

Cambridgeshire's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2010-2011 Summary

Introduction

Cambridgeshire County Council would like to thank all those who took time to contribute to the assessment.

The Childcare Act 2006 expands and clarifies in legislation the vital role local authorities should play as strategic leaders in facilitating the childcare market, first laid out in the Children Act 2004. The 2006 Act reinforces the framework in which local authorities already work – in partnership with the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector and with schools – to shape children’s services. It focuses in particular on sufficient, suitable and flexible childcare that is responsive to parents’ needs.

Section 11 of the 2006 Act places a duty on local authorities to undertake childcare sufficiency assessments every three years, the first of which was completed in April 2008 and can be found on Cambridgeshire County Council’s website www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

What is a childcare sufficiency assessment?

The assessment is a measurement of the nature and extent of, the need for and supply of childcare within each local area of Cambridgeshire. It aims to identify where there are gaps in the market, and plan how to fill those gaps.

Regulations under the Childcare Act detail those with whom the local authority must consult in producing the CSA.

- Parents
- Children and Young People
- Childcare providers
- Persons representing children, parents and childcare providers
- Local employers and their representatives
- Neighbouring local authorities
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board
- Jobcentre Plus
- Primary Care Trust (PCT)

Cambridgeshire’s CSA has involved consultation with:

- 1,452 parents using extensive telephone surveys and a further 221 parents from key target groups.
- 203 children and young people
- 7% of all childcare providers
- 26 employers
- Jobcentre Plus
- Nanny agencies
- Cambridgeshire’s Race Equality and Diversity Service
- The National Childminding Association
- The Primary Care Trust (PCT)
- The Local Safeguarding Children Board

Methodology

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) is a significant and specialised piece of work. Morgans Research Ltd, were commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council in March 2010 to undertake the field work required.

Morgans Research Ltd is an experienced and highly regarded research company and also carried out Cambridgeshire County Council's first CSA in 2007/08.

A structured interview questionnaire was developed and finalised by representatives of Cambridgeshire County Council, Coda Consultants and Morgans Research. This interview questionnaire can be viewed at Appendix 1 of the report.

Subsequently during the summer months Morgans Research team conducted 1,452 telephone interviews with a combination of parents who were users and non users of childcare throughout Cambridgeshire. Each telephone interview took approximately 10-12 minutes. In order to optimise availability of parents and maximise response rates, telephone interviews were carried out from the Morgans Research Wallingford offices during the following times:

- Day time (typically 10am – 5pm);
- Evenings (until 8.45pm);
- Weekends (typically 11am – 4pm)

In terms of the telephone numbers of participating parents, Morgans Research purchased a database of residents within the Cambridgeshire County Council geographical area who were raising children between the ages 0 – 14 years

Discussion groups were also undertaken which focused on the needs of families with disabled children, foster carers, families from Black Minority and Ethnic community, workless parents, teenage parents, shift workers and new communities.

A further 210 face to face interviews were carried out specifically with families who had children aged birth to five years.

Sampling dynamics

In order to identify the level of demand for childcare in identified sub-local authority areas it is essential that a representative sample of parents is interviewed.

Morgans Research purchased contacts from a supplier of database information who were able to identify households with children aged 0 – 14 years in Cambridgeshire.

The data below indicates how the dynamics of the survey progressed during an initial screening process and the subsequent undertaking of the telephone interviews by the Morgans Research team.

The total number of contacts (loaded onto the system)	8,203
Completed telephone interviews	1,452
Failed screening: no under 18s at household	2,568
Live sample (call backs, no replies etc)	3,117
Refusals	284
Incorrect sample details/wrong numbers	125
Other (including contacts not used)	657
Completed face to face interviews	210

In addition, a booster sample of 210 interviews took place in September 2010. These interviews were undertaken at Children’s Centres, community venues, mother and toddler groups, baby and health clinics across Cambridgeshire. Most parents interviewed face to face lived in the following localities; Whittlesey, Bottisham, Burwell and Soham, St Neots, Huntingdon, Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley, St Ives, Cambridge South, Bassingbourn, Melbourn, Comberton and Gamlingay and Cottenham and Swavesey

Background

Cambridgeshire County Council, like all local authorities, has a duty to ensure there is sufficient childcare provision in their area of responsibility.

The Childcare Act 2006 required local authorities to carry out a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment in their area at least every three years. Section 6(1) of the Childcare Act placed a duty on all local authorities to secure the provision of childcare in their area “so far as is reasonably practicable”. In assessing what is “reasonably practicable”¹, Cambridgeshire County Council has an obligation to take into account the state of the local childcare market, particularly the level of demand for childcare in certain sub-locality areas. Cambridgeshire County Councils ‘Reasonably Practicable’ principles will be applied and reviewed systematically in order to manage and facilitate the childcare market.

