

Childcare Focus Groups

Conducted as part of the Borough of Poole's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment by the Corporate Research Team on behalf of Children and Young People's Integrated Services



1. Purpose of the report

This report summarises the findings of three focus groups of parents or carers in the Borough of Poole with children aged 0-4, children aged 5-14 and children with special or complex needs, regarding childcare in Poole.

The aim of the groups was to gain further insight into parents' experiences of childcare, picking up on issues identified for further investigation from the 2007 Childcare Survey including flexibility, costs and information. The needs of parents with older children or children with special needs were also examined, given these groups expressed lower satisfaction with childcare provision in the 2007 Childcare Survey. In addition the focus groups will also be used to inform questions for the 2010 Survey and will feed into the 2010 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

Topic Guides were developed by the Corporate Research Team in conjunction with the Childcare Manager. Comments were also sought from the Children's Centre Managers. Each guide was slightly different to accommodate the different needs of parents.

The three groups took place in March 2010, with 25 parents taking part in total. Interestingly only two of the parents who attended the groups were male. These were predominantly users, but some non-users also took part in each of the groups. Participants were recruited using a number of methods:

- letter sent to random sample of parents on the Short Breaks, CHaD caseload and Portage families mailing lists
- letter to parents selected at random from the Family Information Service database
- parents in receipt of 3 & 4 year olds funding
- an email and letter sent to EY Providers and Out of School Clubs
- an email/advert sent to all schools in Poole
- parents who participated in the 2010 Children's Centres Survey and elected to take part in further research
- parents who participated in the 2007 Childcare Survey
- an advert on the Council's intranet – the Loop

It must be noted that as the majority of these recruitment methods are council sources, there is an expected awareness of Children's Services and the Family Information Service.

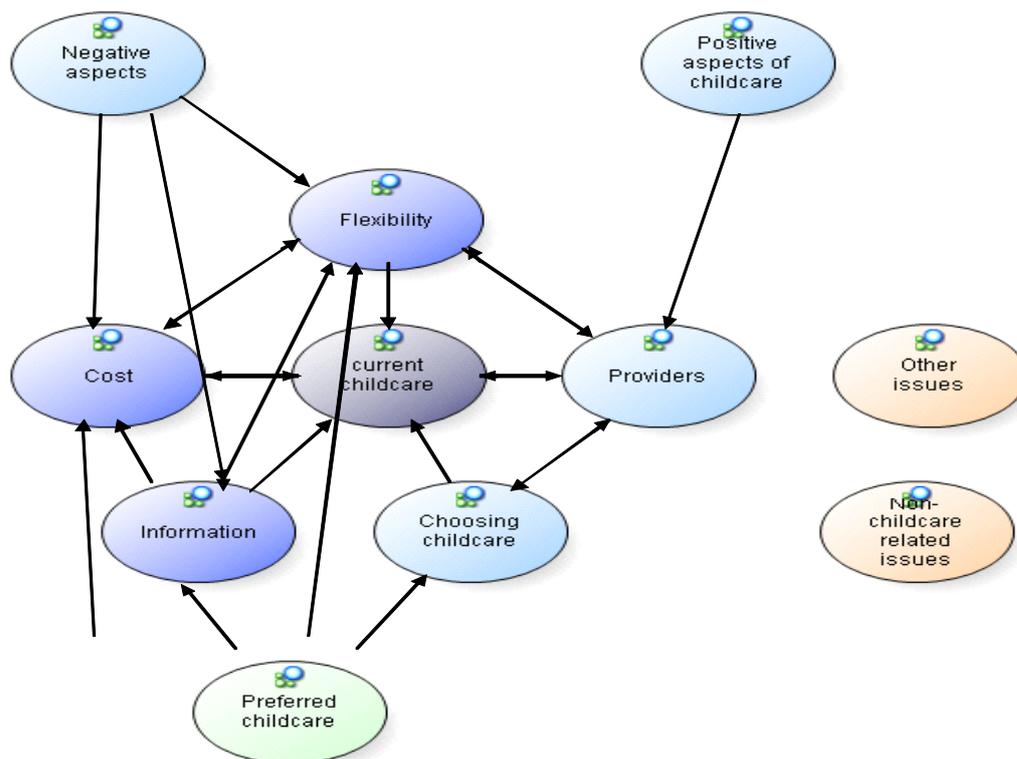
2. Methodology

Focus groups provide a means of exploring topics in more depth; seeking to understand the rationale behind issues and their importance. Often perceptions are given and it is not the facilitator's role to correct information or provide answers, but to allow discussion and encourage everybody to give their views.

The findings in this report are based on qualitative research among a relatively small group of people and should be seen as indicative. Verbatim comments are included, but it is important to note that these comments do not always represent the views of the group as a whole. These are shown in speech bubbles. Colours are used to differentiate the types of comments, or group, as appropriate.

3. Key Themes

The Key Themes model shows the main topics discussed as part of the three focus groups. Each group was structured around the four general areas; childcare used, flexibility, costs and information; with participants given the opportunity to speak freely about aspects of most importance to them within a broad topic guide. Preferred childcare choices is also drawn out from the discussion.



Whilst the three groups focussed on parents with children of different ages/needs, similar messages came out around the key topic areas. The special needs group also raised some non-childcare related issues that can be provided separately. Each theme is analysed in more detail in the following sections of this report.

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5. Key Points Summary

This section summarises the main issues raised by the groups and key actions. More information on the issues indicated below is contained in this report and are also discussed in the 2007 Childcare Survey Report, that can be found at www.boroughofpoole.com/research.

Information is a key area that needs to be addressed that was highlighted by all three groups. Flexibility is a further issue of frustration for the 0-4 and 5-14 group. Suitable provision needs to be addressed for the 5-14 year olds and for children with special needs.

5.1. Information

- **Produce an interactive website, making it easier to search for childcare providers using categories**
- **Make information accessible for parents through a range of sources**
- **Use Health Visitors to 'flag up' key childcare information and promote sources**
- **Hold an annual 'Childcare Fair' to give parents the opportunity to meet childcare providers and find out about the choices available**
- **Raise awareness of all the financial benefits available to parents and make this accessible**
- **Join up information for children's services, especially relating to children with special needs**
- **Provide and promote opportunities for parents with special needs to meet together**

Information came up as an issue to be addressed across all three groups, although parents of 5-14s had slightly different issues to the 0-4s and special needs parents. For the 0-4s and special needs parents, information needs to be made available more clearly. The parents of children aged 0-4 feel they have information overload, with information that is not easy to sort through, and parents of special needs children requiring specific information about providers that care for special needs. An interactive website is the preferred solution given that each parent has different requirements when searching for childcare. The special needs group would welcome all children's information in one place, as they deal with a number of services. The 5-14s require information about childcare for holidays in particular, and require it with plenty of notice so that they can plan ahead. Many ways of providing information are suggested in the report.

The Family Information Service was known to almost all of the parents attending the groups, but awareness needs to be raised of Children's Centres and the services they provide.

Whilst there is high awareness of the 3-4 year entitlement, not all parents are aware of the other entitlements available and benefits that can help with the cost of childcare, such as vouchers. There is also a lack of awareness of the flexible working options that may be available.

5.2. Flexibility

- **Encourage childcare providers to improve the hours of operation**
- **Explore options of flexible working within the Council and other employers**
- **Provide more support for parents searching for emergency childcare**

Flexibility is a particular issue for the 0-4s and 5-14s, relating to opening hours and sessions. Opening hours cause problems with getting to and from work, especially where employers are not flexible with hours. Some employers are less flexible than others. This leads to parents using a combination of providers, or relying on other family members for support. Combined with this, session-based charging means that parents pay for time that they do not actually use, which makes it expensive.

5.3. Suitable Provision

5-14s Provision

- **Increase reliability of after school clubs in schools**
- **Increase provision of breakfast and after school clubs in schools**
- **Increase affordable provision in the school holidays, and raise awareness of what is available through a variety of sources**

Parents of 5-14 year olds have gaps in their childcare. This is for breakfast and after school clubs as well as holiday clubs, with the latter being a particular challenge for parents. There is awareness of extended schools, but few of the schools attended offer this currently, or those that do have limited spaces. Parents would prefer their children to have 'childcare' at school, as this is easier to manage; but they need something that is reliable and ongoing so that they can use it as childcare rather than a club. School holidays are a further key issue for these parents, with a lack of affordable childcare. Many parents are using flexible working or sharing holidays with their partners to avoid the expense.

