



London Borough of Harrow

**Childcare Sufficiency
Assessment 2016**

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Introduction and Methodology

Context

Under the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities have a duty to secure sufficient childcare to enable parents/carers to work, or to undertake education and training leading to work.

The Childcare Act requires local authorities to carry out an assessment of the sufficiency of childcare within their area. The assessment measures the nature and the extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area. Under this duty, local authorities are required to prepare assessments of sufficiency of the provision of childcare in their area at least every three years.

Local authorities are also required to report annually to Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and to make this report available and accessible to parents. Local authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, geographical division and date of publication.

In the London Borough of Harrow, the Harrow Early Years' team charged with responsibility for securing sufficient childcare is specifically keen to assess how and in what ways the local childcare market meets the needs of families with children aged 0-4 years.

Methodology

Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance for local authorities (September 2014)¹ makes clear that local authorities should take into account what is 'reasonably practicable' when assessing what sufficient childcare means in their area and:

- the state of the local childcare market, including the demand for specific types of providers in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists;
- the state of the labour market;
- the quality and capacity of early years settings and childminders registered with a childminder agency, including their funding, staff, premises, experience and expertise;
- encourage schools in their area to offer out-of-hours childcare from 8.00am to 6.00pm; and
- encourage existing providers to expand their provision and new providers to enter the local childcare market.

To support this, PCG Advisory Services is assisting the Harrow Early Years Team to better understand:

- The population profile including labour market and its implications for childcare demand.
- Details about childcare supply in each school planning area. This includes in relation to quality, cost and in providing choice for families.
- Details about childcare demand across each school planning areas; and
- Where there is sufficiency and what gaps there are.

¹ See Department for Education, Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance Part B, September 2014

A mixed method data collection methodology was agreed with the Senior School Improvement Lead. The methodology was implemented across November 2015- February 2016 and comprised:

- Short one-to-one/small group face to face interviews with 32 parents/carers in consultations made possible with the assistance of the Harrow Children's Centre Hub Managers. See Appendix 4 for key conclusions.
- A focus group with Community Ambassadors working particularly with the Somalian and Afghan communities made possible with the assistance of the Norbury School head-teacher. The Community Ambassadors subsequently engaged 17 Somalian and Afghan parents/carers in sharing their perspectives through the standard survey (although most did not indicate their ethnicity on the survey).
- Preparation, distribution and analysis of 335 surveys completed by parents/carers of children aged 0-4 years in Harrow. These have largely been analysed by reference to School Planning Area. There has been significant reluctance on the part of many parents/carers to share ethnicity details particularly which has limited our analysis to reporting on 'White British' or 'other'. The survey distribution was largely through the Families Information Service [FIS], Harrow Children's Centres and the Norbury school Community Ambassadors. See Chapters 3 and 4.
- Participation in the supplementary schools forum and the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) early years settings forum organised by Harrow Early Years in January 2016.
- Preparation, distribution and analysis of 78 questionnaires completed by early years settings attending the PVI forums. This included 42 day nurseries/pre-schools, 34 childminders and two other early years settings. This was augmented with analysis of 96 short questionnaires integrated within the Early Years Census return made possible with the assistance of the FIS Manager.
- Review and analysis of existing supply, quality and profile data held by Harrow FIS and Harrow Education data teams. This was augmented with wider review of population updates available from the Greater London Assembly and comparative information available through the Department for Education and Families and Childcare Trust.
- Meetings also have taken place with the Senior School Improvement Lead, the Senior Early Years Consultant, FIS Manager, DSEN Coordinator, Children's Centre Hub Managers and the Early Years Forum.

Executive Summary

Harrow is a relatively affluent borough in North-West London with reducing deprivation. There is likely an increasing demand for childcare as a result of a growing population of children aged 0-4 years and the growing number of parents/carers in work. Much of this demand is likely to arise in the growth wards of Canons, Marlborough, Wealdstone and Roxbourne. Marlborough, Wealdstone and Roxbourne, together with Harrow Weald, are also expected to require increased childcare provision particularly for eligible two year olds reflecting the relative deprivation of these wards to the rest of the borough.

Overall, most children aged three and four years are taking up early education entitlements in good quality provision in Harrow, where approximately 17 in every 20 early years settings in Harrow have Ofsted ratings of 'good' or 'outstanding' (in line with all England averages). At the same time, 65% of parents/carers report being satisfied/very satisfied with the childcare in 2016. In addition, half of parents/carers feel that there is a good choice of childcare locally and that it is available where and when they need it, and half of parents/carers feel that the quality of childcare is high.

There is excellent take-up of funded entitlements for children aged 4 years and scope to improve take-up of entitlements for children aged three years and eligible children aged two years in Harrow (which are less than the outer London average).

Key considerations for any childcare planners in encouraging greater take-up include:

- a. A changing ethnic profile of Harrow requires childcare provision that is sensitive to religious, cultural and language needs. Some new communities such as from Somalia tend to have lower rates of take-up of childcare for children aged 0-4 years for example².
- b. A higher proportion of children in Harrow who are eligible for the 2 year old entitlement and 3 and 4 year old entitlements have a DSEN. This is when compared to those in outer London and England. This points to demand for childcare that is equipped at meeting the needs of children with additional needs. Most early years settings report they need help to improve their ability to meet the needs of these children.

Parents/carers of children with DSEN/additional needs also report being less satisfied with childcare compared to parents/carers of children without DSEN/additional needs. One quarter of parents/carers who have children with DSEN are not using childcare, compared to 1 in 50 parents/carers whose children do not have DSEN/additional needs. This reflects findings in the CSA 2011.

- c. The primary means by which parents/carers find out about childcare is through family and friends and the internet. FIS has high rates of satisfaction for users (90% very satisfied/ satisfied and none dissatisfied) and is known by close to 3 in 5 parents, is much less commonly used. Less than 15% of parents/carers reporting using the FIS to inform their childcare choices. New investment in expanding the FIS to enable more outreach and promotion should help with this.

² See Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Caring and Earning Among Low Income Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali families* (2014)

Families have choice about the types of childcare they access, although this varies between planning areas/wards, e.g. North West Planning Area has the most choice, while Central Planning Area provides less than 1 in 10 of all pre-school/ playgroup places in Harrow. Given that Marlborough and Wealdstone wards are two of the fastest growing wards and have higher rates of deprivation this suggests a gap for parents/carers in these wards.

Affordability is identified by parents/carers and all types of early years settings as a key priority:

- a. Three in every four families report that childcare costs are not affordable. This is particularly so for families on lower incomes (less than £40,000 per annum) and lone parents.
- b. The average spend on childcare per week is £153. This increases to £199 in the North East Planning Area and decreases to £86 in the South East Planning Area. Costs tend to be less for lone parents, households that are less economically active, lower income households and families with children with SEN/ additional needs.
- c. Harrow childminders tend to charge a little less than London averages for children aged 2-5 years. Nursery costs tend to be higher than London averages.
- d. Early years settings raise concerns about the levels of funding to enable funded places particularly and 21% of early years settings report that they intend increasing fees by more than £10 per week for local families in the coming 18 months.

Most childcare provision is available Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm, with more than half of group settings reporting they operate term time only. Childminders offer significantly more flexibility with most available before 8am and during school holidays/half terms. 1 in 5 operate in the evenings and just over 1 in 10 operate at weekends. While more than 1 in 4 group settings are constrained in their ability to change opening hours because of restrictions on building use, it is encouraging that 18% of group settings are expecting to increase their opening hours within the next 18 months.

This will go some way to helping the 3 in 4 parents/carers that report some difficulties in accessing childcare. Generally speaking, holiday times and evenings are more challenging for parents/carers to seek appropriate childcare for their needs. This is especially so for families with children with additional needs, dual parents/carers and households with higher incomes.

While there are caveats to enabling an accurate picture of the levels of occupancy, there is an estimated 82% occupancy implying scope for greater take up of childcare within existing supply. Furthermore, approximately 1 in 4 early years settings intend to expand supply in the coming 18 months. Most of this growth is expected to come from group settings. This augurs well in preparation for the roll-out of a 30 hour funded entitlement from September 2017 for eligible working families of children aged 3 and 4 years.

In the survey, the parents/carers most likely to have used registered childcare in the previous 12 months are households where both parents/carers are in full time employment, households with an income exceeding £40,000 per annum, bigger families and families where parents/carers are older and/or where parents/carers describe themselves as White British ethnicity.

1. Factors affecting demand and supply of childcare

Total number of children

Children aged 0-4 years old

The ONS [Office for National Statistics] mid-year population estimates report 17,476 children aged 0-4 years residing in the London Borough of Harrow³. The 2011 census recorded 15,916 children aged 0-4 years residing in Harrow suggesting growth of 9.5% children aged 0-4 years since 2011 and is a factor affecting both demand and supply of childcare.

Table 1. Number of children aged 0-4 years old in Harrow by gender and age, estimate 2014

Gender	0 year olds	1 year olds	2 year olds	3 year olds	4 year olds	Grand Total
Males	1,826	1,840	1,858	1,672	1,688	8,884
Females	1,737	1,776	1,799	1,619	1,661	8,592
Grand Total	3,563	3,616	3,657	3,291	3,349	17,476

Children aged 0-4 years with additional needs/disability

In relation to children with extra requirements related to additional needs/ disability:

- For children aged two years that qualify on economic criteria for 15 hours funded early education, 20 have a SEN in Harrow as at January 2015.⁴ This is 4.4% of children aged two years eligible for the 15 hour funded entitlement which is higher than averages in England (2.6%), London (3.4%) and outer London (3.5%).
- For children aged 3 and 4 years taking up their 15 hours funded early education, 430 have a SEN in Harrow as at January 2015.⁵ This is 7% of children aged 3 and 4 years, which is the same as the London average but higher than averages in England (6.1%) and outer London (6.7%).

These indicate demand for childcare that is equipped to meet the needs of families with children with additional needs/ disability. For example, skilled and confident early years staff capable of making adjustments to support each child's learning and development and, where there is access to guidance and support, to tailor childcare provision to meet the specific requirements of an individual child with additional needs.

³ <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/ons-mid-year-population-estimates-custom-age-tables>

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/447587/SFR20_2015_ADDITIONAL_SEN_TABLES.xlsx

⁵ Ibid

The population profile and its implications for childcare planning

Harrow is a relatively affluent borough and deprivation has been reducing. In 2015, Harrow is the sixth least deprived borough in London⁶. Table 2 provides a summary for each School Planning Area and ward for the changing profile of Harrow. This shows, for example, reducing levels of incapacity benefit claimants and dependent children living in households claiming out of work benefits in all wards between 2009-2011-2013. That said Table 2 also shows that childhood obesity rates have been increasing in most parts of the borough and while unemployment rates generally have been falling, there are wards where unemployment was increasing and where high proportions of children (more than 18%) live in households claiming out of work benefits.

The key areas of deprivation affecting children are:

- Wealdstone and Marlborough wards in the Central Planning Area. These are also two of the fastest growing wards in Harrow. These wards also have the second and third highest proportion of lone parents/carers with dependent children and are two of the four wards with highest unemployment (see Appendix 1).
- Roxbourne ward in the South West Planning Area and is also a fast growing ward in Harrow. Roxbourne is the youngest ward in Harrow and has the highest proportion of lone parents/carers with dependent children in the borough (more than 11%) and the second highest level of unemployment in the borough (see Appendix 1).
- Harrow Weald in the North West Planning Area has the fourth highest number of dependent children living in out-of-work households and the fourth highest number of lone parents/carers with dependent children in Harrow, after Roxbourne, Wealdstone and Marlborough wards (see Appendix 1).

By contrast, the North East and North West Planning Areas are much less deprived, particularly wards such as Pinner and Pinner South. Unemployment is low and, with the exception of Canons ward in the North East Planning Area, the population is growing more slowly. Canons is one of the four fastest growing wards in Harrow. The proportion of households with a lone parent with dependent children also tends to be lower, with the exception of Harrow Weald ward in the North West Planning Area.

Harrow has an ethnically diverse population. The 2011 Census estimates show that Harrow is ranked fourth amongst local authorities in England for the proportion of the population who are not White-British (69.1%) which increased from 59% in 2001⁷. The 2014 Schools Census estimates that 88% of the children (aged 0-5 years) in Harrow are from BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) groups. 21% of the children are Asian Other, 21% are Asian Indian, 14% are White Other 12% are White British and 6% are Black African.

⁶ See <http://www.harrow.gov.uk>

⁷ See

http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200088/statistics_and_census_information/496/census_2011_detailed_results_and_reports

Appendix 1 provides an overview for each ward of the three largest ethnicities, albeit that 'White Other' embraces a diverse population including especially more recent arrivals from Poland and Romania. 'Black and Black British' populations covers Black and African origins or heritage, including those of African-Caribbean background, and may include people with mixed ancestry. Wealdstone and Roxbourne wards (the two most deprived wards) and Kenton West ward have more families from Black and Black British populations than the rest of the borough. They are also increasingly joined by Somalian and Afghan families in Wealdstone and Roxbourne wards.

This ethnic diversity is reflected in the proportion of children in Harrow state schools where English is not their first language (65%)⁸, although as Appendix 1 shows less than 2% of residents in any ward do not speak English. The wards however where between 1.4 - 2% of the population do not speak English are Wealdstone, Roxbourne and Kenton West wards. These rates are amplified amongst families with children aged 0-4 years. The most common languages (apart from English) are Tamil (9.8% of children), Gujarati (9.8% of children) and Romanian (6.6% of children). Arabic, Urdu, Polish, Somali, Pashto, Hindi and Persian are also languages spoken in Harrow⁹,

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that attitudes towards childcare can vary significantly for different communities, for example:

Another key finding is that ethnic minority people do not have generic attitudes to 'caring'. This relates to the role of cultural or religious preferences in attitudes to caring, and in particular to registered caring services. Among Pakistani and particularly Somali respondents, these considerations were important in explaining the low use of registered childcare services. This appears to be related to parental emphasis on transmitting cultural values and practices to their children. Some parents/carers would be satisfied if such care was more culturally sensitive, or if some staff shared their cultural or religious values, though a significant minority preferred to be the primary carer for their child at least until secondary school¹⁰.

