



Nottinghamshire
County Council

Cotgrave Children's Centre Community Consultation – Main Report

Written by: Judith Unell and Anne Abel Smith

July 2006

SureStart

Table of Contents

1. Background to the Research.....	3
2. Aim and Objectives of the Consultation	4
3. Methodology.....	5
3.1 Parents' Questionnaire.....	5
3.2. Partners' Questionnaire	5
3.3 Focus Group	6
4. Observations on the Samples	7
4.1 Parents' Questionnaire.....	7
4.2 Partners' Questionnaire	7
4.3 Focus Group	8
5. Main Findings.....	10
5.1 Parents' Questionnaire.....	10
5.1.1 Services ever used.....	10
5.1.2 Usefulness of Services.....	11
5.1.3 Reasons given for services mentioned as not being useful.....	12
5.1.4 Child-friendliness of services.....	13
5.1.5 Reasons given for services mentioned as not being child-friendly	14
5.1.6 Comparing scores for usefulness and child-friendliness	14
5.1.7 Most helpful service to parent	16
5.1.8 Most helpful service to child/children.....	17
5.1.9 Help to use services more often.....	17
5.1.10 Preferences for receiving information.....	18
5.1.11 Reaction to the proposed Children's Centre for Cotgrave	19
5.1.12 Three things Cotgrave needs to make it better for families	19
5.2 Partners' Questionnaire	20
5.3 Focus Group	22
5.3.1 Services most useful to parents	23
5.3.2 Services most useful to the children.....	24
5.3.3 Child-friendliness of services.....	25
5.3.4 Where services are poor or not very useful.....	27
5.3.5 Gaps in services and ideas for improvements.....	28
5.3.6 Specific suggestions for the Children's Centre.....	29
5.4 Issues arising from the Consultation	29
5.5 Key messages for the future	30
6. Appendices	31

Main Report

1. Background to the Research

- In line with the government's current initiative to introduce Children's Centres into communities which fall within the top 20% and 30% of disadvantaged wards nationally, Nottinghamshire has been given the go-ahead for 21 centres to be completed by March 2006, with 3 more to be started in Round One, but completed in Round Two by 2007. A further 25 in Round Two will follow this.
- Children's Centres are intended to provide services and support to children, aged from 0-5 years, their parents and carers, based on partnerships between statutory, voluntary and private organisations and the local authority. Partnership with local parents and their early involvement in planning of Children's Centres is an essential part of the ethos of the Children's Centres programme.
- It is the government's policy to develop Children's Centres within partnerships. Some may be based on a 'strong link' partnership, bringing together existing facilities (e.g. neighbourhood nursery, infants and junior schools, family centre, library, health centre, community centre). Some may involve a new building, creating a one-stop centre attached to or on a school site. Even with a new 'one stop building', there will be a need for sound partnerships with other providers throughout the area.
- All Children's Centres areas will have child care for 50 weeks a year, 8am – 6pm offering care integrated with education.
- Children's Centres are built on the successful practice of Sure Start Local Programmes, which have now all been integrated into the Children's Centres programme.
- Depending on the variable position in childcare, education and other support in local communities, parents/carers and other residents are likely to have different experiences, and therefore will have variable views and feelings about the advent of a Children's Centre in their community.
- Understanding the views of both users and providers, who may be affected in the short and longer term by the implementation of the programme, is vital to ensure that the rollout of Children's Centres is successful and well received within communities.
- Central to the development of Children's Centres is parental involvement and participation, leading to parental involvement in the planning, delivery, evaluation, management and governance of the centres, as appropriate structures emerge.
- Development of the Children's Centres is for families with children under 5; the centres have the potential for wider community use however and could a wider age-range and incorporating, for example, after school care, holiday clubs etc in partnership with the Extending Services in and around schools programme.
- The interviews and the focus group were conducted in an inclusive manner, to enable any parent, worker or member of the community who wished to take part in the consultation to do so. The team aimed to comply with equal opportunities policies and principles throughout the consultation.
- Where possible, hard-to-reach families have been included, where service providers or other agencies were able to give contact details and encourage participation.

2. Aim and Objectives of the Consultation

Overall aim:

- to find out parents' and carers' views and opinions of services on offer for families and young children in their area and how best their requirements can be met in the future with the development of Children's Centres.
- to involve community members and partners in planning together to develop the optimal Children's Centre services for the community.

Specific objectives are:

- i. To identify current provision of childcare, education, health services, family support, leisure facilities and other services relevant to young children and their families, through existing sources where these exist, such as Children's Information Service (CIS), databases or local knowledge
- ii. To identify gaps in the current provision of these services through the involvement and knowledge of service providers, and through discussion with local parents and the community
- iii. To determine which known services on offer are used by parents/carers
- iv. To determine levels of use of services amongst local parents/carers
- v. To gather information on how parents/carers rate the current services used and to seek views on how service delivery could be improved locally
- vi. To understand the likely take-up amongst local parents/carers of the proposed Children's Centre
- vii. To determine an appropriate mechanism for receiving and disseminating information from different local groups
- viii. To identify local anxieties/perceptions/expectations and potential problems for a new Children's Centre amongst parents/carers and partners
- ix. To establish appropriate benchmarks for future research and evaluation
- x. To conduct communications with parents in such a way that future involvement and participation in Children's Centres is encouraged and promoted
- xi. To use the information gathered in the consultation to help create the delivery plan

3. Methodology

The consultation consisted of face-to-face interviews with parents to complete a questionnaire; one focus group with parents recruited via the questionnaire; and a written questionnaire distributed to service providers and key stakeholders in the area, who were also invited to include a list of services in the area.

3.1 Parents' Questionnaire

- The initial phase of the consultation consisted of interviews with parents. It was planned to include:
 - *Parents/carers with children at local schools*
 - *Parent/carers who are users of local toddler groups and other sessions for parents and young children*
 - *Parents/carers living locally*
 - *Local residents*
- Interviews were conducted on 13th June 2006.
- The venues were:
 - Highfields Infant and Nursery School
 - Cotgrave Infant and Nursery School
 - Cotgrave Church of England School
 - Chapel Lane Playgroup
 - Sunshine Playgroup, Cotgrave Futures
 - Cotgrave Health Centre Baby Clinic

The interviews were carried out by the researchers and members of the Children's Centre Development Team, assisted by two trustees and two members of staff from Cotgrave Futures, two Family Centre workers, a Health Visitor and a Homestart worker.

