

Considering childcare and the needs of parents within an Action Plan



Availability and suitable types of childcare can sometimes determine whether parents struggle or flourish within a village. Children are a key way for people to meet within a community, enhancing life and communication. Rural childcare settings can contribute to the local economy by providing local jobs and reduce the amount of travelling to and from nearby towns. Affordable local childcare can enable parents to go back to work or pursue education and training opportunities. Childcare facilities within rural communities can be as important as the post office and village shop.

This leaflet aims to consider what questions could be asked during the Action Plan process as well as giving advice on practical approaches to consultation techniques.

Questions to ask the community about local childcare needs

Here are some examples of the type of questions that should be considered:

- Do you use any childcare in the village?
- Do you use childcare provision out of the village?
- Do you need more childcare?
- What type of childcare do you need?
- How many extra hours or days do you require?
- Where do you want this childcare?
- Do you need out of school childcare and holiday provision?

Current childcare in your community

To discover whether your village has sufficient childcare provision for the needs of its parents it would be useful to find out what types of childcare there are in your locality (A definition of types of provision/terms can be found after Consulting with Parents). What sort of age ranges do these provisions cater for and what times are they open? Local providers may have waiting lists or they may have spare places available. Asking the providers directly would be a good starting point for determining whether there are any obvious childcare needs or sustainability issues in your village. It would be useful to also find out whether many parents take their children to settings in the nearby towns or other villages. Or is your local provision being accessed by children from other areas?

It may be helpful to bear in mind why parents use certain provisions. For example parents may use pre-schools or nursery groups to start their children socialising, learning through play or giving parents access to work opportunities. Working parents may need more after school childcare and holiday provision.

By asking local providers you can also find out whether they have surveyed local parental need. They too may also have needs and questions they want to put to the community and the Local Action Plan may give them an ideal opportunity to strengthen their ties with the wider community.

Consulting with parents

Parents/carers may not always be able to attend more traditional evening consultation sessions so try to include them in other ways. For example:

- Verbal questionnaires at pre-school, day nursery, school etc: pick up or drop off times. This may not always be easy because of people rushing

off to work or going home but it may be possible to get a quick poll on rough needs or more convenient times to ask questions.

- Canvas opinion at local community events or fetes.
- Hold a family consultation fun day. Make sure there are plenty of opportunities for the parents and children to have a good time but also for you to be able to gather information on their childcare needs.
- Hold a drop-in session with plenty of activities or play opportunities for the children whilst information can be gathered on parent's childcare needs.
- If the Action Plan steering committee is formulating a questionnaire, when consulting the village during the Action Plan process, make sure the subject of childcare is included. Try to ask questions that have specific answers or give options for answers. (Please see AirS Toolkit - Designing and producing questionnaires within an Action Plan for more information)
- Try asking parents/carers their needs whilst they wait during a baby clinic or immunisation clinic at the local Healthcare Centre/GP surgery. (Getting permission from surgery staff first!)
- If any of the parents/carers run coffee mornings would they allow you come along and canvas opinion? Similarly is there a local café or tea room that would allow you to ask parents, who use the facility, about their childcare needs.
- Ask your local childcare providers (remember to include Childminders) if they have any spare places or long waiting lists.

What have you found out and where do you take it from here?

Once you have collated and analysed the answers to your questions you may find that current childcare is sufficient. If new places are required can they be filled by expanding any of the present provision? Is the present provision unable to expand due to the size of the premises and the number of children OFSTED allow within the space?

It may be that there is a low but significant need in your parish but there maybe a similar situation in your neighbouring parishes. Working together to pool the local need and create a new childcare opportunity within a cluster of villages may be worth exploring. Transport will be needed and looking into local community transport schemes may be necessary.

There is a lot of support and guidance available and also some funding opportunities to help playgroups expand or start up whether a voluntary or private enterprise.

Types of Childcare Provision - Definition of Terms

Childcare provision covers different age groups and different opening hours. They can be run on a voluntary or commercial basis. The following list describes what is meant by a setting's title:

- **Toddler Groups** – Usually run for no more than two hours (thus they do not need to be OFSTED registered). They are part time self help groups of parents and carers that meet locally with their children on a regular basis. They cater for 0-5 year olds but more commonly go up to 2½ and 3 years.
- **Pre-school playgroups** – these provide sessions of play and education to children aged between 3 and 5. (The government Nursery Education Grant starts at age 3.) However many playgroups cater for 2½ upwards until entering reception year at school – rising 5s).
- **Childminder** – Childminder's provide care, play and learning opportunities for children within a home setting.
- **Day Nurseries** – nurseries are for children under 5 to play and learn whilst their parent's work or study.
- **Nursery Schools/Classes** – provide early education and childcare for the under 5's including parent involvement and family support.
- **Out of school care/ holiday schemes** – these offer a safe place to play for 4 -12 year olds outside school hours. They include:
 - Breakfast Clubs** – a before school provision for primary and secondary school children which includes breakfast and sometimes transport to school.
 - After School Clubs** – after school childcare that may take place in the school or may involve a transfer to another venue. These operate until 6pm generally.
 - Holiday Schemes** – these operate during the school holidays and vary in their timetables, usually between 8pm – 6pm as an extra service to the main day which may be from 9.30am - 4.30pm.
- **Schools** increasingly may offer childcare which may include breakfast and or after school care. The provision may be run by the school governors or a voluntary or private organisation.

Information about current childcare provision can be accessed in West Sussex via West Sussex Children's Information Service which holds a register of all childcare providers and services Tel 01243 777807 or www.childcarelink.gov.uk. In East Sussex the same service is provided by KITES Childcare Information Service Tel 0845 6010777 or email kites@eastsussex.gov.uk

Further Information
Consultation Support
Action in Rural Sussex

Mark McTaggart- Senior Development Officer –
Action Plans
Tel 01273 405448
E: mark.mctaggart@ruralsussex.org.uk
Faustina Bayo, Action Plans Officer (West
Sussex, Lewes and Wealden Districts)
Tel 01273 405458
E: faustina.bayo@ruralsussex.org.uk

Childcare development support
Action in Rural Sussex
Caroline Rix - Rural Childcare Development
Officer
T: 01273 478709
E: caroline.rix@ruralsussex.org.uk

West Sussex Early Childhood Service
T: 01243 520800 (Chichester Office) 01403
320346 (Horsham Office)
E: childrens.info.services@westsussex.gov.uk

East Sussex Early Years and Childcare
Partnership
T: 01323 747490
4th Floor, St Mary's House
52, St. Leonards Road
Eastbourne
BN21 3UU

Funding opportunities

Contact West Sussex Early Years Childhood
Services or in East Sussex the Early Years
Development and Childcare Support Team (as
above)
West Sussex SSEYCS Business Support Unit
T: 01403 320346

Local Network Fund – Liz Allsobrook (Outreach
Officer)
T: 01273 405454
E: liz.allsobrook@ruralsussex.org.uk

Useful websites

www.surestart.gov.uk
www.dfes.gov.uk
www.childcarelink.gov.uk
www.childcarecareers.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk/childcare
www.daycaretrust.org.uk