⁸ See School Census data Jan 2014 (using nursery - year 2 pupils)

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ See JFK, Caring and Earning Among Low Income Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali families (2014)

Table 2. Changing profile of key components of income/employment deprivation in Harrow school Planning Areas/wards and in relation to childhood obesity levels 2009, 2011, 2013¹¹

School planning area	Ward	Child Obesity 2009	Child Obesity 2011	Child Obesity 2013	IB rate - 2009	IB rate - 2011	IB rate - 2013	UE rate 2009	UE rate 2011	UE rate 2013	% dep children in out-of-work households - 2009	% dep children in out-of-work households - 2011	% dep children in out-of-work households - 2013
Central	Greenhill	17.1	17.1	20.0	5.2	4.1	2.0	4.6	4.9	5.1	27	19	16
Central	Headstone South	15.1	15.1	20.1	3.4	2.8	1.4	4.3	3.5	3.7	21	13	11
Central	Marlborough	19.6	19.6	19.0	4.4	3.5	1.6	5.5	6.4	6.1	31	23	19
Central	Wealdstone	20.7	20.7	19.8	5.2	4.2	1.6	5.8	6.9	6.6	33	24	19
North East	Belmont	17.7	17.7	17.0	3.0	2.2	1.0	3.2	2.8	2.9	15	10	9
North East	Canons	18.1	18.1	18.3	2.9	2.4	1.0	3.0	3.4	3.1	17	12	9
North East	Stanmore Park	17.4	17.4	14.4	4.9	4.3	2.1	3.2	3.3	3.0	23	18	16
North West	Harrow Weald	18.4	18.4	19.7	5.1	3.9	1.6	4.2	3.9	4.7	25	20	18
North West	Hatch End	15.7	15.7	20.3	3.1	2.5	1.1	3.0	2.4	2.2	15	13	10
North West	Headstone North	20.3	20.3	20.7	2.4	1.9	1.0	2.9	2.9	2.4	13	8	6
North West	Pinner	17.5	17.5	15.1	4.0	3.5	1.8	2.6	2.5	2.8	17	13	10
North West	Pinner South	13.1	13.1	17.6	2.5	2.0	0.9	3.0	2.1	1.9	10	6	6
South East	Edgware	22.0	22.0	21.7	4.1	3.3	1.4	5.7	4.6	4.4	24	20	13
South East	Kenton East	19.8	19.8	21.8	4.6	3.6	1.6	4.3	4.1	3.8	23	17	13
South East	Kenton West	13.8	13.8	19.9	3.1	2.5	1.2	3.5	2.9	3.0	19	12	9
South East	Queensbury	17.7	17.7	21.3	3.5	3.0	1.4	4.6	4.1	3.2	20	19	14
South West	Harrow on the Hill	18.0	18.0	19.8	3.7	3.4	1.4	3.4	3.7	3.5	19	11	10
South West	Rayners Lane	17.7	17.7	16.0	2.7	2.4	1.2	3.5	2.9	3.0	13	9	8
South West	Roxbourne	19.2	19.2	22.3	5.8	4.6	2.2	6.1	5.1	5.3	33	22	19
South West	Roxeth	16.6	16.6	21.4	3.4	2.7	1.3	4.7	4.9	4.9	19	14	13
South West	West Harrow	23.5	23.5	19.9	4.0	3.2	1.3	4.9	4.1	4.0	21	15	13

¹¹ See GLA, *English Indices of Deprivation 2015 for London*, June 2015

Key conclusions

Factors affecting demand and supply in Harrow include:

- a. There is likely an increasing demand for early years childcare reflecting the growing population. The reducing level of children living in households that claim out of work benefits and incapacity benefits suggests that childcare provision will largely be for households where at least one parent is in paid work.
- b. Much of this demand is likely to arise in the growth wards of Canons, Marlborough, Wealdstone and Roxbourne.
- c. Marlborough, Wealdstone and Roxbourne, together with Harrow Weald, would be expected to have increased childcare provision for eligible 2 year olds reflecting the relative deprivation of these wards. These wards given their relative deprivation are also likely to be the wards where the affordability of childcare is likely to be most significant and where the ability to pay for childcare hardest.
- d. There is a higher proportion of children in Harrow with DSEN that are eligible for the 2 year old funded early education entitlement and 3 and 4 year old entitlements than is the case generally in outer London and England. This points to demand for childcare provision that is equipped at meeting the needs of children with additional needs and disabilities.
- e. The continuing change in the ethnic profile of Harrow has implications for planning childcare provision that is accessible to all families and can meet their diverse requirements. This includes ensuring that there is ongoing dialogue with parents/carers about the value of childcare, especially for children in the early years, and ensuring that childcare provision is sensitive to religious, cultural and language needs. Some new communities, such as those from Somalia, traditionally have lower rates of take-up of early years childcare for example.

See Appendix 1 for summary profiles for each ward taking account of the proportion of children in Harrow, rates of growth in the population of children aged 0-4 years, levels of English proficiency, unemployment levels, the proportion of residents that are lone with dependent children and relative rates of deprivation.

2. Supply of childcare places

Introduction

Using data provided by the Council, we present an analysis of the supply of childcare in London Borough of Harrow.

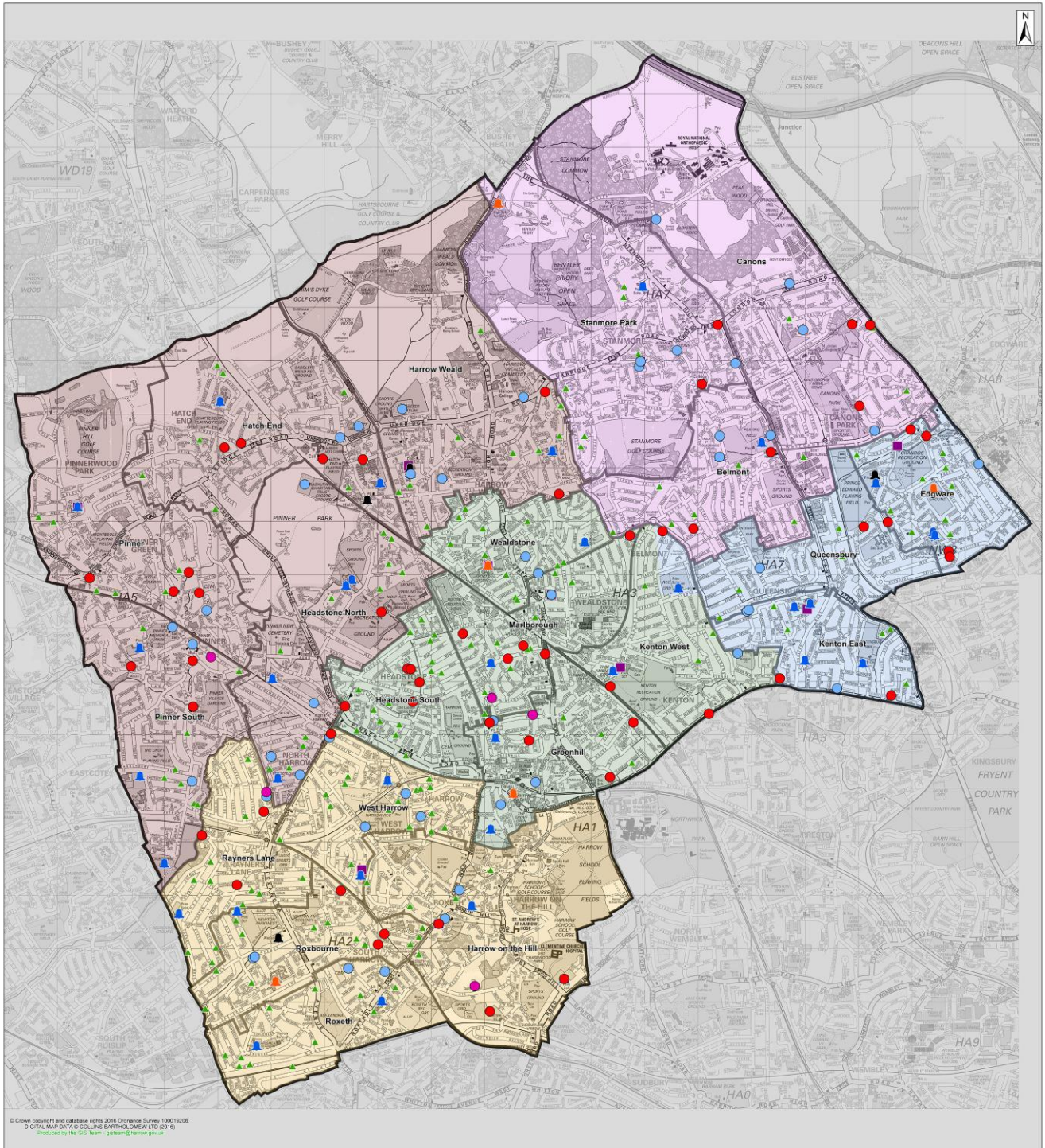
Number of places and type of provision

Harrow had a total of 5,060 childcare places for children aged 0-4 years in 2015. These places are available through:

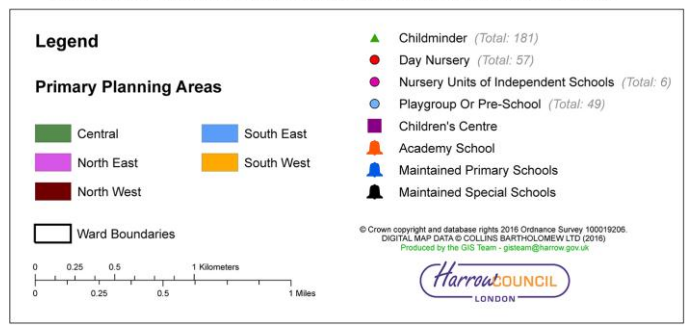
- 50 day nurseries making available 2,387 places for children aged 0-4 years (47% of all places) and 45 playgroups/ pre-schools making available 1,383 places for children aged 0-4 years (27% of all places).
- 182 childminders making available 897 places for children aged 0-4 years (18% of all places).
- 10 independent schools with under 5s nurseries making available 393 places for children aged 0-4 years (8% of all places).

The 2016 visual representation of Harrow's childcare provision at Figure 1 gives a good overview of the location of early years settings. To draw a broad comparison, since 2013 there has been some change in the structure of the market, there has been a reduction in the supply of childminders and pre-schools/ playgroups, while day nurseries and independent schools with nurseries have seen growth.

Figure 1: A pictorial representation of childcare and educational provision in Harrow



Location of Childcare and Education Provision in Harrow (2016)



Tables 3 and 4 set out the registered places available for different types of childcare provision for families with young children in Harrow by School Planning Area and ward. This suggests there might be some challenges for parental choice within School Planning Areas. For example:

- North West Planning Area has the most choice for parents/carers accounting for more than 1 in 4 of all places for childminders, day nurseries, pre-school/playgroups and independent schools with attached nurseries. Pinner South is especially well served for different types of provision.
- South West Planning Area provides parents/carers with 1 in 3 of all childminder and pre-school/play group places within Harrow and close to two in 5 of places at independent schools with attached nurseries for children aged 0-5 years. Roxbourne provides the most childcare places, while West Harrow has more childminders than any other ward within Harrow.
- Central Planning Area provides parents/carers with close to 1 in 4 of all childminder, day nurseries and independent schools with nurseries places in Harrow, but has less than one in 10 of all pre-school/playgroup places in Harrow.
- South East Planning Area provides one in four of all pre-school/playgroup places in Harrow but less than 1 in 8 of all other types of childcare places. This suggests a potential gap in parental choice in this Planning Area.
- North East Planning Area provides close to 1 in 4 of all pre-school/playgroup places in Harrow but less than 1 in 10 of childminder and day nursery provision. There are no places available through the independent school sector. This suggests a potential gap in parental choice in this planning area.