- The questionnaire included an incentive prize draw for a child's Arts & Crafts Set, and an invitation to take part in the planned focus group. Contacts details were taken where given, but this sheet was kept separate from the completed questionnaire.

3.2. Partners' Questionnaire

- Partners, key stakeholders and service providers were informed about the planned consultation in Cotgrave at a meeting on 5th June 2006 at Cotgrave Futures. The partners' questionnaire, consisting of open-ended questions, was used as a discussion guide for the meeting and those present were given copies to take away and complete independently. They were encouraged to return them by 16th June.
- Each person at the meeting was also asked to complete a mapping exercise, giving details of the services of which they were aware in Cotgrave, with times and contact details.
- It was hoped to use this to develop a map of services available in the area to identify any service provision gaps or overlaps.

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

- Other service providers, such as childminders, within a 5-mile radius of Cotgrave were also sent the questionnaire, with an explanatory sheet about developments in Cotgrave. The opportunity to give contact details was given so that the team could make contact in the future; all respondents completed this section.

3.3 Focus Group

- Respondents for the focus group were recruited from the indication in the tick-box on the contact details sheet of the parents' questionnaire showing their agreement to participate. A good response to this was received with 31 offering to take part and 11 saying they were possibly interested.
- Parents were contacted at random from the resulting list, and 12 agreed to come along to Cotgrave Futures on 23 June 2006 between 9.30 and 11.30 am. A free crèche was provided by the Children's Centre for those parents who wished to use it. They were offered a £10 Co-op voucher as a thank you for taking part in the focus group.
- A letter of information, venue and time details and forms for completion for the crèche were sent to these parents on the same day.
- The day before the group was due to take place each respondent was telephoned as a reminder to attend.
- In the event, only 5 of the 12 who had confirmed their attendance actually turned up to the focus group session.
- A mapping exercise was also conducted as part of the focus group to gather knowledge about existing services for them and their children in the area.
- As part of the introduction to the group, an explanation about Children's Centres was given. This was seen as a good way of enabling a wider understanding of the concept to be gained by the parents before the discussion started.

4. Observations on the Samples

4.1 Parents' Questionnaire

- 79 interviews were completed with parents/carers at the various interviewing points, which although low for statistical purposes, can be taken as an indication of parents' views rather than necessarily being representative of all parents in the area.
- The overwhelming majority (75) were female.
- The majority (48%) were aged between 30 and 39 years, with 38% being under 29. 11 (14%) respondents were over 40: these included three grandparents collecting children from school.
- Just under half (49%) of respondents had one child under 5 in the household. 20% had two under fives but only four people had three or more children of this age. 20% of respondents were reported as having no children under 5 in the household.
- Just over a third (34%) of respondents had one child aged 5-16 years in their household; 11% had two; and 10% had three or more. 39% were reported as having no children in this age group.
- Children aged 16+ were found in only 5 families.
- Between them, respondents had 163 children; the number of families with 1 child was 18, the number with 2 children was 34, and 12 families had 3 children. Six families had 4 children, two families had 5, and 1 had 7. 2 respondents said they had no children living with them, and 4 did not respond to the question.
- The total number of children aged under 5 in families interviewed was 84, the number of 5-16s was 72, while the number aged 16+ was 7.
- Given that 79 interviews were completed, this gives the average (mean) number of children of respondents interviewed as 2.1¹.
- None of the respondents reported that they were expecting a baby at that time.
- While only 16% of respondents were working full-time, many more (38%) worked part-time, and just 8% described themselves as unemployed. In addition, 42% described themselves as full-time parents/carers. Three were grandparents.
- 85% of respondents were either married or partnered, while 11% were single.
- Most households (77%) had 2 adults aged over 18 living together in the household, while 14% of respondents lived in households of only one adult. 9% reported having 3 or more adults in the household. The average was 2.0 people in the household aged 18+.
- The ethnic composition of the respondents was 97% White, with 1 Black African person and 1 person from a mixed ethnic background.
- All but 1 of the respondents' postcodes fell into NG12; the remaining one was in NG13.

4.2 Partners' Questionnaire

- 11 completed questionnaires were received from service providers in the Cotgrave area, all of which gave contact details.

¹ This is likely to be slightly higher if those respondents, who did not answer the question about numbers of children, do actually have children in these age groups.

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

- As the table below shows, just over half the partners worked in the field of pre-school development and Early Years education. Two others worked in related settings, the library service and the local health centre. There was also a strong representation from town councillors, three of whom were also trustees of Cotgrave Futures, the location for the proposed Children's Centre.

Table 1 – Partners' settings

Discipline	No. of responses
Pre-school care/development and Early Years education	5
Town council/ Cotgrave Futures	4
Health Centre	1
Library service	1

- The roles which service-providers performed are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Partners' roles

Family Centre worker
Kids Club Manager
Pre-school playgroup chairperson
Health Visitor
Childminder
Out of School Co-ordinator, County Council
Town councillor/trustee of Cotgrave Futures (3)
Clerk to the Town Council
Children's Co-ordinator, Library Service

- 10 of the respondents said how long they had been performing their current role. This amounted to 58.25 years, with an average of 5.8 years.
- Other information was captured from partners at the meeting held on June 5th.

4.3 Focus Group

5 of the 12 recruited parents, all of whom were mothers, attended the focus group. The ages of their children were as follows:

- Between them, the total number of children was 14, 8 of whom were aged 5 or under and 5 aged between 6 and 11 years.
- One mother had four children, 2 others had 3, and the remaining 2 had 2.
- None was expecting a baby.

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

- This gives an average of 2.8 children each, somewhat higher than the reported average of 2.1 seen in the total number of completed questionnaire interviews.
- All the mothers were currently 'full-time Mums'.
- One was on maternity leave but planned to return to work full-time in September when her youngest child would go into a private day nursery. Another was a trained nurse who helped out at the weekly toddler group in Cotgrave; she had no plans to return to paid work.
- One mother had moved into Cotgrave just over a year ago. All the others had lived locally for many years.