Special Needs Provision

- **Provide advice and support to help parents with special needs children identifying appropriate childcare**
- **Provide information about providers ability to care for special needs children to increase parents' confidence**
- **Consider the needs of the child in identifying childcare**
- **Make children's services processes more joined-up**

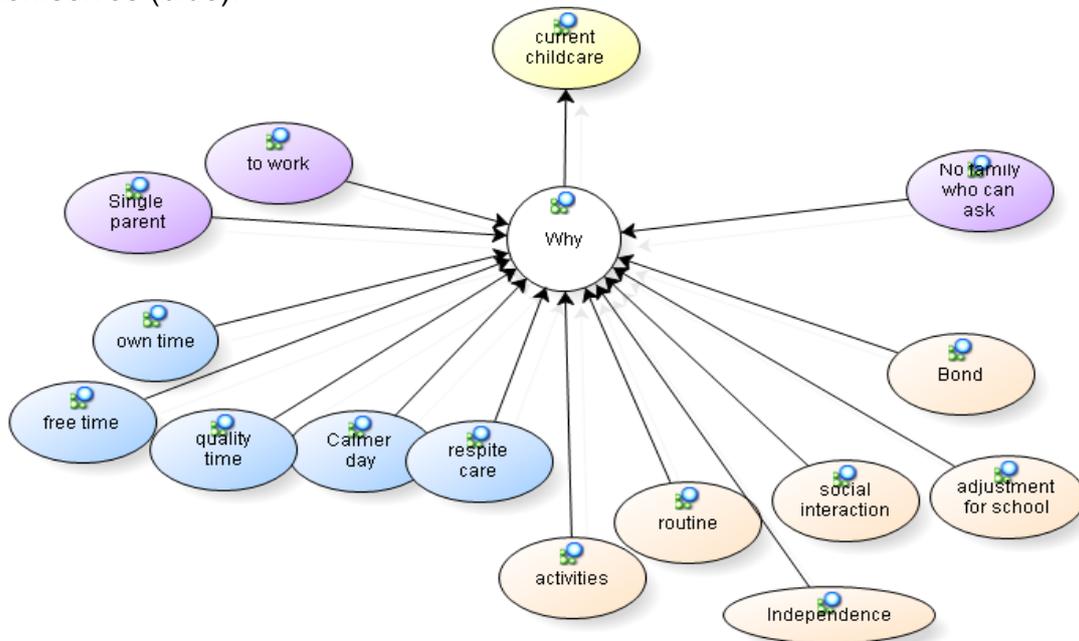
Many parents of children with special needs do not use childcare. This is either because they feel that there is no-one experienced to look after their child because of their specific needs; or because they have been let down in the past. As a result most of them do not work.

The preferred option is to provide childcare at schools, as the children know the staff and other children; but each child has different needs, so some parents felt that they should be individually assessed so that suitable childcare can be provided. They also felt that services should be more joined-up, reducing contact with council departments. These parents seemed to really welcome the opportunity to share their experiences. One parent suggested forming a forum to ensure changes happen.

6. Current Childcare

6.1. Why childcare is used

The model below shows the main reasons why parents use childcare. These vary from necessity (shown in purple) to reasons that benefit the child (shown in orange) or themselves (blue).



Parents of school-age children use childcare because of work, needing someone to mind their child/ren before and after school, with breakfast clubs and after school clubs being used – where they are available. School holidays are another key requirement, and where there is scope for improvement.

Work is also the main reason for parents with children aged 0-4; although they also recognise the benefits of childcare for themselves and their children; such as socialisation, independence and free time. This is also the case for parents who are not currently working, although they tend to use less sessions.

I find by dropping her off at breakfast club the whole day starts a whole lot calmer for both of us. (5-14)

...so it's, um, important for her social aspect for her to learn to play with other kids before she goes to pre-school (0-4 group)

I don't work and I've done it purely for her independence as well. I think she needs the social side of it and also the independence that mummy's not always there...as hard as it is. (0-4 group)

I wanted to go back to work I was going stir crazy at home. I needed to be me again rather than just mummy. (0-4)

I couldn't work unless I have the childcare...I'm a single parent and I have an elderly parent to take care of as well, so if I didn't have childcare...I'd be on the social basically. (5-14 group)

Yeah, well I use breakfast clubs so that I can get to work on time. Um, and leave early so that I can be with them in the evening (5-14 group)

also it gives me just a little bit of free time to get some jobs done or whatever. (5-14 group)

but if I suddenly skipped something that was going on, I notice a big change in the kids' behaviour. (0-4 group)

6.2. Special Needs

Very few of the parents of children with special needs use childcare. Some of them are unable to work because they cannot balance working and catering for their child's needs. There is a desire to work and to use childcare to give them a break, but they do not think that there is anyone with the training or experience to look after their child. Some have looked and not found anything suitable, others do not think that support will be available, either due to prior experience, or their frustration that because their child is not being supported in school, they do not feel that any other provider can help. It also impacts on the time they have to spend with their other children.

it puts such a strain on you...to be able to manage work and childcare, that in the end you give up on the work

I am [their] childcare. As a mother I feel that you've got to be there but it's got to a stage that you can only take so much and do so much that it's gonna wear you down.

so I don't go out cos I don't think I can

I think it's my own fear and pre-conceived ideas that...if I try and access...any kind of care, that it will set [them] back terribly and that we will be back to square one with the violence and the aggression

if I could've found the childcare I would have carried on with work because I enjoyed going to work, I only worked part-time and I was just finding it too much of a strain not knowing when he was going to be well, not knowing that I had somebody to rely on.

I find that my child puts other children in danger, and that's one of the reasons why I'm afraid to access it

I've never really looked to be honest. I just assume that she can't do anything in any club.

you end up doing the childcare and when you've got other children as well it's very, very difficult because they see you as spending so much time with that one child

if they can't cope in mainstream school, and they can't cope with schools they're at and they can't deal with it, what can out of school childcare do

One parent was very complimentary about her childcare provider, as they look after their child without extra support/funding; although childcare is restricted to periods of two hours because of a lack of training to deal with the child's specific medical needs.

the childcare I receive has all been brilliant. The staff in xxx and at xxx have been brilliant and do more than is required without question or complaint.

Some of the children cannot participate in childcare activities because of a physical disability or because of a lack of energy due to their 'disability'. The lack of suitable activities makes it difficult for those who want to use childcare so that their child can socialise (although it appears that there is a cross over between childcare and general after school activities). Related to this, there was also frustration amongst some of the group that 'special needs' covers a diverse range of needs and there is not a 'one size fits all' solution.

Cos there isn't anything there and it just seems like everything's in boxes.

Obviously what she's had is making her very lonely, she's a very lonely little girl and she's got no friends at school

6.3. Family Support

For all of the groups, reliance on childcare also stems from having no family to ask to help – although one parent said that they prefer to have ‘an arrangement’ with a childcare provider rather than potential for disagreements with family members. Some grandparents had been helping, but it can be too much when they become older, so can no longer be used as childcare.

I think sometimes it helps to have a business arrangement with the childcare provider as well. Then if you are not happy with something you can say. (0-4 group)

nursery is the only option as I've got no family that live close by... (0-4 group)

It was fine [for my parents to look after them], they could come home and she could look after them, but now its, they're getting that much older, they need, in the holidays, they need to be kept busy. (5-14 group)

Those parents that do have family in the area that can support them feel very fortunate that they do have family that will help them with childcare.

I use my parents...but my hours are around school, so I can go and pick [them] up and drop [them] off, but they're getting older now, so I think when she comes to this kind of age, I think I'm going to be sort of screwed (5-14).

my mother in-law does have [name] a couple of days as well...and I'm very lucky cos she actually reduced her hours to help me out (5-14).

Cos it's family the only reason I have any life at all and can do a little bit of [work] (0-4).

if you haven't got family, I don't know how you manage (5-14)

Those parents with special needs children that do work especially rely on their family to give support as they do not feel that they can leave their child with anyone else.

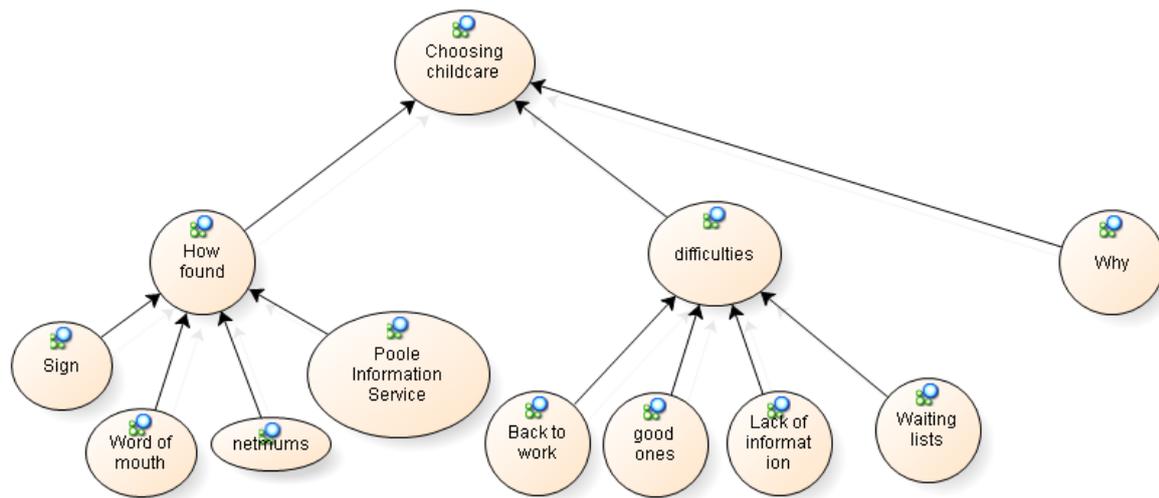
I rely on my mum really...[the child is] not a good communicator and she doesn't like other people around. So, as long as it's someone she knows and she's close to them, I would leave her, but...I don't think I'd feel comfortable unless I know that that person is properly experienced.

...because they know your child and you know they wont make any remarks, they will just deal with it...

7. Choosing Childcare

This section of the discussion covered how parents found their current childcare provider, why they chose them and any difficulties encountered.

Choosing childcare is a complex decision making process which finds some parents trading off factors to select the most appropriate childcare for their situation and their child. This section clearly also relates to information, discussed later in this report.



The Family Information Service (or Poole Information Service as it was also called) was the main source of information for finding childcare by the parents of children aged 0-4. It was also mentioned by the special needs group, although most do not currently use childcare.

Other parents relied on recommendations from friends, or used providers that they knew in making their decision. This was either because they did not know where to go to for information or help, or they wanted to use a provider that they felt confident with, and that had a good reputation.

