

Children's Centres Census 2013



A national overview of developments in Children's Centres



Children's Centres Census 2013

A national overview of developments in Children's Centres

Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	6
Recommendations	8
A brief introduction to Children's Centres	12
What level of demand is there for Children's Centres' services?	13
How have budgets and services changed over the past year and how will they change over the next?	15
How is the range of services offered by Centres changing?	17
How embedded is integrated working?	20
What social service support do Centres provide for Troubled Families?	22
To what extent are Children's Centres involved in the provision of childcare?	25
How many Centres offer services for over-5s?	26
How has the Children's Centre workforce changed over the course of the past year?	27
How widespread has charging become?	31
Who is delivering Children's Centres?	32
What accredited evidence-based programmes are Children's Centres running?	33
The year ahead - what activities will Children's Centres be involved in and what are the biggest challenges they face?	34
Methodology	36

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all Children Centres who took the time to respond to our Census. We would also like to thank Catherine D'Souza, Kieran Reynolds, Olivia Seddon-Daines, Kieran Lowe and Claire McCarthy who supported this work.

Follow us @4ChildrenUK

Children's Centres Census 2013
© 4Children, October 2013
Written and published by 4Children
Cover photography © Gary Manhine

Foreword

Children's Centres are "coming of age", now supporting as many as one million families across the country, and becoming a cornerstone for early intervention and prevention within our communities. That's the underlying message that emerges from the results of 4Children's 2013 Census of Children's Centres.

This is the third annual national-level Census of Children's Centres, which seeks to build a greater understanding of how they are operating, their reach and activities and the changes taking place. We wanted to find out about the services that Centres were offering, the challenges that local authorities and Centre Managers face and how they are responding. Importantly, at a time of major budget reductions we wanted to discover what effect this is having on services and support for children and families.

The story presented by the 2013 Census is that Children's Centres are supporting growing numbers of families and children: nearly three-quarters of Centres reported increasing demand, with the survey suggesting that for the first time, more than one million families are being supported, including two-thirds of the most vulnerable families with a child aged 0-5 years. Centres are largely resisting any shift towards widespread charging for services, and are working with a wider range of agencies – including the health sector – who increasingly view Children's Centres as having an important role in delivery. Yet, the degree of involvement is far from consistent across the country.

In last year's (2012) Census, the picture that emerged was of on-going reform, with movement from universal to targeted services and the introduction of charging for services. Yet, though there were concerns – with Centres closing and services being reduced – in broad terms they hadn't suffered to the same degree as the overall cuts in funding and budget would suggest, benefitting from some degree of local protection and a degree of resilience and creativity from within Centres themselves. One year on, it's no secret that circumstances remain difficult for local authorities and those operating Children's Centres. Pressures on budgets remain very real, with cuts of 15% over the year ahead, and cuts of a third since the start of the decade.

It is very important, therefore, that we recognise the undercurrent of danger, and the real challenges being faced by Centres in some parts of the country. The 2013 Census points towards a continued, steady pattern of Centre closures and service reductions in many local authority areas. This is not withstanding the effort and creative reorganisation to reduce back room costs and keep money on the front line. If all decisions are left to local-level decision making there is a real potential

that the future picture of Children's Centres will be an inconsistent patchwork of Centres and support for parents far removed from the "brave new architecture" originally intended. Changes to the structure of the Early Intervention Grant and reductions to the ring-fenced children's local authority grant, as announced in the 2013 Comprehensive Spending Review, mean that these pressures will continue past the 2015 General Election, leading many local authorities to predict drastic reductions to Children's Centres in 2015.

Within this context, Children's Centre staff are doing a remarkable job and in many cases are reacting to the challenges in the best possible way: finding innovative solutions to the challenges they face. Over the last year, Children's Centres have increasingly relied upon, and attracted the support of, volunteers: their commitment and enthusiasm offers a clear endorsement of the role and work of Children's Centres within their communities.

So, what message can we draw for the future from the Census' findings? How far can further reductions in funding be absorbed and dealt with, or will we reach a breaking point? For 4Children, there is so much more that can be done to be more efficient with the money available, even as it continues to fall. Collaboration between Centres and other local service providers, particularly in the health arena, will be essential if we are to see the sort of "holistic" offering that is vital to improving outcomes for children and families through intervening at early stages of their development. There are positive signs within this year's Census that moves in this direction are being made, but it is also clear that opportunities to deliver the vital joined-up offer needed to meet parents' needs and reduce spending waste are being missed.

After an enormous amount of investment – in both time and money – Children's Centres can clearly show their worth as a valued resource at the heart of local communities, supporting at least two-thirds of all disadvantaged families. But whilst there is uncertainty this enormous potential remains at risk, undermining the valuable, targeted and preventative support that is keeping hundreds of thousands of families out of crisis, threatening the significant social and economic benefits that this support brings.

Nationally and locally, there must therefore be a renewed commitment and effort to enable new support mechanisms for young children and their families, with clear expectations for health, social care, and Jobcentre Plus, to play the maximum possible role.

For Children's Centres to continue to work successfully as

community hubs, excellent working partnerships with local services are crucial. They must remain a national priority for central government if it is to achieve its ambitions to improve educational outcomes, increase social mobility, reduce poverty, help troubled families turnaround and improve child health outcomes.



Anne Longfield OBE
Chief Executive, 4Children

Executive summary

The findings of this year's Children's Centres Census attest to the resourcefulness and commitment of the many local authorities, Children's Centre Managers, staff and volunteers, who are stretching every sinew to maintain and build them as a vital resource in their support for young children and their families and in their early intervention strategies.

The results of the Census indicate that the need for Children's Centres' services remains very strong. Nearly three-quarters of respondents report that the number of families using their services has increased over the past year and more than half are supporting over 300 families on a regular basis. Based on our findings, we estimate that Children's Centres are currently helping more than one million families across the country. Around two-thirds of those have been identified as disadvantaged (320,000 of the 500,000 families with at least one child aged 0-5 years defined as such).

It's no secret that Centres are encountering significant budgetary pressures: in 2013-14, local authorities will be spending nearly 15% less on Children's Centres and Early Years services than in 2012-13. As a total, by 2014-15 the available budget from which local authorities provide Children's Centre services will have fallen by more than a third (down 36%, or £0.9bn) since the start of the decade (2010-11). Given this, it is unsurprising that two-thirds (66%) of respondents reported that their Centres would be operating with a decreased budget in the forthcoming year, continuing the trend our Census observed in 2012. Yet, despite obvious funding constraints, it is clear that much has been done to keep funding on the front line. Two-thirds of Centres said that they expected to continue providing broadly the same level of service over the coming year (40%) or actually increase service provision (27%).

However, we should not ignore the undercurrent threat of closures revealed by the Census, with 2% of respondents saying that their Centre would be closed in a year's time. If extrapolated nationally, this would mean around 60 Centre closures over the next 12 months. Moreover, with the continued cuts in local government expenditure allocated to 2014-15, Children's Centres will become extremely vulnerable if unprotected. It is possible that the on-going and steady rise in the number of Centres being closed will begin to accelerate. Consequently, we would urge local authorities to do all they can to maintain existing levels of funding for Centres, making increasing use of joined-up resources, with the potential to increase the level of expenditure being directed into services provided through them. However, we also believe that central government must now step in to provide further crucial funding, for example, by extending the pupil

premium. This would enable Children's Centres to help prevent family crisis and reduce the social and economic cost that it brings.

Bringing together services and co-ordinating support around the needs of children and families is at the heart of Children's Centres' delivery. Finding ways to drive greater integration in the provision of local services is essential to their success. The Census shows mixed success in terms of partnership working, meaning that there is a continued and unacceptable duplication of effort and expenditure and a need for significant work in this area. Children's Centres must be at the heart of an early intervention and prevention strategy, demanding a joined-up approach and changing the system with a "rewiring" of public services¹ in several areas, set out as follows:

- Ensuring collaboration between Children's Centres and local health services is especially important. Joined-up delivery in this area is key to maximising the effectiveness of health interventions during the critical early years of a child's development and Centres should therefore play a central role in the delivery of the Healthy Child programme. The Census found that baby weighing services in partnership with their local health service and health visitor clinics are available in around four out of five Centres, but provision needs to be extended and consistent across the country.
- Playing a key role within delivery of a successful Troubled Families programme, which is seeking to turnaround 120,000 families with particularly complex needs by 2015. Yet, less than half of Centres are currently involved in the delivery of their local Troubled Families programme. Of those that are not, a striking 52% say that the main reason for this is that local service providers or the local authority have simply not asked them to be involved. In last year's Census it was argued that the Troubled Families programme was being seen as a potential catalyst for joined-up solutions in many areas. However, the findings for 2013 suggest that there is still much to be done to capitalise on the opportunities for integration offered by the initiative. With around £8bn a year spent on dealing with "crisis" families there is scope for developing the next stage of the extended programme, delivered through Children's Centres.
- Having a core role and function in the cost-effective delivery of the Government's support for childcare for disadvantaged two-year olds, where £0.5bn is being invested across England over the coming year to

¹ Local Government Association (2013) Rewiring public services <http://www.local.gov.uk/campaigns>

reach the 40% most vulnerable from September 2014. Children's Centres also have the potential to play a significant role in ensuring that the introduction of the free entitlement to early education for disadvantaged two-year olds is implemented sustainably. It is extremely positive news that Children's Centres are involved, whether through referrals or direct provision of childcare places, but more can be done. However, government must ensure that funding cuts do not undermine Centres' capacity to deliver in this area, as the Census has found that where Centres are looking to cut back, childcare services and staff are often vulnerable. The potential for reinstating childcare provision in Centres where it has previously been removed should also be considered.

- Increasing the integration of Children's Centres with a much wider range of services. This will enable them to be used as a tool for identifying and reaching vulnerable families in particular. This should include integration with safeguarding and a wide range of social services, links to and referrals to/from Jobcentre Plus (as required by statutory guidance from the Department for Education)², as well as the police (for example, linking databases relating to incidents of domestic violence).

There has been strong growth over the last year in Centres' use of volunteers, showing how important Centres are as a springboard in their local communities. Over half of respondents to the Census (55%) report that they have seen an increase in the number of volunteers helping at their Centre in the past year and more than 40% say that the number of hours of support provided by volunteers has risen. Volunteers clearly represent a committed and highly significant part of the Centre workforce – they are a valuable resource, and it is essential that best use is made of the skills and enthusiasm they are able to offer. They also provide a strong link to and with the local communities in which Centres are based.

4Children has long argued the importance of continued support for families as their children grow up and that Children's Centres have an important role to play in this process. Providing services for the over-5s helps ensure that families are consistently supported as their children grow up. All local authorities should consider this approach, already being taken by more than a third of Centres, both to maximise support from parents and their community and provide an opportunity to bring in new and welcome revenue streams.