Table 3: Planning Areas and places

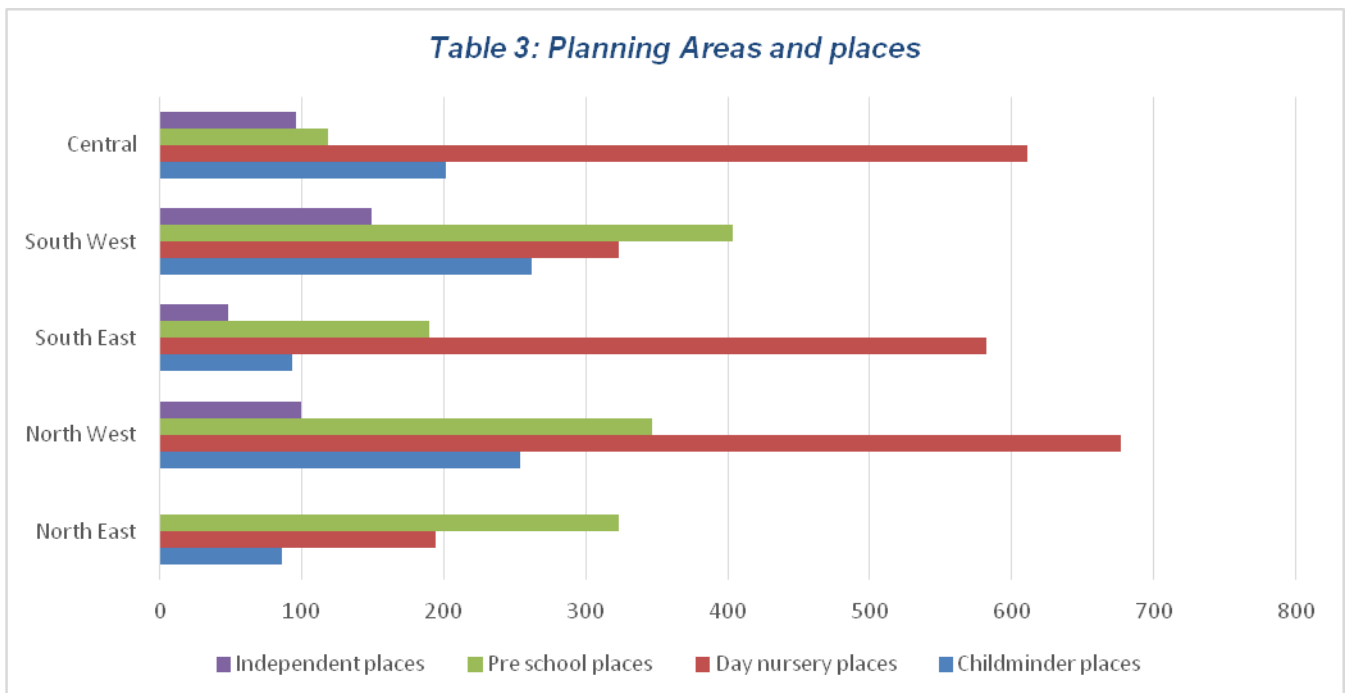


Table 4: Count of childcare places by provider type and planning/ ward area (Harrow FIS data November 2015)

Planning Group	Ward	Childminders	Places	Day nurseries	Places	Pre-school	Places	Independent	Places
North East (1)	Belmont	7	38	2	50	3	108	0	0
	Canons	5	23	2	44	4	115	0	0
	Stanmore Park	5	25	1	100	4	100	0	0
	Total	17	86	5	194	11	323	0	0
North West (2)	Hatch End	8	47	4	217	1	48	0	0
	Headstone North	13	69	1	48	4	140	0	0
	Harrow Weald	9	46	1	30	3	57	0	0
	Pinner	7	32	4	219	1	24	0	0
	Pinner South	11	60	2	163	3	78	1	100
	Total	48	254	12	677	12	347	1	100
South East (3)	Edgware	6	28	4	280	1	20	1	48
	Kenton East	5	28	2	119	1	25	0	0
	Kenton West	4	18	3	138	2	50	0	0
	Queensbury	4	19	1	45	3	95	0	0
	Total	19	93	10	582	7	190	1	48
South West (4)	Rayners Lane	13	54	3	101	1	28	2	41
	Roxbourne	9	52	3	94	2	113	1	45
	Roxeth	10	50	0	0	3	112	0	0
	Harrow on the Hill	7	25	3	108	2	65	1	63
	West Harrow	18	81	1	20	3	86	0	0
	Total	57	262	10	323	11	404	4	149
Central (5)	Greenhill	4	15	3	149	2	65	3	76
	Headstone South	14	62	5	252	0	0	0	0
	Marlborough	11	56	4	170	1	36	1	20
	Wealdstone	12	69	1	40	1	18	0	0
	Total	41	202	13	611	4	119	4	96

Cost of Childcare

Table 5 shows that average hourly rates for nursery fees for children are higher in Harrow than the London average (2.4% more than the London average for children aged 3-5 years and rising to 6.4% more than the London average for children aged two years and 6.8% more than the London average for children aged less than two years).¹²

By contrast, childminders tend to charge less than the London average in Harrow for children aged two or more years (1% for children aged two years and 5.3% for children aged 3-5 years). However, for children aged less than two years average rates are approximately 11% more than the London average.

In the survey, 11 group settings and 6 childminders indicated they were intending to increase fees by more than £10 in the coming 18 months. Extrapolated across the local market, this suggests that more than 1 in 5 (21%) of early years settings intend increasing fees by more than £10 per week for local families.

Table 5, Average hourly cost of different types of childcare, Harrow, London and England

	Under 2	2	3-5
Day nurseries			
Harrow	£6.53	£6.12	£5.77
London	£6.08	£5.63	£5.63
England	£4.69	£4.47	£4.47
Childminders			
Harrow	£5.73	£5.78	£5.54
London	£5.13	£5.85	£5.85
England	£3.95	£4.21	£4.21

In discussion with early years settings at the PVI forum, there was a strong view that the funding provided by the Government was insufficient to cover the costs incurred by providers in providing funded places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

This was reinforced in the survey with group settings where 11 of 45 indicated that ensuring sufficient funding was the foremost priority. By contrast, 3 of 33 childminders identified lack of funding as the foremost priority for improvement. Given the Government ambition to introduce a funded 30 hour entitlement for children aged 3-4 years in most households where both parents/carers (or a lone parent in a lone parent household) are in paid work from September 2017, group settings were especially concerned to make sure that there was sufficient funding to enable sustainable businesses and affordable childcare for families.

¹² Childcare Costs Survey 2015, Family and Childcare Trust.

Quality of Childcare

Table 6 provides a breakdown of the Ofsted ratings of day nurseries and pre-schools/play groups in each ward/Planning Area of Harrow. Table 7 provides the ratings for childminders.

The Ofsted data for group settings (taking account of day nurseries and pre-schools/ playgroups identify high levels of quality: 86% of settings rate 'good' or 'outstanding' for those settings where Ofsted inspections have happened.¹³ The highest proportion of group settings rated 'good' or 'outstanding' is in Central Planning Area (93%) while the area where fewer group settings rated 'good' or 'outstanding' is in the South West Planning Area (67%), although it should be noted that there are higher number of group settings in the South West that have been inspected previously that have not been re-inspected (5).

The Ofsted data for childminders similarly identify significant improvement in quality: 83% of childminders rate 'good' or 'outstanding' for those settings where Ofsted inspections have happened.¹⁴ The highest proportion of childminders rated 'good' or 'outstanding' is in the North West Planning Area (86%) while the planning area where fewer childminders rated 'good' or 'outstanding' is in the North East Planning Area (79%).

Given new entrants into the childcare market, there are a number of early years settings for whom Ofsted inspections have not yet taken place.

Harrow is broadly consistent with the rest of England in relation to the quality of their settings with 17 in every 20 children accessing good or outstanding early years provision. In January 2015, 85% of 2, 3, and 4-year-olds receive their funded early education in settings rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted¹⁵.

Surveys conducted with early years settings identified that more than half would value assistance to improve the quality of their provision and the ability to meet the needs of specific groups of children. This is especially so in meeting the needs of children with additional needs and disabilities. This was reinforced at the PVI forum where concerns were raised about the availability of additional funding to meet the needs of children with extra requirements, although a number of settings also identified the value of the SEN coordinator that works with early years settings to equip them in meeting the needs of children with requirements related to their disability/additional needs.

In surveys, eight group settings and 11 childminders also indicated that having access to more training was a foremost priority, with several noting that training provision was no longer affordable.

¹³ This includes all outstanding and good settings as a proportion of all settings where a rating of outstanding, good, requires improvement or satisfactory exists.

¹⁴ This includes all outstanding and good settings as a proportion of all settings where a rating of outstanding, good, requires improvement or satisfactory exists.

¹⁵ DfE, *An economic assessment of the early education and childcare market and providers' costs*, 25 November 2015, p.37

Group settings (including PVI and independent schools)

- 27 of 45 group settings indicate they want help to meet the needs of children with additional needs/disabilities.
- 23 of 45 group settings indicate they want advice and guidance to support inspections of early years settings
- 21 of 45 group settings indicate they want help to meet the needs of children that have support through Children's Social Care (e.g. children where there is a Child Protection Plan)
- 16 of 45 group settings indicate they want help to improve quality.
- 8 of 45 group settings indicate they want help to better meet the needs of children that are from families seeking refuge in the UK.

Childminders

- 16 of 34 childminders indicate they want help to improve quality.
- 14 of 34 childminders indicate they want advice and guidance to support inspections of early years settings
- 14 of 34 childminders indicate they want help to meet the needs of children with additional needs/ disabilities.
- 7 of 34 childminders indicate they want help to meet the needs of children that have support through Children's Social Care (e.g. children where there is a Child Protection Plan)
- 4 of 34 childminders indicate they want help to better meet the needs of children that are from families seeking refuge in the UK.

Table 6: PVI settings quality ratings, Ofsted (Harrow FIS data November 2015)

Planning Group	Ward	Total PVI settings	No Ofsted Data	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
North East (1)	Belmont	5	1	2	2			
	Canons	6	1	3	2			
	Stanmore Park	5		1	3		1	
	Total	16	2	6	7		1	
North West (2)	Hatch End	5		1	4			
	Headst1 North	5		1	4			
	Harrow Weald	4			3		1	
	Pinner	5	2		2		1	
	Pinner South	6		1	5			
	Total	25	2	3	18		2	
South East (3)	Edgware	6	2	2	2			
	Kenton East	3			2		1	
	Kenton West	5	1	1	2		1	
	Queensbury	4		1	2		1	
	Total	13	3	4	8		3	
South West (4)	Rayners Lane	6		1	1	3		
	Roxbourne	5	3		2			
	Roxeth	3			1	2		
	Harrow on the Hill	5		3		1		1
	West Harrow	4	1	1	2			
	Total	22	4	5	6	6	1	
Central (5)	Greenhill	6		4	1	1		
	Headstone South	5	1	1	3			
	Marlborough	5		1	4			
	Wealdstone	2	1		1			
	Total	18	2	6	9	1		

Table 7: Childminder quality ratings, Ofsted (Harrow FIS data November 2015)

Planning Area	Ward	Total Childminders	No Ofsted Data	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Requires Improvement	Met
North East (1)	Belmont	7	-	1	5	1		
	Canons	5	2		1	1	1	
	Stanmore Park	6	2		4			
	Total	18	4	1	10	2	1	
North West (2)	Hatch End	8	1	2	2	2		1
	Headstone North	13	1	3	8		1	
	Harrow Weald	10	1	1	5	1	1	1
	Pinner	8	4					4
	Pinner South	11	4		7			
	Total	50	11	6	25	3	2	6
South East (3)	Edgware	6	1		4	1		
	Kenton East	5	2		2			1
	Kenton West	4	1		3			
	Queensbury	4			3		1	
	Total	19	4		12	1	1	1
South West (4)	Rayners Lane	12	5		6			1
	Roxbourne	8	1	1	3		1	2
	Roxeth	10	5		2	1	1	1
	Harrow on the Hill	7		2	2	2	1	
	West Harrow	18	4	2	10		1	2
	Total	55	15	5	23	3	4	4
Central (5)	Greenhill	4	1		1	1		1
	Headstone South	14	2	2	7		1	2
	Marlborough	12	2	1	5	1	2	1
	Wealdstone	12	2	1	7			2
	Total	42	7	4	19	2	3	6

Availability of childcare

Based on Early Years Census responses from 95 early years settings, the overwhelming majority of childcare provision is available Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm, with more than half of day nurseries, independent schools and pre-schools/ play groups (group settings) reporting they operate term time only. However, childminders routinely offer much more flexibility. This is reinforced in the survey with providers which found:

- 1 of 45 group settings indicated they were open in school holidays/half terms etc., while none indicated they were open on weekends and evenings. While this under-reports the level of availability (knowing for example there are at least two group settings in Marlborough that operate 48-50 weeks per year and there are at least three group settings in Edgware wards that operate 48-51 weeks per year), it gives a strong indication of the limited availability outside 8am- 6pm, Monday to Friday during school terms.
- 26 of 34 childminders report they open outside Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm. This includes seven reporting that they operate in the evening, 18 reporting availability before 8am, 16 reporting they operate in any half term and as many operate during the Easter break.

Providers gave fairly limited information about occupancy levels that were attributable to their setting, although estimates based on the returns of 40 group settings suggests space for an average of 8.4 additional children per day nursery/ pre-school (of which 2.5 are aged two years) which implies 250 places are currently available for children aged two years and approximately 420 places are available for children aged 3-4 years within existing supply (with approximately 1 in 4 reporting full occupancy) Based on 28 childminders returns, childminders were more likely to indicate they had vacancies with an average of one per childminder (with approximately 1 in 5 reporting full occupancy). This implies a total occupancy rate of 82%¹⁶. This compares favourably to the 2011 Harrow CSA which found 1 in 3 group settings were fully occupied and 1 in 4 childminders were fully occupied, although suggests there is more to do to maximize available spaces:

- 10 of 45 group settings and six in 33 childminders report that they would like to have business support and advice.
- 11 of 45 group settings and three in 33 childminders report that they would like marketing support.

There is an expectation of increased supply (notwithstanding vacancies) and more flexible provision in the coming 18 months:

- 12 of 45 group settings and seven of 33 childminders indicated they were intending to increase the number of places they make available. Extrapolated across the market, this suggests that approximately 1 in 4 settings are intending to expand supply. Of these, 1 in 5 of these are also

¹⁶ Based on total places available in day nurseries, pre-schools and childminders.

intending to increase their fees by more than £10 per week (1 in 4 group settings and 1 in 7 childminders both intend expanding available supply and increasing fees).

- 8 of 45 group settings and two of 33 childminders indicated they were intending to increase their opening hours. It is encouraging given the limited flexibility of group settings that 18% are expecting to increase their opening hours.

What holds back some group settings particularly from expanding are restrictions on building use: this applies to 13 of 45 group settings (28% of all group settings). They report being constrained in their capacity to increase hours by limitations on their buildings (e.g. leases with church groups that use space for other services). This was reinforced in the PVI forum where representatives felt that many charitable organisations that provide facilities for early years settings (e.g. scout huts and churches) are being encouraged, due to cuts elsewhere, to charge commercial rates for premises, which are pushing up costs considerably. They also reported that there were too few purpose built nurseries in Harrow, and so premises are limited and may not have the space for increased demand.