In terms of sub-local authority areas, Cambridgeshire County Council requested that the parental demand survey adhere to three planning regions, and fourteen localities within these regions:

Planning Region 1 – East Cambridgeshire and Fenland

This incorporates the following five localities:

- Wisbech
- March and Chatteris
- Whittlesey
- Ely, Littleport and Witchford
- Bottisham, Burwell and Soham

¹ “Reasonably practicable” allows some flexibility. What is ‘practicable’ or ‘impracticable’ in one time and place may not be in another. The Childcare Act states that “Local authority decisions to address gaps in childcare through one method, rather than another, based on what they regard as reasonably practicable, should be documented and published to allow scrutiny and challenge”.

² In the report this is sometimes shortened to read: BMCG

Planning Region 2 – Huntingdon

This incorporates the following four localities:

- St Neots
- Huntingdon
- Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley
- St Ives

Planning Region 3 – South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City

This incorporates the following five localities:

- Cambridge City North
- Cambridge City South
- Sawston and Linton
- Bassingbourn, Melbourn, Comberton and Gamlingay #2
- Cottenham and Swavesey

Objectives

The prime objectives of the assessment were to

1. Establish the extent to which need or demand for services is met by current provision.
2. Identify gaps in service provision in terms of the need for additional or alternative arrangements.
3. Estimate the level of demand over the next three years.
4. Report in a manner which will enable Cambridgeshire County Council to make informed decisions about the future of childcare provision in Cambridgeshire.

Outcomes of parental demand survey

The following section outlines the results of the 1,452 telephone interviews and 210 face to face interviews that were undertaken by Morgans Research Ltd during May, June and September 2010.

Parental Profile

Number of respondents per locality

Table 1 indicates the number of parents who were interviewed in each of the fourteen locality areas which constitute the Cambridgeshire County Council area.

Table 1 - Number of respondents per locality

Locality	Number of respondents	% of respondents
East Cambridgeshire and Fenland		
Wisbech	97	5.8%
March and Chatteris	102	6.1%
Whittlesey	96	5.7%
Ely, Littleport and Witchford	107	6.4%
Bottisham, Burwell and Soham	115	6.9%
Huntingdon		
St Neots	123	7.4%
Huntingdon	156	9.4%
Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley	136	8.2%
St. Ives	100	6%
South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge		
Cambridge North	129	7.7%
Cambridge South	156	9.4%
Sawston and Linton	91	5.5%
Bassingbourn, Melbourn, Comberton and Gamlingay	125	7.5%
Cottenham and Swavesey	129	7.7%
Cambridgeshire	1,662	100%

The sample sizes for each of the fourteen localities were assigned in accordance with the relative population(s) of children and young people within each one and further boosted with face to face interviews.

Population

The mid-2009 population of Cambridgeshire is estimated at 600,800. Cambridgeshire has been one of the fastest growing counties in England over the past 10 years. Population forecasts by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group (CCCRG) both suggest significant continued growth through to 2021.

Child population within each locality is as follows:

LOCALITY NAME	Age range			Total 0-14	% of total 0-14
	0-4	5-10	11-14		
Wisbech	2100	2400	1700	6200	6.0
March & Chatteris	2200	2800	2100	7100	6.9
Whittlesey	800	1000	900	2700	2.6
Ely, Littleport & Witchford	2800	3000	2000	7800	7.6
Bottisham, Burwell & Soham	2300	2700	2000	7000	6.8
St Neots	2300	2800	2100	7200	7.0
Huntingdon	3000	3500	2500	9000	8.8
Ramsey, Sawtry & Yaxley	2700	3700	2700	9100	8.9
St Ives	1300	1400	1100	3800	3.7
Cambridge North	3500	3800	2500	9800	9.5
Cambridge South	4200	4000	2800	11000	10.7
Sawston & Linton	1700	2200	1500	5400	5.3
Bassingbourn, Melbourn, Comberton & Gamlingay	3200	4000	2600	9800	9.5
Cottenham & Swavesey	2500	2600	1800	6900	6.7
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	34600	39900	28300	102800	100.0

Source: NHS GP registrations October 2009 download

Cambridgeshire's population of children (aged 0-14) grew by 3.3% between 2001 and 2008. However there were marked differences in population change between districts and age groups.