Only a very small number of Centres are working with their local registry service to offer birth registration within Centres, something to be addressed as this can be an important way of driving engagement with parents, particularly as part of an early intervention and preventative strategy.

The Census therefore paints a detailed picture of the challenges and opportunities facing Children's Centres, as well as their significant achievements over the past year. In the recommendations that follow, we set out the key actions that both local and national decision makers need to take in order to maximise the value of Children's Centres by putting them at their heart of their strategies to intervene early and prevent crisis for children and families.

² Department for Education (2013) Sure Start Children's Centres Statutory Guidance April 2013 <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/childrens%20centre%20stat%20guidance%20april%202013.pdf>

Recommendations

1

Local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards should put Children's Centres at the heart of their early intervention and preventative strategies

Children's Centres play a prominent part in improving outcomes for children and families, bringing economic and social benefits for our society and wider communities by improving the circumstances of troubled and vulnerable families. As the latest regulations set out, all should work to ensure that they occupy a central position in the delivery of the Healthy Child programme, as well as having access to a named health visitor. Resources provided to Centres from local authorities should be tailored to reflect this and the savings that can be achieved by integrated working.

2

Government should commit additional investment to Children's Centre budgets by extending the pupil premium to early years

While Centres continue to show relative resilience in the face of cuts, there is a limit to how much further they can be pushed without there being a significant impact on service provision. National direction is required from the Government to ensure that the number of Centres across the country and the current budget for Early Intervention and Early Years support are maintained and built upon.

3

Centres should maintain a base of universal provision

It is very important that Children's Centres remain a universal service, as this is the most effective way of reaching disadvantaged families. Any move towards exclusive targeted provision, including by closing Centres in less deprived areas, would seriously undermine the "holistic" approach currently being taken. Children's Centres could develop an unhelpful reputation as a provider of services focused specifically on "failing" families, which would hinder their ability to reach those who need them most. It is important to remember that one in three of the most disadvantaged children live in areas that are considered relatively affluent as a whole.

4

There should be integration of local services into Children's Centres to deliver a "holistic" whole family model of support

There needs to be a determined drive towards a new way of working with the whole family - integrating with those working across a wide range of areas associated with the work of Children's Centres. As in the first recommendation, this includes those in the health sector (including health visitors and community midwives), as well as social workers, Jobcentre Plus, and the police, in order to establish a "holistic" model of support for children and the whole family.

5

There should be a statutory requirement for data and information sharing between local authorities, agencies and Children's Centres

This is crucial to facilitating collaborative working between Centres and the full range of children and families services at a local level, as Children's Centres don't have access to data which would potentially assist and support their own work. This would include having access to data from the police on incidents of domestic violence and on whereabouts of those children or families in need (including vulnerable families); from local authorities and health providers to help work around early intervention and Troubled Families; and live birth data from the health service.

6

Children's Centres should play a crucial role in the delivery of the free early education entitlement for two-year olds

More Centres should look to provide childcare services as part of their offer to parents; providing this for two-year olds would enhance their work supporting early intervention. Delivering the new free entitlement for the most disadvantaged children at this age would be an effective new way of reaching families. This is particularly true in light of Ofsted's assertion that the quality of childcare is enhanced by a direct link with a Centre.

Recommendations continued

7

The potential role of Children's Centres in the delivery of local Troubled Families programme needs to be maximised

Greater efforts are needed in this area, which represents an opportunity to drive joined-up solutions and realise the benefits of early intervention and targeted help for families in crisis. It is essential for Children's Centres to be involved in delivery of the programme if the best outcomes are to be achieved. Given that some local authorities have enjoyed only limited success in "turning around" the troubled families in their area to date, we would urge those that are not yet working with Children's Centres on the programme to do so.

8

Children's Centres need to be appropriately represented on local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)

Children's Centres and social services should work more closely together as one means of supporting child protection. Centres need to be recognised for their role in providing help to families dealing with issues such as domestic abuse, alcohol and drug abuse and post-natal depression.

9

Barriers preventing third sector organisations from running Children's Centres should be broken down

There needs to be a continuing focus on breaking down barriers to entry that currently limit the involvement of voluntary and community organisations in running Children's Centres. There should be a new legislative requirement placed on local authorities, which would prevent the closure of Centres without full and audited consideration of the potential role for the voluntary sector to take over.

10

There should be better evaluation of the work Children's Centres do

More help should be provided centrally to help Children's Centres carry out effective evaluation of their services. 4Children, in partnership with University College London Institute of Health Equity, has developed an outcomes framework for Children's Centres, which represents a base to work from in this regard. The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) should also consider what advice and support it can offer.

11

Centres should extend their work to over-5s, to cover children aged 0-19 years

Developing an offering for over-5s is an important way in which Centres can expand their reach and ultimately help as many families as possible, recognising the importance of continued support for families as their children grow up. Providing services for older children enables Centres to reach a wider breadth of families and continue to provide support even after children start school. They also bring potential financial benefits, as these services are in large part provided through additional charging to parents (as they are over and above any statutory duties). Centres could prospectively operate as service hubs for children and young people throughout the entire period from birth up to the point they reach adulthood.

12

Centres should consider introducing birth registration

This can, as evidence from a number of Centres has shown, help promote parental engagement with Centres and their services and help widen their reach still further.

A brief introduction to Children's Centres

The Department for Education defines a Children's Centre as "a place or a group of places:

- Which is managed by or on behalf of, or under arrangements with, the local authority with a view to securing that early childhood services in the local authority are made available in an integrated way;
- Through which early childhood services are made available (either by providing the services on site, or by providing advice and assistance on gaining access to services elsewhere); and
- At which activities for young children are provided"³

Children's Centres have a specified "core purpose", which is "to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in the greatest need and their peers in:

- Child development and school readiness;
- Parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and
- Child and family health and life chances"⁴

Children's Centres originated as Sure Start Local Programmes, an initiative announced as part of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review. Between 1999 and 2004, 524 Sure Start Local Programmes were set up in selected areas in the 20% most deprived wards in England.

A national roll-out of Sure Start Children's Centres then followed between 2004 and 2010, which proceeded in three phases. Phase 1 extended full coverage to the 20% most deprived wards; under Phase 2 there was a further extension to ensure full coverage across the 30% most disadvantaged areas; finally, Phase 3 extended complete coverage to the remaining 70% of areas, with in excess of 3,500 Children's Centres ultimately being established.

The actual number of Centres across England remains the subject of some debate. Figures released earlier this year by the Department for Education record that at the end of April 2013 there were 3,116 Children's Centres, a decline from 3,631 at the end of April 2010. However, Ministers also noted that there were only 35

outright closures during this same period, stating that the change had otherwise been the result of re-organisations and mergers.⁵ Management of Children's Centres is now provided in a number of different ways and models. In some cases, for example, management has merged, with services provided as a "cluster" at a number of sites.

3 The Department for Education (2013) Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance, p. 6 <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/childrens%20centre%20stat%20guidance%20april%202013.pdf>

4 The Department for Education (2013) Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance, p. 7 <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/childrens%20centre%20stat%20guidance%20april%202013.pdf>

5 Answer to written Parliamentary Question from Sharon Hodgson MP (Hansard, 20 May 2013, Column 584W) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130520/text/130520w0007.htm#13052112000020>

What level of demand is there for Children's Centres' services?

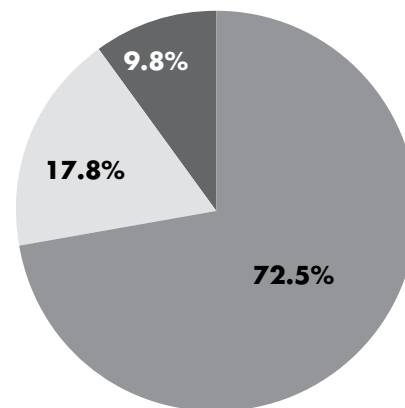
Our analysis suggests that over one million families are now being supported by Children's Centres every year. They provide crucial early intervention and preventative services for parents, and are essential for over two in five families with young children across the country. The Census clearly shows that the level of need and demand for Centres' services is substantial – and increasing – and that they occupy a key role at the heart of their communities, especially in disadvantaged ones.

One of the most significant findings of this year's Census is that a substantial majority of respondents – nearly three-quarters – reported that their Centres had seen an increase in the number of families using their services over the past year, reflecting that in most cases, Children's Centres and the services they provide were needed more than ever. The results also show that instances of falling demand are very limited, with fewer than 10% of respondents saying that the number of families using their services had decreased, further evidence that Children's Centres are at the heart of their communities, and can be regarded as a fundamental part of the architecture of delivery of children's services.

“I think we will see greater numbers of families coming in for support in the coming year.”

Centre Manager

Figure 1: Has there been any change in the number of families who use your services over the last 12 months?⁶

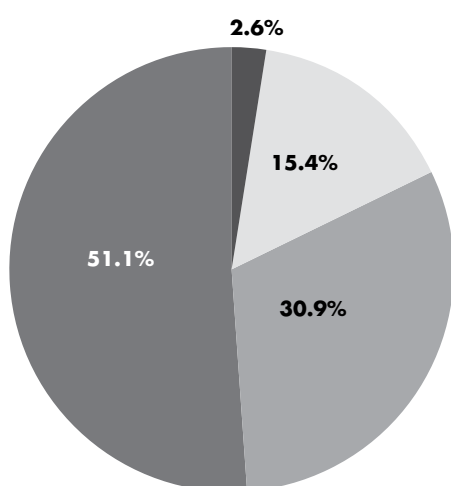


It has increased – 72.5%
It has stayed the same – 17.8%
It has decreased – 9.8%

Just over half of respondents to the Census said that their Centres were being used by more than 300 families on a regular basis. The number working with between 101 and 300 families was also high, at 31%, while the proportion of respondents who said their Centres worked with 50 families or fewer was small, at less than 3%.

⁶ n = 501 base

Figure 2: Approximately how many families use your Centre on a regular basis?⁷



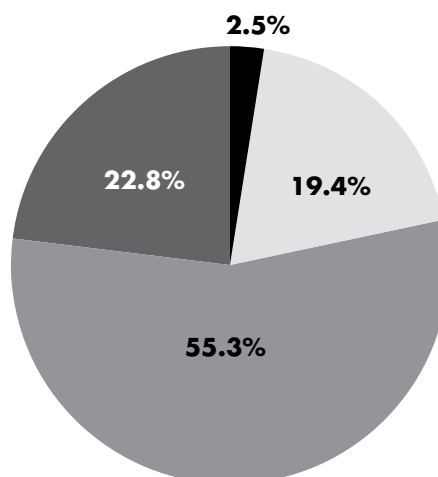
0-50 families – 2.6%
 51-100 families – 15.4%
 101-300 families – 30.9%
 More than 300 families – 51.1%

So, what does the picture from the Census tell us about the need and demand for services across the country? 4Children estimates that if these findings were scaled up to the national level, it would suggest that more than one million households are now using Children’s Centres every year. This equates to roughly 42% of all households in England with at least one child aged 0-5 years, indicating that more than two in five such families regularly rely on the services that Children’s Centres provide.