5. Main Findings

5.1 Parents' Questionnaire

- Altogether 79 questionnaires were completed, which was below the minimum target of 100. However, a good spread of respondents was achieved across the venues available in Cotgrave on the interviewing day and it was decided after careful consideration that a further round of interviewing was unlikely to produce a significant improvement in the quality and depth of information. Some questions were answered by only a small number of respondents, so care must be taken when comparing percentages.
- Under half (43%) of respondents said that they knew about Sure Start.
- 39% did not know, while 18% were not sure.
- It is not surprising, therefore, that a majority (61%) said that they did not know or were not sure that they knew about the proposed Children's Centre for Cotgrave. 38% said that they did know about the Centre.

5.1.1 Services ever used

- All respondents were asked which local services they had ever used, by means of a Showcard (see Appendix 2). Their responses are shown in Table 3.
- Responses are shown for all respondents and, for comparison purposes, by those who claimed to be aware of Sure Start.
- Care must be taken where numbers responding are low, as these may not typically reflect the views of all local people.

Table 3 – Services ever used

Service	Number ever used service N=79	% ever used Service	% Sure-Start-aware respondents using service
GP practice	71	90	91
Health visitors	67	85	88
Midwife	64	81	76
Children's Library Service	49	62	68
Nursery in a school	47	59	68
Pre-school playgroup	45	57	56
Antenatal sessions	41	52	59
Family member	27	34	38
Friends	23	29	32
Toddler Group	22	28	32
Speech therapy	12	15	18
Story Time Sessions	12	15	18
Dietician/nutritionist	11	14	18
Childminder	10	13	15
Day Nursery	10	13	12
Parenting Advice & guidance	10	13	18

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

Breastfeeding group	9	11	9
Children's Information Service	8	10	15
Home Visits	8	10	12
Crèche	7	9	12
After School Club	5	6	6
Further Education	5	6	6
Toy Library	5	6	12
Homestart	4	5	6
Job Centre	4	5	9
Breakfast Club	3	4	6
Family Centre	2	3	3
Independent School	1	1	3
Home Safety Equipment	1	1	3
Welfare Rights sessions	1	1	3

Shaded areas represent a percentage higher than the total for all users.

- This shows that the GP practice and health visitors were the most frequently used services at 90% and 85% respectively of all respondents.
- Among those services focused on young children, the school-based nursery and pre-school playgroup were the most widely used, ahead of a toddler groups, childminders or a day nursery.
- For the majority of services, levels of use were higher among respondents who were aware of Sure Start.

5.1.2 Usefulness of Services

- Respondents were then asked how **useful** they'd found the services they'd mentioned, for themselves and their family.
- By service mentioned in the previous question, responses were as shown in Table 4.
- The average (mean) score indicates the level of usefulness found by respondents, and the closeness to 5.0 indicates the level of satisfaction.
- However, care must be taken with the low numbers of responses for some services, as resulting percentages are not necessarily representative of views of all. For example, while the Independent School scores 100%, Very Useful, this was used by only one person.

Table 4 – Usefulness of services ever used

Service	Numbers using service N=79	Very useful %	Quite useful %	Not useful / not at all useful %	Average score*
GP practice	71	49	28	4	4.2
Health visitors	67	43	25	10	4.0
Midwife	64	72	8	8	4.5
Children's Library Service	49	63	14	2	4.4

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

Nursery in a school	47	85	9	4	4.7
Pre-school playgroup	45	80	13	0	4.8
Antenatal sessions	41	59	27	5	4.4
Family member	27	93	0	7	4.8
Friends	23	87	9	0	4.8
Toddler Group	22	41	36	14	4.0
Speech therapy	12	42	17	17	3.7
Story Time Sessions	12	42	50	0	4.3
Dietician/nutritionist	11	45	9	27	3.5
Childminder	10	80	20	0	4.8
Day Nursery	10	40	30	20	3.8
Parenting Advice & guidance	10	40	40	0	4.3
Breastfeeding group	9	44	11	1	3.8
Children's Information Service	8	50	25	13	4.1
Home Visits	8	25	25	26	3.4
Crèche	7	43	0	28	3.5
After School Club	5	60	40	0	4.6
Further Education	5	60	20	20	4.0
Toy Library	5	40	20	0	4.0
Homestart	4	25	0	50	2.5
Job Centre	4	0	0	75	2.3
Breakfast Club	3	33	33	0	4.5
Family Centre	2	50	0	0	4.0
Independent School	1	100	0	0	5.0
Home Safety Equipment	1	0	0	100	2.0
Welfare Rights sessions	1	0	100	0	4.0

* Of those giving a response, excluding 'Don't know/no response', where 5= Very useful, 4 = quite useful, 3 = neither, 2 = not useful, 1 = not at all useful

- This indicates generally high levels of satisfaction about the usefulness of services, with a majority achieving a score between '4' and '5'. The lowest scores were given to Homestart, the Job Centre and Home Safety Equipment, but the tiny numbers using these services make these assessments unreliable. Towards the middle of the range, between neutral and quite useful, were Speech Therapy, the Dietician/Nutritionist, the Day Nursery, the Breast-feeding Group, Home Visits and the Crèche.

5.1.3 Reasons given for services mentioned as not being useful

- Respondents were asked about a service they had mentioned as being not useful or not at all useful, and why this was so.
- The response was low (19 in total) reflecting the generally high level of satisfaction generally recorded.
- Most of these people did not give a reason for the services not being useful.

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

- Where a response was recorded, an unsatisfactory service from the health visitor or midwife was mentioned by 4 people, poor information or advice by 2 people, and dissatisfaction with appointments by one person.

5.1.4 Child-friendliness of services

- Respondents were asked how child-friendly they had found the services.
- By service mentioned in the previous question, responses were as shown in Table 5.
- Again the average score gives an indication of the level of child-friendliness felt by respondents, the closeness to 5.0 indicating the level of satisfaction.
- Caution should again be shown when looking at low response numbers.