Broken down by age groups, population change has been as follows:

0-4 YEAR OLDS	2001	2008	% increase/decrease
Cambridge City	5100	6200	+21.6
East Cambridgeshire	4200	5100	+21.4
Fenland	4800	5000	+4.2
Huntingdonshire	10100	9300	-7.9
South Cambridgeshire	7700	8700	+13.0
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	32100	34300	+6.9

5-10 YEAR OLDS	2001	2008	% increase/decrease
Cambridge City	5800	6300	+8.6
East Cambridgeshire	5400	5800	+7.4
Fenland	6400	6500	+1.6
Huntingdonshire	13200	11800	-10.6
South Cambridgeshire	10100	10500	+4.0
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	41000	40900	-0.2

11-14 YEAR OLDS	2001	2008	% increase/decrease
Cambridge City	4100	4000	-2.4
East Cambridgeshire	3800	3700	-2.6

Fenland	4200	5000	+19.0
Huntingdonshire	8600	8700	+1.2
South Cambridgeshire	6900	7300	+5.8
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	27500	28700	+4.4

Source: CCCRG mid-2008 population estimates.

Notes: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

CCCRG population forecasts suggest marked growth in child population in Cambridgeshire by 2021, but this is due primarily to expected future housing developments in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. Indeed growth in child population will only occur in those two districts, while all other districts will experience child population decline.

New Housing Developments

It is forecast that 50,100 dwellings will be built in Cambridgeshire between 2008 and 2021. However, this forecast is based on Regional Spatial Strategy targets that are currently under review, so the targets are subject to change.

	Estimated		Forecast dwellings		
	2001	2008	2011	2016	2021
Cambridge City	44,500	48,000	50,200	57,700	63,500
East Cambridgeshire	30,900	35,500	36,600	38,100	39,500
Fenland	36,700	41,800	42,900	45,400	47,700
Huntingdonshire	65,700	70,000	72,100	74,900	76,900
South Cambridgeshire	54,200	59,900	62,000	70,700	77,700
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	232,000	255,200	263,800	286,800	305,300

Source: CCCRG mid-2008 dwellings forecasts.

Migration

Except for annual fluctuations, all districts in Cambridgeshire experienced greater inward than outward migration between 2001 and 2009. In general Cambridge City had the highest total in-migration, and this is expected to increase by 2011 due to new housing developments.

NET MIGRATION	2001-2002	2007-2008	2010-2011
Cambridge City	-500	1500	1400
East Cambridgeshire	1300	1100	-300
Fenland	1200	1100	100
Huntingdonshire	200	600	-300
South Cambridgeshire	800	1100	-900
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	2900	5500	0

Source: CCCRG mid-2008 population estimates.

Cambridgeshire has experienced a growing international migrant population since 2002. Though it is difficult to estimate migrant population sizes, administrative data suggests that the largest total growth is likely to have occurred in Cambridge City, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland.

Total non-UK National Insurance Registrations	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
Cambridge City	2500	2390	2800	3780	3740	3780	4190
East Cambridgeshire	250	240	360	1190	1030	1050	1650
Fenland	180	260	740	1530	1170	1230	1480
Huntingdonshire	460	490	690	1000	1300	1110	1080
South Cambridgeshire	600	600	920	1120	900	810	1000
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	3990	3980	5510	8620	8140	7980	9400

Source: National Insurance Number registration data.

In recent years most migrant workers have arrived from Eastern European countries, but significant populations have also arrived from Asian and Western European countries.

Ethnicity

The 2001 Census shows Cambridgeshire's population as predominantly White British. Cambridge City was the most ethnically diverse district with around 4,100 people identifying themselves as Asian, 1,500 as Black, and 3,800 as Chinese or other ethnicity. Travellers are among the largest minority ethnic groupings in Cambridgeshire, and were included as 'White Other' in the 2001 Census. The 2011 Census will contain a separate 'Traveller' category.

	All People	White British	White Other	Mixed White and Other	Asian or Asian British Other	Black or Black British Other	Chinese or Other Ethnic Group
Cambridge City	108900	85500 (78.5%)	11900 (10.9%)	2100 (1.9%)	4100 (3.8%)	1500 (1.4%)	3800 (3.5%)
East Cambridgeshire	73200	68500 (93.7%)	3100 (4.2%)	500 (0.7%)	300 (0.4%)	200 (0.3%)	500 (0.7%)
Fenland	83500	80900 (96.9%)	1400 (1.7%)	500 (0.6%)	300 (0.4%)	200 (0.2%)	200 (0.2%)
Huntingdonshire	157000	146600 (93.3%)	5900 (3.8%)	1500 (1.0%)	1500 (1.0%)	800 (0.5%)	800 (0.5%)
South Cambridgeshire	130100	121400 (93.3%)	4900 (3.8%)	1100 (0.8%)	1100 (0.8%)	600 (0.5%)	1000 (0.8%)

Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Disability

In 2009 in Cambridgeshire approximately 3,340 young people aged 0-17 received a Disability Living Allowance.