Well, because I didn't know anything about childcare or what options there were, the childminder...was word of mouth, cos I wanted to make sure that it was somebody who was tried and tested and that I could trust... (0-4)

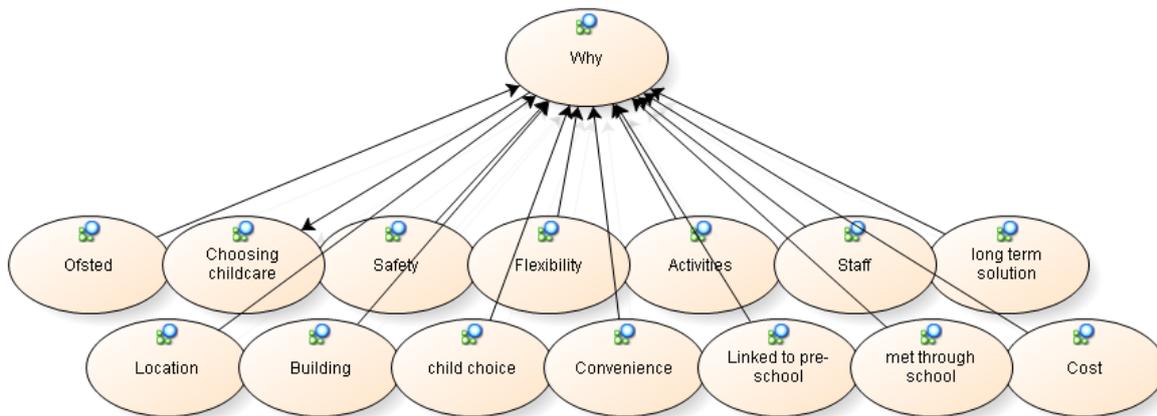
My was more word for mouth, only because I didn't know what to do. I didn't know who to go to. (0-4).

I was worried about it cos to be honest with you, I had no idea about any childcare for [name] when she got to five...I don't think there's a lot of information around, um, unless you know where to look or where to go. (5-14)

I just didn't know where to start, and again it was just talking to other people and finding out what they used. (0-4)

Netmums and the 'sign outside' the provider were other ways parents mentioned that they found out about childcare provider.

When it comes to choosing childcare, parents use different selection criteria according to their situation, as the model shows below.



Location and hours were the two main criteria for those with children age 0-4. Some parents chose a suitable location first and narrowed the choice down to a few providers that they visited with the child. Others identified those providers that could provide the hours that they required to fit around work, which often meant a trade off between factors, usually involving location. Some selected a provider on the basis that it was linked to the pre-school they wanted the child to attend.

it was literally getting the pack through and going through and looking at people, and actually the childminder was the furthest away that I picked in the end and again it was because of the hours. (5-14)

When parents had a choice of providers, the staff (either the rapport with the child, or the feeling the parents got), the building and child choice came in to play, with parents choosing the place where the child seemed the happiest and settled. Safety was a concern for two parents in the 5-14 group. For one parent this was because the nature of their job makes them consider health and safety. Another parent was particularly concerned about child safety/protection as their child was prone to running off.

I just picked 5 that were closest to my house and visited them with him and just tried them out and asked questions and toured their facilities (0-4)

all the ones near us, where the children play outside, where people are just walking pass the wall, and you could just reach in and pick a child up like that. (5-14)

One family uses the childcare provider closest to their home as they do not have transport, although the later discussion revealed areas of dissatisfaction with this provider on a number of areas. It appears that the quality of this provider is not comparable with providers used by other parents.

Child choice is a key factor for older children, with parents finding childcare that would interest the child or that they can go to with friends to make it more appealing. Ideally childcare located at their school is the most convenient option.

they are quite happy and lots of their mates go there and being 12 it's kind of cool. (5-14)

7.1. Waiting Lists

Waiting lists were one of the negative factors mentioned. Some people were aware that the popular providers get booked up in advance, but others, especially those that have lived or come from overseas, were not aware that waiting lists could be an issue.

I'm not English, so I don't come from this country, so this was all completely new to me...now I see that there's mums, the babies that aren't even born yet that put their children on the list (5-14)

but one reason I did go with the private nursery is probably the waiting list (5-14)

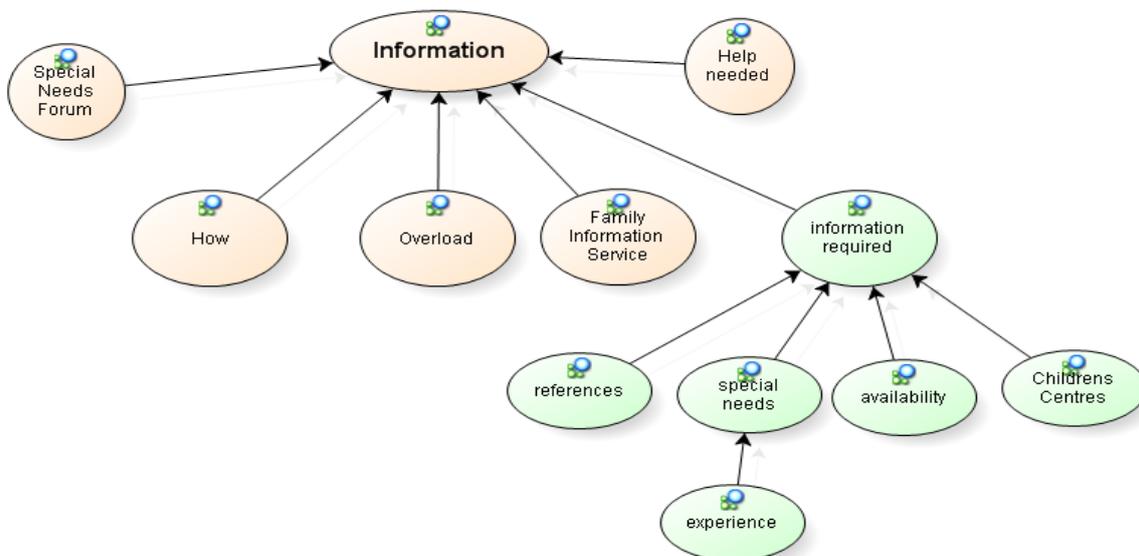
Also lots of them have got waiting lists, like my one, they said oh put it down when I was pregnant...they said, oh, no get your name down now and I still haven't got the sessions that I want... (0-4)

A negative is waiting lists or just availability really, if you're relying on after school club, you have a school with 300 kids, and after school club is the main place(5-14).

The 'good ones' are difficult to get into and are felt by some to be kept a closely guarded secret. This may be ones that offer provision after school, or those providers that have extended hours providing greater flexibility. One such provider was said to charge higher costs because of the demand for extended hours.

8. Information

Information was one of the issues discussed at length by all of the groups. The key topics discussed are shown in the model below, covering how parents prefer to find information about childcare, issues related to information such as overload, help to explain options and gaps including availability of childcare, awareness of services (such as Children's Centres) and discussion of a website.



8.1. Current information sources

The Family Information Service (FIS) was known to all of the parents attending the groups, although this was to be expected given recruitment was mostly via council sources. Parents find the FIS helpful and some were complimentary about the service, but some of the parents of children aged 0-4 did not know where to get information or what to think about when considering childcare. Many parents that use FIS felt overwhelmed by the information provided.

but you know when you get the pack through, you look at it and go, right where do I start? (0-4)

So we're going to have to keep phoning every single childminder to find out what there is...(special needs)

I had to spend a long time, I had to print them all out and go through them all. (0-4)

there's so many more childminders than you would have ever imagined until you get that list (0-4)

I didn't know what to do with it, you just sat there and unless you were prepared to go and sift through leaflets and start ringing everybody on the list. (0-4)

Yeah, I needed to know the information quickly, not spend days looking for it. (0-4)

I don't know about anyone else, but if I get one more pack as thick as these [leaflets] you just end up with piles of paper (special needs).

Lack of awareness of what's available is a key issue for parents of children aged 5-14, and also for those with special needs children.

Until you know what to ask, how do you know what you don't know? (5-14)

More information for older children as there seems to be a lot for the younger children, but as they get to secondary school. I guess that when you get to that I haven't looked, like I don't know what. (5-14)

I think a lot of people think of social services, so they see that as to do with crisis and not just giving information out. (5-14)

You don't know what to ask for, you don't know what's out there (special needs).

But then if you have that information can you let us know that you..have it, um, that [we] can access it (special needs)

..This is it, you had to know to ask...(special needs)

Is there anything on the information service for people with children of special needs? (special needs)

One parent with a special needs child was using their direct payments to provide childcare support, but it was felt that this was not a common option to other parents so information needs to be provided to make parents aware of their options.

I think I probably get quite a lot of respite from my little girl, through social services, they pay me to fund carers... I'm using my direct payments workers as my 121, so, but it's only cos I know her that that's happened if you know what I mean, so those things should really be there. (special needs)

But yeah, if I didn't have that then I'd have nobody to look after her kind of thing so I do have that flexibility so it does work, and I know it probably could work for other people so if you find a carer that you're happy with...(special needs)

8.4. Further Help Needed

The discussion highlighted that parents can become overwhelmed and overloaded by information and they would welcome help in narrowing down their choices and deciphering the information about the various providers to come up with the solution that best meets their needs. In the case of special needs someone to help providing the information and also clarification of what support is available is welcomed.

