

Meeting childcare needs in Dorset

What we did

Children's Services surveyed parents, community groups, employers, childcare providers and others across Dorset to determine whether there is enough appropriate childcare in Dorset to meet parents' needs. The surveying took place during 2007 and the results were produced in a report – the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008. The Assessment will be repeated at least every three years and new data will be included at least annually.

Why is this important?

Some parents need childcare so that they can continue to work or return to work after a break. Others want to attend training courses or academic courses, which may then help them to return to work or otherwise improve their job prospects. If childcare is not available these parents may not be able to work or study. This assessment has identified gaps in the childcare market and made recommendations in the report to fill them.

Continued overleaf...



What we found

Generally there are enough places for the number of children we have in Dorset. In particular, holiday play schemes were seen as vital in order to support parents who are working or wanting to return to work or training. Several key issues affect the uptake of places including:

Location	Places are not always in the right location.
Hours of business	Childcare providers are not always open at the times needed or for the length of time required.
Income	Affordable is a major issue. Dorset childcare fees are the highest in the south west. 29% of respondents (Parental Survey May 2007) state affordability as their main reason for not using childcare. This affects families earning less than £30,000 pa the most.
Rurality	Rural areas are under served because childcare providers find it difficult to run a business where the population is sparse. West Dorset, North Dorset and Purbeck were least well served with childcare places.
Disability	Parents of children who are disabled report a lack of suitable childcare and have concerns about providers' knowledge and skills. They reported their reliance on Opportunity Groups (childcare providers who cater exclusively for children who are disabled), who they feel, are more responsive to their children's needs. Single parents and parents with a long term limiting illness were less likely to be able to find childcare to support a child who is disabled.
Age	There is lack of provision for children aged 8-14. This shortage is especially acute in rural West Dorset and parts of North Dorset.

Next steps

- Improve access to childcare especially in rural areas through targeted funding and innovative models in areas of lower population density.
- Provide funding and business advice to childcare providers in priority areas as identified by the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.
- Develop and invest in innovative provision for children who are disabled such as Count Me In, which links children who attend special schools to after school and holiday clubs.
- Prepare childcare providers for the extension of Nursery Education Funding from September 2010.
- Promote tax credits to low income families to increase their ability to access childcare. We have two pilots – Beaminster and Littlemoor.
- Work with employers to promote the benefits of childcare vouchers to both them and their employees.
- Establish training for childcare providers aimed at raising the quality of care and the sustainability of their provisions.
- Develop age appropriate external activities linked to out of school provision and holiday schemes. Focus on the needs of 9-14 year olds and working parents.
- Ensure that primary schools meet their extended services childcare requirement by 2010 and that secondary schools are equipped to deliver a varied menu of activities including offering children a safe place to be outside of school hours.

