare and that Care to Learn would pay for it.

For the other two providers 'Information not available', although it is known locally that one of these works in partnership with LBI and provides childcare for Step Into Childcare courses.

If yes, how? Who pays, etc?

Payment was either by the student or the provider, depending on the income of the parents and funding available to the training providers.

If not provided, what advice is given?

One university commented that information was provided through the Student Welfare Service.

Conclusions

This survey was not explicitly part of the Childcare for Islington report, but the relevant responses indicated that most training providers recognised the importance of their students accessing childcare – they either offered childcare on site or were aware of funding available through Care to Learn. Their courses were generally full, sometimes with a waiting list. Drop out rates were generally low, pass-rates high, which implied that, for these types of vocational training, childcare was sufficient.

³ Camden Job Train, City & Islington College, City University, The Factory, Groundwork North London, Islington Childcare Trust, LB Islington, London Metropolitan University, Middlesex University, The Parent House and Springboard Islington.

However, there is scope for further work to explore in more depth the extent to which childcare needs are impacting on the ability of students to complete courses, both childcare and other types of training or study, that can lead to employment. From other consultation with stakeholders, the gap in provision and funding for holiday periods can be an issue for some parents.

6.7. Other boroughs

Work is ongoing to develop links with other boroughs and to exchange information and good practice.

In Chapter Four on childcare supply, some brief headlines are set out about provision over the border from direct liaison with those boroughs.