Cos obviously you haven't looked at childcare before, you're just getting leaflets and there isn't anyone to go and talk to and say, well, what does this mean, or why should I look at a childminder over a nursery, or anything like that (0-4).

to actually interpret your situation and look at it from a different point of view and say, well have you thought about a childminder?, have you thought about this? (0-4)

I do agree it's nice to get on the internet, but it would be nice as well to be able to have someone who you can speak to. (special needs)

there's nothing specific where you could actually go and speak to somebody or look for somebody or a place where, whether you want you know a childminder whether you want a nursery or whatever or just an after school club. (special needs)

...because you're not sure what you're entitled to in childcare out of school, should I be saying that umm I can get 121 support with my daughter so that she can go to an after school club or a holiday club, but should I be contacting these people, I don't know. (Special needs)

Cos I don't know whether to try and find a job first and then see what childcare I can get, or [the other way round] (5-14)

Difficulties in finding suitable childcare are leading one parent to consider whether they should find a job and then childcare or childcare and then a job as they did not feel confident that they could find something that would meet their requirements.

Parents of children with special needs are in contact with many people at the council and would welcome a single point to channel information, and to take responsibility (although this is related to frustrations that extend beyond childcare to Children and Young People's Services generally). However, there is an issue of services talking to each other and looking at the family's needs. There also appears to be differences in awareness of information according to whether children attend mainstream schools or special schools. The group felt that information should reach all parents, no matter what school their child attends.

They should be available in schools as well I think because like what you were saying maybe that information that went out, went to the special schools where they think there'd be children there but it hasn't gone to mainstream schools where there are probably children in there (special needs).

at the moment it's this person's going to help, this person's going to help, I've got these different people coming in (special needs).

I think the thing that's most important here is having that contact point...as a lot of people said here yeah, I don't know, it's clear you need to find somebody and I think you need on the internet and also somebody who you can speak to. Sometimes you need to speak to somebody (special needs)

8.5. Interactive Website

The main suggestion that arose from the 0-4 group and special needs group was to have an interactive website providing information about all the childcare. If this is searchable, parents can filter information to find what they are looking for more easily; whether they are looking for childcare according to location, providing particular hours, or finding places at short notice. Some parents have used direct.gov.uk to search for childminders, but are faced with clickable pages and they have to go to and from the pages, which they find frustrating.

A website that is regularly updated, either by the FIS or by service providers themselves (as it was recognised that such a website could be resource intensive) would overcome the information overload that parents currently face. The 0-4 group were particularly excited about this suggestion. The parents of special needs children felt that the FIS site could be expanded so that all the relevant information could be found under the FIS 'umbrella', making services more joined-up.

It's like looking for a place to rent or buy and you type in the location and how many bedrooms you want. (0-4)

But if it was under the Borough and the [FIS] umbrella...so that everything can be accessible from one point...to be able to access different leads and different activities and different whatever we would all know. (special needs)

..maybe a good idea to ask um people that do the direct payments... support workers, people that..everything to just amalgamate and just join one...coz everything actually is really run by the Borough isn't it ? (special needs)

It's a good idea, but I don't know how practical it is because it needs to be updated on a regular basis. (0-4)

The bones of it are there, but if it was broadened out to access, access different pages into, you might have to click on to different sites (special needs).

childcare providers that have um provision for children with say additional needs...then if you could, if you could access a separate page of theirs it would open up and they'd probably introduce themselves, say how long they'd been childcaring for...what they specialise in.. (special needs)

it would be nice to have the additional information you know this childminder has had experience of, is quite willing to discuss with you..(special needs)

8.6. Information for 5-14s

Some of the parents of children aged 5-14 liked the idea of a website, but as the children are at school, and they were mainly looking for breakfast and after school clubs to be provided at school; information could be filtered through schools. Many information sources were suggested including schools, book bags, libraries, doctors, Poole news, Primary Times and leaflets. It is important to use a range of sources. The main thing is to ensure that information is provided long enough in advance to ensure that it can be used as childcare rather than simply activities. Awareness of school holiday provision is a particular issue for the 5-14 group.

8.7. Childcare Fair / Event

Some kind of 'event' was suggested by all three groups to increase awareness of the choices available. The 0-4s group suggested a careers fair type event, giving parents the opportunity to meet providers and members of Children's and Young People's Services to find out more about the various options and providers. Plenty of notice of any event would be needed to increase attendance, and the 5-14 group suggested different times so that parents could attend. Some parents were aware of open days that had been organised by individual providers, but these had not given enough notice, or been at a time when they were looking for childcare. It could also be repeated each year so that parents can find out what they need to think about next, as situations may change for the parents (with work) or the child.

It was also suggested that such an event could be an opportunity to consult parents to find out their requirements and plan childcare to meet their needs, helping to ensure suitable provision is available.

8.8. Health Visitors

Part of the problem with information overload is that parents receive information at key times, when they cannot necessarily see the relevance. However, Health Visitors were mentioned as an opportunity to be a key source of information and could be used to provide snippets of information that parents will need to know and signpost information so that they can consider their options.

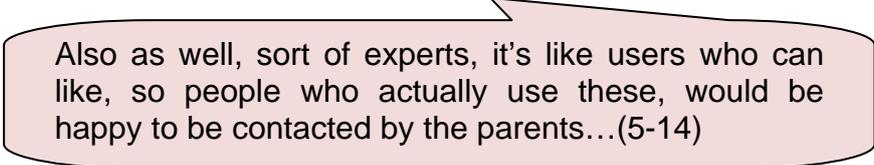
8.9. Information Requirements

Information the groups would require includes:

- ✓ What hours
- ✓ Flexibility
- ✓ Whether they cover shifts
- ✓ Availability – to plan ahead and find out what's available at short notice
- ✓ Information about the providers
- ✓ Capacity – how many children they will take
- ✓ Do they do school pick ups
- ✓ If they can deal with special needs children and what experience
- ✓ Ofsted inspections
- ✓ What they do with the kids and where do they take them
- ✓ Have they got a garden
- ✓ Whether they cover nights
- ✓ An easier key to find information

References

Parents of children aged 5-14 would welcome 'recommendations' or 'references' about childcare providers. A paragraph could be available on the web, but they would also welcome the opportunity to contact parents who use the providers (not selected by the providers themselves), to ask questions.



Also as well, sort of experts, it's like users who can like, so people who actually use these, would be happy to be contacted by the parents...(5-14)

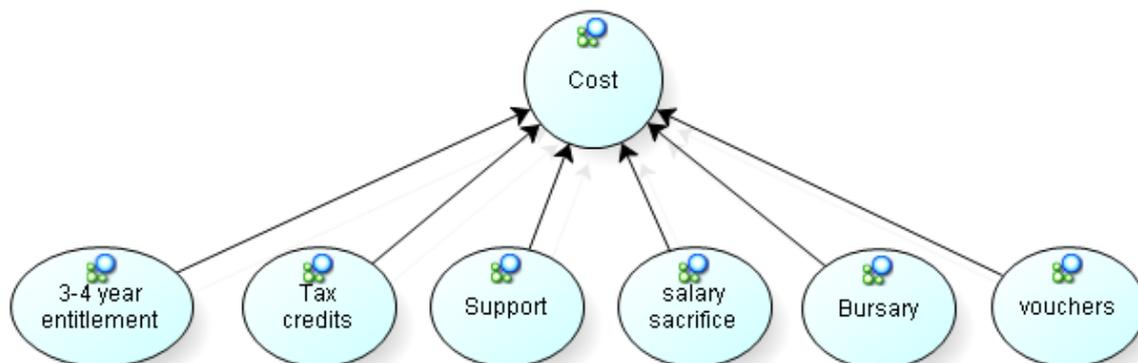
Special needs

The special needs parents also wanted more details about the experience of the childcare providers.

They also seemed to really welcome the opportunity to meet with other parents in similar situations and share their experiences. One person suggested forming an ongoing group or forum so that they could continue to get support.

9. Affordability

The model below shows the main topics discussed under costs and affordability.



Issues surrounding affordability and costs also relate to flexibility due to sessions, discussed in the next section.

Across the 0-4 and 5-14 groups it was felt that childcare was expensive, which increases if school pick ups/drop off are required and if there is more than one child in a family. For some, the costs of childcare is a reason why they do not work, and some parents calculate the hours that they will work so that they can benefit from financial assistance. A few parents do not work at all because they do not consider it financially worth their while. A few husbands had lost their jobs, which for some put a greater strain on finances and lead to a decision as to whether to retain a childcare place (as it would otherwise be lost), for others they are financially better off, given the financial support they now receive although they are on a lower income.

You do get what you pay for, but then it's got to be affordable. (5-14)

I've just had my bill through and cried. (0-4)

I'm not having any more [children] (0-4).

And with two children as well, even with the government funding, two children, that's it, if you have any more, you're not going to get anymore money and it is and I think they don't look at the fact that a childminder may charge £30 a day (0-4).

I've just got to bite the bullet and pay for it as I've not got a choice (0-4).

It did defer me from going back to work after my second, but for the moment, until funding comes in at three. It's just not cost effective, and the stress and everything that comes with it, it's just not worth it for me at the moment (0-4).

...my husband was made redundant...so we were still paying £200 a month for After School Club, because...once I took her out there was no way that she would have gone back in at the end of the year, so then what do you do? So you're paying for something that you don't need AT ALL, because there's no choice (5-14)

Cost is such a concern that one parent was initially upset when they realised their child would be born in September rather than August, taking them into the next academic year and increasing expenditure on childcare. On the other hand, another parent would pay whatever is needed to give their child quality childcare, but this was the only person in the group that felt this way. This shows that people view childcare differently, and one person felt it is important to have a variety of childcare providers and prices to fit different budgets and requirements as parent use childcare differently.