	Age range of children in receipt of				TOTAL
	DLA				
	0-5	5-10	11-15	16-17	0-17
Cambridge City	50	160	180	50	440
East Cambridgeshire	50	150	140	60	400
Fenland	70	250	320	100	740
Huntingdonshire	110	400	440	140	1090
South Cambridgeshire	70	250	260	90	670
TOTAL CAMBRIDGESHIRE	350	1210	1340	440	3340

Household Composition

According to 2001 Census figures, more than 80% of all dependent children in Cambridgeshire live in households with a married or cohabiting couple.

The 2001 Census also shows that a fifth (21%) of children in Cambridge City live in single parent households. The second highest percentage is Fenland (19%), followed by Huntingdonshire (14.8%), South Cambridgeshire (12.3%) and East Cambridgeshire (12.2%).

Economic Activity Summary

Research Group population forecasts to 2021 suggest that changes in future total labour force sizes will vary by district. Cambridge City, for example, will experience significant growth in its total labour force size, with South Cambridgeshire experiencing moderate growth and Fenland small growth. By contrast, Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire will see smaller total labour force sizes in 2021 than in 2008.

All districts except Cambridge City show economic activity rates above the national rate of 79%. Expected changes to retirement age legislation may affect future activity rates.

According to the 2009 Annual Population Survey the employment rate for Cambridgeshire as a whole is around 79%. The highest overall employment rate is in East Cambridgeshire (84.2%), followed by South Cambridgeshire (83.3%) and Huntingdonshire (79%). The lowest rates are in Fenland (77.8%) and Cambridge City (74%). However, the large number of students in Cambridge City affects its employment rate as students are considered part of the labour force but are not usually employed.

Based on benefit claims data, the highest unemployment rate is in Fenland (4.3%). The lowest rate, possibly reflecting its position as Cambridgeshire's most affluent district, is South Cambridgeshire (1.7%)

Household incomes

In 2009 South Cambridgeshire had the highest median household income in the County (£36,000). Fenland district had the lowest (£27,500), which is around 30% lower than in South Cambridgeshire.

Childcare Supply

In December 2010, there were 1493 early years and childcare providers in Cambridgeshire, providing a total of 27,910 childcare places

Childcare registrations broken down by type are as follow:

Provider type (by registration)	Number in Cambridgeshire
Childminder	873
Out of school care	152
Holiday Play scheme	120
Pre-school playgroup	118
Extended day playgroup	61
Day Nursery	92
Maintained nursery schools & classes	31
Nursery units of independent schools	12
Private nursery schools	22
Creche	12
TOTAL	1493

NB: While the figure for childminders is 873, this figure is all childminders registered and active. This figure may be lower as some are not caring for children at present.

Childcare places available by district are as follows:

Childcare places for 0-4 year olds:

Total places available	2007	2008	2010
Cambridge City	3732	3008	3932
East Cambridgeshire	1582	2213	2083
Fenland	1555	1524	1877
Huntingdonshire	4030	4167	5934
South Cambridgeshire	3282	3508	4665
TOTAL	14181	14420	18491

NB: Including maintained nursery provision

There has been a significant increase (4,310) in the number of early years places across the County as a whole. Huntingdon and South Cambridgeshire have seen the most increase with 1,904 and 1,383 places respectively.

Childcare places for 4-11 year olds:

Total places available	2007	2008	2010
Cambridge City	2673	2230	1770
East Cambridgeshire	828	679	727
Fenland	991	848	754
Huntingdonshire	4721	3762	4096
South Cambridgeshire	2931	2183	2072
TOTAL	12144	9702	9419

There has been a decrease of childcare places (2,725) for school age children in recent years. Cambridge City has seen a significant drop of 903 places.

LOCALITY	Registered places per 100 children (aged 0-14)	
	2007	2010
Wisbech	14.8	16.0
March and Chatteris	18.1	18.1
Whittlesey	16.1	22.2
Ely, Littleport and Witchford	21.6	21.5
Bottisham, Burwell and Soham	20.2	20.9
St Neots	29.3	27.3
Huntingdon	34.6	33.8
Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley	23.5	25.0
St Ives	39.7	32.9
Cambridge North	30.0	27.6
Cambridge South	38.2	32.1
Sawston and Linton	30.3	26.7
Bassingbourn, Melbourn, Comberton and Gamlingay	21.1	22.4
Cottenham & Swavesey	23.0	20.6

Childcare Demand and Satisfaction

45% of parents who responded to Cambridgeshire's 2010 – 2011 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Parental Demand Survey were currently accessing some form of formal or informal childcare for at least one child in their family. Usage was highest in Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley (51%) and Cambridge North (50%), and lowest was Ely, Littleport and Witchford (36%) followed by March and Chatteris (40%).