The results also indicate that Children’s Centres are successfully targeting their services at more vulnerable families, with – on average – around two-thirds (64%) of vulnerable families within their reach area being registered with their Centre and using the services provided. Transposed nationally, this equates to 320,000 of the half a million “vulnerable” families with at least one child aged 0-5 years. A breakdown of the proportion of vulnerable families within a Centre’s reach area who are registered shows that nearly four in five Centres are reaching more than half of all of the vulnerable families in their reach area, with one in five supporting over 85%, the level at which Ofsted will record a Centre on this criteria as “outstanding”.

⁷ n = 501 base

Figure 3: Approximately what proportion of vulnerable families in your “reach” area are registered with the Centre?⁸



0-19 per cent of vulnerable families registered – 2.5%
 20-49 per cent of vulnerable families registered – 22.8%
 50-79 per cent of vulnerable families registered – 55.3%
 80-100 per cent of vulnerable families registered – 19.4%

Together these results demonstrate that Centres truly have started to come of age. With the overwhelming majority of respondents reporting that demand is rising, it is likely that user levels will only continue to increase in the future.

Furthermore, it is also significant to note that looking back at the results of last year’s Census, over 90% of respondents were expecting to operate with static or decreased budgets during 2012-13. It appears, therefore, that many Centres are not only managing to help more families, but have succeeded in doing so with increasingly limited financial resources. This is a testament to the creativity and resourcefulness of providers in difficult times and to their capacity to lever in additional support, notably from volunteers, as will be seen later in this report.

⁸ n = 443 base

How have budgets and services changed over the past year and how will they change over the next?

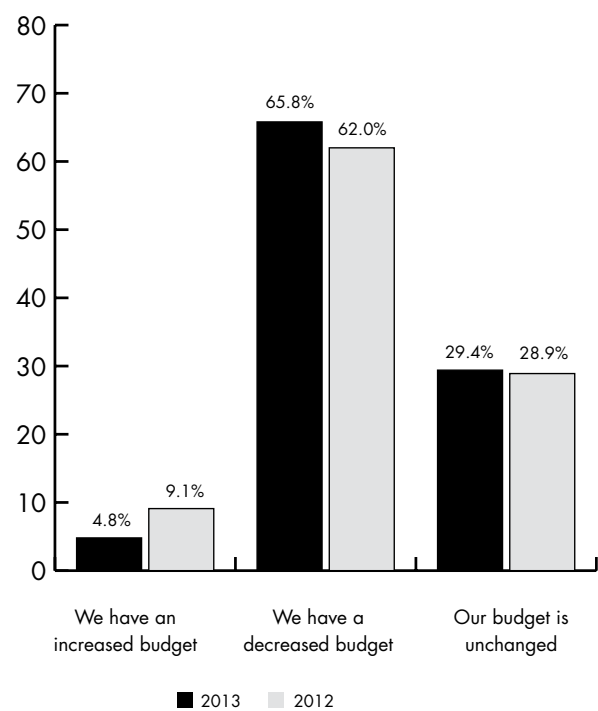
There is no doubt that Centres are encountering significant budgetary pressures. The previous Children's Centre Census in 2012 found that a majority were just about coping, despite an overall picture of worsening financial sustainability. How has the situation developed since then?

The financial challenges facing Children's Centres are well known. Recent figures released by the Department for Education suggest that in 2013-14, local authorities' expenditure on Children's Centres and Early Years services will be nearly 15% less than in 2012-13, with the overall total declining from £1.283bn to £1.093bn.⁹ As a total, by 2014-15 the available budget from which local authorities provide Children's Centre services will have fallen by more than a third (down 36%, or £0.9bn) since the start of the decade (2010-11).

Individual councils are, therefore, under pressure to make significant cuts to service budgets, including Children's Centre budgets, both in the current and future financial years. For example, Swindon Borough Council announced in February that it would have to reduce funding for Children's Centres by 7.9% in 2013-14, and by a further 7.9% in 2014-15.¹⁰ Warwickshire County Council have also consulted on proposals to make savings of £2.3m in the next financial year, from its current Children's Centre budget of £7.5m,¹¹ and Kent County Council put forward plans to deliver savings of £1.5m.¹²

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that this year's Census has found that Centre finances remain a deep concern for many. Around two-thirds of respondents reported that their Centres would be operating with a decreased budget in the forthcoming year, while less than 5% said that their budgets had increased. The trend from 2012 is of a worsening financial picture. More Centres have experienced reductions in their budgets, whilst the number reporting that their budgets have increased has halved compared to what it was before.

Figure 4: How does your budget for the coming year compare to your budget last year?¹³

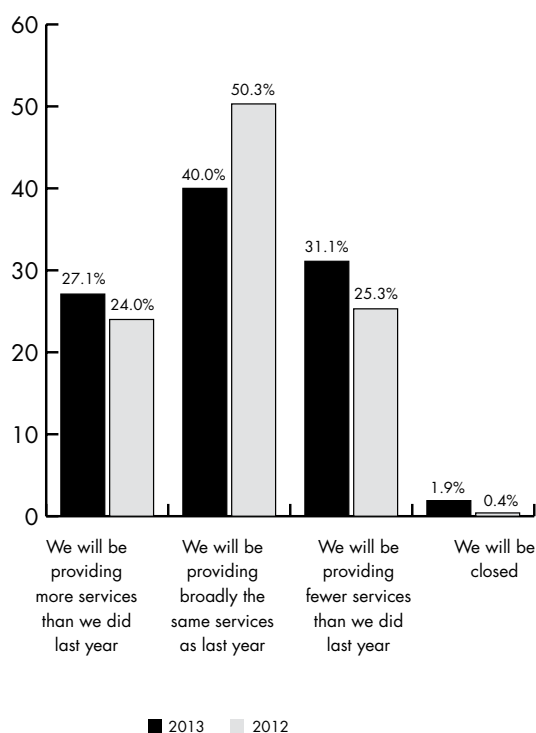


Despite obvious funding constraints, when we asked respondents where they anticipated their Centres would be in a year's time, over two-thirds said that they expected to be providing broadly the same level of service as they do now (40%) or actually providing more services (27%). This suggests that many Centres have, to date at least, remained resilient in the face of national budget cuts. Whether this continues remains to be seen. An indication that this positive picture may not continue comes from the notable increase in the number of respondents who say that their service offering will be reduced over the coming year (up from 25% to 31%).

⁹ The Department for Education (2013) 2013-14 Planned Expenditure on Schools, Education, Children and Young People's Services by Local Authorities, p. 3 (Table B) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/244055/SR35-2013.pdf
¹⁰ Swindon Borough Council (2013) Children's Centre Consultation July 2013, p. 2 <http://www.swindon.gov.uk/cd/Council%20and%20Democracy%20Document%20Library/Information%20-%20Childrens%20Centre%20Consultation%20July%202013.pdf>
¹¹ Warwickshire County Council (2013) Warwickshire Early Years and Children's Centre Consultation, p. 4 <http://askwarks.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/warwickshire-early-years-and-children-s-centres-consultation-document.pdf>
¹² Kent County Council (2013) Shaping the future of Children's Centres in Kent, p. 3 <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/childcare-and-pre-school/childrens%20centre%20consultation/Childrens%20Centre%20Consultation%20Document.pdf>

¹³ n = 483 (2013) n = 516 (2012) base

Figure 5: Where do you expect your Centre will be in a year's time?¹⁴



Beneath these top-line figures, the Census also appears to reveal a growing undercurrent of the potential threat of closures for some Centres. 2% of respondents said that their own Centre will be shut in a year's time. If replicated throughout the country, this would equate to the loss of around 60 Centres in total across England. This is a significant rise in relative terms from last year, when just 0.4% of respondents expected their Centre to close. With even deeper cuts expected after the next General Election (the recent Comprehensive Spending Review announced that overall local authority funding will be cut by another 10% in 2015-16)¹⁵ the pressure will only intensify. The Local Government Association has warned that non-statutory services, including Children's Centres, will be especially vulnerable, with millions living in areas where Centres will potentially be at threat of closure.¹⁶

In this context, it is a very real possibility that the gradual rise in closures observed over this and last year's Censuses will begin to accelerate substantially. We would, therefore, urge both local authorities and central government to do all they can to protect funding for Centres, and recognise that it will not be possible to place ever increasing pressure on budgets without this becoming a risk to support for children and families in significant parts of the country.

“During the last 12 months my local authority has tried to protect and maintain front line services including Children’s Centres as part of its Early Intervention strategy. To its credit, the number of buildings has remained largely the same and the number of Centre workers has increased.”

Centre Manager

“We are given more plates to spin with less budget and no increase in staff. Having said that, I have a wonderful team that will go the extra mile and we know we are making a positive difference to families’ lives.”

Centre Manager

“Reduced budget, increasing demand for services, reduced local authority personnel and services like adult education and a more complex Ofsted inspection framework. How much more can we take?”

Centre Manager

¹⁴ n = 483 (2013) n = 529 (2012) base
¹⁵ HM Treasury (2013) Spending Round 2013, p. 10 (Table 1) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209036/spending-round-2013-complete.pdf
¹⁶ Local Government Association, “Government cuts risk ‘failing communities’” (9 May 2013). http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/3984939/NEWS

How is the range of services offered by Centres changing?

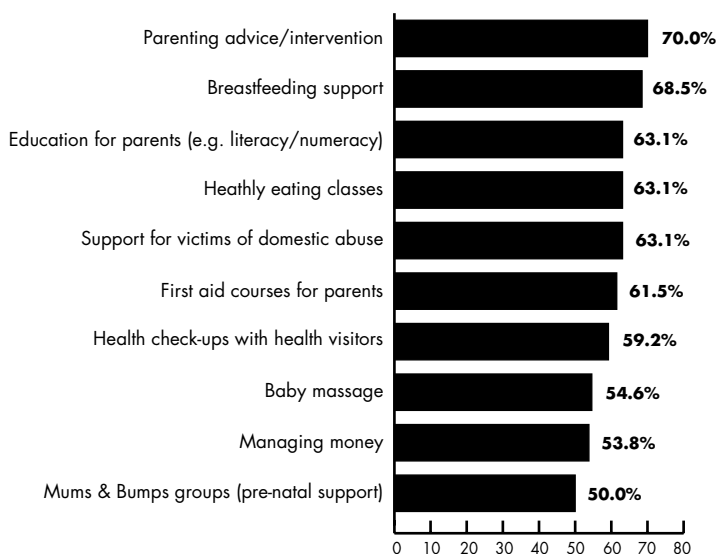
With the removal of the Sure Start “core offer” in 2012 (which explicitly set out a suite of core services that all Children’s Centres were expected to provide) and its replacement with the “core purpose” of improving outcomes for young people and their parents, particularly those in greatest need, Children’s Centres have been granted more discretion in determining the types of services they offer. Which services are Centres choosing to expand and cutback and what are the reasons underpinning these decisions?