I actually wept cos I realised that it was going to be another few thousand pounds. But that's how...expensive it is, but I just went on thinking we can't do this, you know, I can't pay for another year. I'm glad now, but that's how awful it is the financial issue (5-14).

it is important to me because she with a childminder five days a week...I am not willing to compromise...so if that means that we have to eat baked beans and toast five days a week and she goes to a better nursery or childminder (5-14)

9.1. Inconsistencies

The groups highlighted a number of inconsistencies with costs. For example, some parents explained that they have to pay a deposit to secure a place for their child, adding to the financial burden. Different practices also appear to apply regarding payments for holidays. Some parents have to pay the full price if they do not use childcare for a week or two during the summer holidays; whereas others may get a discount or an allocation of holiday entitlement each year, which also adds to the expense of childcare.

Upfront costs are horrendous. Deposits – especially if your child doesn't like it after the first couple of weeks and you've lost that money and you have to pay it all over again (0-4).

if you wanted a holiday, that they gave us like one week's holiday a year or something. (0-4)

Yeah, you still have to pay (0-4)

Well where I am you get your three weeks minimum (0-4).

I argue that they charge you half rate when you're not using it.... (0-4)

I just thought that doesn't add up with everything else, it's just another thing to pay for on top of the holiday (5-14)

There also appears to be different practice for discounts for more than one child. A couple of parents in the groups had twins, and find it frustrating that they cannot always find a place for two children.

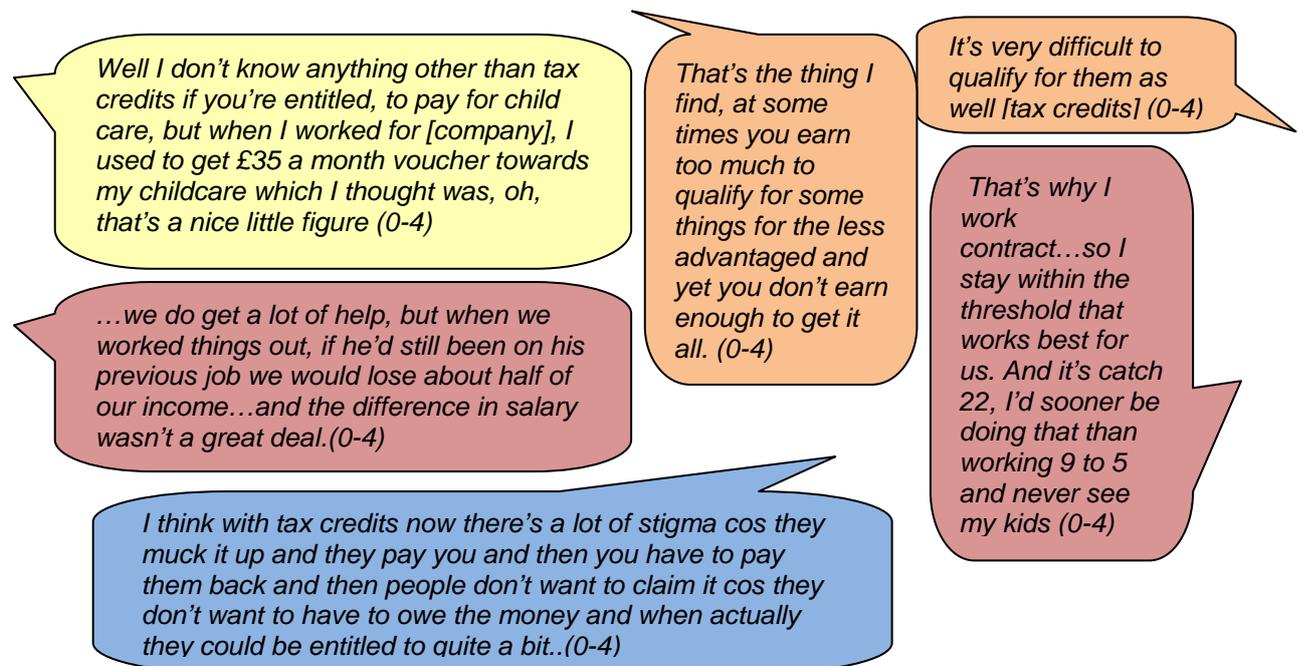
...I put their name before they were born, for childcare at the hospital, and there were 6 vacant places but I couldn't have two there... (5-14)

...no discount for 2 which I find a bit gutting really, if you got 10% off for having a second child (5-14)

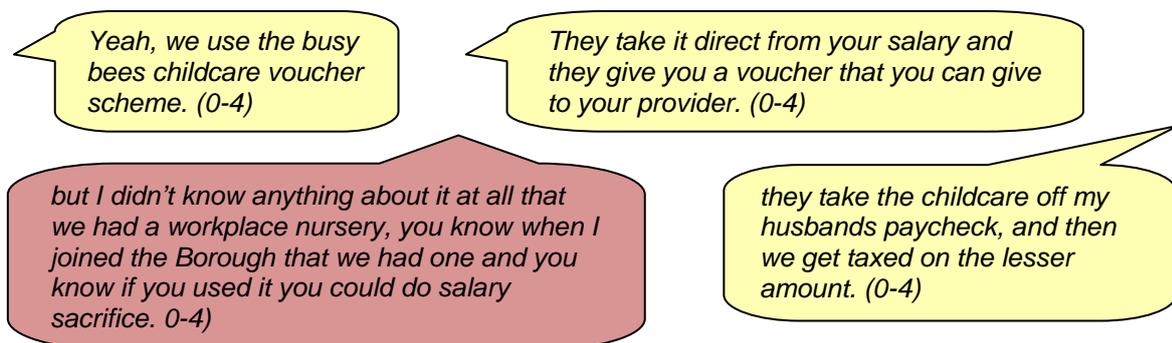
I've got to say though, Ofsted now for a childminder where you register as 1 to 3 they will now allow you 1 to 4 if it's twins. (5-14)

9.2. Help with childcare costs

The groups were asked about their awareness of any help with childcare costs that is available. There is a high awareness of child tax credits, although a couple of people feel that they have a poor reputation because of the press about having to pay back money. Some people are above the thresholds, so are unable to claim any financial support, but others are able to get support with their childcare, whether that is tax credits or through support for qualifications/training.



A few of the parents with children aged 0-4 were aware of the salary sacrifice schemes, and most of the parents of school-aged children are using this system to make savings on their childcare costs. Some parents did not think that all employers provide a salary scheme, whilst others said that you can ask your employer to provide vouchers. There is variation in knowledge of this scheme, and further information is needed so that parents are aware of the benefits available.



9.3. 3-4 year funding

All of the parents were aware of the 3-4 year entitlement, although they did think that it should start sooner and some were aware of the 2 year old pilot schemes, which they would welcome.

the funding doesn't come in until they're three and that's a term after as well isn't it? So if they are born on the first of January they'll have to wait until Easter. (0-4)

with the two year funding we'll be waiting two years, which is quite hard especially when you see people who are getting two year old funding, you're like, why can't I have it? (0-4)

But she turns three in June, so I think well do I put her in a government-funded pre-school from 9 till 3 and it will be completely free for me as I won't have any childcare costs, but they don't open till 9 and I've got to be at work at 9? So I'm stuck really unless I find a pre-school that starts at 8.30. (0-4)

I only found out [about 3 and 4 year free sessions] from a friend. Cos I had only just come back in the country and... I knew nothing, I had no idea. (0-4)

9.4. Help for training

A couple of the parents attending the 0-4s group were receiving financial support for training. Another parent would be interested in undertaking a course, but was not aware that financial support was available; or where they could go to find out about assistance. When asked they would probably try the Family Information Service or careers service, but weren't sure which one would provide the information. This needs to be made clearer, and information should be available from a variety of agencies where it is relevant.

I didn't realise that you can get help, like, for training, cos I was sort of thinking about doing, so it would be nice to know, you know if you want to retrain in something then I'm not really sure where you go to find out that kind of information, so like returning to work if you want to do something different. (0-4)

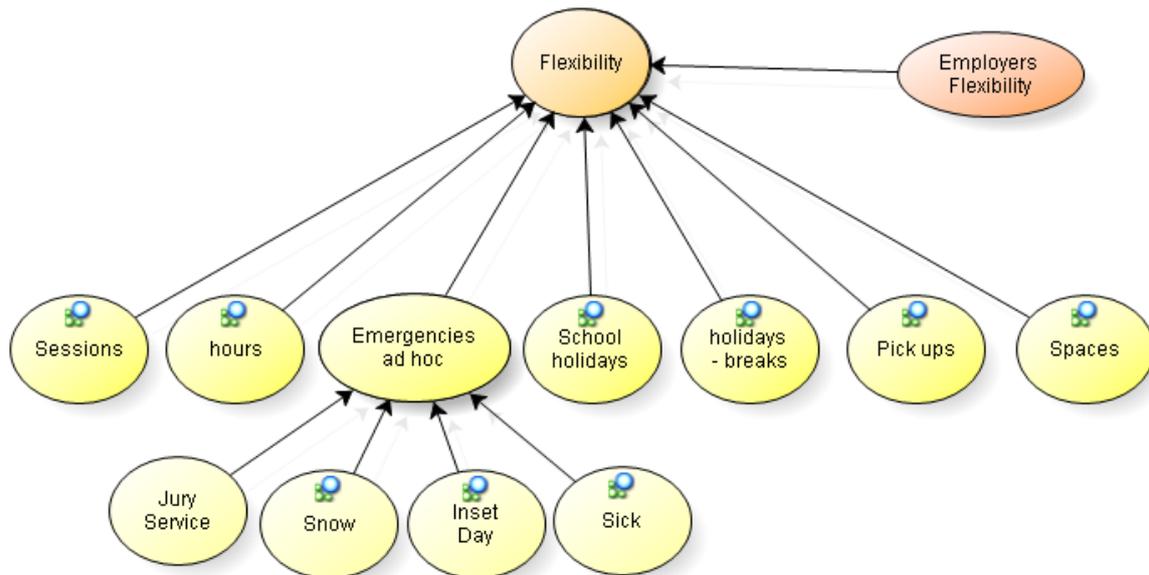
They're [childcare] a silly price. I'm lucky, I'm doing a nursing course, so I get it paid for, but if I was wanting to study for something different at uni, I wouldn't have been able to do it, cos it's so expensive (0-4).

