

9 Childcare and Disadvantage

9.1 Introduction

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2007) identifies Parks and Walcot, Penhill and Central as the most disadvantaged areas in Swindon. Characteristics of these areas relevant to childcare are higher numbers of lone parents and higher numbers of workless households.

Swindon Sure Start Partnership at Swindon Borough Council offers family support services in these areas through the provision of Children's Centres. These areas are where the first (phase one) Children's Centres are located.

9.2 The 2008 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

At the point of the 2008 childcare sufficiency assessment 32 parents in disadvantaged areas responded to the consultation either by responding to the questionnaire or during outreach work. This was not a statistically valid sample and indicated that further outreach and engagement work with parents would be necessary.

9.3 Increasing the number of responses from families in disadvantaged areas

The consultation questionnaire for the 2011 childcare sufficiency assessment was distributed to parents via preschool, nurseries, childminders, schools and Children's Centres. This differed from the 2008 assessment when consultation with parents of school aged children was carried out in different ways in different school clusters. By using the same questionnaire for all families in 2011 a higher number of responses (149 in total) was identified from families in disadvantaged areas which is a statistically valid sample.

9.4 Disadvantaged areas and childcare demand

This analysis aimed to gain a more in depth understanding of any similarities or differences in the childcare needs between parents in disadvantaged areas and other areas which need to be accommodated in the Childcare Sufficiency action plan. However, there were no significant differences apparent from the consultation with parents about demand for childcare.

Parent comments about childcare usage included:

- The childcare provided by the nursery is outstanding. The staff are friendly, helpful and relate well to the children
- We are very happy with the standard of care provided

Parent comments about work included:

- Due to lack of available before and after school childcare I am unable to increase my working hours
- We would prefer more flexibility in sessions available – three longer days would work better with our working pattern

- For people to come off full benefits they need to work 16 hours a week so funded education should be for 16 hours

Parent comments about childcare barriers included:

- It is very expensive
- It is impossible to find one carer for all three children
- Finding places in the school holidays and to be able to put all four children in the same place

9.5 Disadvantaged areas and childcare supply

- There are significantly fewer childminders working in disadvantaged areas than elsewhere in Swindon. Those that are working in disadvantaged areas have vacancies.
- The quality of childminders overall as measured by Ofsted outcomes is slightly higher than in other areas (57% in disadvantaged areas have judgements of good or better compared with 56% elsewhere in Swindon)
- The quality of group provision overall as measured by Ofsted outcomes is significantly higher than in other areas (77% in disadvantaged areas have judgements of good or better compared with 68% elsewhere in Swindon)
- Breakfast club provision is available at many of the schools located in disadvantaged areas though there are some gaps in both group breakfast and after school childcare provision.

Significant differences in early education needs between the general Swindon population and the population in disadvantaged areas are:

- Parents in disadvantaged areas are more likely to use the full entitlement (89% in disadvantaged areas compared with 74% elsewhere in Swindon)
- Parents in disadvantaged areas are more likely to be able to find enough sessions (74% in disadvantaged areas compared with 64% elsewhere in Swindon)
- Parents in disadvantaged areas are more likely to want to use five sessions of three hours (47% in disadvantaged areas compared with 41% elsewhere in Swindon)

Parent comments about funded early education include:

- The staff are friendly helpful and relate well to the children.
- I am very happy my daughter has a place at preschool (and with a childminder).

9.6 Two year old funding

Swindon Borough Council trialled funded early education sessions for two year olds in the financial year 2010 – 11 with funding from the Department for Education. Further funding for two year olds was made available to all Local Authorities in 2011 - 12. The aim of the funding was to support both the child's early education and to offer parental support through Children's Centres.

The scheme offers two year olds who have been referred by a relevant professional up to ten hours a week of funded early education. Applications must meet both national criteria set by the Department for Education and local criteria set by the Local Authority. Criteria do not include where a child lives in Swindon, but focus on income and family circumstances.

Over and above the 188 children who benefited from this funding during the pilot stage, an additional 112 children have attended funded sessions for two year olds since additional funding was confirmed.

9.7 Recommendations

- Monitor changes to benefit entitlements and their impact on childcare demand in disadvantaged areas
- Review working arrangements between Job Centre Plus and Swindon Sure Start Partnership childcare brokerage services