

Boughton Ollerton Children's Centre Community Consultation – Executive Summary

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May 2005

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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 Boughton Ollerton, 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 Boughton Ollerton 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 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 12 service providers.
6. Members of the Children's Centre team and local workers conducted interviews with 118 parents and carers, of whom 37 volunteered to take part in the planned focus group, to be held in Boughton Ollerton the following week. This is an indication of the keen interest shown by parents.
7. While 118 interviews were completed, 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 (45%) or 30-39 age group (44%), and were predominantly female (92%). Some 84% of respondents had children under 5, while only 7 respondents said that they were pregnant.
9. 42% stated they were working either full or part-time, and 74% were either married or partnered. The average number of people aged 18+ living in the household was 1.8 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 83% of respondents)
 - GP practice (80%)
 - Midwife (76%)
12. This was followed by services mainly for children, namely:
 - Nursery in a school (71%)

- Children’s Library service (47%)
- Family member (36%)
- Day nursery (35%)
- Family Centre (30%)
- Toy Library (29%)
- Pre-school playgroup (28%)
- Toddler group (26%)
- Home Safety Equipment (26%)

13. 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)
14. 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)
15. The following scores show that these services tended to be very highly rated, but those providing a child-centred service were considered more child-friendly than health services. (Overall average of 4.7 compared to 4.2)
16. Similarly, the overall average mean score for usefulness for health services is 4.4 compared to 4.6 for average mean scores of child-centred services.

	Numbers using service	% Ever used	Mean score* - usefulness	Mean score* - child-friendly	
Health visitors	98	83%	4.4	4.5	Health Services
GP practice	94	80%	4.3	3.9	
Midwife	90	76%	4.7	4.5	
Antenatal ¹	56	47%	4.1	4.0	
Nursery in a school	84	71%	4.8	4.8	Child-centred services
Children’s Library Service	56	47%	4.4	4.3	
Family member	43	36%	4.8	4.9	
Day Nursery	41	35%	4.6	4.7	
Family Centre	35	30%	4.8	4.8	
Toy Library	34	29%	4.3	4.3	
Pre-school playgroup	33	28%	4.5	4.8	
Toddler group	31	26%	4.6	4.8	
Home Safety Equipment	31	26%	4.5	4.6	

*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

17. 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’. (Mean score of 4.3 compared to 3.9)
18. Reasons given for perceived shortcomings for any of the services included being ‘not child-friendly’, ‘no toys or play area’, ‘giving poor advice’, and difficulties with waiting times or appointments. (See tables 5 & 7 in main report). However, responses were relatively low.
19. The most helpful service cited by parents for themselves from the list shown was Nursery in a school (22%), Day nursery (14%), Midwife (11%) and Family Centre (10%). (See table 9 in main report)

¹ Order changed to include with Health Services

20. The one most helpful service for the child was again said to be Nursery in a school (33%), with Day nursery at 15%. (See table 10 in main report)
21. Parents suggested that different times of events would help them to use services more often, followed by 'better public transport' and 'childcare'; 'better public transport' was more important to younger than older respondents. (See table 11 in main report)
22. The preference for receiving information tended to be by newsletter or information sheet. (See table 12 in main report)
23. Asked what 3 things Boughton Ollerton 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. A meeting place, especially for mums, the need for more support and general improvements to the area were the next most frequent requests. (See table 16)

The Focus Group

24. Eleven parents were subsequently selected at random from the 37 willing parents/carers for the focus group, of whom 5 took part.
25. Most respondents had more than one child and had lived in the area for some time, although a couple had moved to the area relatively recently. They carried out a mapping of services and activities during the focus group. This demonstrated a lack of awareness of available services amongst most of this group, although one of the newcomers had very proactively found out about activities.
26. On the whole, the findings reflected the results from the questionnaire, including the call for more information about available services.
27. A couple of the mums in the group were critical of the service provided at the nursery in schools in the area, and wished they had realised that their child could have stayed longer at the neighbourhood nursery. However, not all of the group shared this opinion.
28. The Family Centre was enthusiastically endorsed by those aware of the services it offers, like the Drop-in sessions, but several thought that it was only available if referred by Social Services. It was suggested that the Family Centre does not advertise its services widely enough.
29. Mums like the type of sessions that the Family Centre and Toddler groups offer, where they can stay with their children but meet and mix with other parents, but it was felt that there is not enough of this type of provision in Boughton Ollerton.
30. Existing holiday and weekend provision was also not felt to be available, especially for older children, and this was something that the respondents felt needed addressing.
31. The Health Visitor service was criticised by some for being reactive, and for not being able to provide information required. They felt that the demise of home visits was detrimental and that some families will be missed, if they do not have to attend baby clinics.
32. Some spoke of the lack of support received from some Healthcare services, in their experience, but there was also an example of good working practice.
33. Respondents were generally critical about the standards of facilities for them and their young children in Ollerton town centre, citing either Tesco store or the GP practice disabled toilets as the only suitable ones readily available,