The Government expanded eligibility for a 15-hour funded early education entitlement for two year olds in 2014/15. As at January 2015, there were 550 eligible children in Harrow and take up was 47% of these children. This is less than the outer London average of 50% and slightly better than the London average of 46%.¹⁷ Take-up has been improving and was reported as having increased to 62% by September 2015.¹⁸

As at January 2015, 91% of the 3 and 4 year olds resident in Harrow are claiming their free entitlement to early education and childcare¹⁹. This is up 1% although entirely the result of impressive results in take-up by 4 year olds where Harrow is at 100%. There has been a reduction in the proportion of three year old children taking up their entitlement to early education and childcare from 85% to 81% between 2014 and 2015, a rate significantly lower than England and London (overall and outer London).

Table 8. NEG 3 and 4 take up 2011-2015, Harrow as compared with England, London and Outer London

	3-year-olds					4-year-olds					3- and 4-year-olds				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
England	92	93	93	94	94	96	97	98	98	99	94	95	96	96	96
London	85	86	87	87	85	92	93	94	95	94	88	89	90	91	90
Outer London	85	86	87	88	87	93	95	95	96	96	89	90	91	92	91
Harrow	76	78	83	85	81	88	90	91	96	100	82	84	87	90	91

¹⁷ DfE, *Provision for children under 5 years of age: January 2015*, June 2015

¹⁸ As reported by FIS Manager

¹⁹ Ibid.

Key conclusions

1. Overall, most children aged 3 and 4 years are taking up early education entitlements in good quality provision where approximately 17 in every 20 early years settings in Harrow have Ofsted ratings of 'good' or 'outstanding' (in line with all England averages). There is scope to improve, however, take up of entitlements for children aged three years and eligible children aged two years (which are less than the outer London average).
2. Families have choice about types of childcare although this varies between Planning Areas/wards e.g. North West Planning Area has the most choice, while Central Planning Area provides less than 1 in 10 of all pre-school/ playgroup places in Harrow. Given that Marlborough and Wealdstone wards are two of the fastest growing wards and are characterised by higher rates of deprivation this suggests a gap for parents/carers in these wards/ planning area.
3. Affordability is identified by all types of early years settings as a key priority. There are concerns raised about the levels of funding provided to enable the provision of funded places particularly.
 - a. Average hourly rates for nursery fees are higher in Harrow than the London average (+2.4% for children aged 3-5 years, +6.4% for children aged two years and +6.8% for children aged less than two years).
 - b. Harrow childminders tend to charge a little less than the London average for children aged two or more years (1% for children aged two years and 5.3% for children aged 3- 5 years). However, for children aged less than two years average rates are approximately 11% more than the London average.
 - c. 21% of early years settings intend increasing fees by more than £10 per week for local families in the coming 18 months.
4. Most childcare provision is available Monday to Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm, with more than half of group settings reporting they operate term time only. However, childminders routinely offer significantly more flexibility with most available before 8am and during school holidays/ half terms. 1 in 5 operate in the evenings and just over 1 in 10 operate at weekends.
 - a. While more than 1 in 4 group settings are constrained in their ability to change opening hours because of restrictions on building use, it is encouraging that 18% of group settings are expecting to increase their opening hours within the next 18 months.
5. While there is more work to do in enabling an accurate picture of the levels of occupancy, there is approximately 82% occupancy implying scope for greater take up of childcare within existing supply. Furthermore, approximately 1 in 4 early years settings intend to expand supply in the coming 18 months. Most of this growth is expected to come from group settings.

3. Parent and carer experiences of childcare

Key reasons for using childcare

Table 9 sets out the primary motivations of families using childcare by School Planning Area.

Three main reasons dominate parents/carers motivations for using childcare; going to work (23%), providing time for their child to play with other children (21%) and because it is good for their child/ren (20%). The South East Planning Area has the lowest percentage of parents/carers who use childcare to allow them go to work at 24% and the North West Planning Area has the highest at 36%. Analysis of the demographic profile the South East Planning Area also has the lowest percentage of parents/carers where both partners work (13%).

Table 9: Motivation for using childcare

Reasons for using childcare	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Go to work	29%	36%	24%	34%	30%	13%	23%
Children play with others	26%	31%	24%	25%	30%	13%	21%
Good for my child	15%	31%	24%	25%	28%	13%	20%
Offered free hours (NEG2 NEG3/4)	12%	9%	10%	9%	5%	4%	7%
Give me time for other activities	0%	4%	5%	16%	0%	6%	5%
Give me a break/respice	9%	4%	0%	13%	5%	3%	5%
I am studying	0%	2%	5%	0%	5%	0%	1%
Offered funding through <5s panel	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	1%

More detailed analysis identifies that:

- For households where both parent/carers are in full time employment, 71% stated that take up of childcare is to enable them to work. For households where one parent is in full time employment this reduces to 32% and is 14% for those households where no parent/carer is in full time employment.
- Households where the respondent's partner is in full time employment have a higher level of take-up to provide a break/respice for the respondent (11% compared to 3%).
- Parents/carers of children with additional needs/SEN are 13% less likely to use childcare as to support them going to work compared to parents/carers who do not have children with additional needs/SEN (17% compared to 30%). However they are 17% more likely to use childcare to give them time for other activities or to allow them to attend appointments (22% compared with 5%). They are also 10% more likely to use childcare because it is good for their child (33% compared to 24%).

- Generally speaking the older the parent/carer is the more likely they are to use childcare to allow them to go to work, with 13% of 22-29 year olds using childcare to support their going to work, compared to 44% of 40 to 49 year olds.
- Parents/carers with a disability are 19% less likely to use childcare as to support them going to work, than parents/carers who are not disabled (17% compared to 35%). However they are 23% more likely to use childcare because it is good for their child (50% compared to 27%) and 20% more likely to use childcare to give their child the chance to play with other children (50% compared with 30%).
- Lone parents/carers are less likely to be motivated to take-up childcare to allow them to work compared with dual parents/carers households, to allow their children to play with others or because it is good for their child (12% less for all three reasons).
- Households with an income of greater than £40,000 per annum are 31% more likely to use childcare to enable the parent/s to work (53% for all households with an annual income exceeding £40,000 compared with 22% for all households with an annual income less than £40,000). They are also 11% more likely to use childcare because it is good for their child (34% compared to 23%) and 13% more likely to use childcare to give their child the chance to play with other children (39% compared with 26%).
- The ethnic profile of the sample is varied (see Appendix 2) resulting in low numbers within individual ethnic groups. However when comparing those who described their ethnicity as 'White British' as compared with all other ethnicities, White British parents/carers are 16% more likely to use childcare in order to go to work (46% compared to 30%). This may be a result of the higher level of White British parents/carers that are both working full time (30% compared to 21%), whereas for other ethnicities there is a higher percentage of one parent/carer working full time (63% compared to 48%).

Making decisions about which childcare to use

Table 10 makes clear that parents/carers consider multiple factors in making decisions about which childcare to use for their children. For more than 19 out of 20 parents/carers the following are **always** important considerations:

- quality and range of activities
- quality of care
- atmosphere (warm/welcoming/clean)
- safety/security
- qualified staff

For 18 out of 20 parents/carers the following are important:

- cost/charges
- close to home
- flexibility
- opening times
- Ofsted report
- recommendation from other parents

The South East and Central Planning Areas have fewer parents/carers reporting that it is important for childcare to accommodate their shift/work patterns. Less important considerations were catering for their child's additional needs (64%) and being close to work (54%). However, more detailed analysis identifies that:

- 34% more parents/carers of children with SEN/additional needs find it important that childcare caters for their children's special needs (94% compared to 60%). For parents/carers whose children do not have SEN/additional needs it is more important that childcare accommodates work/shift patterns (+24%) and that there is a good Ofsted report (+23%).
- Those on a lower income (less than £40k a year) are 33% more likely to state that it is important that childcare caters for their child's special needs than households on a higher income (over £40k per year) (75% compared to 42%).
- Lone parents/carers are 24% more likely to state that it's important that the childcare setting is closer to their school (74% compared to 49%), 21% more likely to say that it is important that childcare caters for their child's additional needs (79% compared to 58%) and 21% less likely to find it important that childcare is close to school (69% compared to 90%).
- Parents/carers of an ethnicity other than White British are 45% more likely find it important how well the setting caters for their child's additional needs compared to those who are not White British (91% compared to 46%)

Table 10: Key factors in deciding upon particular childcare

Important factors in choice of childcare	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Quality and range of activities	97%	96%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
Quality of care	97%	98%	100%	100%	98%	100%	99%
Atmosphere (warm/welcoming/clean)	93%	98%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
Safety/security	97%	98%	100%	100%	98%	98%	98%
Qualified staff	94%	98%	100%	100%	95%	98%	97%
Cost/charges	93%	94%	89%	93%	98%	95%	94%
Close to home	94%	96%	90%	90%	95%	95%	94%
Flexibility	93%	91%	94%	100%	88%	95%	93%
Opening times	89%	92%	95%	97%	95%	88%	92%
Ofsted report	86%	92%	89%	97%	95%	87%	91%
Recommendation from other parents	93%	88%	89%	89%	95%	90%	91%
Accommodates my shift work patterns	92%	83%	75%	93%	72%	81%	83%
Cultural diversity	82%	74%	88%	86%	76%	74%	78%
Close to school	69%	73%	75%	81%	70%	72%	73%
Caters for my child's special needs	57%	64%	76%	74%	55%	63%	64%
Close to work	59%	49%	67%	52%	53%	52%	54%

Use of childcare

The profile of families that shared their perspectives through the survey is set out in Appendix 2. In considering childcare use, the families that participated in the survey most likely to have used registered childcare in the previous 12 months are:

- Where the family has more than one child. For example, 73% of families with three children have used registered childcare in the last 12 months compared to 39% of families with one child.
- Generally the older parents/carers become the more likely they are to have used childcare in the past 12 months, with 67% of 40-49 year olds using childcare compared to 30% of those who are 22-29 year olds.
- Households where both parents/carers are in full time employment are more likely to have used childcare in the last 12 months (74%) compared to families where one parent is employed (55%) and those where neither parent is employed (31%).
- Households where total income exceeds £40,000 per annum are 44% more likely to have used childcare in the last 12 months than those on less than £40,000 per annum (72% compared to 28%).
- White British families are 20% more likely to have used childcare in the last 12 months than those who are of another ethnicity (67% compared to 47%).
- Disabled parents/carers are 13% more likely to have used childcare in the last 12 months than non-disabled parents/carers (67% compared to 50%)
- Most families are aware that early years settings have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to enable access for children with additional needs/disabilities; however this is higher for parents/carers who have a child with SEN/additional needs (98%), compared to 89% of parents/carers whose child does not have SEN/additional needs.

Table 11 sets out the childcare options that families identify taking up. Day nursery is the main type of childcare taken up (30%), which accords with day nurseries accounting for more than 40% of the available provision, except in South East Planning Area where pre-school/ playgroup is the main type of childcare used (33%), and family is used by less than half the number of families than in all the other Planning Areas (7%). This is consistent with the earlier finding where the South East Planning Area provides 1 in 4 of all pre-school/ playgroup places in Harrow but less than 1 in 8 of all other types of childcare places.

Table 11: Main types of childcare taken up

Types of childcare	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Day nursery	31%	28%	33%	33%	19%	37%	30%
Family	15%	20%	7%	20%	14%	17%	17%
Pre school / playgroup	12%	15%	33%	13%	17%	17%	16%
Childminder	15%	11%	7%	10%	14%	10%	11%
After school club	8%	6%	0%	7%	6%	7%	6%
Friends / neighbours	8%	4%	7%	0%	8%	3%	5%
Holiday club / play scheme	4%	4%	0%	7%	6%	3%	4%
Nanny/au pair/ home carer	4%	6%	0%	3%	3%	3%	4%
School nursery	0%	4%	13%	3%	6%	0%	3%
Breakfast club	0%	2%	0%	3%	6%	2%	2%
Crèche	4%	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%	1%
Other	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

More detailed analysis identifies that:

- Parents/carers who have children with SEN/additional needs have a similar profile of use compared to those without SEN/additional needs but are slightly more likely to use family (+9%), afterschool club (+7%) and pre-school/ playgroup childcare (+9%) compared to parents/carers whose children do not have SEN/ additional needs. They are also less likely to choose day nurseries (-8%) and childminders (-10%) than families whose children do not have SEN/additional needs.
- Generally the more children a family has the more likely they are to use childcare, for example if a family has three children, 35% use pre-school/ playgroup compared to 10% of families with one child.
- Parents/carers with a disability are more than twice as likely to access preschool/ playgroup or childminders than parents/carers without a disability (38% compared to 15%) and more likely to use a day nursery (40% compared to 29%) but less likely to use family (17% compared to 0%).
- Families who earn over £40,000 a year are more likely to use all types of childcare; particularly families (24% compared to 10%), day nurseries (40% compared to 20%), and childminders (17% compared to 4%). Au pairs and nannies are used solely by households where family annual household income exceeds £40,000 (7% compared to 0%).

How childcare is used by families was a feature of our engagement with Community Ambassadors working at Norbury School and in one-to-one/ small group interviews with 26 parents/carers attending Children's Centres in Harrow.

Norbury School works with Community Ambassadors (two of Somalian origin, one Afghan origin) to support engagement with these communities, given that Somalian and Afghan communities in the area are not making best use of Harrow's preschool childcare offer.