Table 5 – Child-friendliness of services ever used

Service	Numbers using service N=79	Very child-friendly %	Quite child-friendly %	Not child friendly / not at all child-friendly %	Average score*
GP practice	71	49	23	6	4.2
Health visitors	67	57	19	7	4.3
Midwife	64	45	16	5	4.3
Children's Library Service	49	59	27	4	4.5
Nursery in a school	47	89	6	2	4.9
Pre-school playgroup	45	82	9	2	4.8
Antenatal sessions	41	24	10	7	3.8
Family member	27	85	4	4	4.8
Friends	23	91	9	0	4.9
Toddler Group	22	73	9	9	4.5
Speech therapy	12	50	17	17	3.8
Story Time Sessions	12	75	17	0	4.7
Dietician/nutritionist	11	45	9	9	3.9
Childminder	10	80	0	0	4.8
Day Nursery	10	60	30	10	4.3
Parenting Advice & guidance	10	60	30	0	4.7
Breastfeeding group	9	22	22	0	4.0
Children's Information Service	8	38	0	0	3.9
Home Visits	8	50	25	13	4.1
Crèche	7	43	14	14	3.7
After School Club	5	60	40	0	4.6
Further Education	5	20	0	20	3.0
Toy Library	5	60	20	0	4.4
Homestart	4	25	0	50	2.5
Job Centre	4	0	0	100	1.8

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

Breakfast Club	3	0	67	0	3.7
Family Centre	2	50	50	0	4.5
Independent School	1	100	0	0	5.0
Home Safety Equipment	1	0	0	0	3.0
Welfare Rights sessions	1	100	0	0	3.0

Of those giving a response, excluding 'Don't know/no response', where 5= Very child-friendly, 4 = quite child-friendly, 3 = neither, 2 = not child-friendly, 1 = not at all child-friendly.

- The range of scores for child-friendliness is greater over the range of services than those for usefulness, indicating that services are considered less consistently child-friendly than they are useful. Antenatal sessions, speech therapy, the dietician/nutritionist, the Children's Information Service, the crèche, further education, Homestart, the job centre, the breakfast club, home safety equipment and welfare rights sessions appear at the lower end of the range of scores, while at the other extreme there are several services achieving maximum or near-maximum scores. However, the previous caveat about the interpretation of very small numbers applies in several cases.

5.1.5 Reasons given for services mentioned as not being child-friendly

- Respondents were asked about a service they had mentioned as being not child-friendly or not at all child-friendly, and why this was so.
- Of the 16 people who said that they had experienced a service that was not child-friendly, only 9 gave a reason. These responses are presented in Table 6.
- The lack of a child-friendly environment with a play area and toys to keep children occupied emerges as the leading factor.

Table 6 – Reasons for being not child-friendly or not at all child-friendly

Service	Number of responses	% of those responding
No child-friendly play area or toys	4	25
Not helpful/no interest in or patience with child	2	13
No facilities for children, e.g. changing facilities	1	6
Not appropriate/not suitable for children	2	13

5.1.6 Comparing scores for usefulness and child-friendliness

- Matching the average scores of respondents' views of parent and child's needs gives the following:

Table 7 – Comparison of parent and child average (mean) scores

Service	Average score ¹ Usefulness	Average score ² Child-friendliness	Difference ³
GP practice	4.2	4.2	0.0
Health visitors	4.0	4.3	-0.3
Midwife	4.5	4.3	0.2
Children’s Library Service	4.4	4.5	-0.1
Nursery in a school	4.7	4.9	-0.2
Pre-school playgroup	4.8	4.8	0.0
Antenatal sessions	4.4	3.8	0.6
Family member	4.8	4.8	0.0
Friends	4.8	4.9	-0.1
Toddler Group	4.0	4.5	-0.5
Speech therapy	3.7	3.8	-0.1
Story Time Sessions	4.3	4.7	-0.4
Dietician/nutritionist	3.5	3.9	-0.4
Childminder	4.8	4.8	0.0
Day Nursery	3.8	4.3	-0.5
Parenting Advice & guidance	4.3	4.7	-0.4
Breastfeeding group	3.8	4.0	-0.2
Children’s Information Service	4.1	3.9	0.2
Home Visits	3.4	4.1	-0.7
Crèche	3.5	3.7	-0.2
After School Club	4.6	4.6	0.0
Further Education	4.0	3.0	1.0
Toy Library	4.0	4.4	-0.4
Homestart	2.5	2.5	0.0
Job Centre	2.3	1.8	0.5
Breakfast Club	4.5	3.7	0.8
Family Centre	4.0	4.5	-0.5
Independent School	5.0	5.0	0.0
Home Safety Equipment	2.0	3.0	-1.0
Welfare Rights sessions	4.0	3.0	1.0

¹Of those giving a response, excluding ‘Don’t knows/no response’, where 5 = Very useful, 4 = quite useful, 3 = neither, 2 = not useful, 1 = not at all useful,

²Of those giving a response, excluding ‘Don’t knows/no response’, where 5 = Very child friendly, 4 = quite child friendly, 3 = neither, 2 = not child friendly, 1 = not at all child friendly

³ The larger the figure the larger the difference in the perception of the usefulness and child friendliness of the service. A score of 0 means that the service is seen as equally child friendly and useful

- The closer to an average score of 5, the more ‘useful’ or ‘child-friendly’ a service is considered to be. The difference is shown in bold when the service is more ‘child-friendly’ than ‘useful’.

- The midwife is viewed as more slightly more useful than she is child-friendly, while the health visitors are viewed as marginally more child-friendly than useful. The differences in scores are quite small across the 30 services listed, with just over half (16) being rated more child-friendly than useful, only 7 being more useful than child-friendly and 7 being rated equally on both measures.
- The weighting towards usefulness is greatest for the Job Centre and Breakfast Club, while the weighting towards child-friendliness is greatest for Home Visits, the Toddler Group, Day Nursery and the Family Centre and Home Safety Equipment, although once again, very small numbers apply in several of these categories.

5.1.7 Most helpful service to parent

- Respondents were asked to say which one out of the services they had mentioned was the most helpful to them, as a parent. The following table shows the most frequently mentioned.

Table 8 – Most helpful service to parent

Service <u>most</u> helpful to you as parent	% Mention
Pre-school playgroup	15
GP practice	14
Nursery in a school	13
Health visitors	10
Midwife	9
Family member	8
Childminder	6
Antenatal sessions	4
Children's Library Service	3
Parenting Advice and Guidance	3
After School Club	1
Breakfast Club	1
Toddler Group	1
Children's Information Service	1
Dietician/Nutritionist	1
Family Centre	1
Toy Library	1
DK/NR	8

- It would appear that support from healthcare professionals (the GP, health visitors and the midwife), combined with childcare support from the pre-school playgroup and the nursery in a school, are particularly important to parents in Cotgrave.