95% of responding parents were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their current/existing childcare arrangements. Single parents were less satisfied (91%) than two parent families (96%).

Use of formal childcare only was highest (47%) amongst parents of a child aged 3-4 and lowest (9%) amongst those parents with an 11-14 year old.

Of those parents who use childcare, the types of childcare used are:

Type of formal childcare	Percentage	Parents with a 0-5 yr old	Parents with a 6-10 yr old	Parents with an 11+ yr old
After school club	29%	11%	42%	44%
Private day nursery	23%	38%	n/a	n/a
Pre-school/playgroup	18%	29%	n/a	n/a
Registered childminder	18%	15%	24%	27%
Breakfast club	12%	5%	18%	18%
Nursery class attached to an infant/primary school	8%	14%	n/a	n/a
Children's Centre nursery	3%	5%	n/a	n/a
Nanny/Au-pair	1%	1%	1%	1%
Crèche	1%	1%	n/a	n/a
Special provision for children with disabilities	<1%	0%	0%	1%
Others	1%	1%	1%	1%

Stakeholders

The Childcare Act lists key stakeholders with whom the local authority must consult when undertaking the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

The following represent the views of relevant personnel within the named organisations.

Childcare Information Service (CIS)

The Childcare Information Service works with all types of parents and carers. They deal with parents who need childcare to suit their family circumstances, but often this is childcare within 1 or 2 miles from their home or workplace. Recently they have had enquires from parents needing care for school aged children where the school that the child attends does not have its own after school club. Transport then can become an issue especially if the family does not have its own car. So the importance of local and accessible childcare is key.

In the experience of staff from the CIS not all settings are confident about their ability to cope with a child with special needs or a disability.

The cost of childcare is important, with many parents finding this an issue. Staff explain funding streams such as Early Years Funding and the childcare element of Working Tax Credits.

Job Centre Plus

Job Centre staff report that childcare is one of the main issues for parents finding suitable work. They are asked information relating to the availability of childcare so signpost to Opportunity Links the CIS for Cambridgeshire. Parents state that they find it difficult to access childcare before and after school and in school holidays to fit around working hours advertised. This becomes more apparent for those parents who are seeking work that involves working shifts. This is further exacerbated in rural areas, where transport is an issue too.

Staff also report that parents are concerned with financial issues with many stating that the cost of childcare seems unaffordable. Job Centre staff then discuss the Childcare element of the Working Tax credit, using a 'better off' calculation to confirm the financial support available to them.

Nanny agencies

A nanny agency based in Cambridgeshire reported that parents who used their service were those who needed flexible childcare often for longer hours, i.e. until 7 or 8pm at night and those who need 'emergency childcare'.

Families from Traveller Communities

An Early Years Family Worker who works with Travellers stated that there are barriers to break down within the communities as travellers have differing cultural beliefs regarding education and its benefits. In order to inform and influence the travelling community regarding early year's education professionals must gain their trust and raise awareness of the benefits of early years education and the free entitlement. Work is being done to

overcome these difficulties but often the families move on and new relationships need to be established.

NHS/Primary Care Trust

All staff employed by the health service in Cambridgeshire had access to support from the Childcare Coordinators of Anglia Support Partnership. They reported that some parents who contact them have difficulty in finding childcare to meet the unsociable hours that they work. They also report that parents in some areas of the region i.e. Cambridge City are struggling with availability and cost of childcare. Some staff have delayed their return to work from maternity leave due to lack of suitable available childcare. They are presented with many questions regarding the financial implications, particularly the childcare element of working Tax credit and childcare voucher schemes.

Children's Centres

The message from Children's Centres is that they deal with a wide range of parents with numerous issues; they have found that childcare is key in order to support these parents. One comments that the 2 year old pilot² was a real boost enabling them to identify learning and welfare needs early and enabling them to encourage the families to engage with other activities whilst their children are in childcare. Others have identified that their parents need longer hours for their childcare so the flexible entitlement should help with this. Others, especially in rural locations, said parents felt that there was limited local choice especially if they worked antisocial hours i.e. shift workers.

Children's Centres signpost parents to sites such as Opportunity Links in order to search for childcare although many question the different types of childcare available and do not understand the differences. Most centres who responded have close links with NCMA co-ordinators regarding childminding.

Schools offering childcare

The message from schools offering childcare is that this is seen as a selling point for parents. Those schools with onsite preschools and wrap around care for school aged children are very popular where parents are able to access the childcare on the school site. The schools promote the childcare available in their schools; those in growing communities find pressure on their childcare places whereas those in a rural location generally find that sustaining the care is an issue.