The main challenge identified by Community Ambassadors for Afghan and Somalian communities is how to stimulate take-up. The reasons for lack of use overlap. These are:

- Childcare from a very young age is not the norm in Afghanistan or Somalia, except for very wealthy families. As a result, there is little understanding or trust in how early years childcare might benefit their children. For example, many parents/carers don't appreciate that children can learn through play; they view it just as play.
- Parents/carers are afraid of losing their first languages, and so don't like to bring their children to English-speaking sessions when they are very young. In addition, many parents/carers are not confident in their ability to engage with childcare practitioners and other parents, due to lack of confidence in speaking English.
- Sometimes they are afraid of attending sessions that are held on church grounds. They worry there will be a religious element that may not be in keeping with their own religious beliefs – even though this is rarely the case and it just so happens that the premises are being used by the group. This points to a need for ongoing dialogue with parents.
- Posters and other information that advertises the availability of early years childcare does not feel like it is made relevant to Somalian and Afghan parents/carers even when they know it exists. They are not aware it is available for their family.

Norbury, in collaboration with two other schools (Elmgrove and Vaughan), set up the Community Ambassador Programme (with a successful bid to the John Lyon Fund). They felt it was important for the school to be able to engage with parents/carers and their children before they begin at school to help children develop school readiness.

Often the role of the Community Ambassadors is quite hands on – it can include going with a parent to a new childcare setting or Children's Centre for the first few times, until the parent feels comfortable with it. The Community Ambassadors also run sessions across the three schools for parents/carers with children at the school already, who often also have younger children.

The Community Ambassadors felt that Harrow Council might find more publicity of the Families Information Service would be helpful in raising awareness of what is available, especially where it involves outreach to parents/carers and practitioners that work with families and where there is scope for campaigns in community languages.

Frequency of childcare used

The average number of days per week that respondents use registered childcare for children aged 0-4 years is 3.6 days²⁰. Informal childcare is used an average of 2.8 days per week²¹.

Table 12: Frequency of use of registered and informal childcare for children aged 0-4 years

Type of childcare	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Childcare for <5 years	3.3	3.6	5.2	4.2	3.4	3.2	3.6
Informal childcare	3.0	2.3	3.0	2.5	4.2	2.7	2.8

More detailed analysis identifies that:

- the South East and South West Planning Areas show the highest frequency of childcare use for children aged 0-4 years at 5.2 days a week and 4.2 days a week respectively; this compared to 3.3 days a week on average for the North East.
- parents/carers that have children with SEN/additional needs use childcare for children aged 0-4 years 4.6 times a week compared to 3.5 times a week, however there is no difference in frequency of informal use.
- in households where both parents/carers are working, the average use of childcare for children aged 0-4 years is 4.0 days per week, and is 3.7 days a week of informal childcare. This drops to 3.5 times a week and 3.2 times a week respectively when only one parent/carer is working.
- there is no difference in use of registered childcare for children aged 0-4 years depending on income, however for those families whose income is less than £40,000 per annum the use of informal childcare is higher (4.2 days per week compared to 2.5 days per week).

Difficult times to access childcare

Table 13 sets out the times that parents/carers identify it is most difficult to access childcare. Around a quarter of parents/carers don't have any difficult times in accessing childcare. Summer holidays and Christmas holidays were considered difficult by 1 in 6 parents/carers and half-term and evenings by 1 in 8 parents/carers.

This varied across locations with parents/carers in the North West Planning Area finding it more difficult to access childcare in the evenings compared to other locations. Those in the South West find weekends more difficult times to access childcare. Parents/carers in the North East and South West Planning Areas find it harder to access childcare in summer holidays than other areas. Parents/carers in the Central Planning Area have least difficulties accessing childcare at times that suit them.

²⁰ Average number of days with registered provision for under 5s is calculated using the total days of childcare used per week for crèche, childminder, day nursery, school nursery and pre-school/ playgroup.

²¹ Average number of informal days is calculated using the total days of childcare used per week for nanny/ au pair/ home carer, family, friends/ neighbours.

Table 13: Times it is difficult to access childcare

Difficult times to access childcare	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
No difficulties	12%	15%	14%	13%	21%	8%	12%
Summer holiday	18%	5%	14%	19%	7%	4%	8%
Christmas holiday	12%	9%	14%	13%	9%	3%	7%
Half-term	12%	7%	10%	9%	2%	5%	6%
Evenings	3%	15%	10%	9%	5%	3%	6%
Weekends	0%	9%	5%	13%	0%	5%	5%
All year	6%	4%	0%	3%	7%	3%	4%
Overnight	0%	4%	5%	6%	0%	1%	2%

More detailed analysis showed:

- 7% more parents/carers with children with SEN/additional needs find it harder all year to access childcare compared to families without SEN (11% compared to 4%). However, families with children without SEN/additional needs find it harder to access childcare in the holiday times than those parents/carers with SEN/ additional needs.
- Generally the more children a family has the harder they find it to access all times of childcare.
- 9% more dual parents/carers than lone parents/carers have difficulties in accessing childcare, and this is true across all childcare times with the exception of weekends and overnight, for which the same percentage of lone and dual parents/carers find it difficult.
- A greater percentage of parents/carers on a higher income (households earning over £40,000 per annum) state difficulties in finding childcare across all childcare times.
- While White British and other ethnicities find it equally difficult to access childcare at all times, 26% of White British parents/carers stated that they had no difficulties in accessing childcare compared to 13% of other ethnicities.

Affordability of childcare

Affordability of childcare is examined in terms of its impact on parents/carers, the average cost of childcare and sources of assistance with cost.

Table 14 sets out the consequences of a lack of suitable, affordable childcare. Only 1 in 6 parents/carers reported that they did not have any consequences as a result of the affordability of childcare, however this varies by area with more parents/carers feeling negative consequences in the South East Planning Area - only 1 in 20 parents/carers felt no consequences as a result of the lack of affordability of childcare. The South East Planning Area also shows the highest number of parents/carers who have been impacted by not being able to take up a job (24%), start employment (19%) or take up training/ studying (19%) Looking across individual impacts, the Central Planning Area shows least consequences despite having 3 of the 5 most deprived wards in the borough²².

²² Early Years Needs Assessment: A better start to life for every child, Sept 2012 Baxter, M. Appendix 1

Table 14: Consequence of lack of affordability

Consequences of lack of affordability	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Nothing	15%	24%	5%	25%	26%	9%	15%
Taking up a job	12%	13%	24%	13%	5%	7%	10%
Starting employment	15%	11%	19%	13%	2%	3%	7%
Training/studying	3%	5%	19%	6%	7%	3%	5%
Other	3%	4%	5%	0%	7%	1%	2%

More detailed analysis identified that:

- As with having more difficulty in relation to times to access childcare all year, difficulties as a result of affordability are accentuated for parents/carers of children with SEN/ additional needs. 16% more parents/carers report they have had difficulty taking up training/ studying (22% compared to 6%).
- 16% more lone parents/carers report difficulties as a result of lack of affordability compared to dual parents/carers (8% compared to 24%). The main difficulty is in taking up a job (17% compared to 13%).
- Where both partners are working, less parents/carers face consequences as a lack of affordability. Where only one parent is working, the non-working parent faces greater difficulties in taking up a job.
- 26% less families on lower income (less than £40,000 per annum) said that they faced no difficulties as a result of the affordability of childcare, though looking at individual issues showed equal percentages of parents/carers that had faced problems of taking up work, employment or training/studying.
- White British parents/carers were more likely to say that they had no impacts as a result of the affordability of childcare compared to other ethnicities (36% compared to 18%). Those of other ethnicities found it harder to take up a job as a result of this (14% compared to 6%).

Table 15 shows that the amount paid for childcare within Harrow is very variable. The average paid for childcare per week by parents/carers across Harrow in £153, however this varies by area with the South East Planning Area £113 cheaper than the North East Planning Area (£199 compared to £86).

Table 15: Average paid per week for childcare



There is also variability across Planning Areas – approximately four in every six parents/carers (62%) in the South East Planning Area pay less than £50 per week, compared to 1 in 6 (18%) in the North East Planning Area.

Table 16: Frequency of average amount paid per week for childcare

£ paid per week	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
£0 - £25	13%	15%	42%	24%	26%	11%	19%
£26 - £50	6%	19%	25%	0%	11%	7%	11%
£51 - £100	6%	15%	17%	12%	5%	26%	14%
£101 - £200	31%	22%	0%	47%	26%	19%	25%
£201 - £300	31%	19%	8%	6%	16%	22%	18%
£301 - £400	0%	4%	0%	12%	11%	11%	7%
£401 - £500	6%	4%	8%	0%	0%	4%	3%
Over £500	6%	4%	0%	0%	5%	0%	3%

More detailed analysis identifies that:

- For lone parents/carers households the average cost of childcare is £81 less than in dual parenting households (£159 per week compared to £78). This may go some way to explaining the lower costs in the South East Planning Area, which has a higher percentage of lone parents/carers responding to the survey compared to other areas. No lone parents/carers report spending over £200 per week on childcare (compared to 33% of dual parents/carers).
- 52% of households where both parents/carers are in full time employment report spending more than £200 per week on childcare costs (average spend per week is £213). By contrast, 19% of households where no parents/carers are in full time employment spend more than £200 per week (average spend per week is £105).
- Families with children with SEN/additional needs are likely to spend less than half on childcare than other families every week (£70 compared to £160). 57% of families with children with SEN/additional needs spend less than £25 per week on childcare compared to 17% of families without children with SEN/ additional needs.
- Spending on childcare rises with household income. Those earning over £40,000 per annum spend an average of £181 per week on childcare, those earning less than £40,000 per annum spend an average of £88. 12% of families with an annual household income less than £40,000 spent more than £200 per week on childcare. By contrast, 38% of families with an annual household income greater than £40,000 spend more than £200 per week on childcare, with 4% of families reporting spending more than £500 per week on childcare costs.
- Spending on childcare generally rises with the number of children in a family. More than 50% of families with three or four or more children spend £200 per week or more on childcare costs. By contrast, less than 35% of families with two children or fewer spend £200 per week or more on childcare costs.
- Those who describe themselves as White British ethnicity spend an average of £171 per week on childcare, compared to those of other ethnicities who spend £149 per week.

To support paying for childcare, child tax credit (17%), childcare vouchers (15%) and NEG3/4 (15%) are the main sources of assistance.

The percentage of parents/carers accessing assistance varies by Planning Area. In general parents/carers in the South East Planning Area have greater access to all sources of assistance compared to other areas. The South West Planning Area has the second highest level of access to sources of assistance, and one third of parents/carers access child tax credit in the South West (31%) compared to only 5% in the North West. Family contribution is highest in the South East (10%) and the North East (9%).

Table 17: Sources of Assistance

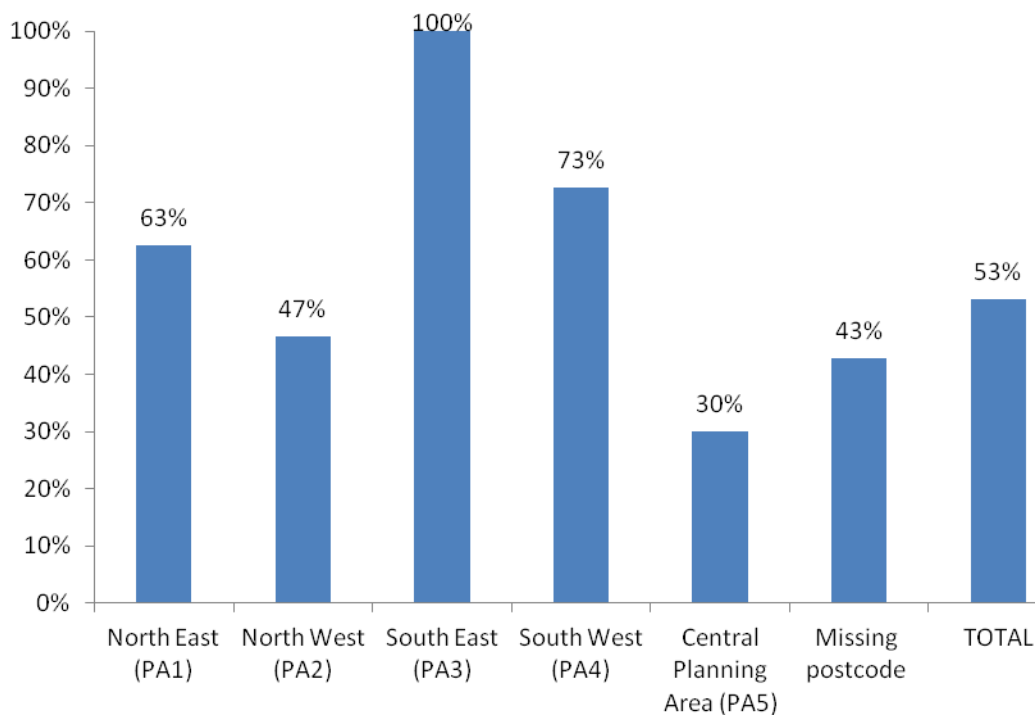
Source of Assistance	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Child tax credit	18%	5%	29%	31%	16%	3%	17%
Childcare vouchers	9%	22%	24%	16%	9%	9%	15%
NEG3/4	9%	11%	24%	22%	14%	9%	15%
NEG2	3%	5%	10%	13%	5%	0%	6%
Childcare element of working tax credit	12%	5%	10%	0%	7%	4%	6%
Family contribution	9%	4%	10%	3%	2%	9%	6%
Student Finance	0%	0%	5%	3%	0%	0%	1%
DHP Funding	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Additional funding through under 5's panel	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%

More detailed analysis shows:

- For families where both partners work full-time the percentage of households using childcare vouchers is 40%. This compares to 12.5% where one parent is working. For households where only one parent is working full-time 12% of parents/carers take up child tax credit and the childcare element of working tax credit. This compares to 6% in households where both parents/carers are working, presumably as a result of the higher level of income in households where both partners are working (e.g. 88% of households where both partners work are on over £40,000 per annum, compared to 50% where only one partner works). Those on incomes of over £40,000 per annum are 18% more likely to use childcare vouchers (25% compared to 8%).
- White British families were more likely to use childcare vouchers (22%) compared to other ethnicities (14%). This reflects the higher percentage of White British ethnicities that have both partners working full time (22% of White British compared to 14% of other ethnicities).
- Generally lone parents/carers had higher levels of access to benefits than dual parents/carers, particularly child tax credit (+51% more, 63% compared to 12%) and NEG 2 (20% more, 25% compared to 5%).