although the library was said to have the right sort of attitude towards mums with children, even if access was not very easy.

34. One respondent's experiences with Open Learning demonstrated the difficulties faced in order to combat lack of reliable transport, need for childcare and inconsistencies in learning facilities.

"...the logistics of it, when you sit there and work it out – it's a nightmare. It's not only not child-friendly; it's not parent friendly. Or you end up doing an evening course when you should be at home with the kids, and you're at home doing nothing all day when they're at school. This get-the-mums-back-to-work thing could have been done an awful lot easier."

35. Parents spoke about their expectations for the Children's Centre based on what they had heard so far. They anticipate that it will benefit children who should learn to mix better, and mums who should feel less isolated if there opportunities for them to mix with other mums.
36. However, there was much talk about the problems faced by those on the Retford Road estate, which is traditionally stigmatised, it was said, and therefore prevents the Toy Box neighbourhood nursery from fulfilling its potential. They suggested that this must be overcome for the Children's Centre programme to be successful.
37. Similarly, it was said by some of these respondents that the Children's Centre must make sure that potential users do not associate it with negative perceptions of Social Services.

Ideas for Improvements

38. The main ideas for improvements or additional services to the area from this group of parents were:
- Soft-play or tumble-tots activity
 - Activities for 6-10 year olds
 - Play schemes for the school holidays especially for those parents without access to transport
 - Path to link the Dukeries Complex to Toy Box nursery, to provide a link between the two areas and give easier mud-free access from the estate to the school
 - More help and support for working parents
 - Youth club or similar to cater for older children, as it was believed that the existing youth club in the Dukeries was closing down
 - Weekend activities were also felt to be important to this group
 - Promotion either of the Family Centre or the type of activity that they currently offer.

"The Family Centre is fantastic but it's only open school hours – what about weekends? What if you're at work – there's nothing then".

And overall

- More information available about activities and services, which is up-to-date and age appropriate

Partners' Views

39. The views of partners largely reflected those expressed by parents both in the questionnaire and the focus group.
40. The requirements for the area as perceived by the partners included more play facilities, the need for more effective communication of services to parents and the need to encourage more use of services by parents.
41. There was also the acknowledgement that better services could be offered, such as those delivered by Sure Start local programmes.
42. A few highlighted the need for co-operation amongst service providers in the way services are delivered through more effective partnership working, but there was also the emphasis on the need to promote existing good practice to parents, but in such a way that parents feel empowered rather than dictated to.

"I hope it means two things – that services will be more coherent and professionals will work more closely together. Secondly, that parents will gain the confidence to demand what their children are entitled to."

43. The possibility of both uniting the community and enabling professionals to operate more effectively through increased provision was also mentioned.

"The Children's Centre should provide and co-ordinate increased play and social opportunities for children. Services such as Speech & Language should then offer their services/support at these events/groups etc."

44. The main challenge was thought to be getting parents involved and encouraging take up of services.

"Persuading parents to take advantage of everything on offer for them."

"There are good services, but they are not sufficiently 'joined up' for parents to be fully aware of what's available. The communication is widely spread, with 2 centres."

45. Meetings to discuss local issues was seen as potentially useful by some, but it seems that this is an subject which needs some consideration for it to become effective. Only the Retford Road Tenants meeting was cited as a regular meeting to which local people are invited, but few were said to attend.
46. It would also appear that for some a parent is normally only invited in a 'client' capacity rather than in a joint working relationship capacity with groups of professionals.
47. Raising parents' self-esteem was seen as a priority for one partner, but most of the focus was on introducing specific services and improving information provision, rather than developing partnership working.