Where respondents told us that they expected their Centres to be providing more services in a year’s time, we asked them what services they were planning to increase. 70% of this group reported that they would be expanding their parenting advice and intervention services and nearly 69% intended to increase breastfeeding support. Education services for parents (such as numeracy and literacy classes), support for victims of domestic abuse and healthy eating classes were each highlighted as areas of planned expansion by 63% of this group of respondents.

Meanwhile, we utilised a similar approach to find out about service reductions and asked all those respondents who said they expected to be providing fewer services in a year’s time what they were planning to cut back. “Stay and Play” services were by a clear margin the most vulnerable, with around 58% of Children’s Centres saying they would look to cut back provision in this area. Baby massage, community groups and first aid courses for parents were also earmarked for cuts by at least 30% of Centres which expect to reduce their offering.

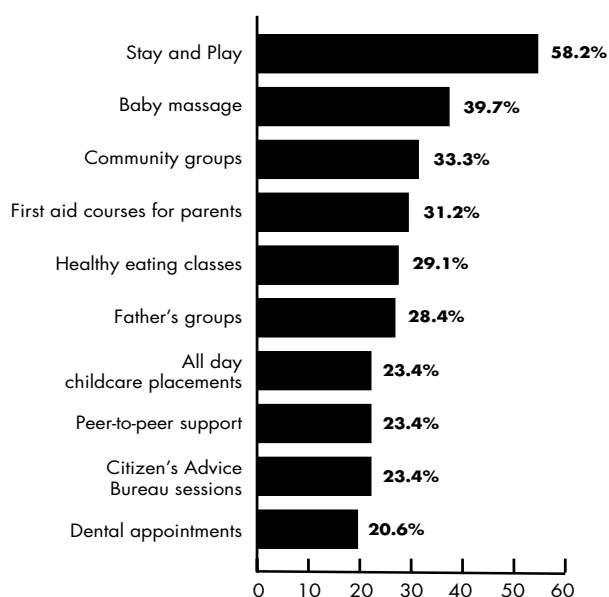
Other services cited by at least half of respondents who expect to be providing more services in the next year included first aid courses for parents, health check-ups with health visitors, baby massage sessions, support for parents with managing money and pre-natal “Mums and Bumps” groups.

Figure 6: Which services do you expect to increase at your Centre?¹⁷



¹⁷ n = 130 base

Figure 7: Which services do you expect to cut back at your Centre?¹⁸



The fact that “Stay and Play”, baby massage and community groups feature so prominently suggests that when Centres need to cut, universal services are most likely to be in the firing line. However, it is important to recognise that the availability of universal services plays an important part in driving levels of engagement of parents with Centres (and their “reach”). This was demonstrated within the survey of families using Children’s Centres in Phase 1 and 2 areas¹⁹ that was conducted earlier this year as part of the “Evaluation of Children’s Centres in England” (ECCE) research programme. This research found that “Stay and Play” groups were the most commonly used type of service in Children’s Centres, with almost half (47%) of families who use Centres taking part in these sessions.²⁰ To preserve the integrity of their Centres, in terms of reach and numbers of users, providers should therefore be wary of drawing down universal services and look instead, for example, to the use of support from volunteers.

It is also notable that around a quarter of respondents who were looking to cut back some activities highlighted all day childcare placements as an area they planned to cut back on, especially given the extensive need for childcare places as a result of the roll-out of the free entitlement for two-year olds from September 2013 (to be expanded further in September 2014)²¹.

In order to probe the main factors underpinning the expansion or reduction of services, this year’s Census also asked respondents to identify what the planned changes were driven by. The majority (58%) cited greater focus on targeted services as the key factor driving shifts in service provision. Just under a quarter (23%) said reduced resources were the main driver of change, although if the sample is restricted to just those respondents who say they will be offering fewer services in a year’s time, this rises to 51% (however, even within this restricted sample, greater focus on targeted resources is still cited by a substantial 41%).

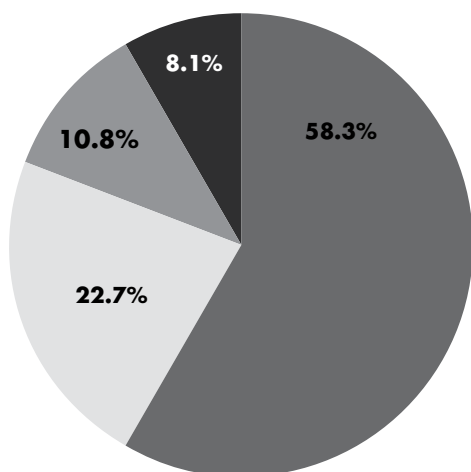
¹⁸ n = 141 base

¹⁹ Children’s Centres were initially established as part of the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLIP) initiative, which ran from 1999 to 2004 – during this period, 524 SSLIPs were set up in selected areas of the 20% most deprived wards. Between 2004 and 2010 the programme was then rolled out nationally, in three phases. Phase 1 Centres provided full coverage of the 20% most deprived wards, and Phase 2 Centres extended this to the 30% most deprived wards. Finally, Phase 3 provided full coverage to the remaining 70% of areas.

²⁰ The Department for Education (2013) Evaluation of Children’s Centres in England (ECCE) Strand 2: Baseline Survey of Families Using Children’s Centres in the Most Disadvantaged Areas, p. 21 (Table 2.1) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/191007/DFE-RR260.pdf

²¹ For a number of years, all three and four-year olds in England have been entitled to 15 hours of free early education for 38 weeks during the year. From 1 September 2013, this free entitlement was extended to 20% of two-year olds, targeted to help the most disadvantaged. From September 2014, the free entitlement will be extended again so that it covers 40% of two-year olds: Department for Education (2013) [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211313/080713 - Letter from Elizabeth Truss MP to leaders of local authorities.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211313/080713_Letter_from_Elizabeth_Truss_MP_to_leaders_of_local_authorities.pdf)

Figure 8: What are planned changes primarily driven by?²²



Greater focus on targeted resources - 58.3%
 Reduced resources - 22.7%
 Changes in Ofsted requirements - 10.8%
 Changes in local need - 8.1%

A greater focus on targeting resources is therefore the major priority for Children’s Centres; indeed, with only 11% citing changes in Ofsted requirements as a major driver of change, it seems that this is something that goes beyond recent shifts in inspection frameworks and is underpinned by the need to change the way in which services are delivered, a response to both budget cuts and a drive from local authorities to achieve value for money, including through increased integration of services.

It is also important that Children’s Centres retain their universal provision, as this remains the most effective way of reaching disadvantaged families. Any move towards targeted provision would seriously undermine the “holistic” approach currently being taken. Children’s Centres could develop an unhelpful reputation as a provider of services focused specifically on “failing” families, which would undermine their ability to reach those who need them most.

As the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children’s Centres has powerfully argued, “at a time when we want Children’s Centres to do more to engage ‘hard to reach’ families ... the stigma around using them that such a policy direction would create would be deleterious to this work”.²³

22 n = 480 base

23 All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children’s Centres (2013) Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children’s Centres, p. 22 <http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/cffc42fe49eb43e2b330a1fd00b8077b/Best-Practice-for-a-Sure-Start.pdf>

How embedded is integrated working?

Bringing together services and co-ordinating support around the needs of children and families is at the heart of Children's Centres' delivery. Collaboration with other local services can not only help deliver efficiencies, it also ensures families are able to access a "holistic" model of support, organised and delivered in response to their own individual needs. A recent report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children's Centres sets out how important this is, stressing that such integration is central to delivering the best outcomes for children and families.

As part of this year's Census, we sought to test the reality of the ambition to be joined-up, and examine how embedded partnership working has become across a range of different services and programmes.

Finding ways to drive greater integration in the provision of local services for children and families is essential if we are to effectively reach families with children at the earliest possible opportunity, something that has been demonstrated to have the most significant positive impact on a child's development. Centres that are working with families from pregnancy onwards can help support and promote key parenting behaviours.

A recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children's Centres has stressed the need to effectively integrate Centres with local perinatal health services, such as health visitors and community midwives, as well as broader services such as employment support through Jobcentre Plus. The Group has argued that in order to facilitate this, it will be crucial for local commissioners and Health and Wellbeing Boards to move towards a system of pooled budgets and away from "siloed" funding arrangements.²⁴

The Local Government Association has also advocated the importance of integration in delivering effective early intervention. They have called for the introduction of what they term "place-based public service arrangements" – effectively a system of pooled budgets – with "increasingly porous organisational and financial boundaries" in place of rigid distinctions between agencies.²⁵

However, while integrated working is clearly becoming a central part of the policy agenda, there are often challenges to delivering this on-the-ground. Firstly, Children's Centres encounter barriers to establishing links with other agencies and services, a legacy of the way in which the delivery of public services has been designed and delivered over time, in particular a "silo" mentality

which often persists. Secondly, even if this initial barrier is overcome, there can often then be reluctance from others to either share information or enter into more formal working partnerships, often because of the simple fact that Children's Centres are not always viewed as "statutory" bodies.²⁶

This year's Children's Centre Census reveals mixed success in terms of partnership working. In some areas, this appears to be particularly strong, but in others there remains much work to be done if opportunities for partnership working are to be capitalised on.

Ensuring collaboration between Children's Centres and local health services is especially important. Joined-up delivery in this area is key to maximising the effectiveness of health interventions during the critical early years of a child's development and Centres should therefore play a central role in the delivery of the Healthy Child programme. In order to examine the degree to which Centres and health service providers are currently working together, respondents to the Census were asked about what services they were working in partnership with their local health service to provide. Health visitor clinics were cited by 81% (perhaps reflecting the substantial emphasis that is being placed on partnership with Children's Centres in the health visitor implementation programme), while 79% of respondents said they were providing baby weighing services in partnership with their local health service.

