

Retford (North) Children's Centre Community Consultation – Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Nottinghamshire has been given the approval to develop 22 Children's Centres in the county by March 2006, 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, and involving local parents in the planning, delivery, management and evaluation of their local Children's Centre.
2. All Children's Centres will provide day-care, with a qualified early years teacher leading the curriculum, with some day care places reserved for local families. Other core services are support to child minders, play and early learning for the 0-3s, health and family support, and opportunities to access training and employment.
3. The overall purpose of the consultation in Retford (North), as elsewhere, was to inform the community about the forthcoming Children's Centre development, determine the views of parents, carers and partners, to identify knowledge and views of current services and the perceived needs for the future for families; to involve parents, carers and partners in developing future services for the community, and use the output from the consultation to help in the development of the delivery plan for Retford (North) Children's Centre.
4. The full report discusses the consultation in greater detail; the report, with appendices, is available from Diane Tinklin, Children's Centre Team or Janet Lang, Consultant, or will shortly be available as a pdf file from www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/eydcp/childrenscentres.

Questionnaire completion

5. After initial meetings with partners to explain the purpose and process of the consultation, self-completion questionnaires gathering their views were completed and returned by 9 service providers.
6. Members of the Children's Centre team and local workers conducted interviews with 67 parents and carers, of whom 35 volunteered to take part in the planned focus group, to be held in Retford (North) the following month. This is an indication of the keen interest shown by parents.
7. Caution should be exercised in comparing percentages, as some questions received low responses.
8. The majority of respondents fell into either the under 29-age group (36%) or 30-39 age group (46%), and all were female. Some 81% of respondents had children under 5, and none said that they were pregnant at the time.
9. 51% stated they were working either full or part-time, and 87% were either married or partnered. The average number of people aged 18+ living in the household was 2.0 people.
10. Asked about their ethnic background, all respondents who answered the question - the majority of respondents- described their ethnic origin as white.
11. Asked about local services ever used, the highest scoring were:
 - Health visitors (used by 91% of respondents)

- GP practice (90%)
 - Nursery in a school (85%)
12. This was followed by services mainly for children, and informal help with child care from family and friends:
- Toddler group (72%)
 - Midwife (64%)
 - Pre-school playgroup (51%)
 - Children’s Library service (48%)
 - Ante-natal sessions (42%)
 - Family member (42%)

All other services scored 25 % or less i.e. 1/4 or less of respondents claimed to use the service as listed. (See table 3 in main report)

13. Respondents were asked how useful, and how child-friendly, they had found the service they’d mentioned. From the results, an average (or mean) score was calculated showing which service was most highly rated, with 5 being the highest possible score. (See tables 4 & 6 in main report)
14. The following scores show that these services tended to be very highly rated, along both dimensions but that those targeted more specifically at children were considered more child-friendly than health services. (Average of 4.8 compared to 4.1)
15. Similarly, the average mean score for usefulness for health services is 4.3 compared to 4.6 for averaged child-centred services.

| | Numbers using service | % Ever used | Mean score* - usefulness | Mean score* - child-friendly |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Health visitors | 61 | 91 | 4.2 | 4.3 |
| GP practice | 60 | 90 | 4.4 | 3.9 |
| Nursery in a school | 57 | 85 | 4.8 | 4.9 |
| Toddler Group | 48 | 72 | 4.4 | 4.5 |
| Midwife | 43 | 64 | 4.6 | 4.3 |
| Pre-school playgroup | 34 | 51 | 4.4 | 4.8 |
| Children’s Library Service | 32 | 48 | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| Antenatal sessions | 28 | 42 | 4.0 | 3.8 |
| Family member | 28 | 42 | 4.9 | 5.0 |

*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

16. Comparing the mean scores for usefulness and child-friendliness for these services, it can be seen that the GP practice is viewed as more ‘useful’ than it is ‘child friendly’.
17. Reasons given for perceived shortcomings for any of the services included the lack of a child-friendly play area and toys, difficulties in talking confidentially in front of the children, negative or patronising attitudes on behalf of receptionists, long waiting times and lack of patience with the child (See table 6 in main report). However, responses were very low.