Childcare Providers

A total of 94 childcare providers were asked about notable changes in the childcare picture since the last CSA, including whether there were any gaps in provision, what support parents and carers were requesting from them at the current time, and how they offered this advice and support. They were also asked how well they felt they were supported and were given the opportunity to offer any other comments or thoughts they wished to the study.

² The pilot provided free early years education to over 13,500 disadvantaged two year olds between 2006 and 2008. The main purpose of the pilot was to improve children's social and cognitive outcomes, e.g. their social confidence and independence, and their verbal skills and reasoning ability. Additional aims were to have a positive impact on children's parents and wider family.

Key points raised were

- The economic situation seems to be impacting on elements of childcare business and many settings have seen an increase of parents experiencing financial problems
- Affordability and parenting support remain the key issues for parents, according to providers.
- Parents are asking for more flexibility including earlier starts and later finishes.
- Providers report that there is too much paperwork and increased pressures linked to EYFS and other new initiatives.
- Most providers have good knowledge of financial support and provide regular information to parents about the affordability of childcare.
- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of children with English as an additional language and 'at risk' children in some areas
- Across the County the most common theme the providers are being asked about is flexibility of hours available. Providers in growing communities unsurprisingly are finding increased pressure on places in both early years and wrap around care. However in rural settings they are trying to be more flexible in order to attract and retain the children to help with their sustainability.
- Accessibility is important to parents, although providers did report that they have children from outside their immediate catchment area showing that parents will travel to find quality provision that meets their requirements. Cross border business was also benefiting some providers.
- The offer of the free educational entitlement has stimulated demand to the extent that many providers, especially some small, village pre-schools are at capacity.
- There is still demand for more affordable and flexible childcare (including Accredited Childminders in some areas of the County in particular areas of Fenland and Cambridge City.
- The general feedback on the support offered by the local authority was very positive and beneficial to providers.
- Children's Centres have increased in prominence since last the CSA, with providers finding them a useful source of support and advice, especially in March & Chatteris locality.

Employers

There is a consistent cultural assumption that looking after the children is still a female responsibility. This seemed not to be contested, even by relatively senior women interviewed during the course of the study.

There appeared to be willingness and often a preference for use of informal care where it was available, mainly because it was affordable and more flexible.

Parents are seen to be responsible for making their own childcare arrangements; employers can support flexible working and the local authority can help to provide it and support employers in being flexible.

It is important that family friendly policies should form part of a wider work/life balance from which all employees may benefit.

A shortage of nursery places was identified; they tended to be seen as having 'proper facilities' for children. However, childminders were seen as potentially more flexible.

The provision short-coming that was most often mentioned by employers was the lack of cover for a few hours either side of the working day to allow for meetings overrunning and commuting times – identified as 'extended' around Cambridge in particular.

The structure of the benefits system was also seen by many as a disincentive to those employing people, in particular women, on a part time basis. There was also a specific problem when additional hours were needed to cover short term service demand.

The cost of childcare was widely seen as a barrier to work, particularly in low pay industry sectors.

Few employers expressed plans to develop further support for families except those who routinely evaluate broader employee benefit packages - usually on a national scale. One contact included a more specific commitment to extend existing parental leave policies to grandparents and 'others' and another explained that forthcoming re-structuring would be 'closely evaluated by the unions' for its effects on parents. This was entirely in keeping with the wider concern about fairness in concessions and benefits made available to employees.

Family friendly policies were generally regarded as a positive way forward by most employers though it seems likely that attitudes vary between workplaces. Decisions about and working culture with regards to flexible working may often be left to relatively junior line managers on a day to day basis.

There was some interest in setting up voucher schemes.

There was a very low awareness of Cambridgeshire F.I.S. Its principal role identified was to provide an updated source of information about obligations to employees who are parents and benefits and support available to children. Cambridgeshire FIS should be the signposting hub, both for their own use as employers and as somewhere employers can direct parents.

Consultation with Children and Young People

Children and Young People aged 11+

Three groups were held with a total of 26 young people aged between 11 and 14 years in Sawston, St Neots and Wisbech, one of which included young people with special needs.

Two venues were formal (paid for) after school clubs and the other was a school offering sports based activities, which some of the young people attended as childcare to give their parents more time for work.

Young people were aware of the difference between after school club (childcare) and after school activities (varied menu) and fully understood the reasons why they attended.

A quarter of the young people attended after school club by choice as they enjoyed it and two thirds of the young people attended one or two nights a week through necessity as their parents were working.

Not all young people in the groups attended an after school club.