Parents/carers who received support were asked if they would prefer to access their free entitlement over more weeks of the year (fewer hours per week over more weeks of the year). Overall 53% of parents/carers stated that they would prefer this, however Table 18 shows the variability across Planning Areas with this percentage dropping to 30% in the Central Planning Area and increasing to 100% in the South East Planning Area.

Table 18: % Parents/carers accessing support who prefer to access free entitlement over more weeks of the year



Perspectives on current childcare

Table 19 provides parents' perspectives on the current childcare offer. Two out of three parents/carers (65%) feel satisfied with their current childcare arrangements, and find that there is local childcare available. This compares to 82% of parents/carers of 3 and 4 and year olds who were satisfied with the quality of early years' provision in the Harrow CSA 2011²³.

However, only 1 in 4 (25%) parents/carers find that childcare costs are affordable, and this drops to 1 in 5 parents/carers in the North West and North East Planning Areas where costs are relatively high.

Appendix Four sets out the key findings from one-to-one/ small group interviews with 32 parents/carers of children aged 0-4 years in Harrow. These provide a richer insight into how parents/carers think about the role of registered childcare for their children and how they perceive childcare provision in Harrow. Largely, this reinforces the findings set out at Table 19 about most parents/carers being satisfied, the challenges for many about the affordability of childcare outside of funded entitlements and the challenges for some in having childcare available when they need it.

²³ Early Years Needs Assessment: A better start to life for every child, Sept 2012 Baxter, M. Appendix A

Table 19: Perspectives on current childcare

Indicator	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Very satisfied with my current childcare	67%	70%	69%	57%	64%	66%	65%
There is childcare locally for my children's age	70%	66%	53%	60%	66%	70%	65%
Good choice of childcare locally	52%	59%	56%	47%	52%	50%	53%
Childcare is available where I need it	43%	56%	63%	43%	47%	50%	50%
Childcare is available when I need it	48%	51%	60%	36%	47%	51%	48%
Quality of childcare locally is high	52%	58%	50%	27%	42%	55%	48%
Prefer to use family or friends	30%	33%	40%	27%	36%	18%	30%
My childcare costs are affordable	18%	19%	36%	25%	28%	26%	24%
I can find childcare for my child with SEN	0%	12%	21%	11%	7%	8%	9%

More detailed analysis identifies that:

- Just over one third (36%) of households where both or one parent are in full time employment feel that childcare is affordable. For those on higher incomes (over £40,000 per annum) 39% agree that childcare is affordable compared to 26% of families on lower incomes. Those on a higher income are also more likely to be satisfied with their current childcare (76%) than those on a lower income (64%). This difference in households on lower incomes reflects findings in the CSA 2011 where 84% of households on higher incomes were satisfied compared to 75% of lower income households¹¹.
- Dual parents/carers also find childcare more affordable compared to lone parents/carers (36% compared to 25%), which aligns with the income of lone parents/carers where none earn more than £40,000 per annum (in the survey) compared to less than 2 in 5 (39%) of dual parents/carers.
- Generally speaking the more children in a family, the more affordable childcare becomes, with 55% of households with three children stating that it is affordable compared to 27% of households with one child.
- Parents/carers of children with SEN/additional needs are less satisfied with childcare compared to parents/carers of children without SEN/additional needs (42% compared to 72%). 25% of parents/ carers who have children with SEN can't find childcare for their child, compared to 2% of parents/carers whose children do not have SEN/additional needs. This reflects findings in the CSA 2011²⁴ where parents/carers reported "a lack of suitable early years provision for children with disabilities and additional needs", with 6% stating that they were not able to find suitable early years provision.

Parents/carers of children with SEN/additional needs are also less likely to find the quality of childcare high compared to those without SEN/additional needs (33% compared to 61%).

²⁴ Early Years Needs Assessment: A better start to life for every child, Sept 2012 Baxter, M. Appendix A

- Dual parents/carers are less likely to be satisfied with their current childcare than lone parents/carers (50% compared to 70%) despite more dual parents/carers finding their childcare affordable. However lone parents/carers are less likely to report that they rate quality of childcare high compared to dual parents/carers (41% compared to 53%).
- White British parents/carers are 8% more likely to be satisfied with their current childcare arrangements than families from other ethnicities (77% compared to 69%).
- The younger a parent is the more likely they are to prefer using friends and family for childcare, for example 50% of parents/carers aged 16-21 years prefer to use friends and family compared to 23% of those aged 40-49 years. Again this reflects findings in the CSA 2011 where younger parents/carers reported a “need for additional support to information, support and guidance”.

Key conclusions

1. Overall, 65% of parents/carers report being satisfied/very satisfied with childcare in 2016. This compares to 82% of parents/carers of 3 and 4 year olds who were satisfied with the quality of early years’ provision in the Harrow CSA 2011. Other perspectives showed:
 - a. 65% of parents/carers are satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of childcare locally for their children’s age.
 - b. Half of parents/carers feel that there is a good choice of childcare locally and that it is available where and when they needed it. Parents/carers in the North East were more satisfied while parents/carers in the South East were least satisfied.
 - c. Half of parents/carers also feel that the quality of childcare is high.
2. Parents/carers of children with SEN/additional needs are less satisfied with childcare compared to parents/carers of children without SEN/additional needs. Only 1 in 10 parents/ carers who have children with SEN say they can find registered childcare for their child (although when looking at the more specific question about actual use, this increases to 1 in 4), compared to 1 in 50 parents/carers whose children do not have SEN/additional needs.
3. Three in every four families don’t find childcare costs affordable. This is particularly the case for those on lower incomes (less than £40,000 per annum) and lone parents.
4. Those on a higher income (over £40,000 per annum) are more likely to be satisfied with their current childcare (76%) than those on a lower income (64%).
5. Three main reasons summarise parents/carers motivations for using childcare: going to work (23%); providing time for their child to play with other children (21%); and because it is good for their child/ren (20%).
6. The primary motivation of using childcare is to enable parents/carers to go to work is even greater for dual parent households where both are in full time employment, households with an annual income exceeding £40,000 and parents/carers of White British ethnicity. By contrast, it is less important for households where children have SEN/ additional needs, where parents/carers have a disability and for lone parents/carers.

7. Parents/carers whose children have SEN/additional needs are more likely to use childcare to allow them time for other activities or to attend appointments, and also because it is good for their children compared to parents/carers whose children do not have SEN/ additional needs.
8. Parents/carers consider multiple factors in making decisions about which childcare to use for their children. Critical to choosing childcare for 19 out of 20 parents/carers are the quality and range of activities, quality of care, atmosphere, safety/security and the qualifications of the staff.
9. 34% more parents/carers of children with SEN/additional needs find it important that childcare caters for their children's additional needs (+34%), whereas for parents/carers whose children do not have SEN/additional needs it is more important that childcare accommodates work/ shift patterns (+24%) and that there is a good Ofsted report (+23%).
10. In the survey, the parents/carers most likely to have used registered childcare in the previous 12 months are households where both parents/carers are in full time employment, households with a higher income (total income exceeds £40,000 per annum), households with more children, where parents/carers are older and where parents/carers describe themselves as White British ethnicity.
11. The most commonly used types of registered childcare are day nurseries, with the exception of the South East Planning Area where both day nurseries and pre-school playgroups are equally used. Family and pre-school/ playgroup are the other two main types of childcare used across Planning Areas.
12. For under Five's, the average number of days per week that respondents use registered childcare is 3.6 days. Informal childcare for all ages is used for an average of 2.8 days per week. The South East and South West Planning Areas show the highest frequency of childcare use for children aged 0-5 years at 5.2 days a week for registered childcare and 4.2 days a week for informal childcare.
13. Around three quarters of parents/carers have some difficulties in accessing childcare. Generally speaking, holiday times and evenings are more challenging for parents/carers to seek appropriate childcare for their needs. This is especially so for families with children with SEN/ additional needs, dual parents/carers and those households on a higher income.
14. 1 in 6 parents/carers reported no consequences as a result of the lack of affordability of childcare. This varies by area with more parents/carers feeling negative consequences in the South East Planning Area. Difficulties as a result of affordability are accentuated for parents/carers of children with SEN/ additional needs, lone parents, families on lower incomes and those of an ethnicity other than White British.
15. The average spend on childcare per week is £153, this increases to £199 in the North East Planning Area and decreases to £86 in the South East Planning Area. The survey highlights costs as cheaper for lone parents, households where residents are less economically active, households with lower incomes and families with children with SEN/ additional needs.

4. How parents/carers find out about childcare

How parents/carers found about their current childcare?

Table 20 sets out how parents/carers found about their current childcare arrangements. These reveal that for close to 3 in 10 parents/carers, friends/ relatives (28%) and the internet (27%) provide the primary sources of information and advice about their current childcare, although this reduces to 2 in 10 for South East Planning Area.

1 in 6 parents/carers also used Children’s Centres (16%). Similarly 1 in 6 parents/carers used the Harrow Families Information Service as a source of information (14%) of parents. However this decreases to only 2% in the North East Planning Area.

Table 20: How parents/carers found out about current childcare

Indicator	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Friend/ relative	26%	27%	20%	30%	30%	32%	28%
Internet	36%	27%	20%	27%	25%	26%	27%
Children's Centre	21%	20%	20%	14%	10%	12%	16%
FIS	2%	13%	14%	16%	17%	18%	14%
School	10%	6%	9%	2%	8%	5%	6%
Library	0%	3%	6%	2%	5%	2%	3%
Advert for provider	5%	2%	6%	7%	0%	2%	3%
GP/ Health clinic/ Health visitor	0%	2%	3%	0%	5%	3%	2%
Job Centre	0%	2%	3%	2%	0%	2%	1%

More detailed analysis identifies that:

- Generally younger parents/carers are more likely to find out about their current childcare arrangements from a Children’s Centre compared to older parents/carers. For example, 1 in 3 parents/carers aged to 29 years has found out about their childcare provision from Children’s Centres compared to 1 in 5 older parents/carers.
- 38% of dual parents/carers found out about their childcare from a friend or relative compared to 21% of lone parents/carers, who were more likely to find out about their current childcare through the internet (29%) or FIS (25%). Lone parents/carers are more likely than dual parents/carers to find out about their current childcare through a job centre (8% compared to 1%), library (13% compared to 3%) and their GP (13% compared to 2%).
- Lower income households (less than £40,000 per annum) are more likely to have used the Children’s Centres (25%) for information relevant to their current childcare arrangements compared to higher income households (15%).

- Households with families who are other than White British ethnicity are more likely to report that Children’s Centres (24% compared to 12%), the internet (39% compared to 28%) and Harrow FIS (20% compared to 10%) were where they found information to decide on their current registered childcare.

How easy is it to find information about childcare in Harrow

Table 21 sets out parents/carers views about ‘when looking for childcare in Harrow, how easy or difficult did you find getting advice and information?’ This reveals that just under half of parents/carers found it easy or very easy to access information and advice to help with their decision making about childcare.

Table 21 shows the South East Planning Area has the highest number of parents/carers who are more likely to report it is very difficult to find information (19%) compared to 3% in the North East who find it very difficult.

Table 21: How easy it is to find information when looking for childcare in Harrow

Level of difficulty	North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
Very easy	13%	13%	13%	17%	10%	9%	12%
Easy	29%	45%	38%	33%	36%	34%	36%
Neither easy or difficult	52%	32%	25%	27%	40%	43%	38%
Difficult	3%	2%	6%	17%	2%	4%	5%
Very difficult	3%	9%	19%	7%	12%	11%	9%

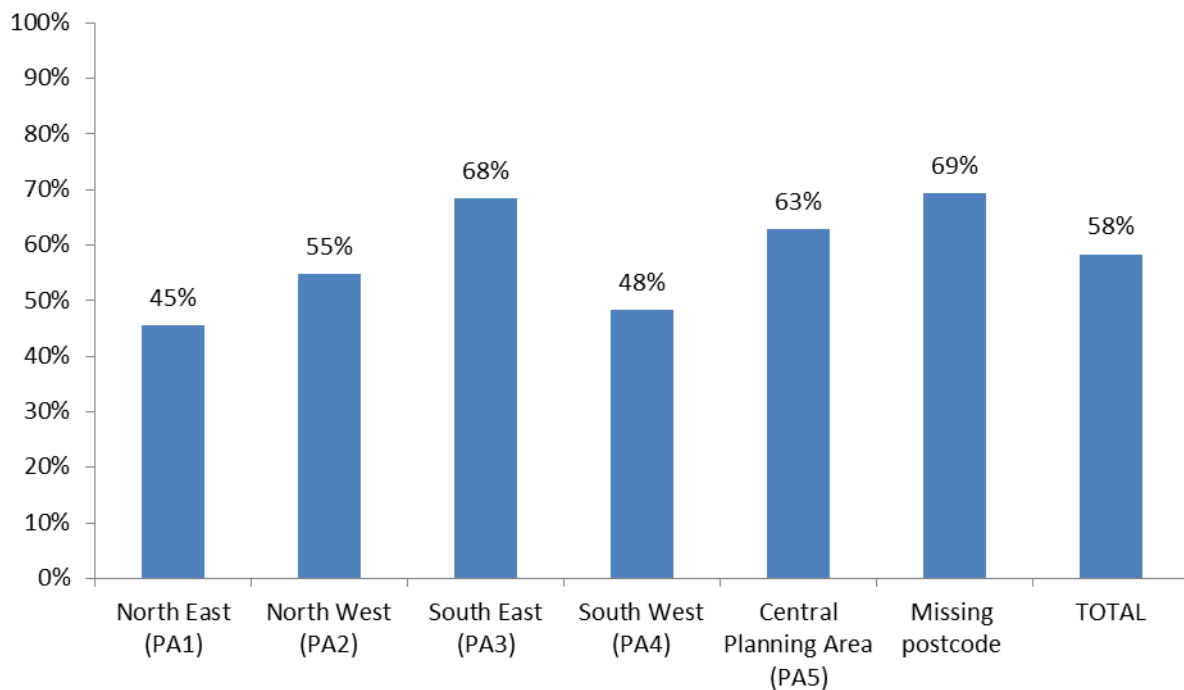
In considering other family characteristics, differences were highlighted in more detail:

- Generally the more children a family had the easier it is to find information – 60% of families with four children found it easy or very easy compared to 42% with 2 children.
- Lone parent families found it easier to get information than dual parent families (57% compared to 43%).
- Parents/carers who have a disability find it easier to get information on childcare than those who are not disabled (80% compared to 44%).