18. The most helpful service cited by parents for themselves from the list shown was, by a considerable margin, Nursery in a school (24%), followed by Midwife (7%), Childminder (7%), Family Member (7%), Breast-feeding Group (6%) and GP Practice (6%).
19. The most helpful service for the child was again said to be Nursery in a school (36%), followed by Pre-school Playgroup (10%) and Health Visitor (6%).
20. Parents suggested that better public transport would help them to use services more often, followed by better childcare and different times of events. Better public transport was important to younger parents, while childcare was more of an issue for older respondents. (See table 10 in main report)
21. The preference for receiving information tended to be by newsletter or flyer/information sheet, followed by word-of-mouth information from local professionals such as health visitors or nursery school staff. (See table 11 in main report)
22. Asked what 3 things Retford (North) would need to make it better for parents with young children, the most frequently suggested ideas focused on play and leisure activities for all children, including older ones, indicative of the concerns of respondents who feel that the lack of facilities for older children impacts on their younger children. More mother and toddler groups and more provision for children to be looked after before and after school and during the school holidays were other priorities stated by the parents. (See table 12)

The Focus Group

23. Eleven parents were subsequently selected at random from the 35 willing parents/carers for the focus group, of whom 6 took part.
24. Most respondents had more than one child and had lived in the area for some time. They carried out a mapping of services and activities during the focus group. This demonstrated an uneven awareness of available services within the group.
25. On the whole, the findings reflected the results from the questionnaire, including the call for more information about available services.
26. These mothers also wanted more information about alternative and complementary therapies for their children.
27. Some dissatisfaction was expressed about out-of-hours care provided by local GPs during emergencies involving their children, and one mother felt that she had received little support from her doctor when she had suffered from postnatal depression.
28. The lack of crèche facilities at the Leisure Centre was felt to limit its usefulness to parents, and there was concern that leisure facilities would be reduced when the Leisure Centre opened after its refurbishment.
29. Breast-feeding support was identified as a service that had proved particularly beneficial, both practically and emotionally.
30. It was emphasised that breast-feeding support is equally necessary for second and subsequent children, although this was not always recognised by healthcare professionals.

31. The parents agreed about the valuable role played by the school-based nursery in their children's development but they also believed that their children needed more safe, open spaces for unstructured play.
32. They said that public amenities in Retford were generally not child-friendly. It was difficult to find anywhere to change or breast-feed their young children, and the toilets in the centre of town were poorly lit and inaccessible to pushchairs.
33. Facilities for changing and occupying children at GPs' surgeries and at the Job Centre were also described as very limited.
34. Irregular bus services and the lack of buses with drop-down floors to accommodate pushchairs added to the difficulties of parents travelling into the town centre.
35. The main ideas for improvements or additional services to the area from this group of parents were:
 - Better-maintained parks and more access to open land
 - Communal allotments to promote self-sufficiency and healthy eating
 - Better facilities for the 10-15 age group, particularly a youth club
 - Better toilet facilities in public spaces, shops and surgeries
 - An up-grading of the local bus service.
36. The parents put forward many imaginative ideas about how the children's Centre might help local parents and children, including:
 - Baby yoga and massage
 - Classes on different cultures and religions
 - Advice and guidance at all stages of a child's development, and help in learning to play with babies
 - A local information exchange
 - Toddler groups for grandparents and grandchildren.
37. Some concerns were expressed about aspects of the Children's Centre and its impact on the immediate neighbourhood.
38. The parents were particularly anxious about parking and about the security of the Children's Centre building.
39. Other concerns were how the development would affect the appearance of the school and whether the Children's Centre would continue to be supported by central government funding over the longer term.

Partners' Views

40. Some of the views of partners were similar to those expressed by parents both in the questionnaire and the focus group.
41. For example, they identified a need for 'wrap-around care', such as after-school care and, more generally, for affordable childcare.
42. They also deplored the poor maintenance and security of outdoor play facilities.
43. In addition, they saw a need for better local access to specialist services, such as speech and language therapy and child and family therapy.
44. They felt that parental support should include training, back-to-work advice, help with library and internet access, and information on benefits and grants.

45. They were generally optimistic about the impact of the Children's Centre, anticipating that, through improved co-ordination and localised delivery, services would become more accessible and better targeted. They believed that the Children's Centre would offer a readily identifiable focal point for the provision of specialist services.
46. There were some practical concerns about the operation of the Children's Centre, notably around access, parking and the prevention of vandalism.
47. The partners were also concerned about whether the Children's Centre would effectively be able to serve both Hallcroft and Carr Hill.
48. Their replies suggested that more needs to be done in the area to promote partnership working and parental involvement.
49. The partners' priorities for the area reflected both the substantive services they wished to see in place, such as affordable and flexible childcare, and the approaches they would like to see adopted by service providers. Thus, for example, they wanted *"balance in providing services that don't patronise or make people feel threatened."*
50. A partner who was a childminder expressed concern that the Children's Centre might actually reduce care choices for young children by eroding the position of local childminders.