

Hucknall East Children's Centre Community Consultation – Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Nottinghamshire has been given the approval to develop 21 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 Hucknall East, 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 Hucknall East Children's Centre at Butler's Hill.
4. The full report discusses the consultation in greater detail; further copies of the report, with appendices, are available from Di Kingaby, Children's Centre Development Officer or Judith Unell, Consultant and author of this report, 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 16 service providers.
6. Members of the Children's Centre team and local workers conducted interviews amongst 102 parents and carers, of whom 44 volunteered to take part in the planned focus group, to be held in Hucknall the following week. This is an indication of the keen interest shown by parents.
7. An encouraging 37% said that they knew about the proposed Children's Centre for Hucknall East, but the majority (61%) did not know or were not sure.
8. The largest number of respondents fell into the 30-39 age group (45%), with 38% aged 29 or less. 96% were female. Almost half (46%) had at least one child under 5, and nearly a quarter (23%) had two under-fives. Only 7 respondents said that they or their partner were pregnant.
9. 59% stated they were working either full or part-time, and 85% were either married or partnered. The average number of people aged 18+ living in the household was 1.9 people.
10. Asked about local services ever used, the highest scoring were health services
 - GP practice (86%)
 - Health visitors (85%)
 - Midwife (73%)
 - Antenatal services were used by 57% of respondents.
11. The most frequently-used children's services were:

- Toddler group (65%)
 - Children’s Library Service (54%)
 - Nursery in a school (51%)
 - Pre-school playgroup (44%)
 - Family member (41%)
12. All other services scored less than 30%: i.e. less than 1/3 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 among those services most highly rated for usefulness, those providing a child-centred service were considered more child-friendly than health services.

| | % Ever used | Mean score* - usefulness | Mean score* - child-friendly | |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| GP practice | 86 | 4.1 | 3.6 | } Health services |
| Health visitors | 85 | 4.2 | 4.2 | |
| Midwife | 73 | 4.7 | 4.3 | |
| Antenatal sessions | 57 | 4.2 | 3.2 | |
| Toddler group | 66 | 4.7 | 4.9 | } Child-centred services |
| Children’s Library Service | 54 | 4.3 | 4.5 | |
| Nursery in a school | 51 | 4.8 | 4.8 | |
| Pre-school playgroup | 44 | 4.6 | 4.8 | |
| Family member | 41 | 4.8 | 4.8 | |

*Of 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

15. Comparing the mean scores for usefulness and child-friendliness for these services, it can be seen, for example, that the GP practice is viewed as more ‘useful’ than it is ‘child friendly’, whereas the pre-school playgroup is marginally more child-friendly than useful.
16. Just under a quarter of respondents (24%) identified a service that was not helpful or useful, reflecting generally high levels of satisfaction. For the small number of dissatisfied users, poor information and an unsatisfactory response from the health visitor were the principal reasons given.
17. At 39%, the proportion of respondents who reported a service as not child-friendly was somewhat higher. The principal reasons given was the lack of a child-friendly play area or toys.
18. When asked to identify the one service that had been most helpful to them as parents, the respondents cited the school-based nursery (19%), toddler group (15%), pre-school playgroup (11%) and health visitor (9%). (See table 8 in main report)

19. The most services nominated as most helpful for their child were, similarly, the school-based nursery (24%), toddler group (21%), and the pre-school playgroup (13%), followed by the day nursery (8%). (See table 9 in main report)
20. Parents suggested that different times of events would help them to use services more often, followed by childcare, although both these factors were more important to younger than older respondents. (See table 10 in main report)
21. There was a strongly expressed preference for receiving information by newsletter. Word-of-mouth information from local professionals or specific information sessions at a nursery or clinic were the next most favoured means of finding out about what is available. (See table 11 in main report)
22. When asked if they had any comments or concerns about a Children's Centre for Hucknall East, most did not respond, reflecting low levels of prior awareness about the development. However, 21% expressed very positive support for the new initiative.
23. A question about which 3 things Hucknall East needs to make it better for parents with young children revealed that more and better play opportunities for children was the top priority. In particular, there was a perceived need for better and cleaner outdoor facilities in playgrounds and parks, and several respondents wanted better indoor play areas too.

The Focus Group

24. Parents who completed the questionnaire were asked whether they would be willing to take part in a focus group to discuss the issues raised in greater depth. Of the 44 willing parents, 10 were selected at random and 5 turned up for the session. All were long-term residents of Hucknall and they had 8 children between them, ranging from 4 months to 6 years.
25. The focus group session began with a mapping of the local services and activities for families with young children and went on to explore their own experiences and ideas about the services they received.
26. These mothers, several of whom had very young children, were particularly enthusiastic about the benefits of toddler groups, which offered parents and children parallel opportunities to socialise in a relaxed and informal environment. Their value as a means of meeting other parents was repeatedly emphasised.
27. Other services that these parents had found particularly valuable were the antenatal sessions and the Premier Mums Group for first-time mothers, both based in a clinic at one of the health centres. Both were highly rated for the usefulness of the information imparted during the sessions and for the opportunities they offered to build networks of new friends.
28. Informal friendships with other parents were seen to be as important and useful as local services.
29. The focus group mothers felt that the local services targeted specifically at parents with young children made considerable efforts to be child-friendly. Limitations tended to reflect practical constraints rather than negative attitudes. There were concerns, however, about the lack of changing and toilet facilities for children at the library in the centre of Hucknall.
30. Their main criticisms about a lack of child-friendliness were reserved for general community services (such as doctors' surgeries) and those directed principally at adults, such as the Job Centre. A lack of crèche facilities, inadequate play facilities and toys, being made to feel awkward if your children were with you, and erratic waiting times all made life difficult for parents with young children.

31. Information giving about services and activities was considered to be rather hit-and-miss. A suggestion was made for a community notice board or information sheets for parents. An exchange of information could be combined with an exchange of toys and children's equipment.
32. Other ideas for improvements or additional services to the area from this group of parents were:
 - a group which Dads could attend with their children
 - free parents' classes on First Aid for children
 - a safe, well-looked-after park where mothers and children could feel safe during the day and which could be secured at night to prevent vandalism (also reflected in the report 'Churches Together in Hucknall: Results from the Community Listening Exercise 2003/2004')
 - more activities for older children and places for them to meet their friends
 - more holiday care and after-school care.
33. When asked for suggestions about what the Children's Centre might offer, the parents came up with:
 - a breast-feeding support group plus a welcoming drop-in area for mothers needing to breast-feed their babies.
 - a lunch club for young children that would help them with their diet and get them used to eating sociably alongside other children.
34. The group expressed no concerns about the arrival of the Children's Centre. One mother had had some initial anxieties about how it would affect the toddler groups in Hucknall but now felt reassured that it would be co-ordinated around existing provision.

Partners' Views

35. There was an agreement among the partners that the Butler's Hill area was relatively poorly served, both by child-specific services such as toddler groups and pre-school playgroups and generalist services such as GPs and Post Offices.
36. They saw a need for many more facilities for young families, including affordable childcare, more nursery places, better access to health visitors and Speech and Language Therapy, and more after-school care. They wanted services to be truly responsive to families and needs led.
37. Many welcomed the opportunity that would be offered by the new Children's Centre to be provided in a more integrated and accessible way, with improved opportunities for inter-agency working.
38. At the same time, anxieties were expressed that the siting of the Children's Centre in Butler's Hill might result in a net loss of services to Central and North Hucknall, particularly through the movement of the Spring Street Family Centre from its present location to the new Children's Centre. Involving parents from all areas of Hucknall and giving them choice about how and where to access services were therefore seen to be key issues.