Table 22 shows how many parents/carers in Harrow are aware of the FIS to find out about childcare options. Overall 58% of parents/carers were aware of the FIS, which is an improvement on the CSA 2011 where “over half the parents/carers had not heard of the FIS”²⁵. Levels of awareness vary by area, with only 45% of parents/carers in the North East Planning Area aware of the FIS compared to 68% in the South East Planning Area.

²⁵ Early Years Needs Assessment: A better start to life for every child, Sept 2012 Baxter, M. Appendix 1

Table 22: Percentage of parents/carers aware of Harrow FIS as a source of childcare advice and information

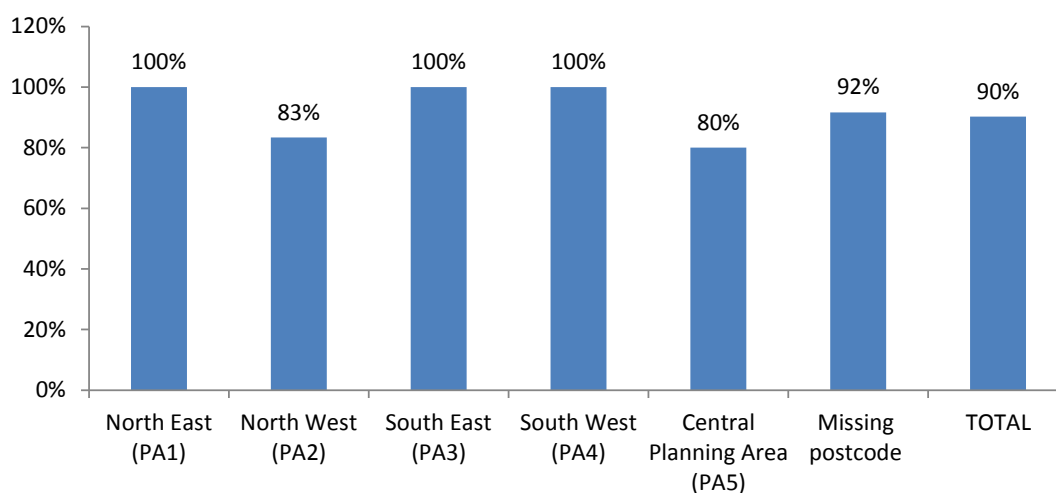


More detailed analysis shows:

- Parents/carers with children with DSEN/additional needs have higher levels of awareness of Harrow FIS than parents/carers whose children do not have DSEN/additional needs (73% compared to 57%).
- White British parents/carers are more aware of Harrow FIS than other ethnicities (66% compared to 55%).
- 11% more lone parents/carers are aware of Harrow FIS than dual parents/carers (67% compared to 56%).

Table 23 sets out the level of satisfaction for parents/carers who used Harrow FIS for information relevant to their current childcare arrangements. Overall 90% were either very satisfied or satisfied with the service; an increase of 8% on the CSA 2012 findings²⁶ (82% satisfaction). However the level of satisfaction drops to 80% in the Central Planning Area and 83% in the North West Planning Area. It's important to note however that no parents/carers that used the service were dissatisfied in any part of the borough.

Table 23: Satisfaction with Harrow Families Information Service



More detailed analysis shows only that dual parents/carers were less satisfied with Harrow FIS than lone parents/carers with 87% of dual parents/carers satisfied or very satisfied compared to 100% of lone parents/carers. Within this, 67% of lone parents/carers were very satisfied compared to 39% of dual parents/carers.

Key conclusions

1. Approximately half of parents/carers in Harrow found it easy or very easy to access information and advice to help with their decision making about childcare.
2. Close to 3 in 10 parents/carers use friends/ relatives and the internet as the primary sources of information and advice about their current childcare arrangements.
3. Other key sources of information and advice for around 1 in 6 parents/carers are Children's Centres and Harrow FIS. Lone parents/carers are slightly more likely to find out about their current childcare through the internet or FIS. Parents/carers with children with SEN/additional needs are equally likely to find out about their current childcare from Harrow FIS or the internet as they are from friends/relatives.
4. 58% of parents/carers are aware of the FIS, which is an increase on the CSA 2011 where "over half the parents/carers had not heard of the FIS". Parents/carers satisfaction with the services had increased by 8% from 82% in 2012 to 90%. The use of the FIS is variable with 2% of parents/carers used the Harrow FIS in the North East Planning Area compared to a maximum of 17% in the Central Planning Area.

²⁶ Early Years Needs Assessment: A better start to life for every child, Sept 2012 Baxter, M. Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Key information about wards relevant to childcare planning²⁷

North East Planning Area (GLA Planning Area 1):

Belmont has 4.1% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 29% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (47%)
- White British (30%)
- White Other (11%)

For the 71% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is low (less than 4%) and part time work is undertaken by 29% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for less than 5% of all households.

Canons has 3.5% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 87% from 2001- 2011. **Canons is one of the fastest growing wards in Harrow.**

English proficiency is very high with less than% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (40%)
- Asian or Asian British (24%)
- White Other (12%)

For the 71% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is 3.5% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 5.1% of all households. The proportion is increasing.

Stanmore Park has 3.17% of children aged 0-4 years. This is the lowest number of children aged 0-4 years in Harrow. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 34% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (47%)
- Asian or Asian British (29%)
- Other White (10%)

For the 67% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is approximately 4% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for close to 6% of all households and are increasing proportionate to all households.

North West Planning Area (GLA Planning Area 2):

Pinner has 3.2% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 15% from 2001- 2011.

²⁷ See London borough of Harrow, 2015 Indices of Deprivation

English proficiency is very high with less than half of 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (52%)
- Asian or Asian British (27%)
- White Other (10%)

For the 69% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is less than 4% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for just over 6% of all households and are increasing proportionate to all households.

Pinner South has 4.3% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 35% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is very high with less than half of 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (52%)
- Asian or Asian British (33%)
- White Other (8%)

For the 72% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is less than 4% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for just over 5% of all households and are increasing proportionate to all households.

Hatch End has 3.6% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 12% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (48%)
- Asian or Asian British (33%)
- White Other (9%)

For the 71% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is close to 4% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for less than 5% of all households and are decreasing slightly as a proportion of all households.

Harrow Weald has 3.5% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 40% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (41%)
- Asian or Asian British (31%)
- White Other (11%)

For the 69% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is less than 4% and part time work is undertaken by 29% of all residents aged 18 years or older. **Lone parent households with dependent children account for 8.5% of all households and is increasing. Harrow Weald ranks fourth for lone parent households with dependent children in Harrow.**

Headstone North has 3.8% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 22% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (39%)
- White British (31%)
- White Other (12%)

For the 73% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is close to 4% and part time work is undertaken by 26% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for less than 5% of all households and are increasing slightly as a proportion of all households.

South East Planning Area (GLA Planning Area 3):

Edgware has 3.78% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 55% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with close to 1.4% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (48%)
- White Other (18%)
- White British (17%)

For the 71% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is 5% and part time work is undertaken by 29% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 7% of all households. The proportion is increasing.

Kenton East has 3.7% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 8% from 2001- 2011. Kenton East has the second lowest number of children aged 0-4 years in Harrow.

English proficiency is less high than most other parts of the borough with close to 2% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (61%)
- White British (14%)
- White Other (12%)

For the 70% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is close to 5% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 7.5% of all households and are increasing slightly.

Kenton West has 3.8% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 4% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is less high than most other parts of the borough with close to 1.5% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (42%)
- White British (23%)
- White Other (14%)
- Black or Black British (13%)

For the 72% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is over 6% and part time work is undertaken by 26% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for just over 4% of all households and are decreasing proportionate to all households.

Queensbury has 4.04% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 25% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with close to 1.4% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (62%)
- White British (13%)
- White Other (12%)

For the 69% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is less than 4% and part time work is undertaken by 30% of all residents aged 18 years or older. LONE parent/carer households with dependent children account for just over 7% of all households and are increasing proportionate to all households.

South West Planning Area (GLA Planning Area 4):

Harrow on the Hill has 3.37% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 40% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (35%)
- White Other (34%)
- White British (13%)

For the 70% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is close to 4% and part time work is undertaken by 25% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for less than 6% of all households and is decreasing.

Rayners Lane has 4.09% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 16% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is very high with less than half of 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (55%)
- White British (27%)
- White Other (8%)

For the 70% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is less than 4% and part time work is undertaken by 30% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 4% of all households and are decreasing proportionate to all households.

Roxbourne has 4.51% of children aged 0-4 years. **Roxbourne is the second youngest ward with 12.5 per cent of its residents aged 0-7 years.**

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (46%) with the highest concentration of Other Asian residents with 22.1% and where this is growing quickly (up from 8.1% within the ward in 2001).
- White British (25%)
- Black or Black British (14%)

Roxbourne ranks 2nd of all wards for income deprivation affecting children and for employment deprivation in Harrow. Lone parent households with dependent children account for over 11% of all households and are increasing proportionate to all households. Roxbourne ranks 1st for all lone parent households with dependent children.

For the 68% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is close to 6% and part time work is undertaken by 30% of all residents aged 18 years or older.

Roxeth has 4.36% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 11% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with about 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (47%)
- White British (23%)
- Other White (11%)

For the 71% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is approximately 5% and part time work is undertaken by 30% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 7% of all households and are decreasing proportionate to all households.

West Harrow has 3.72% of children aged 0-4 years. The slowest growth for any ward in numbers of children aged 0-4 years is West Harrow. The number increased by 5% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (40%)
- White British (32%)
- White Other (12%)

For the 72% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is close to 4% and part time work is undertaken by 27% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 6% of all households and are increasing slightly.

Central Planning Area (GLA Planning Area 5):

Greenhill has 3.35% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 92% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (41%)
- White Other (26%)
- White British (16%)

For the 73% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is less than 5% and part time work is undertaken by 23% of all residents aged 18 years or older. Lone parent households with dependent children account for approximately 6.5% of all households. The proportion is increasing.

Headstone South has 3.8% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 30% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with less than 1% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- White British (31%)
- Asian or Asian British (24%)
- White Other (12%)

For the 73% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is 4.5% and part time work is undertaken by 26% of all residents aged 18 years or older. LONE parent households with dependent children account for approximately 6.5% of all households and are increasing.

Marlborough has 3.9% of children aged 0-4 years. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 72% from 2001- 2011. **Marlborough is one of the four fastest growing wards in Harrow and has the 3rd highest number of children aged 0-4 years.**

English proficiency is high with approximately 1.4% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (42%) with 24% Indian and 11% Other Asian
- White British (23%)
- White Other (10%)

For the 72% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is over 6% and part time work is undertaken by 28% of all residents aged 18 years or older. **Lone parent households with dependent children account for 9% of all households and are increasing proportionate to all households. This is the 3rd highest level of lone parent households.**

Wealdstone has 4.79% of children aged 0-4 years. **Wealdstone is one of the four fastest growing wards and ranks 1st within Harrow for 0-7 year olds, with 13% of its usual resident population aged 0-7 years.** This compares to Harrow, 11.5% overall. The numbers of children aged 0-4 years increased by 82% from 2001- 2011.

English proficiency is high with close to 1.4% of the population who cannot speak English and the primary ethnicities of its population are:

- Asian or Asian British (39%)
- White British (25%)
- Black or Black British (15%) and is much higher than 8.2% in Harrow overall

For the 69% of residents that are economically active, unemployment is over 6% and part time work is undertaken by 29% of all residents aged 18 years or older. **Lone parent households with dependent children account for more than 10% of all households and Wealdstone ranks second amongst all wards for lone parent households with dependent children.**

Wealdstone ranks first for income deprivation affecting children of any ward in Harrow and first for employment deprivation of any ward in Harrow.

Appendix 2: Profile of families sharing perspectives through survey

Harrow Council conducted a survey with 337 parents/carers to understand their perspectives on childcare. This appendix sets out the profile of those 337 families.

Where families live

The table below shows the profile of respondents at a Planning Area level.

Planning Area (PA No.)	No of respondents	% total respondents	No of Children	% total children
North East (PA1)	34	10%	60	13%
North West (PA2)	55	16%	94	21%
South East (PA3)	21	6%	32	7%
South West (PA4)	32	9%	56	12%
Central Planning Area (PA5)	43	13%	75	16%
Missing postcode	152	45%	140	31%
TOTAL	337	100%	457	100%

The table below shows the profile of respondents at ward level.