Substantial numbers also said that they were working with local health services to provide ante-natal services, with 64% offering ante-natal midwifery clinics and 47% offering ante-natal classes. 43% said they provided post-natal midwifery clinics. These results are broadly consistent with findings from the Department for Education's "Evaluation of Children's Centres in England" (ECCE). A recent ECCE report into the delivery of family services in Children's Centres (which was based on interviews with 121 Centre Managers) found

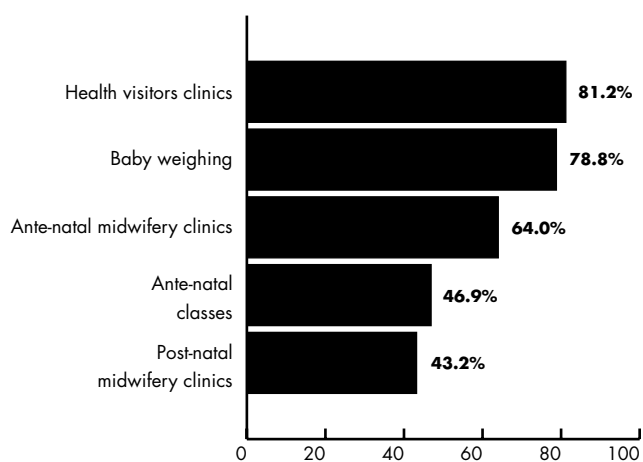
24 All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children's Centres (2013) Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres, p. 12-18 <http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/clfc42fe49eb43e2b330a1fd00b8077b/Best-Practice-for-a-Sure-Start.pdf>

25 Local Government Association (2013) Rewiring Public Services: Children's Services, p. 9 http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=cc8e3fc4-2105-459d-8b94-06f15aea96af&groupId=10180

26 The Children's Society (2013) Breaking barriers: How to help children's centres reach disadvantaged families, p. 9 http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/breaking_barriers_report.pdf

that around 64% of Centres provided ante-natal services (with 97% of these doing so in partnership with other agencies), while around 48% delivered post-natal classes (88% in partnership with others).²⁷

Figure 9: In 2012-13 which of the following did your local health service provide, within, or in partnership with, your Centre?²⁸



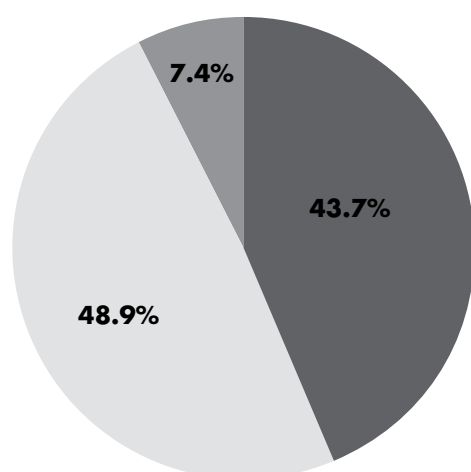
²⁷ The Department for Education (2013) Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) Strand 3: Delivery of Family Services by Children's Centres – Research Report, p. 16 (Table 3.1) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224096/DFE-RR297.pdf

²⁸ n = 405 base

What social service support do Centres provide for Troubled Families?

Troubled Families is one of the Government's most high-profile initiatives and aims to "turn around" the lives of 120,000 households with particularly complex needs by 2015. All local authorities in England are responsible for identifying, working with and ultimately "turning around" the troubled families in their area.²⁹ However, analysis by 4Children reveals wide disparities in performance to date.³⁰ While some local authorities had succeeded in "turning around" over a quarter of troubled families in their area by the end of July 2013, others had not yet reported succeeding in "turning around" any families. Furthermore, despite the crucial role for Children's Centres in supporting vulnerable families at times of crisis, and a defined role for Children's Centres within this programme by government, less than half of the Centres have been involved in working as part of their own local Troubled Families programme.

Figure 10: In 2012-13, were you involved in your local Troubled Families programme?³¹



Yes - 43.7%
No - 48.9%
Unsure - 7.4%

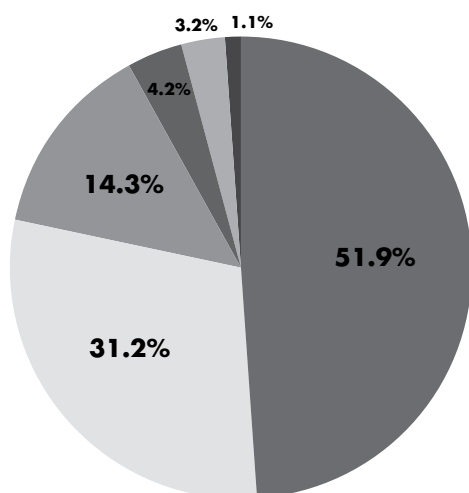
The reasons given by those respondents who were not involved are particularly interesting, with over half (52%) saying the main reason was that local service providers or the local authority had simply not asked them to be involved. Issues such as funding, staffing and expertise were cited as barriers by only a very small number of respondents. These findings suggest that in a number of cases, Centres which have the capacity to support families in urgent need are not being utilised. In order to maximise the effectiveness of the Troubled Families programme, it is vital that the initiative levers in support from all those providing services to children and families. Consequently, we would stress that it is essential for Children's Centres to be involved in delivery of the programme if the best outcomes are to be achieved. Given that some local authorities have enjoyed only limited success in completing "turn around" of troubled families in their area, we would urge those that are not yet working with Children's Centres on the programme to do so.

²⁹ Department for Communities and Local Government (2013) Helping Troubled Families turn their lives around. <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

³⁰ 4Children has conducted internal analysis, currently unpublished, based on the most recent performance data submitted by local authorities to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

³¹ n = 405 base

Figure 11: For what reason were you not involved in your local Troubled Families programme over the past year?³²

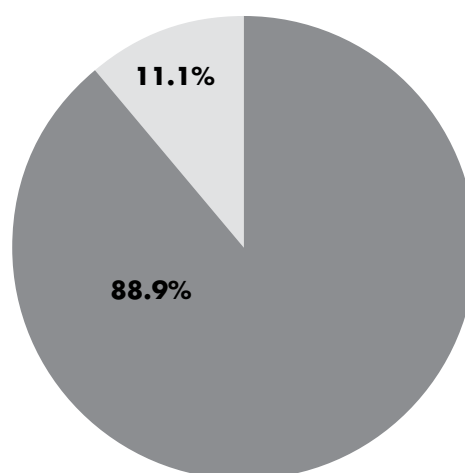


Local service providers/the local authority have not asked us to be involved – 51.9%
 Other – 31.2%
 There is no local Troubled Families programme/I haven't heard of the local programme – 14.3%
 We have insufficient staffing to be involved – 4.2%
 Troubled Families are not our area of expertise – 3.2%
 We have insufficient funding to be involved – 1.1%

In last year's Census, it was argued that the Troubled Families programme was being seen as a potential catalyst for joined-up solutions in many areas. However, the findings for 2013 suggest that there is still much to be done to capitalise on the opportunities for integration offered by the Troubled Families initiative.

The results regarding involvement with the Troubled Families programme are perhaps surprising, given that the Census also shows there is a close working relationship between Children's Centres and local authority Children's Services Directorates when it comes to the care of "at risk" or "in need" children in a high proportion of cases. When asked whether Children's Services brought or referred families where children were considered "at risk" or "in need" to the Centre for support, nearly 90% of respondents said that this sort of collaboration was taking place.

Figure 12: Do Children's services bring or refer families where children are considered "at risk" or "in need" to your Centre so that you can support them?³³



Yes - 88.9%
 No - 11.1%

However, there remain a number of specific "problem" areas in which more still needs to be done. Our survey found that a majority of Children's Centres are not routinely included in key child protection forums. Fewer than 40% of respondents to the Census said that their Centre Manager, or another appropriate member of staff, was represented on their local MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) board. MARACs are multi-agency meetings where representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies share information about high risk victims of domestic abuse in order to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase the safety of victims and their children. They are, therefore, an important part of the local information sharing architecture around domestic abuse and the fact that the majority of Centres do not appear to be involved is worrying.

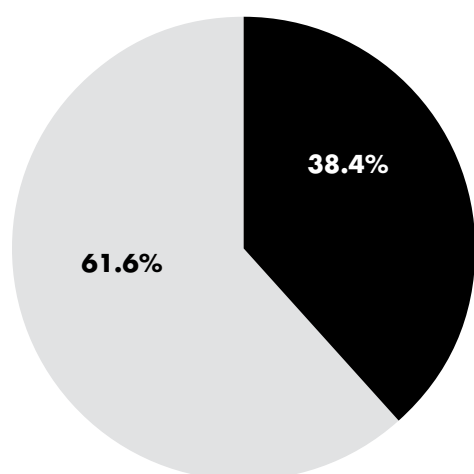
Indeed, others have raised concern that incidents of domestic violence are not shared with Children's Centres, which makes it difficult for them to identify those families that need additional support, suggesting that this may be a particular area in which partnership working needs to be strengthened.³⁴

³³ n = 198 base

³⁴ The Children's Society (2013) Breaking barriers: How to help children's centres reach disadvantaged families, p. 8 http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/breaking_barriers_report.pdf

³² n = 189 base

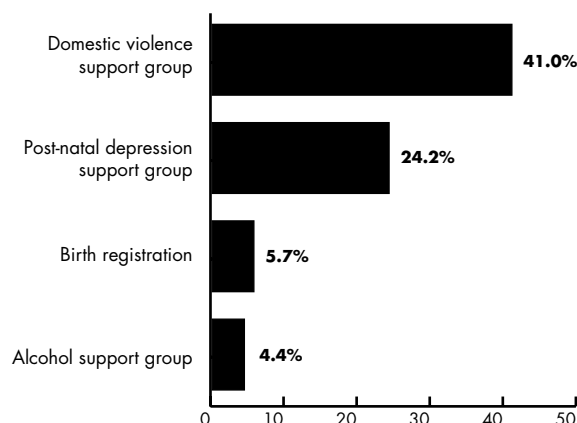
Figure 13: Is your Centre represented on the local MARAC board?³⁵



Yes - 38.4%
No - 61.6%

The Census also looked at where support for families, including those in crisis and preventative services, is available. It found that a relatively high proportion (41%) offered domestic violence support groups. However, 4Children’s report into family violence, “The Enemy Within”, found that only 1% of people who had experienced family violence had sought support from their local Centre³⁶ illustrating that more needs to be done to raise awareness of these services.

Figure 14: In 2012-13 did any of the following services run in your Centre?³⁷



It is notable that only a small very number (6%) were working with their local registry service to offer birth registration within Centres; the fact that provision of such services in Centres is so low is something to be addressed, as birth registration can be an important way of driving engagement with parents, particularly as part of an early intervention and preventative strategy.

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children’s Centres has recommended that the provision of birth registration should become a standard practice within Centres, a position supported by evidence from the Department for Education.³⁸ In principal no legislative changes are needed to allow the widespread adoption of birth registration in Centres, and it should be a key priority in the future to make this happen.