5.1.8 Most helpful service to child/children

- Respondents were asked to say which one out of the services they had mentioned was the most helpful to their child or children. The following table shows the most frequently mentioned.

Table 9 – Most helpful service to child

Service <u>most</u> helpful to your child	% Mention
Nursery in a school	24
Pre-school playgroup	19
Midwife	8
Children's Library Service	8
Family Member	8
Childminder	5
Toddler Group	4
GP practice	4
Dietician/Nutritionist	3
Health Visitors	3
Speech Therapy	3
Toy Library	3
After School Club	1
Home Visits	1
Parenting advice and guidance	1
Family Centre	1
DK/NR	6

- The balance of responses is slightly different here, with the nursery in a school rated as being more helpful to the child than the pre-school playgroup, toddler group or childminder, and the midwife rated more highly than the health visitor or GP.

5.1.9 Help to use services more often

- A list of suggestions that might help parents to use services more often or more easily was shown to respondents. See Showcard 2 (Appendix 2). They were asked which of those listed might help them.
- Responses are given for the group as a whole and then for those respondents aged less than 29 years and 30-39 years, the dominant age groups in the sample.

Table 10 – Help to use services more often

Suggestion	Number	Total %	Aged < 29 %	Aged 30-39 %
Different times of events	24	30	30	29
Better price	19	24	33	18
Childcare	17	22	27	13
Better public transport	16	20	27	18
Someone to go with	16	20	23	21
None	24	30	27	37

- These results show that different times of events was the biggest factor that would help parents to use services more often, with little difference between the two age groups.
- Better price, childcare and better public transport were all more important to the younger age group.
- Having someone to go with was the least important factor overall, and was given similar weight by the two age groups.

5.1.10 Preferences for receiving information

- Shown a list of ways of receiving information, respondents were asked to say which they would prefer.

Table 11– Preferences for receiving information

Suggestion	Total %	Aged < 29 %	Aged 30-39 %
	Newsletter	68	60
Flyer / information sheet	61	70	61
Word of mouth (e.g. health visitors, nursery staff)	37	43	26
Word of mouth (family, friends, other parents)	33	27	34
Information session at nursery/clinic/Sure Start	27	30	26
Article in local paper	23	20	26

- These results show a strong preference for written information as the best way of finding out about what is available locally, with younger parents favouring a flyer or information sheet and older parents a newsletter.
- Younger parents preferred to receive word of mouth information from local professionals, while older parents were more content to rely on information passed on by family and friends.
- Younger parents showed a slightly stronger preference than older parents for local information sessions.

5.1.11 Reaction to the proposed Children’s Centre for Cotgrave

- Respondents were asked if they had any comments or concerns about a Children’s Centre coming to Cotgrave.
- 83% did not respond to this question but most of those who did had positive expectations of the Centre. One respondent highlighted a particular need for activities over the summer holiday period, and a meeting place for families.
- One respondent expressed concern about possible competition between the Children’s Centre and the two established local playgroups. Another believed that the Children’s Centre had taken a youth club facility away from local young people (because the Centre is to be located in premises at Cotgrave Futures that formerly belonged to a youth club) and was unhappy about this.

5.1.12 Three things Cotgrave needs to make it better for families

- When asked what three other things Cotgrave needs to make it better for families with young children, respondents came up with a list of suggestions as shown in Table 12 below.

Table 12 – Suggestions to make the area better

Suggestion from respondent	% (N=79)
Playground/Park (better/safer/cleaner)	25
More/better facilities for smaller children	19
More/better child care/nurseries/crèches	16
Outdoor, more/better play areas/somewhere to play/more activities	13
Mother & Baby/Toddler Groups/Playgroups/toddler activities	11
Youth club/Activities for older children	8
More/better information	6
Holiday activities/care for children	5
Before and after-school activities/clubs	5
Indoor/Safe/Soft play area	4
Place to meet/groups for Mums to meet	3
More/better buses/pushchair-friendly buses	3
Swimming pool/leisure facilities	3
Cheap/affordable activities	3
More policing	3
More support/somewhere for support	1
Road safety/speed bumps/school crossing patrols	1
Clean up drugs/litter/dog mess	1
Family entertainment/pub/somewhere to eat with children	1
Other	10
Don’t know/no response	16

- The most frequently suggested ideas focused on outdoor play and leisure activities for all, including older children. These fall outside the Children's Centre remit but are indicative of the concerns of respondents who feel the lack of facilities for older children impacts on their younger children.
- More child care in nurseries and crèches is a pressing concern for parents in Cotgrave, reflecting a relative shortage of local provision
- Parents also want more activities and meeting places for those with very young children, plus care and activities for older children at the end of the school day and during the holidays.

5.2 Partners' Questionnaire

- Partners' anonymised responses are shown in full at Appendix 3.

5.2.1 Current problems or gaps in services

- Partners were asked to comment specifically on services for parents and young children in the Cotgrave area, the site of the forthcoming Children's Centre.
- They said that many parents are isolated and apathetic, sometimes because they have overwhelming personal problems, such as indebtedness, for which little local help is presently available. Young parents often lack essential life skills and are unaware of services that might benefit them.
- Partners believe that many families lack adequate support networks, both informal and formal. One said that some families are becoming fragmented because they cannot obtain housing in Cotgrave, while others are living in overcrowded conditions because of the lack of affordable housing.
- Partners said that there are limited services in Cotgrave for families with young children and teenagers. Families moving into Cotgrave are often surprised at how little is available compared to where they previously lived.
- Specific gaps identified by partners are:
 - Wrap-around child care for nursery age children attending local schools;
 - Afternoon provision for children who require child care in term time;
 - Someone to co-ordinate childminders;
 - Informal family advice on benefits and employment opportunities.

5.2.2 Likely impact of the Children's Centre

- The partners all had positive expectations of the Children's Centre. They hoped it would stimulate:
 - a more co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services and the identification of service gaps;
 - early intervention;
 - the strengthening of an already positive approach to inter-agency working;
 - an umbrella for local services, with a clear focus upon the child and a friendly and accessible point of contact;
 - better relationships with parents, through involving them directly in the Children's Centre, building their confidence and helping them to express their needs;
 - services tailored to local requirements;

- access to wrap-around care, counselling and training in parenthood.