I get mine funded. But I have to pay a big chunk of my childcare myself on top. (0-4)

10. Flexibility

Flexibility was a key issue discussed by the 0-4 and 5-14 groups. The model below shows the main issues discussed by the groups. These relate to the hours of availability, getting children to and from school, the problems that sessions create, the difficulty of finding childcare for school holidays and emergency or ad hoc situations. The flexibility of employers was also discussed.

The issue of flexibility and timing also relates to costs, covered in the previous section.



10.1. Opening Hours

Opening hours are one of the key negative factors associated with childcare. Many parents, particularly those children aged 0-4, had difficulties finding providers that start early enough and finish late enough so that they can get to work on time. These parents also foresee problems with school pick-ups. Other parents are nurses that work shifts or study, meaning that they have irregular hours. Although those who are nurses use a work-based nursery that they find is more accommodating.

It is long trek for us, but then it's worth it to know the fact that you've got flexibility. (0-4)

There is only one pre-school in Poole that opens early and closes late, so and they are booked, fully booked in advance, um although they have just hiked their prices. (0-4)

But a big negative is the flexibility. There aren't enough playschools, nurseries, childminders that are flexible... cos there are a lot of parents that work shifts and you may not always want to put your child in, or pay for, all week, but you may need them to go all week one week and one day another week. (0-4)

I actually don't understand why they don't open up earlier cos the number of times that I was late for work, um a number of years ago, um yeah, so there wasn't much flexibility. (0-4)

And also most places don't open until 8 o'clock...then what are you supposed to do in the meantime? And also I don't finish work until 6, most places shut as six, so you are then stuck with a pickup. (0-4)

We're all looking at children starting school, so we're having to worry about half days and, um, who's gonna have to pick up from school (0-4).

I think that's what's good about a nursery, cos a nursery is open all year round, apart from bank holidays and it is 8 till 6, so I think that's obviously [helps] people that work different hours, but that covers a lot of people, and that's why I use a nursery. I couldn't use a pre-school. (0-4)

I do use a workplace one, you know, Topps in Bournemouth... but they are very flexible, you know I just phone up and say can I bring them in tomorrow. (5-14)

Flexibility of hours is a concern that is also shared by parents of special needs children.

there does not seem to be any extra support available outside of set periods and also 9-3pm in school term time. My child care has been by casual agreement. This does make work very difficult for me, but I am lucky to be able to negotiate a bit of flexibility with my boss. (special needs)

10.2. Sessions

Sessions present a further issue because they restrict flexibility and mean that parents pay for hours that they do not actually use.

I wish that we don't have to pay for the whole afternoon when we don't use it, but I think 6 o'clock, you know, I feel like she should stay there until 6.00 cos I'm paving til 6 o'clock.

Sessions, they're just not flexible enough. (0-4)

But I was having to pay even when she doesn't go, so she goes, they go every time, because psychologically, we haven't got any money to go on holiday, but I just don't want to, it's like that mentally, I don't want to pay £23 for 4 hours if she's not going (5-14).

Well with the sessions that they are talking about if you need to come for like 8 until two, but the session runs from 8 until 12 and then 12 until 5, even though you only want until two, you have to pay right up until five (0-4).

they used to do it by the hourly rate, which was brilliant because you could just have a couple of hours and only pay for a couple of hours, but now they've gone to a system of sessions so I have to pay from 3 til 6, even though I only use from 3-5, so it's a bit expensive now (5-14).

Just the nursery has flexibility to enable us to work full time and you have to spend maybe an extra hour on a particular day, but if it can't provide that then it does not allow us to do that. They say it needs to be in sessions. So if I need to work one hour extra, I need to pay for two and a half hours long session. (0-4)

Wouldn't it be good if you could just drop them off, without any warning, a drop in centre where you can just drop them off, pay by the hour, pick them up when you like and it's all covered. Utopia, but, that would be... Well I joke, you know, but they're not stuck around sessions or, you know, having to have this limit of staff down to manage (5-14)

10.3. Flexi-time

A few parents had been able to negotiate term-time or flexible hours so that they do not have to rely on childcare; but for some this has come at a cost, with mothers taking jobs that give them flexibility rather than maximising their earning potential, although this was a decision they took.

I'm lucky enough that I work term time, I don't have that issue, uh I actually provide childcare myself, um, so it's my opportunity to actually spend time with my kids (5-14).

I'm also on a term-time only contract, which was a choice, which is not necessarily as well paid as job as I could be doing. (5-14)

Other parents have flexi-time, which can assist with childcare, although core hours need to be covered; and some parents do face negativity from employers or other members of their team if they need to juggle hours because of childcare. Some of the attendees work for the Borough of Poole.

We've got a flexi system at the place I work, but...I have to pick her up at half past three, so it doesn't add up. So I think, maybe if it was open from maybe half past 8 until 5 o'clock then it would allow me to work and help us to keep that work life balance (0-4).

Now my son has started school, I have managed to change my hours at work, so that I do two short days (5-14).

Whilst it was understood that some companies may not be able accommodate flexible working because of 'business needs', needing staff for cover/core hours, it was felt that this is something that should be explored, particularly at the Borough of Poole, where the Council could lead by example and some companies may see the benefit.

why can't companies, employers actually be more flexible with their staff? Because not everyone in the company is going to need childcare to be dropped off at 9 o'clock, (0-4).

I think it's the nature of the job you are doing. Cos I, cos like we have flexi working system, but we need to be there in the office between half past nine and quarter past four. Those are the core hours that we need to be there to keep the business run, so, it's the job we do and sometimes we can't, you know we would like to take flexi (0-4).

You know well not every company would say yes we can do that, but some companies will. (0-4)

Other parents were not aware that they could ask their employer for flexible working, term-time working and just advice in getting back into work, showing there is a need to make parents aware of the options available to them to assist with childcare.

I'd never heard of term-term working, until I met someone who was doing it, so if you are out of the work place, you are completely out at sea at what sort of jobs as I don't know what other jobs I would be able to do (5-14 group)

10.4. School Holidays

The school holidays cause a headache for the majority of parents. Parents of children 5-14 face the problem of finding affordable childcare. The expense involved means that some parents have chosen jobs with flexible hours, or term-time working, others use parents, and some cover school holidays between them. One parent is contemplating sending their child abroad to stay with their parents, as the flights are cheaper than paying for childcare. Lack of availability or awareness of what is available is a further problem.

Oh I don't like to think about it! (5-14)

They don't have a holiday club where I live, so the problems we've got is flexibility in what do you do in the holidays, and you have to find something at the leisure centre (5-14)

But I was having to pay even when she doesn't go, so she goes, they go every time, because psychologically, we haven't got any money to go on holiday, but I just don't want to, it's like that mentally, I don't want to pay £23 for 4 hours if she's not going. (5-14)

I know a lot of childminders who will not take children just for the school holidays, or just term time and they are not happy to do the flexibility. They want set days, set times... (5-14)

I've had to me and my husband have had to split it between us through the summer we've just done it, that means then that we don't actually get any holiday together (5-14)

a working mum's worst nightmare! (5-14)

I would love to (work) but I can't think of a job where I could get someone to look after them in school holidays... (5-14)

In the summer holidays I work, come out in a minus, I work for nothing, can't even remember, £25 a day holiday club so I don't have any family I don't you know, the the most I can take is 2 weeks, so I'm still paying for 5 weeks at you know £25 a day (5-14)

it works out a lot cheaper if I fly to [place] I come from [place] fly her over there, leave her for a couple or hopefully 3 weeks with my mother and then fly and pick her up again. That works out cheaper than paying for 5/6 weeks...isn't it absolutely ludicrous that that's what you effectively in your own mind have to contemplate (5-14)

For those with children aged 0-4, there are issues around taking breaks, and whether these are paid for.

10.5. Emergency / ad hoc childcare

There are times when emergency childcare is needed. This may be when a child, or parent is sick, a nursery closes or when school is closed for inset days or because of snow. The latter are found to be easier to accommodate as they affect the whole school, so there are often negotiations with other parents.

What would happen if you went in hospital? one of... the ladies at playschool, she got bed rest for six weeks...and her husband was like, right, what am I going to do with the children for six weeks? (0-4)

I mean luckily you're then have 300 kids in the same situation or 300 parents in the same situation you know a couple of parents would get together and say hmmm can you take the day off and I'll have yours and you know.. that that seems to be not too bad when it effects the entire school. (5-14)

When it comes to inset day, I rely on other parents. And that's got easy as my children have got older, so I just rely on other mums that I know aren't necessarily working or work different hours from me.(5-14)

Individual emergencies are thought to be more difficult to find solutions for. One parent was in a situation where they had to arrange childcare where their nursery shut down at short notice, and would have welcomed support from FIS to find a solution. Another parent required childcare to do jury service and could not find information about providers who could provide spaces at short notice and the flexibility to provide the hours required.

trying to find somebody who would understand that I am not going to be there for a standard two weeks, I'm not going to be there 9-5, Monday to Friday, I could get kicked off that morning, I could be there for five months... nobody was willing to help me... it was only because I knew the girl, that she said, I will do anything for you..but I can't rely on that, nobody can. So why do they have to be so inflexible? Cos there must be other people in the same situation ... (0-4)

It was felt that the way information is currently provided does not make it possible to search information quickly. The FIS can provide greater assistance in such circumstances which are problematic when a solution is needed to meet different requirements. This is where an interactive, updated, well-publicised website would be useful.