Children aged 5 – 11 years

Five schools in Cambridgeshire took part in the survey, resulting in a sample of 177 children from a variety of year groups. The children were asked to respond to 10 questions, an analysis of which is provided below:

Conclusion/points of note

The key findings from this exercise are as follows:

1. Informal childcare is widely used.
2. Most accessing formal childcare are using after school care rather than a breakfast club.
3. Most children attend childcare because their parents work, or train, though some are there for social reasons.
4. A diverse variety of activities is needed to meet the needs of pupils using out of school care.
5. More attention should be given to accessible outdoor play, both before and after school.
6. For children, the most favoured attribute in the adults that look after them was that they make them feel safe. This is support, if any were needed, for the ongoing high prioritisation of staff suitability, and staff training in support to children and young people in out of school settings.
7. Children also liked adults who play games with them and prepare good food.

Foster Carers

The time that foster carers looked after children varied and was not always known at the time children first come into their care. In some cases it may be just overnight, or for a matter of weeks. In other cases it can be right through to adulthood. However, in all cases, it is obvious that foster carers treat their foster children as if they are their own, regardless of time periods.

Foster carers with younger children like to use mother and toddler groups as these are considered good for the children and the foster carers from a socialising point of view. Some foster carers had used nurseries, preschool/playgroups, after school clubs and holiday clubs. The main issue was a lack of consistency as to whether they would be refunded any costs involved. Other barriers were

- Volume of information the foster carer has to give a provider about the child
- Providers not having the skills to deal with foster children
- Transport to access specific groups and clubs
- Lack of awareness of what is on offer for foster parents and the children in their care.
- Feelings of guilt if needing to take respite from foster caring

School holidays were a real worry for many foster carers, especially if their foster children did not attend local schools and thus had few friends living locally. They also worried that if

the foster children attended a holiday club and played up during the first day or two, they would be excluded and thus have to spend all summer at home.

There was an acknowledgment that some older foster children have difficulty making friends and lack social skills.

Foster carers would like to see the pack from the fostering service updated with more content. They would also like to have vouchers for family days out, especially in the summer holidays.

Parents of Children with a Disability

Face to face interviews were held with parents of children with disabilities and additional needs.

12 parents were interviewed, 50% of which were full time carers of their disabled child. The remaining parents were working part time.

All the parents with school age children were pleased with the new after school clubs at the special schools. They felt this was a positive activity for their child, giving opportunity for socialising.

Most parents with younger aged children used (or would start using in September) some formal childcare, mainly the free entitlement (but not the full entitlement), at day nurseries, or preschool/playgroups, most with one to one support.

Not all of the parents were accessing care that met their needs.

“My son had one to one care but he would run away, I thought he would have the same 2 carers all the time but it has not worked out like that. He is now digging in his heels, he will not go out. Sometimes they come and he stays in his room and we go out but that is not the point. The care is not working, so this is when I found out about the after school club, it will be some sort of break. It is not really for me but my other children.”

Parents were keen that their children should use childcare, for the children’s social development and also so they could either work or spend time with their other children. Those families with a more physically disabled child welcomed respite care as this gave the parents a break and enabled them to do activities with their other children, which otherwise was not always possible.

More after school clubs and breakfast clubs are needed that will be flexible and accept disabled children.

Parents also wanted more information, not only about childcare availability but also about entitlements and the process to go through.

Parents with a disabled child face a range of problems including:

- Finding childcare providers that are trained to cope with disabled children
- Finding childcare providers that have the availability of trained staff to cope with disabled children – numbers of staff and times they’re working
- The elongated and difficult process of obtaining a statement

- The lack of freely available information
- Finding irregular care for other children when attending hospital appointments with the disabled child
- Being able to offer disabled children the same opportunities as other children

“He needs a statement for medical needs. The school applied for extra help for his medical needs it should only take 6 weeks but so far it has taken 2 months as it has gone to appeal as the school was not happy with the hours they have been given.”

“The difficulty was with the County Council. They were slow with funding for preschool, so we had to come in to act as his one to one support. When the staff were Makaton trained, they thought it was so good they have done it with the other children who are not disabled. We are starting the process for him being statemented early.”

For parents with older children, summer holidays presented additional problems especially as there was little choice available. Although the local holiday clubs said they were inclusive and did not discriminate against disabled children, the parents said these clubs did not meet the needs of their children.

All of the parents were aware of Tax Credits but only a few received them. The application process was perceived to be complicated.

Having disabled children affected all of the parents with regard to what work they could do; the hours they could work; and the location in which they could work. Their children may have many appointments for hospital review and therapy and this restricts the ability to work of at least one of the parents in the family.

Parents from a Black or Minority Ethnic background

20 parents were interviewed, 25% of these parents worked either full time or part time.

The main reasons for using formal childcare were: to prepare children for school; to help the children learn to speak English before they went to school; and to allow them to socialise with other children.