5.2.3 Biggest challenge in developing the Children's Centre

- The partners identified two principal challenges.
- The first is to improve and promote effective joint working by local services and the community. This will require breaking down professional barriers and persuading different organisations to work as a team for the benefit of children.
- A more strategic approach to the development of services and support systems is also needed.
- The second challenge is to tackle the disengagement and apathy of many parents in Cotgrave. A fear of change and mistrust of authority prevalent among 'hard-to-reach' families needs to be overcome if their voices are to be heard.
- All parents need to be made more fully aware of the services that are available.
- Parents need to be brought into the Children's Centre building.

5.2.4 Effectiveness of existing meetings between services

- The partners were asked to identify cross-agency/service meetings already held in the area to discuss local issues. Their comments on their usefulness were also sought, along with information as to whether parents were involved.
- Two respondents mentioned the former Cotgrave Family Support Group, which appears to have operated as a multi-agency group linked to Cotgrave Futures. The group was said to have had limited parental involvement and it was suggested that a new group was now needed, with increased involvement of parents and schools.
- No other cross-agency meetings were mentioned, although different services had their own meeting schedules, sometimes involving parents and service users.
- It was noted that communication between agencies is frequently lacking at present.
- The partners' replies on this issue underline the need for the Children's Centre Development Team to give priority within its action plan to establishing a cross-agency network to support communication and joint working.

5.2.5 Top priorities for Cotgrave

- Responses to a question about their top three priorities for the area tended to reflect the partners' hopes and concerns expressed earlier in the questionnaire. Thus they identified needs for:
 - *"Improved services for families."*
 - *"All services and provisions working as a team."*
 - *"Sharing resources to avoid duplication; therefore more resources available."*
 - *"Raising public awareness."*
- Their replies also revealed their hopes about the values that should underpin the delivery of services in the area:

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

- *“Engaging the community. Making sure that the Children’s Centre is a vehicle for parents to move on to better things and not as a place where poor, disadvantaged or educational underachievers attend.”*
 - *“Accessible support which is seen as taking on board parents’ needs.”*
 - *“Provide a welcoming meeting place. “*
- More specific suggestions about what is needed were:
 - Flexible, affordable local childcare, 5 -14 years (16 years for young people with a disability). This needs to fit around available employment opportunities.
 - Holiday activities/transport provision.
 - Basic life skills – parenting, healthy eating, cooking, home management.
 - Activities for children: accessible, cheap or free; safe places to play.
 - Informal opportunities to meet other families on drop-in basis.
 - Teaching of parenting skills, for example through positive parenting classes.
 - Educational opportunities for parents.
 - Afternoon playgroup sessions.
 - Support for home-based childcare settings.

5.3 Focus Group

- The discussion guide used in the focus group will be found in Appendix 4. This included areas which reflected the main sections of the parent’s questionnaire:
 - Knowledge of services in the area
 - Strengths and weaknesses of current services
 - Gaps in current provision
 - Good things to come from the development of the Children’s Centre
 - Areas for improvement in the local area
- Focus group respondents were initially invited to undertake a mapping exercise, to gather information about services and activities in the area. This can be seen in Appendix 7.
- This showed that peaks of activities in the area fall on certain days, with little known activities on other days.
- Additionally, as a means of asking parents for their views on services, some of the early results from the questionnaires were shared with them and their comments were invited.

Of the 12 parents who had confirmed the previous day that they would attend the focus group, only 5 arrived for the session. All were mothers. The ages of their children were as follows:

- 8 months, and 6, 9 and 11 years
- 10 months, and 4 and 6 years
- 1 and 4 years
- 18 months and 8 years
- 9 months, 2.5 and 5 years

5.3.1 Services most useful to parents

- The focus group members were asked to identify the services they found most useful to them as parents.
- These were (in order of usefulness):
 - Toddler group
 - Pre-school playgroups
 - Nurseries in school
 - Library
 - Leisure centre

- A mapping exercise carried out at the beginning of the session indicated that the main provision for the 0-3 age group in Cotgrave consists of two playgroups (daily) and a toddler group. One playgroup also has a lunch club. All these facilities are term-time only, with the exception of one playgroup which is usually open for the first three weeks of the summer holidays, and the toddler group which sometimes opens for half-term. One playgroup is also closed on Inset days.
- At the moment there is only one toddler group in Cotgrave, and one mother made the point that, in the area where she had lived previously, she had had a choice of a different one each day of the week.
- One of the focus group members was involved in running the Friday toddler group. Recognising that she was inevitably somewhat biased, she commented:

Well, I like it because it's Friday afternoon, the end of the week and you can chill out.... And toddler groups are good because they're cheap.

- There used to be another toddler group at the local Ashlea Special School, but it is currently closed:

It's stopped at the minute...there used to be a toddler group on a Tuesday morning. It was a really nice one... but the lady stopped doing that because she's been on long-term sick with her back and they haven't had any other teachers that wanted to take it on. But it was a fantastic group, really good. They've got a sensory room for the babies that you can go into, and they've got a big hall full of all this equipment and they always did singing, story time and drink and biscuit. It was brilliant, and all for 50p. It was a fabulous group.

- It was thought that whether this toddler group starts up again will depend on whether the particular member of staff is able to come back.
- The playgroups were welcomed as an opportunity to give mothers a break from their children:

Its two and a half hours and you can leave your child for that time and you can go off and do what you want to.

Unell Research Consultants Ltd

- The lunch club which one of the playgroups offered was also popular because it gave mothers a little more time to themselves before picking their children up. However, it cost another £4.50, was only for one and a half hours, and the mothers had to provide packed lunches.
- The nurseries in schools were particularly helpful to parents because the children went daily and there were no costs involved. In Cotgrave, children could go to playgroup between the ages of 2 and 3, and they would usually move into a school nursery sometime after they turned 3.
- The mothers spoke highly of the story time at Cotgrave library which takes place on the first Friday afternoon each month. However, they pointed out that this clashed with the toddler group also held on a Friday afternoon. They felt that, if the Children's Centre were able to persuade the library to reschedule the story time, this would be an obvious improvement:

It's a shame. That's an obvious one to be sorted out, really, because we don't feel we're in a position to say 'you should be open on a Wednesday or whatever...'