³⁵ n = 404 base

³⁶ 4Children (2012) The Enemy Within. <http://www.4children.org.uk/Resources/Detail/The-Enemy-Within-Report>

³⁷ n = 405 base

³⁸ All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children’s Centres (2013) Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children’s Centres, p. 26-33 <http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/cffc42fe-49eb-43e2-b330-a1fd00b8077b/Best-Practice-for-a-Sure-Start.pdf>

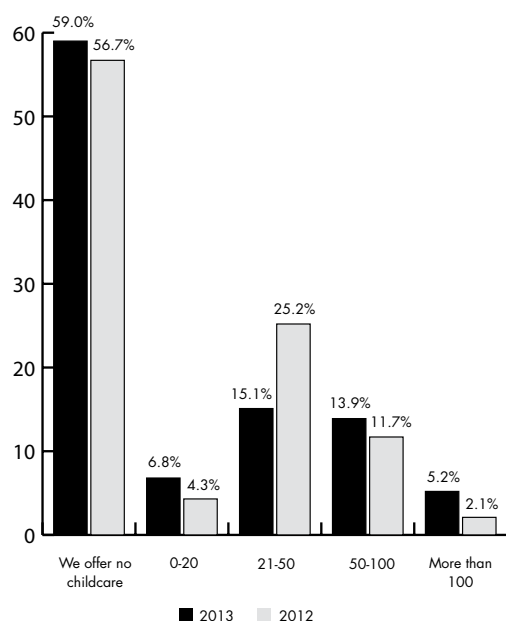
To what extent are Children's Centres involved in the provision of childcare?

With the introduction of the new free entitlement to early education for disadvantaged two-year olds, there is renewed attention on the role that Children's Centres can play in delivering and facilitating childcare. What is the current level of provision?

In 2011, the Government removed the requirement for Children's Centres in the most disadvantaged areas to provide access to childcare if there wasn't an identifiable need. Last year's Census suggested that while this had not resulted in a major reduction in the number of Children's Centres offering childcare, there was evidence of downsizing in scale, with the number of Centres offering 50-100 places falling while the numbers offering 21-50 places rose. The latest findings offer an opportunity to revisit these trends.

The most significant observation from this year's Census is that the proportion of respondents who reported that their Centres offered 21-50 childcare places has fallen significantly, reversing last year's findings. Whereas in 2012 around a quarter of respondents were providing 21-50 places, in 2013 this has fallen to 15%. This drop is somewhat compensated for by slight rises in all other categories, as Figure 15 shows.

Figure 15: How many full time equivalent childcare places are available at your Children's Centre?³⁹



These results imply that a degree of polarisation has taken place with respect to childcare provision. Centres that have the capacity to offer large numbers of places have slightly expanded their provision, while those with more limited capacity have reduced their childcare places.

With the introduction of the free entitlement for two-year olds now underway, Children's Centres have the potential to play a significant role in ensuring that the policy is implemented effectively, with the added ability to offer both childcare and family support at the same time. This is something that would add value to wider government – and local authority – aims of improving wider social mobility, and also supporting later stages of early intervention strategies and the Troubled Families programme.⁴⁰

Given the focus on high quality provision as part of the roll-out, it is important to remember that Ofsted has previously stated that “evidence suggests that the quality of early years provision that is directly linked to a Children's Centre is better overall than the quality of early years provision without such as association”.⁴¹ Policymakers should therefore be mindful of the valuable part Children's Centres have to play in delivering the free entitlement.

³⁹ n = 483 (2013) n = 563 (2012) base

⁴⁰ See footnote 21 for further details of the free entitlement to early education for disadvantaged two-year olds

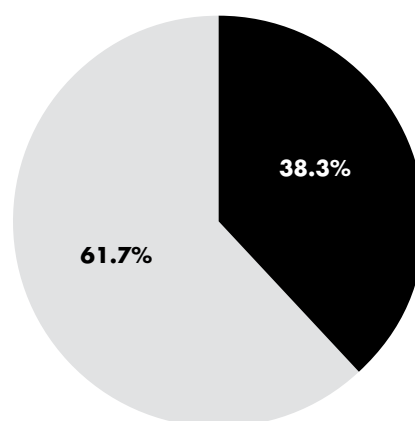
⁴¹ Ofsted (2012) The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills: Early Years, p. 17 <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/report-of-her-majestys-chief-inspector-of-education-childrens-services-and-skills-early-years>

How many Centres offer services for over-5s?

While all Children’s Centres provide services for parents and under-5s, developing an offering for over-5s is an important way in which Centres can expand their reach and ultimately help as many families as possible. How many Centres are currently providing services for this age group?

4Children has long argued the importance of continued support for families as their children grow up and that Children’s Centres should have an important role. As Figure 16 shows, nearly 40% of respondents to the Census say that they are offering regular services for children over the age of five. This is a positive sign and indicates that while Children’s Centres remain committed to providing crucial support in the early years, a significant proportion also recognise the value in providing services for older children. This, in turn, enables them to reach a wider breadth of families and continue to provide support even after children start school, as well as potentially bringing financial benefits, as these services are in large part provided through additional charging to parents (as they are over and above any statutory duties).

Figure 16: Do you offer regular services at your Children’s Centre for children over the age of five?⁴²



Yes - 38.3%
No - 61.7%

Providing services for over-5s helps ensure that families are consistently supported as their children grow up. Ultimately, 4Children believes that Centres are well placed to deliver services for across the whole 0-19 age range and should operate as service hubs for children and young people throughout the entire period from birth up to the point they reach adulthood.

4Children believes that all local authorities should consider the approach taken by many Centres across the country of providing services to children over five, both to maximise support from parents and their community (many of whom will have children aged both above and below the five-year old “threshold”), as well as providing an opportunity to bring in new and welcome revenue streams that can help underpin their wider remit at a time of financial uncertainty.

42 n = 501 base

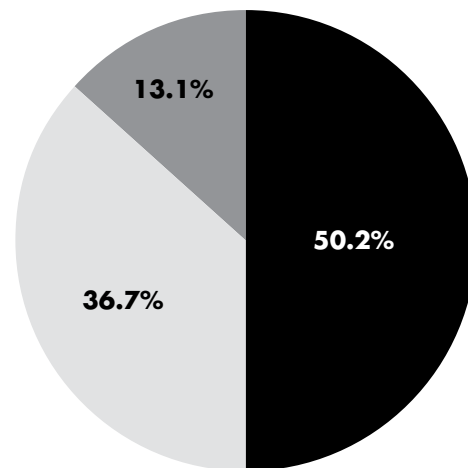
How has the Children's Centre workforce changed over the course of the past year?

Maintaining a high quality, experienced workforce is essential to the success of Children's Centres. It is also vital that Centres are able to effectively engage volunteers and capitalise on the enthusiasm and goodwill which many feel towards Centres, particularly in tough times. At a time of moving towards integrated working and increasing partnership development, there is clearly a need to strengthen the skills base of staff and, in particular, the leadership being provided in this area. How has the Children's Centre workforce changed over the past year?

In total, half of Census respondents said that the number of paid staff employed at their Centre has stayed the same – this is a positive sign, and suggests that there has not been a large scale fall in the size of the sector workforce despite the financial pressures that many Centres are encountering. However, a significant number of respondents did say that the number of paid staff at their Centre is decreasing, with just over a third (37%) reporting that this is the case.

13% of respondents said that the number of paid staff at their Centre had increased over the past year. This is broadly in line with the findings of last year's Census, which suggested that around 14% of Centres would seek to increase staffing levels to meet priorities during 2012-13.

Figure 17: Has your number of paid staff increased or decreased over the past year?⁴³

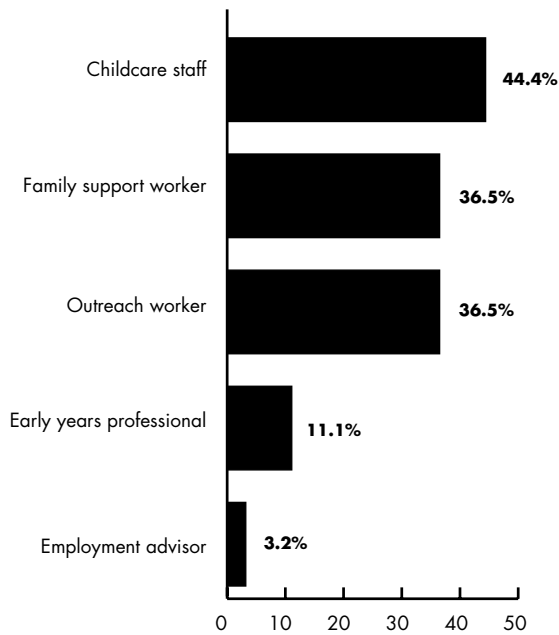


Stayed the same - 50.2%
Decreased - 36.7%
Increased - 13.1%

However, it should be noted that there is a substantial level of overlap between the sorts of roles that are being increased and cut back. Of those Centres that expanded their staffing levels over the past year, 44% increased the number of childcare staff roles, while family support workers and outreach workers were amongst the specific roles that were also mentioned by significant numbers of Centres.

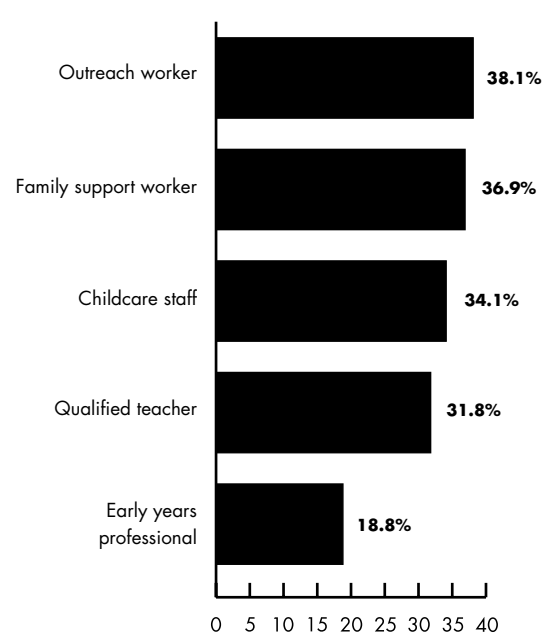
43 n = 480 base

Figure 18: Which of the following paid staff roles did you increase in the past year?⁴⁴



When examining solely the responses of those Centres that are reducing staffing levels, it seems that many of the same roles have been subject to cutbacks. As Figure 19 shows, outreach workers, family support workers, childcare staff and early years professionals have all been cut by significant numbers in those Centres that have seen a reduction in the number of paid staff.

Figure 19: Which of the following paid staff roles did you decrease in the past year?⁴⁵



This overlap may reflect the fact that outreach, family support, childcare and early years are core services that have a higher number of staff in the first instance, meaning that when Centres are either expanding or cutting back staff, these positions will naturally feature.