But again, why can't the council have an emergency list to give to people in that situation if the hospitals can have a list of emergency childcare providers who are willing to take at short notice (.0-4)

When a child is sick, this causes a dilemma for working parents. One parent mentioned that the hospital provides a list of on-call childminders that would take sick children at short notice, but other parents feel pressure when their child is ill. They may send their child to school with a minor illness because they face difficulties if they phone work to say they cannot come in. To avoid what would be an awkward call to their employer, one parent had said that they were sick instead of the child.

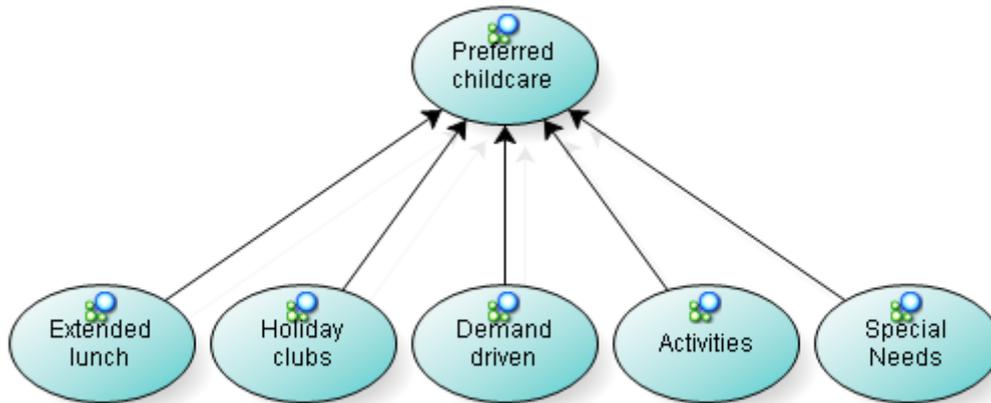
... that is a question that goes round in your head [whether to send them to school]. (5-14)

school's got a different attitude like they really get very cross if you send your child is [sick].(5-14)

I know it's awful but it's when your kids are ill, but I feel this pressure at like work if I don't, because of the team... if I don't turn up for work it's like 'oh my god'...but it's just that morning you wake up and [they'll] say 'I can't go to school today'....It's alright, you'll be fine!' Calpol, off you go. I feel so bad but I just panic...what the hell am I going to do. (5-14)

11. School-age Provision

Looking at preferred childcare, the parents of 0-4 children require greater flexibility, with longer hours so that childcare can fit in with work. For parents of 5-14s and special needs there are gaps in current provision.



Many of the parents of children aged 5-14 are aware of extended schools, but very few had an offering at their child's school, or for those that do, places are limited. Parents need something that they can rely on as some have been contacted to be told that after school activities are cancelled at the last minute, meaning that after school clubs cannot be relied on as childcare. For parents of the older and special needs children the preferred option would be to provide childcare at school, because this avoids the need for pick ups and they are with their friends.

But certainly breakfast clubs would be ideal, but the school where we are doesn't have that. (5-14)

it would be nice to encourage holiday clubs and after school clubs which we don't have (0-5).

They do a bit of that at my daughters school um in the holiday, it's only once a week (special needs)

I think, is there the issue of extended schools now that they should provide wraparound care from 8 til 6? I'm not aware of that happening at the school my children are, cos at the moment they can go the breakfast club at 8 o'clock, but then they certainly can't go anywhere until 6...but I don't know that that's something that's going to be developed? (5-14)

For me it's more summer camps, holiday things for this age group that would keep them busy, keep them occupied. (5-14)

Or after school clubs they'll do them one week and then the next one the teacher might have cancelled, so you couldn't bank on it every Tuesday if you wanted to work late... (5-14)

...but that's not childcare then is it? [after school clubs] (special needs)

my idea was to try and access um school holidays within school settings for childcare using the staff that we already know that our children know and love, who are trained (special needs)

if you're trying to cater for all ages its difficult to have a big enough environment that everybody can do their thing... (5-14)

It was also suggested to look at the demand for childcare, rather than being supply-driven so that it focuses on un-met needs and specific requirements.

It was recognised that schools finish at different times, which makes school pick ups easier to manage, but one parent mentioned their school has 90 minute lunch breaks, meaning that the school finishes later. Some of the other parents thought this was a good idea, as it gives more time for exercise combined with a later finish that would mean less time to accommodate childcare.

I'm just thinking that would be so much easier... what a good idea! It's just, why does it just take one people to think about it and why aren't all schools doing it?

11.1. Activities

In terms of the type of activities, parents had different opinions; and it was felt that the children's opinions would be different again.

There was a discussion over whether 'childcare' was the correct term. The difficulty is that each child is different, with different interests. It was recognised that finding something to interest all children of all ages would be difficult. For older children, supervision is what is needed and from the parents point of view, the main thing is that they want to know where their children are, and that they are safe.

Provision at school would be easiest, as it would avoid the need to travel to and from providers; and they would also be with their friends, so the activities would matter less.

Homework would be good (5-14).

If they've got mates with them you don't have to do that much with them (5-14).

um sort of group provision...an after school club as such they need to have an area where they can rest and refresh, they need to have an area where they can help themselves or be helped to um food, drink, um they need to be able to um follow their pursuits... within reason um but it's often times that the environment not the activity (5-14).

but it's having the environment that can cater for the whole age isn't it of 5 – 11 like you're saying to allow everybody to do... (5-14).

At that age they can have very specific ideas about who they wanna hang out with and what they want to do, and like you said not old enough to be left, but equally not old enough not to be left...so it's finding a halfway house between keeping their independence, there's great activities.. but yes actually, you are still being watched and...kept in a secure environment and that's very difficult and that's where there's a gap. (5-14).

12. Special Needs Provision

Parents of children with special needs also felt that provision should be provided at schools, as their child is familiar with the setting, and the staff have the appropriate training that would give the parents more confidence in leaving them. This is particularly important given the specific needs each child has, and as some of the children with special needs have problems with socialising with other children.

I mean if we were talking about um say after school clubs, holiday clubs, things like that there are some childcare providers that could integrate in with the schools (special needs)

I thought a school is built for children and to look after the children that come into the school so why are they not used for afterschool clubs or holiday clubs when they've got the facilities there and like you say, if they've got the staff there... (special needs)

...staff that they know and their happy and they know each other and their friends (special needs)

... you've got that building there and it's familiar for you know when you've got children like you say who are unfortunately who doesn't like something that's different you've got that familiar.. (special needs)

...she's not a sociable child, she's not good at communicating but at her school she's happy to go there and you know it's people she knows so she's happy (special needs).

Some parents felt that they would be unable to commit to regular childcare sessions because their child may not feel like attending on particular days.

..coz it's not always easy to say my child's going to access that on a Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday coz on a Monday and a Wednesday that child might just not feel like going... But it isn't that just the same as with school really, if they're not well or if they couldn't cope with going in ...(special needs)

As with the parents of children aged 5-14, school holidays are also seen as a problem for children with special needs. Some parents would welcome their children having continued interaction, although again each child's needs are different.

...everyone loves 6 weeks on holiday but for a child who is finding it difficult at school, 6 weeks is a long time to be away...it keeps them well within having to go back to school and getting all this the worry and trying to get [them] settled in again...(special needs)

The provision for children with special needs must accommodate the child's needs, but here there is a blur between childcare and after school clubs, although childcare is seen as a break for both the parent and the child.

...in the school holidays it's difficult to take her anywhere because [they are] not comfortable (special needs).

It's the timing though...a lot of clubs are done like straight from school so sometimes if she does make a day then there's no way that she would be able to do the after school club you know (special needs)

I wonder whether...rather than trying to fit a square peg in a round hole you need to right back off and look at them individually as like a profile and building some type of knowledge base ... so you perhaps have a choice of 20 typical special needs child[ren]... that would give you some more direction and work out how to allocate your resources coz I think... it's really built on a prototype of a typical child, a regular child.. (special needs)

Parents were asked whether childcare should be specific for children with special needs or mainstreamed. As each child has very different needs, a blanket approach is not considered helpful. Parents feel that it is important to look at the child's needs when deciding on what childcare is the most appropriate and for this to be considered when they contact Children's Services. There was frustration needs are not being accommodated and that parents have contact with many services from within the Council. A joined-up approach is welcomed that focuses on the child and the families needs.

I think at the point where the child is either diagnosed or there's some type of assessment process you allocate whether perhaps this child is...entitled to a certain type of special needs child support care or whatever ...then surely if you fine-tune that process you're going to end up really satisfied the needs of the special needs community (special needs)

you're going to have a win-win because surely you must be in the situation sometimes where you have able bodied children who also aren't satisfied in their childcare environment because you're trying to satisfy the special needs environment, coz that's what we see at school, with [special needs children] in a main stream school, just drive everybody nuts. (special needs)

With the right support, maybe [could have mainstream childcare]. (special needs)

I think you're trying to kill two birds with one stone perhaps, that isn't possible, so from my perspective, going back and looking at the bare necessity needs of the child and applying the process throughout that..(special needs)

I don't think you can add on bit to what you've got, it's not just saying 'oh you know we need to branch off bit and have a look here'. I agree with what you're saying, I think it's, you need to go right back to the basics and look at what sort of provision you're looking at for this child, or what sort of childcare. ..(special needs)

One parent felt that Poole Council was not providing as good a service as Dorset County Council, and that the Council should learn lessons from other authorities.