- The leisure centre in Cotgrave offers a range of facilities, which are popular with parents. These include Gym Tots, play and soft play sessions, singing, and both pre-booked and drop-in swimming sessions. All require the children to be accompanied by their parents.

5.3.2 Services most useful to the children

- The results of the focus group suggested that the services the parents believed to have been most useful to their children were:

Pre-school playgroup
Library
Toddler group

- The playgroups were particularly valued by mothers whose children were only children or had older siblings in school:

I'd personally have to say the playgroup because, just because of the ages of my children, I had one at home just on her own, so the playgroup was her only real contact all day with other children.

The mothers also appreciated their flexibility in that they could choose the sessions their children went to.

- There was general agreement, though, that playgroups were quite expensive: there was a registration fee of £10 at one playgroup and £5 at the other, and each session costs £4.50. Also, mothers can't just turn up and they're committed to certain sessions, so they have to pay even if the child is not going.

- The library was highly valued as a resource. This was partly because it was centrally located and near the shops, which meant that it could be used for shelter if it was raining or as a reward for children who were reluctant to accompany their mothers shopping. Although the monthly story time was popular with both mothers and children, it was the library itself which was the main attraction:

The library is fantastic. You can go in there whenever.

My children particularly couldn't live without the library, and still couldn't. Even if I don't go to the story sessions all the time, they're really good in there, they've got stuff that you can play with, the books are nicely laid out and they've just changed it again...

- One mother felt that her child had benefited considerably from the toddler group, although she regretted that because she was new to the area, she had not heard about it until her child was 9 months:

I did not find out about the Friday afternoon toddler group until my youngest was already 9 months and...he's not used to being around younger children and (my eldest) was, and you can see a difference. For me one of the big benefits now is the Friday afternoon group because when I do get along I know he's interacting with children of his own age

5.3.3 Child-friendliness of services

- The mothers felt that the facilities available at the baby clinic could be improved – for example, there are only two changing tables and, if these are in use or the task completed, the only alternative is to put the baby on the floor. This was seen as unsatisfactory and potentially dangerous because often mothers would need to bring older siblings as well, and these would tend to run around. One mother said:

What you've got at the minute, you've got basically chairs across the walls so you've got a huge open space but on a Tuesday afternoon it's full of tiny babies and toddlers running around...it's just impossible.'

The room's not very well equipped for toddlers. When you've got your little ones on the floor, it's not the toddlers' fault...there's nowhere really where they can play and you can put your baby away sort of thing.

As a solution, another mother suggested:

They could put a line of chairs across the middle of the room and have babies in the front where the weighing scale is and leave the rest of the space open for the toddlers to run around.

- Access was mentioned as an important feature of child-friendliness – specifically automatic doors for pushchairs and buggies. The mothers commented on the brand-new ones at the health centre which were very effective in being both

child-friendly (i.e. opening automatically) but also child-proof (i.e. hard enough to open so that older children could not 'escape').

- The attitude of the professionals involved was also a factor. The mothers commented on how important it was to be given a polite welcome and some appreciation of the difficulties of the practical difficulties of managing babies and baggage:

So much depends on the staff – whether you actually get a smile out of somebody when you first go up to them, or if they even acknowledge the fact that you might be carrying a rucksack with a changing bag and a baby [before asking] 'What time's your appointment?' or 'Have you got the red book?'.

- Along the same lines, the mothers also suggested that there should be somewhere to leave the inevitable baby 'paraphernalia' when visiting the doctor or health centre:

When they're newborn particularly, you've got the baby, you've got your toddler, you've got the changing bag, the red book, coats, there's nowhere to put them down...

Part of the difficulty was the requirement to leave buggies in the buggy-storage area rather than being allowed or able to take them into the waiting area and the doctors' surgeries. While it was understood that this was common practice elsewhere, too, it was seen to exacerbate the mothers' practical problems:

There's a buggy storage area so you don't have to leave them outside, but you can't take the buggy in to see the doctor or even if you're sitting and waiting, you've got your child on your knee or in a car seat...there's nowhere where you can just put your baby down, just to sort out your other child...

It was felt that, at the very least, there could be stools which could be grouped together to lay a baby on, or hooks to hang one's bags.

- Similarly, the lack of specific changing facilities at the health centre was considered inconvenient and unsatisfactory:

There's nowhere to change them... if you go for a doctor's appointment. The amount of times I've been waiting...and I've said, 'My daughter's filled her nappy, can I change it?' and they've said, 'You'll have to use the disabled toilet.' There's no changing mat or anything, you have to change them on the floor...'

The only place in the health centre with changing facilities was the baby clinic with its two changing tables, but this was often inaccessible to parents because groups were being held in there. However, the mothers in the focus group thought that at the very least a changing mat or pull-down table could be provided in the disabled toilet.

5.3.4 Where services are poor or not very useful

- On Tuesday afternoons a baby clinic is held at the health centre, but this is essentially a weighing session and there are no opportunities for play. There are health visitors present but no childcare worker or nursery nurse. The clinic used to offer 'Baby Play' on a Wednesday once a fortnight, but that has now stopped. One mother commented:

I've been to one previously in a different area and it's not the same, it's very much you just queue up and you do the necessaries and then go and, if you do talk to somebody, it's just because you happen to be next to them. There's nothing really to encourage you to stay there and have a play time.

- Similarly, there are few opportunities for social interaction with other mothers:

I've been to one before in a different area where it's actually done like a session, you might actually learn like safety in the home for half an hour, and you go over and have your child weighed in between times and if you want to stay and talk to the health visitors you can, but there is actually...I mean you don't have to go and listen to whoever's talking and learn anything but there's that opportunity to have a cup of tea and just having a cup of tea makes you think 'I'll just stop for a few minutes'.

- The provision of information about services and activities for younger children was considered to be almost non-existent:

In Cotgrave it's all word of mouth, if you know people who go...I mean I've been in Cotgrave for five years but when I first moved here there was nowhere to find out what was going on. There might be a poster in the doctor's surgery or the library but otherwise there's no way of really finding out what's going on.

My daughter, at the minute she's not quite old enough to go to the playgroup and I didn't even know about the toddler group, so I think if it was better advertised...