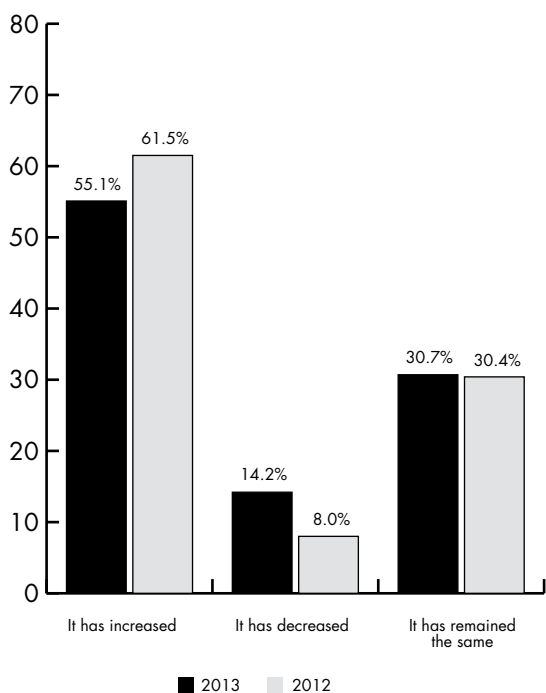
With respect to childcare, these findings arguably reinforce the view that some degree of polarisation in provision is taking place. The fact that Centres who are expanding paid roles are particularly keen to take on childcare staff suggests an eagerness to create more places where there is capacity to do so. However, amongst those Centres that are reducing their offering, childcare staff seem to be vulnerable to cuts.

Looking at the level of engagement and support from volunteers, over half of respondents to the Census (55%) report that they have experienced an increase in the number of volunteers involved with their Centre over the past year. For roughly a third (31%), the number of volunteers has stayed the same as last year. These figures are broadly in line with the trends observed in 2012.

44 n = 63 base

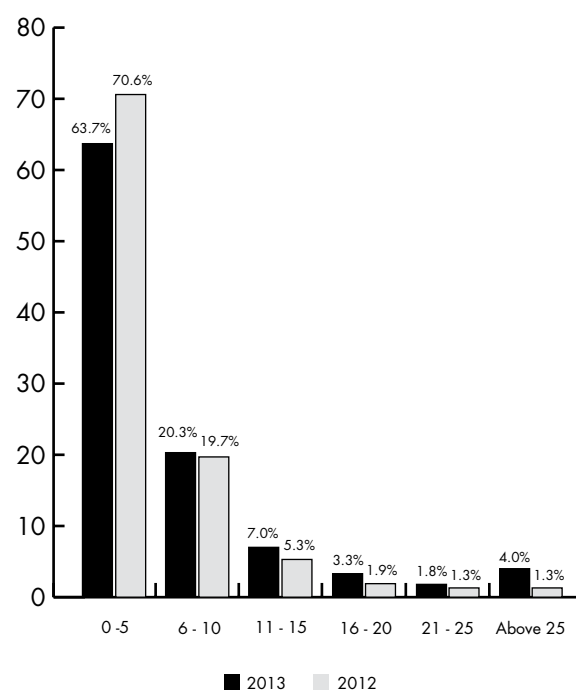
45 n = 176 base

Figure 20: Has the number of volunteers at your Centre changed over the last year?⁴⁶



The majority (64%) of responses from Centres which receive support from volunteers say that up to five volunteers help them every month. A further 20% of respondents say that between six and ten people volunteer with them on a monthly basis and 4% say their Centres receive support from over 25 volunteers each month. Indeed, compared to 2012 there appears to have been a slight shift towards Centres taking on more volunteers than last year, as Figure 21 shows.

Figure 21: If you have volunteers at your Centre, how many currently volunteer each month?⁴⁶

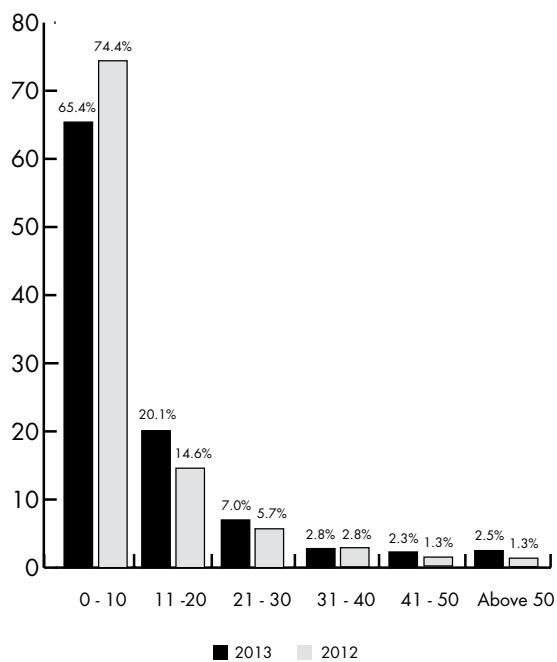


Based on these figures, 4Children believes that there are at least 10,000 volunteers supporting Children’s Centres around the country. However, this assumes that the number of volunteers at each Centre is at the bottom end of each of the categories used in Figure 21, so in reality the overall number of volunteers will be much higher. Given the growing significance of volunteers and the role they play in Centres, this is an issue that we will look to examine in further detail in future editions of the Census.

Turning to the number of hours that volunteers were providing, 65% of respondents said that on average volunteers provided up to 10 hours of support for their Centre each week. A further 20% of respondents reported that volunteers were providing 11 to 20 hours of help and 2.5% said that volunteers provided over 50 hours of support each week.

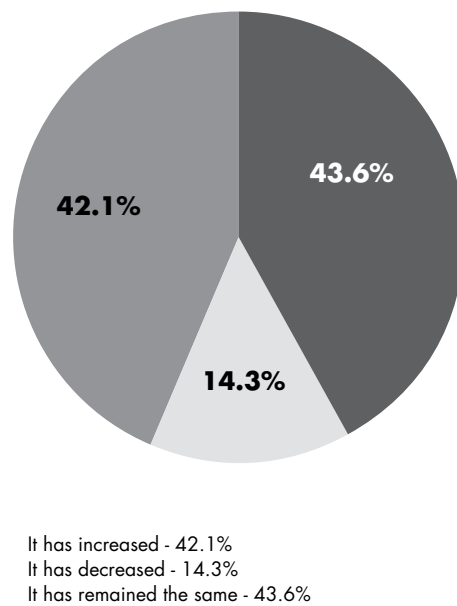
⁴⁶ n = 399 (2013) n = 472 (2012) base

Figure 22: Broadly speaking, how many hours a week do the volunteers provide on average?⁴⁷



When asked about how volunteers’ hours had changed over the past year, 42% of respondents said that volunteers in their Centres were providing more hours of support each week. Around 44% of Centres said that their volunteers’ hours had stayed the same, and only 14% reported a decrease. It is clear therefore that volunteers remain a committed and highly significant part of the Centre workforce.

Figure 23: Has the number of hours a week changed in the last year?⁴⁸



Volunteers are a crucial resource and it is essential that Children’s Centres make the best use the skills and enthusiasm of those who are prepared to volunteer and offer support. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children’s Centres has recently recommended that all Centres should develop a volunteer force, and identified a number of key steps to maximising the value of volunteers, such as appointing a senior member of staff as a volunteer co-ordinator who is responsible for recruitment, training and support.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ n = 399 (2013) n = 472 (2012) base

⁴⁸ n = 399 base
⁴⁹ All Party Parliamentary Group on Sure Start Children’s Centres (2013) Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children’s Centres, p. 20 <http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/cffc42fe49eb43e2b330a1fd00b8077b/Best-Practice-for-a-Sure-Start.pdf>

How widespread has charging become?

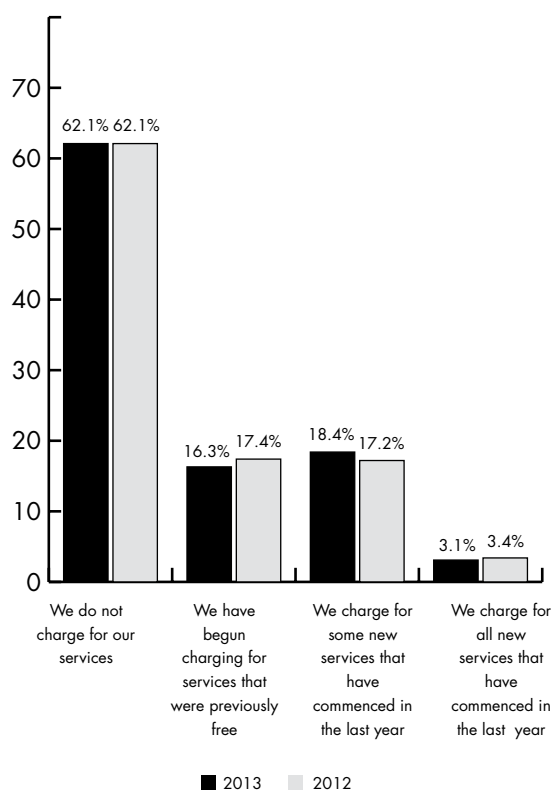
The decision over whether or not to charge parents for services continues to be a dilemma for Children’s Centres. Last year’s Census found that despite budgetary pressures, the majority of Centres had chosen not to do so. 12 months on is this still the case, or has charging become more widespread?

In total, 62% of respondents to this year’s Census said that they did not charge for any of their services, demonstrating a strong commitment within the sector to maintaining free provision wherever possible.

Meanwhile, 16% of respondents reported that their Centre had started charging for services that were previously free, and 18% said that their Centre charged for some new services that commenced in the last year. Notably though, only 3% of respondents reported that their Centre charged for all new services which had commenced during the last 12 months.

Comparing the results to last year’s Census, there is a remarkable level of consistency across all responses, as Figure 24 shows. This demonstrates that despite on-going pressure over the last 12 months, there has been no large scale move towards charging within Centres.

Figure 24: In the last 12 months have you implemented charges for any of the sessions you offer?⁵⁰



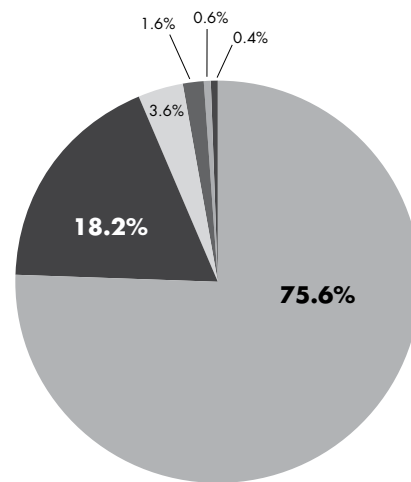
⁵⁰ n = 478 (2013) n = 507 (2012) base

Who is delivering Children's Centres?

Last year's Census demonstrated that, despite enthusiasm from both government and the voluntary sector for voluntary organisations and social enterprises to take on more of a role in running Centres, change in this area had been limited. How has the situation developed over the past 12 months?

Overall, 76% of respondents to this year's Census reported that their Centres were being operated by the local authority. 18% said they were run by a voluntary sector provider, and roughly 4% were operated by private sector organisations. Other models were not widespread, with just 1.6% of respondents stating that their Centre was run by a health body, and less than 1% reporting that they were run as either a social enterprise or a co-operative of staff.