Most parents not using childcare would like to, mainly so their child/children could mix and socialise and to help them to start to speak English.

The Asian mothers wanted their children to learn basic activities and to be with other children, they also mentioned discipline. They did not access all the hours that the children were entitled to because of a lack of availability. In this regard they were concerned that their three year olds did not yet have places.

The parents, who did not work, were not using childcare until the children were eligible for their free entitlement. They did not need childcare as they were at home looking after their family. However, availability for the free entitlement is an issue: for example one child was due to go to nursery in April but as a result of there being no places available, his start date had been put back until September.

Workless Parents

A total of 21 workless parents were interviewed, the ages of their children ranged from 6 months old to 14 years old.

Five of the workless parents with preschool children were using their full free entitlement at a preschool or nursery, the main reason being to prepare the children for school and to allow them to socialise.

The parents could not anticipate what childcare they might need until they got a job, and so it was low on their priority list. They were all having great difficulty in finding work.

The overwhelming reason for not using childcare was that these parents were not working so could not afford it, and because they were at home they felt childcare was unnecessary. Many of those interviewed were expecting to earn low wages, which would not cover the cost of childcare; it will not be affordable and as such out of their reach. One parent thought they might get shift work and would need out of hours childcare but the respondents could not say what type of care they would need in the future.

Lack of transport was also given as a reason for not accessing childcare.

In terms of help and support most of them would turn to family or friends for help, one person mentioned Job Centre and a couple thought the CAB.

New Communities

A group of parents from a new community at Orchard Park were interviewed. All 17 respondents were female, five of which represented BME families: Asian, Dutch, Spanish, Polish and Kenyan. The ages of the children varied from 3 months to 13 years old.

More than half of the parents did not access any form of childcare stating the following reasons

- Cost of childcare
- Lack of availability close to home for the different age ranges, in particular nursery provision.
- Lack of knowledge in where to access childcare, information and support.

A couple of parents commented that Orchard Park would be improved with the addition of some shops. One parent also mentioned that communication through Orchard Park was not very effective with regards to childcare and other applicable services – she suggested that a communication board or website should be created.

Teenage Parents

A total of 16 young parents were consulted either as a group or face-to-face: individually or in pairs. The ages of the parents ranged from 18 to 21 years and at least half had 2 or more children.

Use of informal childcare was limited and unlikely because grandparents were themselves young and often still working

The cost of childcare and the means to travel to work were seen as barriers to accessing formal childcare. Where some parents had an awareness of the financial support available to assist with childcare costs there was little faith in the cost effectiveness of childcare unless they worked full time and earned a 'reasonable wage'.

Other barriers were

- The lack of funding to help with childcare once a parent who wants to train or study turns 20 years of age
- The lack of availability of childcare places
- Not knowing where to go to obtain information and support.
- Some felt they were better off claiming Income Support.

Shift Workers

The main impact of shift work on their children/lifestyle/use of childcare included:

- One parent not being around at meal times and to put the children to bed, so less quality time spent with children
- Short term extension of childcare use when longer shifts worked and other parent not available
- Difficulty in the partner getting even a part-time job due to changing of shift patterns of main wage earner
- Big impact on sleep patterns, particularly a reduction in sleep time to allow for their personal involvement with their children especially those with younger children
- Partners took flexible jobs, enabling them to change their hours to suit the shift work patterns and changes in shifts and thus be available for childcare

All parents were juggling childcare with most doing alternate shifts with their partner. Thus this created an environment in which the parents spent little time together. Their lifestyle was very much dictated by work shifts patterns and working around childcare.

Most families constantly juggled working hours to minimise the need for childcare and used grandparents, friends or neighbours as a fill in.

All of the respondents that had children in formal childcare said that they had to use childcare to enable them to work and had no other options.

Most parents also referred to the quality of childcare they accessed as being an important factor in their choice of childcare.

Choice of specific childcare setting was mainly due to word of mouth from other parents.

Difficulties experienced in using formal childcare included:

- Closing down of childcare settings
- Long waiting lists for nursery – have to put child's name down as soon as wife becomes pregnant
- General lack of places
- Difficulties in trying to put children into an after school club because it had been at full capacity
- Cost of childcare

Parents thought that in order for them to use childcare in the future, the costs associated with childcare would have to be reduced. Also, particularly for younger children, an extension of the 15 hours entitlement would be useful.

School holidays put additional pressure on parents. They add significantly to costs of childcare and require parents to make alternative arrangements. These included:

- juggling holiday entitlement to allow them to look after their children
- using more informal childcare
- using holiday camps

This group of respondents demonstrated awareness and use of Tax Credits and Childcare Vouchers.