- Mothers felt that the Children's Centre could be useful as a source of continually updated information – perhaps via a large notice board. It was also pointed out that midwives and health visitors were in a prime position to make new mothers aware of the support and facilities available in their local communities:

I actually think that the midwives or maybe the health visitors should have something. When a new baby's born, there is so much to take in but one of the things that is important is to be able to get into a network where you can meet new mums, and maybe having the midwives saying, look you're in this village, these are the possibilities that you can go to, we'd encourage you to go along and you can meet some new people. At the moment they only tell you about the clinic which isn't really a meeting place for mums, it's just a weighing centre!

- There used to be a play park for younger children but it was removed after being vandalised. Consequently, the provision of outside play facilities for this age group was highlighted as very poor:

Oh, my God, they so need a park. It's dire...

They've done the big park but it's useless for little ones...they can't get on it...even my 6-year-old struggles to get across some of the bits on there.

What they need is that one from West Bridgford here in the middle of Cotgrave. That's fantastic. They've got big things for the older ones, little crawl-through tunnels, a sand pit, swings...

It's enclosed so you can keep an eye on your children, it's got chairs so the mum can sit down and it's all bark as well. It's just really nice.

- There was general agreement that there was a significant need for play provision specifically for younger children, but it was thought that this should be in the same place as the play area aimed at older children, so long as attempts were made to prevent vandalism:

They need to be together because if you've got two kids of different ages you want to have them in one place definitely, but what you need to do is to have the high fences with the spikes on and whatever paint it is, and then lock them so the [older kids] can't get in, because the kids are all out there around 5, 6 o'clock so that's when you need to lock them.

- Similarly, there was very little indoor play provision for younger children, when it was raining, especially in the holidays when the playgroups were shut:

When it rains, there's not really an awful lot to do indoors, without spending loads of money basically. In the holidays, when the playgroups are shut and it's bucketing down with rain, you can go to the library or swimming and that's really about it.

Ideas discussed included a small play area, possibly a 'soft' play area, and singing and story-telling groups. Mothers liked the idea of the facility being 'drop-in' rather than run as pre-booked sessions, and also of there being a café where they could buy drinks and meet other people.

5.3.5 Gaps in services and ideas for improvements

Suggestions for services or activities that would plug gaps in local provision and improve life for parents and children were as follows:

- An outdoor play area specifically for younger children.
- A 'drop-in' play area for under-2s, and also for under-5s during the holidays when the playgroups were closed; if there were a café as well, this could become a welcome meeting-place for mothers and carers.

- A rescheduling of the story time at the library so that it doesn't clash with the toddler group.
- A second toddler group, similar to the Friday one, but preferably held in the morning.
- A play area for older children who accompany their mothers to the baby clinic.
- The Gym Tots session at the Leisure Centre is only for 2-year-olds and under, so some similar afternoon facility for 4-year-olds, who have been at nursery or playgroup in the morning, would be welcome.
- More local childminders with available spaces. One key childminder has moved away and there are now very few in the area (when one mother was looking for one recently, there were eight but only two with available places).
- A toy library – the childminders used to meet and share toys, but there has never been any similar facility for parents.
- Better advertising of local services and facilities for 0-5s, perhaps in the library and notice boards in doctors' surgeries.
- Improved baby-changing facilities at the health centre.

5.3.6 Specific suggestions for the Children's Centre

- When asked for suggestions about what the Children's Centre might offer, the parents came up with:
 - support in the form of full-time childcare for working mothers
 - a meeting place for childminders to meet with the children in their care – i.e. a 'Nannies and Nippers' group
 - a meeting place for mothers with new babies – perhaps a regular group in the morning when older siblings are in nursery or playgroup
 - providing space so that the Sunshine playgroup could offer an afternoon session, perhaps by offering alternative space to the 'Kids' Club' (for older children)
 - an information resource about services and activities for 0-5s perhaps via a continually updated notice board
 - a 'drop-in' play area for younger children, perhaps offering a play/soft play area, singing and story-telling sessions, and a café for mothers and carers to meet and chat
 - activities during half-term and school holidays
- The group expressed no concerns about the development of the Children's Centre.

5.4 Issues arising from the Consultation

The community consultation in Cotgrave, comprising interviews with parents, the parents' focus group and a written questionnaire to service providers, indicated the following:

- a warmly positive response to the idea of the development of the Children's Centre
- a strong endorsement of the principle that the Children's Centre provision should be needs-led and planned on the basis of a continuing dialogue with parents

- a desire on the part of local services and groups for a constructive partnership with the Children's Centre
- a need for improved and safe indoor and outdoor play environments in Cotgrave, especially for under-5s
- a demand for childcare to complement school provision, particularly with regard to holiday care
- a need for more provision for the 0-2 age group
- a desire on the part of parents and professionals to improve the quality of communication and consultation about services for families with young children.

5.5 Key messages for the future

- The interviews with parents, the focus group and input from the partners show a high level of agreement about the needs of parents and young children in Cotgrave for the future.

These include:

- More up-to-date information about services and activities to be available to parents in a format and location/s to be agreed, but somewhere accessible to the majority.
 - Raised awareness of existing services across the area.
 - Increased provision of relevant services for families with young children in the area.
 - The need for more play and leisure activities, for young children, throughout the year, with their families, and for older ones as well.
 - Access to training in parenting skills and life skills for young parents; also better access to employment-related training and education.
 - The coordination of service providers and improved partnership working to deliver services.
- While the consultation necessarily had its limitations, due to lack of time and resources, the results are still felt to be representative of the community; it was always seen as a first conversation to provide a basis with which to develop the future Children's Centre in Cotgrave.
 - There is the need to assure parents and partners that the Children's Centre is sustainable and that the involvement of all parties is crucial in its success, as well as allowing parents to take ownership of the Children's Centre, to be jointly engaged with professionals in the provision of services for them and their families.
 - This consultation and the planned feedback session are the starting points from which services for children under 5 and their families will develop. There is every reason to think from responses that parents will become involved, so that the Children's Centre becomes their service, rather than something delivered to them.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Parents' Questionnaire

Appendix 2 – Showcards

Appendix 3 – Questionnaire for Service Providers/Partners

Appendix 4 – Discussion Guide for Sure Start Children's Centres Focus Groups

Appendix 5 – 'Other' Responses from Parents' Questionnaire

Appendix 6 – Responses from Partners and Service Providers

Appendix 7 – Mapping exercise: Current Services in Cotgrave from parents and partners