Figure 25: Operation of Centres by sector provider⁵¹



Local authority – 75.6%
Voluntary sector provider – 18.2%
Private sector organisation – 3.6%
Health Body – 1.6%
Co-op of staff – 0.6%
Social enterprise – 0.4%

These findings are very similar to those recorded last year,⁵² and there has been very little movement in terms of who actually operates Centres to date. Although there is a great deal of interest in enabling alternative providers to run Children's Centres, including work by the Department for Education to identify and break down barriers to entry for voluntary organisations, the impact of such efforts is taking time to filter through. However, over the last year, a large number – between 300 and 400 (10%) – of Centres have been put out for tender, meaning we might expect a big change to take place over the coming year. Moreover, it is essential that any local authorities that are considering closing a Children's Centre should fully explore options for alternative models of provision before doing so.

⁵¹ n = 501 base

⁵² It should be noted that in the 2012 Census, respondents did not have the option of saying that their Centre was run by a social enterprise, meaning only five responses were possible: local authority, voluntary sector provider, private sector organization, health body or co-operative.

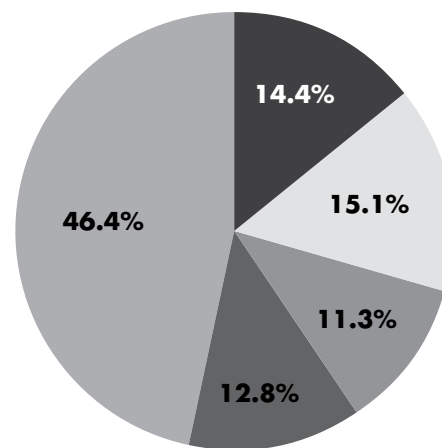
What accredited evidence-based programmes are Children's Centres running?

With an increasing focus on the importance of evidence-based interventions, how widespread are accredited programmes within Children's Centres and what type of initiatives are Children's Centres running.

The results of this year's Census show that the vast majority of Centres are running some form of evidence-based programme. When asked about what accredited parenting programmes their Centres have provided over the past year, only 13% of respondents said they were not running any at all. These results are in line with previous findings from the Department for Education's "Evaluation of Children's Centres in England" (ECCE), with last year's Centre leader survey reporting that around 12% of Centres were not delivering any evidence-based programmes⁵³. Furthermore, in the ECCE's recent report into the delivery of family services by Children's Centres, 112 out of the 121 Centre Managers interviewed (nearly 92%) said they delivered some form of evidence-based programme in 2012.⁵⁴

The Census also probed the provision of three evidence-based programmes in particular – Triple P, the Nurturing Programme and the Solihull Approach. The results show that around 14% of respondents reported that their Centre delivered Triple P, 15% provided the Nurturing Programme, and just over 11% offered the Solihull Approach. Just under half of Centres reported that they ran another accredited programme.

Figure 26: Which of the following accredited parenting programmes did you provide in 2012-13?⁵⁵



Triple P - 14.4%
Nurturing Programme - 15.1%
Solihull Approach - 11.3%
None - 12.8%
Other - 46.4%

Overall, the Census demonstrates that extensive numbers of Centres are implementing evidence-based programmes in some form; that there is a firm recognition of the importance of these sorts of interventions within the sector; and that increasing the use of – and number of Centres using – these types of programme are essential to the future successful delivery of family support.

53 The Department for Education (2012) Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) Strand 1: First Survey of Children's Centre Leaders in the Most Deprived Areas, p. 51 (Table 4.12) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184027/DFE-RR230.pdf

54 The Department for Education (2013) Evaluation of Children's Centres in England (ECCE) Strand 3: Delivery of Family Services by Children's Centres – Research Report, p. 16 (Table 3.1) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224096/DFE-RR297.pdf

55 n = 478 base

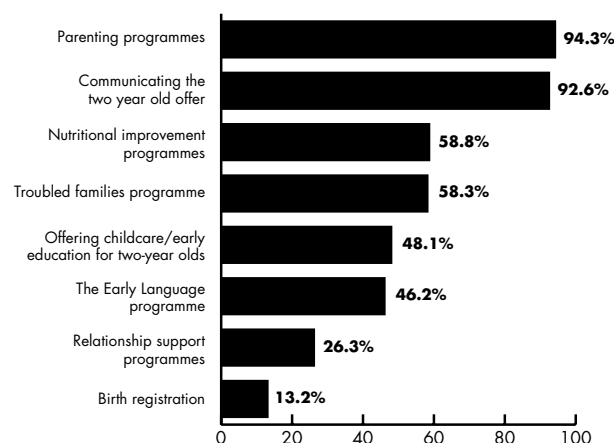
The year ahead – what activities will Children’s Centres be involved in and what are the biggest challenges they face?

Many local authorities and Children’s Centres’ providers are stretching every sinew to maintain and build vital support for young children and their families, including in support of early intervention and preventative strategies. Looking ahead to the coming year, what types of activities do Centres anticipate that they will be engaged in over the next 12 months and what do they see as their most significant challenges?

The Census asked respondents what activities they expected to be involved in over the year ahead. Unsurprisingly, 94% said that parenting programmes would be a core part of their work, but a notable 93% also reported that they would be involved in communicating the offer of free early years childcare for disadvantaged two-year olds, showing that Centres will play a major role in disseminating messages around the free entitlement to parents and encouraging take-up. A high proportion, nearly half (48%), reported that they anticipate being involved in the delivery of childcare as part of the two-year old offer. With the Census indicating that this is higher than the proportion of Centres currently offering childcare provision across all ages (41%), this would be a significant increase.

Over half (58%) of respondents anticipated that they would be involved in the Troubled Families programme, which again would be an increase from the current level of involvement (44%), but would still be nowhere close to the universal level of involvement that Children’s Centres could have in the programme. Similarly, though it is anticipated that availability of birth registration through Children’s Centres will increase from 6% to 13%, there clearly remains significant potential for further expansion in providing this particular service.

Figure 27: Which of the following activities do you expect to be involved in over the year ahead?⁵⁶



Respondents were also asked about what they thought the biggest challenges in the management of their Centre would be in the coming year, with 70% citing “reaching the most vulnerable families” as a leading issue. Significantly, just over half (53%) of respondents also said that “meeting demand for services” represented an important objective, reinforcing the view that while Centres may be under budgetary pressure, the need for their services is very strong and potentially rising, and they remain a crucial resource for helping those throughout their communities.

56 n = 403 base

Unsurprisingly, nearly half of respondents stated that “sustaining funding” was a priority, while “maintaining staffing levels” was cited by around 34%. Interestingly though, one of the most widely mentioned issues – referred to by 42% of respondents – was “having the time and money to evaluate services”. This indicates that many Centres recognise the importance of good evaluation, but that resource constraints are often one of the key obstacles to implementation. With the importance of evaluation becoming an increasingly prominent part of the debate around Children’s Centres, policymakers should be conscious of the fact that Centres have limited resources to dedicate to such tasks and it is important that help is available to enable them to evaluate their services effectively. 4Children is working in partnership with Professor Marmot’s team at the University College London Institute of Health Equity to develop an outcomes framework for Children’s Centres’ work with children and families,⁵⁷ which will provide a basis for building Centres’ capacity in this area. The Early Intervention Foundation⁵⁸ is also in an excellent position to offer advice and support to Centres on such matters.

“The changes to funding will inevitably have an impact but [we are] thinking about new ways of working and identifying ways to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.”

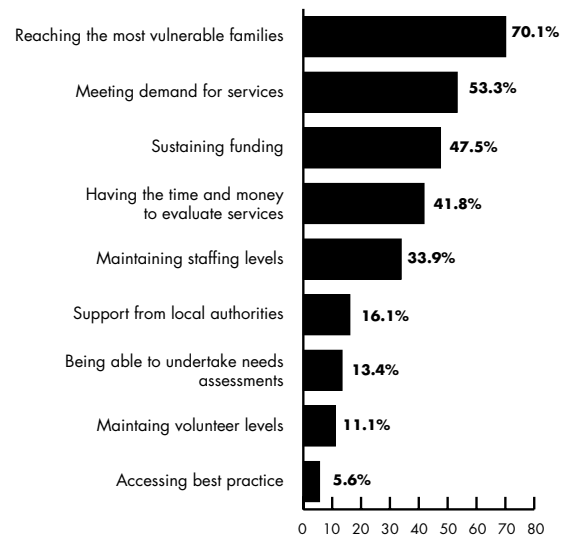
Centre Manager

Meanwhile, barely more than one in ten respondents said that “maintaining volunteer levels” would be a major challenge in the year ahead, which again attests to the commitment of volunteers who support their local Centres. Given that the section on the Centre workforce showed that both the numbers of volunteers and hours of help they provided increased over the last year, the value of the help that volunteers offer is very clear. In addition, fewer than 6% of respondents thought that “accessing best practice” would be a major issue, suggesting that knowledge sharing is effectively embedded across the Centre network.

“We are facing a [funding cut that] feels catastrophic and unsustainable. Preventative support to families will become a thing of the past if funding continues down this path.”

Centre Manager

Figure 28: What do you think will be the biggest challenges for you in the management of your Centre over the coming year?⁵⁹



Results of this year’s Children’s Centres Census attest to the resourcefulness and commitment of all those who are working very hard to maintain and build these crucial services. They also highlight the strength of feeling amongst parents and families and the value they place on Centres’ services. In addition, the findings illustrate Centres’ crucial role at the heart of the early intervention and prevention strategies that are so important to improving social mobility for hundreds of thousands of children and bringing wider social and economic benefits to all of our communities.

⁵⁷ University College London Institute of Health Equity (2012) An Equal Start: Improving outcomes in children’s centres <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/an-equal-start-improving-outcomes-in-childrens-centres>

⁵⁸ See the work of the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) <http://www.earlyinterventionfoundation.org.uk/>

⁵⁹ n = 478 base

Methodology

Between Thursday 4 July and Monday 2 September 2013, 4Children undertook an online survey with Children's Centre staff working in Centres across England. We utilised the same list of Centres as was used for the 2012 Children's Centre Census. In total, we received 501 responses from across 127 local authorities (75.6% of these responses completed the survey in full). We estimate that this equates to an approximate national response rate of 16%. A review of existing literature relevant to current trends in Children's Centres was also undertaken to supplement the primary research.

The survey was self-selecting and, therefore, may underestimate certain aspects of the overall population of Children's Centres, such as the proportion of Centres operated by voluntary sector providers. National estimates calculated in the Census draw on recent data provided by the Department for Education on the number of Children's Centres nationwide⁶⁰ – however, be aware that such estimates are approximate rather than definitive in nature.

Where relevant, we provide comparisons with the 2012 Children's Centre Census. This was conducted between Wednesday 14 March and Friday 20 April 2012 and received a total of 578 responses from across 133 local authorities, which at the time represented a national response rate of 16%.

Please contact 4Children's Policy Team for further details on the research methodology: public.affairs@4Children.org.uk

⁶⁰ Answer to Parliamentary Question from Sharon Hodgson MP (Hansard, 20 May 2013, Column 584W) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130520/text/130520w0007.htm#13052112000020>