I think either you need to steal all the information and expertise of someone who's already done this and there are boroughs that have phenomenal childcare base (special needs)

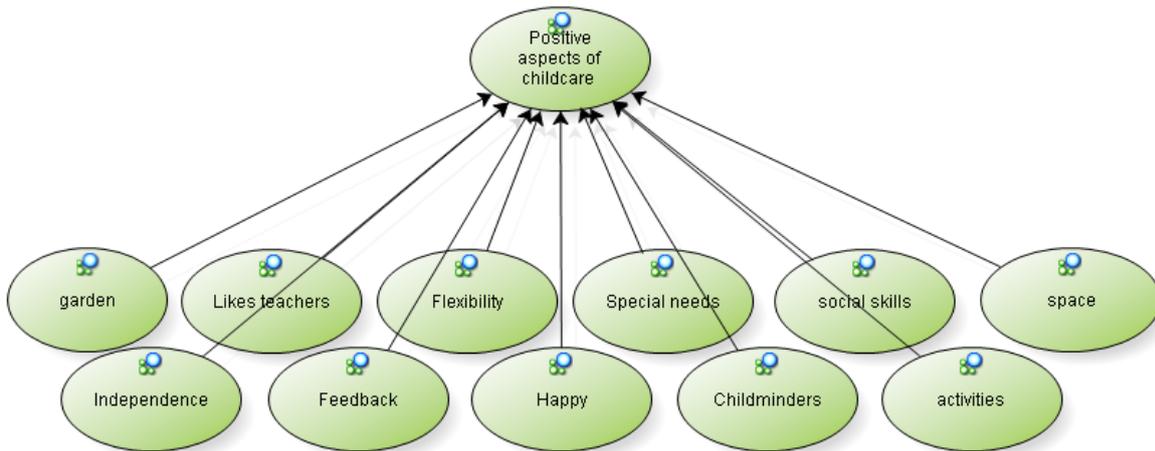
The Childcare Focus Groups were managed by the Corporate Research Team, Borough of Poole, on behalf of Children and Young People's Integrated Services. For further information please contact Corporate Research on (01202) 633354 or visit our website at www.boroughofpoole.com/research

Appendix A - Key issues models

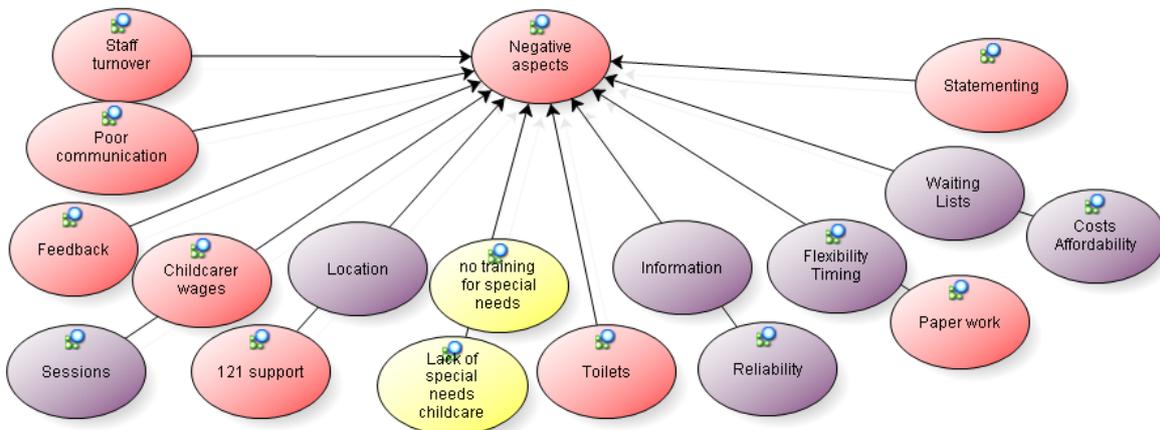
Current Childcare

The parents that attended the groups use a variety of childcare, dependent upon the age of their child and their situation.

The model below shows the positive aspects of childcare raised by the parents of children aged 0-4.



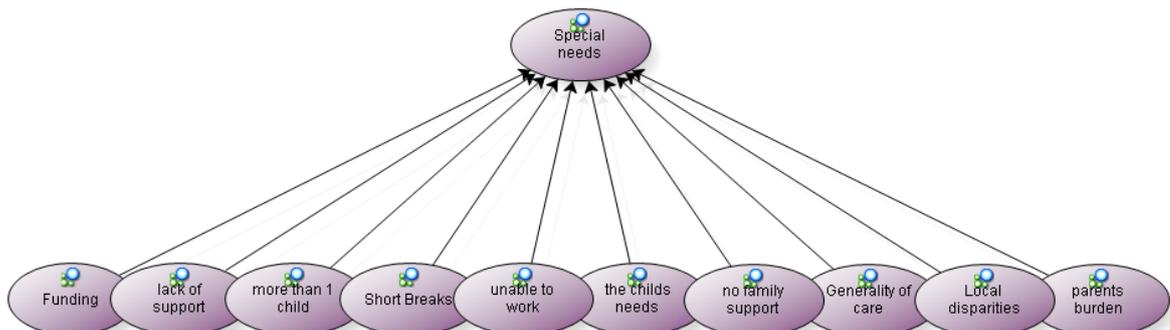
And the negative aspects that arose from the groups.



Red = raised by 0-4s, Purple = raised by more than one group. Yellow = special needs.

Special Needs

Below are the issues discussed by the special needs group.



Appendix B

Main Points

At the end of the discussion, each parent was asked to share the main point or comment that they would like to feed back to the Childcare team.

O-4 Group – Main points to feed back

- *For me, flexibility and we've discussed in detail how this should be so that would be my main change that I would like to see.*
- *I can't think of any one single thing, I just wish there were more carers like the one we have. Cos I know some people do it for the money. I know she's on a lot of money for what she does, it's great, but she does it cos she loves the job and it turns out she can earn a decent amount, but I just wish that was the case.*
- *I'd say flexibility for government-funded pre-schools, so they open earlier, finish later and have holiday clubs for working parents.*
- *Addressing the gaps across the Borough cos some areas of Poole aren't as well off in terms of access to the facilities like a obviously children's' centre, but it would be nice to encourage holiday clubs and after school clubs which we don't have.*
- *Costs.*
- *All of the above. I do like the idea of the confused.com style website, that would be very useful.*
- *Sessions, they're just not flexible enough.*
- *Costs I'm afraid.*
- *I don't really have problems, I think the children's centres are great and they do an amazing job. Maybe courses for parents on parenting...*

5-14 Group – Main points to feed back

- *It's really difficult for me as I've got such a fabulous parent support, so, but then I've got [name] who's two, so I'd go cost and variation*
- *More summer camps, holiday things for this age group that would keep them busy, keep them occupied. I can drop them off before work and pick them up after work that's what I need.*
- *Information and also children's services. I think a lot of people think of social services, so they see that as to do with crisis and not just giving information out.*
- *To make more information available earlier and look at the provisions that are there, like in a normal market place, it's demand driven, not this is how many places we've got and that's it, you know, that scenario, but that this is looked at, you know, there must be ways around it, how we can offer enough after school places in a school with 300 greater than 20.*
- *Holiday camps and that far enough ahead that you can plan. Lots of notice please.*
- *More information for older children as there seems to be a lot for the younger children, but as they get to secondary school. I guess that when you get to that I haven't looked, like I don't know what.*
- *From a personal point of view, I'd say the same, clubs for older children... I'm [also] intrigued by the fact that people are unsure of what the age groups are etc for children's centres [raise awareness].*
- *I would just say about information sharing really. It needs to be more comprehensive.*
- *Information and the cost really. I don't know really what you can do about that, but, yeah.*

Special Needs Group – Main points to feed back

- *Ideally a choice of any sort would be good but uh a good understanding of their ability and their expertise that could be proven and probably measured, I hate that word but I think it's important. You know a really good understanding of what they could provide in that time and if this didn't work what they would do instead.*
- *I'd just be happy to have more information of what was available out there, how we could access it.*
- *Yeah I think mine's having a central point and having links to that and that point being someone who can take responsibility, take accountability and if they're not the person, that they can make sure that they either put you in contact with the person you need to speak to or that they take that and say I will find that out and I will come back to you. Just having that that central point wherever it be.*
- *The same really.*
- *Obviously I think listening tonight, I mean obviously a lot here that are not going to mainstream schools, you seem to know a lot more information than um my child is at a mainstream school and I think it should be provided to mainstream schools, provide information, because you've come out with lots that I've never ever heard of myself... I think that's something but obviously childcare now have to cater more like after school you know and evening clubs, things like that for childcare. It's got to cater for their needs.*
- *Mine would be after school clubs, holiday clubs which are flexible, um, with staff who are trained in or can work with my [child], that's important.*
- *Yeah I think the central information, getting hold of information.*
- *I do honestly think that because we've met today as a group, I think we should as a group stay to try and keep pushing, coz I don't know about anyone else but I'm fed up of being told no ,when actually, when you look at it, there isn't really, really that good enough reason to be told no.*