Planning Area (PA No.)	Ward	No of respondents	% total respondents	No of Children	% total Children
North East (PA1)	Belmont	10	3%	20	4%
	Canons	12	4%	18	4%
	Stanmore Park	12	4%	22	5%
North West (PA2)	Harrow Weald	12	4%	19	4%
	Hatch End	10	3%	19	4%
	Headst1 North	7	2%	11	2%
	Pinner	20	6%	33	7%
	Pinner South	6	2%	12	3%
South East (PA3)	Edgware	7	2%	9	2%
	Queensbury	5	1%	7	2%
	Kenton East	4	1%	7	2%
	Kenton West	5	1%	9	2%
South West (PA4)	Harrow on the Hill	3	1%	5	1%
	Rayners Lane	3	1%	5	1%
	Roxbourne	9	3%	15	3%
	Roxeth	5	1%	13	3%
	West Harrow	12	4%	18	4%
Central Planning Area (PA5)	Greenhill	17	5%	28	6%
	Headst1 South	8	2%	15	3%
	Marlborough	9	3%	15	3%

Planning Area (PA No.)	Ward	No of respondents	% total respondents	No of Children	% total Children
	Wealdstone	9	3%	17	4%
Missing postcode	Missing	152	45%	140	31%
Total	Total	337	100%	457	100%

What we know about these families?

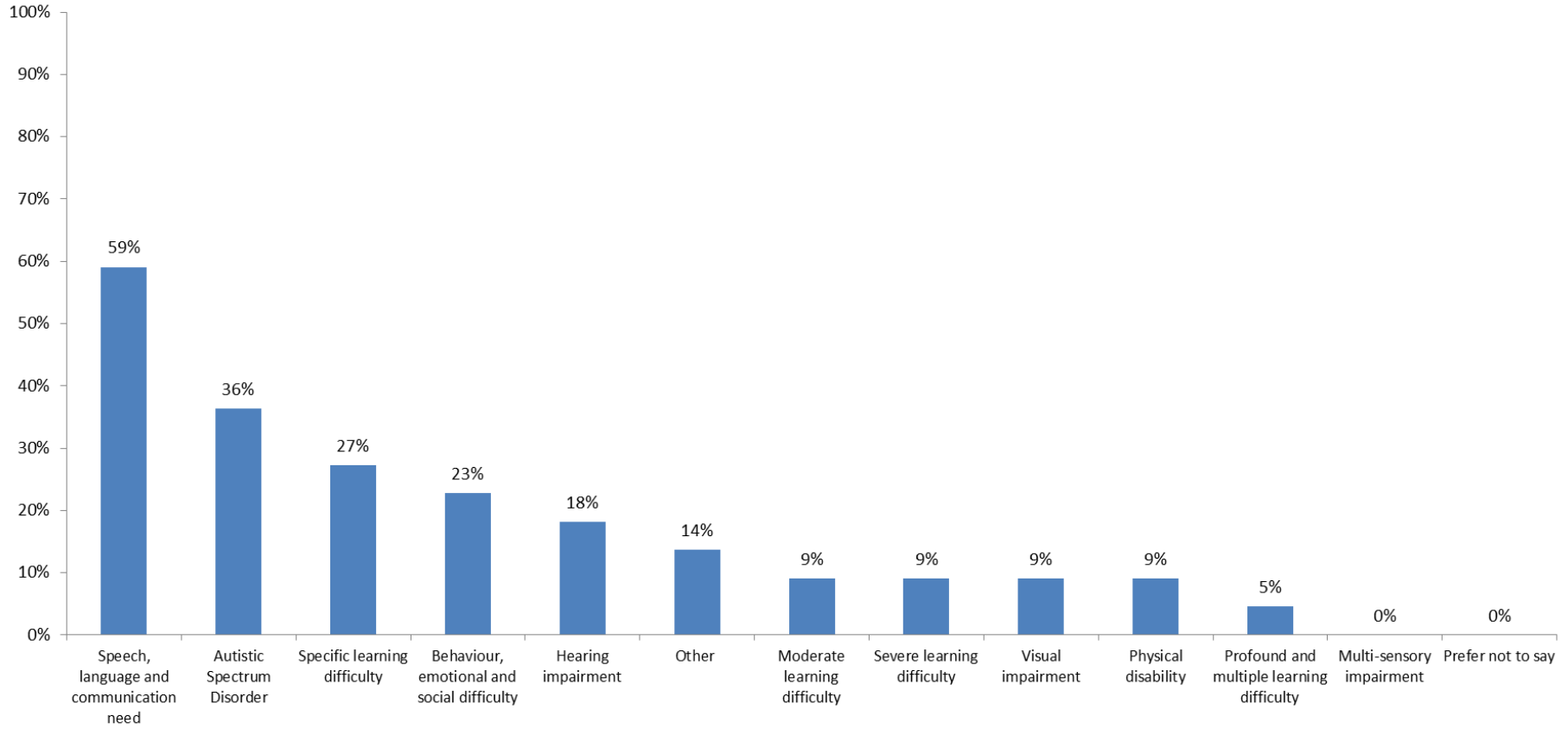
Locality	Demographic	Number of families
Disability	Number with children with additional needs/ disability	22
	Number of parents/carers with additional needs/ disability	6
Employment status	2 Parents/Carers in Full-Time Employment	35
	1 Parent/Carer in Full-Time Employment, Other not in Full-Time Employment	122
	Other	180
Household income	£0 to £10,000	24
	£10,001 to £20,000	21
	£20,001 to £30,000	22
	£30,001 to £40,000	24
	£40,001 to £50,000	27
	£50,001 to £60,000	21
	£60,000 and over	54
	No response	144
Dual parent or lone parent household	Lone parent	24
	Dual parent	196
	No Response	117
Number of children	0	61
	1	129
	2	122
	3	17
	4+	8
Ethnicity	African	3
	Bangladeshi	3
	White British	50
	Caribbean	5
	Chinese	3
	Indian	64
	Irish	4
	Other	5

Locality	Demographic	Number of families
	Other Afghan	1
	Other American	1
	Other Asian	15
	Other Black	1
	Other English	1
	Other Iranian	1
	Other Mixed	6
	Other north African Moroccan	1
	Other Romanian	1
	Other White	15
	Pakistani	16
	White	19
	White and Asian	2
	White and Black Caribbean	1
	No response	119
Age	16-21 years	3
	22-29 years	39
	30-39 years	145
	40-49 years	32
	50-59 years	2
	60 years or over	1

SEN/Additional Needs

22 children have an additional need or SEN. The majority of these children had multiple needs (12 out of 22 children), with some children having up to six areas of need. The most common additional need was in terms of speech, language and communication (13 out of 22 children), followed by seven children on the autistic spectrum.

Table 24: SEN or Additional needs profile for children



Appendix 3: Profile of families by area

Demographic Profile		North East (PA1)	North West (PA2)	South East (PA3)	South West (PA4)	Central Planning Area (PA5)	Missing postcode	TOTAL
No. of respondents		34	55	21	32	43	152	337
SEN/ Add needs	No SEN	97%	93%	90%	94%	93%	93%	93%
	SEN	3%	7%	10%	6%	7%	7%	7%
Working F/T	Both	15%	9%	14%	31%	12%	5%	10%
	Partner	53%	55%	38%	22%	44%	13%	30%
	Respondent	9%	5%	19%	13%	7%	2%	6%
	No-1	24%	31%	29%	34%	37%	80%	53%
LONE/ Dual	Dual	88%	94%	81%	88%	90%	88%	89%
	Lone	12%	6%	19%	13%	10%	13%	11%
Income	Higher than £40kpa	58%	58%	42%	45%	49%	59%	53%
	Lower than £40k pa	42%	42%	58%	55%	51%	41%	47%
Ethnicity	White British	12%	34%	14%	19%	23%	26%	23%
	Other	88%	66%	86%	81%	77%	74%	77%
Disabled	Not disabled	100%	94%	95%	100%	95%	100%	97%
	Disabled	0%	6%	5%	0%	5%	0%	3%
Age	16-21 years	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	1%
	22-29 years	21%	14%	19%	16%	21%	17%	18%
	30-39 years	65%	63%	57%	72%	74%	60%	65%
	40-49 years	12%	22%	24%	9%	5%	17%	14%
	50-59 years	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	2%	1%
	60 years or over	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Appendix 4: Parent focus groups and interviews

Total of 32 parents/groups of parents/carers spoken to of where:

- 50% did not have English as a first language
- 40% came from Black or Minority Ethnic Groups, (70% if including Polish and Romanian parents)
- 7% had children with additional needs.

Cedars Centre, 25th January 2016 - in reception

1. Mother with three year old son, been coming to nursery here since October 2015. She found out about the centre through her Health Visitor who had suggested Cedars. Previously she used a childminder but she wanted to improve her child's ability to socialise with other children. In terms of quality, she is looking for friendly staff, who she feels are trustworthy. She likes updates on how her child is doing, and anything he has done for the first time. She likes to know they're watching him and taking an interest in him.

She wants to get a job. She and her son have only recently left a women's refuge. Her son's father was violent.

Prior to using the Children's Centre she used a childminder who "was amazing". Came at 7.30am, and would drop him home at 6.30-7pm. She was very flexible.

The Children's Centre is less flexible, but she appreciates it for different reasons. She wanted her child to socialise more, plus she feels the staff are very good. At her first session they gave her directions, as she was new to the area, to other local facilities (libraries etc.), plus they have a key worker attached to the centre, who she feels isn't just there for the children, but really helps the parents/carers too.

She is aware of the grants available for childcare for 2/3/4 year olds and her son's childcare is paid for through this.

2. Not willing to speak. Father understands more about childcare. Mother has poor English.
3. Poor English – wasn't her son, was her sister's. She was just dropping him off.
4. Mother with two children, aged two and five. The five year old is in the reception class at Cedar Manors School. The year old attended nursery at Cedars, and the two year old has been coming to nursery since September. She chose Cedars because it had a good Ofsted, and it was convenient, being halfway between her and her in-laws. In terms of signs of quality, she likes to see somewhere where children are allowed to "just get on with things", her son likes telling stories and she likes a place where they'll let him do that and encourage the children to learn through play.

Her motivation for bringing her children to nursery is that she needs to work, mainly for her mental health! She's "not one of these people who could spend all week with the children". In terms of flexibility, this is mainly being provided by her work at present, allowing her to get in late and leave early, or through help from family close by.

In terms of affordability, she feels the cost is reasonable. It could be expensive if they'd been using it full time since birth. She is aware of the grants available for childcare – because of their income she is disqualified from the grant for three year olds. Her two year old will qualify for the following year, but she believes the grants are inflexible in how the 15 hours can be used, so she is in two minds as to whether to take advantage of it.

5. Mother with three children aged five (with cerebral palsy), two years old, and five months old. In terms of other types of childcare, she used Home-Start when the five year old was younger. She has just started using Cedars this January. Her eldest now attends school. English is not first language.

In terms of quality, she's looking for safety first. Her daughter had a bad nappy rash, and she told the session leader, who didn't do anything about it. This was disappointing for the mother. Previously she used the nursery at Stanmore Children's Centre for her eldest son. She said the service there was "5 star" and they had a specialist SEND key worker who was very good for her son.

Her motivation for bringing her two year old to the Children's Centre is because she is very busy at home looking after the children and wants to find some time for herself. Her youngest daughter, at only five months, needs a lot of her attention, and her son, although he is at school, is only at school part time. In addition, due to his disability he is often ill and so requires looking after at home – recently he had a chest infection which kept him off school. She has a carer for her son for three days a week, six hours a day – Thursday, Friday and Saturday. She herself has developed health problems, and her GP has booked her in for two operations.

6. Mother with two children, daughter aged three years and a son aged 2.5 years. Her son comes to the Children's Centre for the Cedars music group and sometimes for the stay and play sessions. She does not use other forms of childcare, and relies heavily on her parents/carers who live close by. English not first language.

Her reason for coming to the centre is that it is well run and very friendly, while not being too crowded. Importantly her son enjoys it! He particularly enjoys singing. It's important to her that he is in a safe environment with people she can trust.

She doesn't currently work but is hoping to go back when he goes to school. She finds the Children's Centre hours sufficiently flexible for her needs – she doesn't tend to go out after 6pm anyway so doesn't need longer hours for child care.

Her daughter goes to nursery at Bushy, and previously used to go to the nursery at Stanmore Baptist Church – it was a really good nursery but has closed down. She is not using the entitlement to free childcare for either of her children.

7. South Korean mum with two children, one aged years old and one aged eight months. She is looking for both a nursery for her eldest, and sessions to go to with her eight month old. Her reason for using child care is to provide good experiences for her children, she wants both them and her to make friends – she has been in the UK just over one year.

She wants to use the Children's Centre because it's free. She doesn't really know what else is available. A friend recommended this Children's Centre for her. Today is her first time visiting it. In terms of quality indicators she is hoping to make friends and learn more about English culture.

8. Polish mother with four children, boys aged six years and 4.5 years old who both are autistic, and two daughters aged two years and less than one year old. She doesn't currently use any childcare other than the services provided at the Children's Centre. She has no family living close by, and is a full time mum.

She and her family moved to the UK over two years ago, and initially were living outside Harrow, where they went to the local Children's Centre twice a week. It had a good sense of community and a nice atmosphere – mum would share experiences at the Children's Centre and she liked that. She's found Harrow a little more "London" – more closed and not as friendly.

She really like the Cedars Centre: it's a good size, and is quite busy with a variety of activities. The only downside for her is lack of access to outside space.

Affordability of child care is definitely an issue for her with four children – they are currently reliant on her husband's salary. She is vaguely aware of the grants available for childcare, but believes the family income just exceeds the ceiling for the 2 year old grant. Her two year old will go to nursery in September. Ideally she'd have sent her earlier, as she's already at the age where she's getting bored at home, needs more stimulation. She'd like to see more flexibility on when children start.

Her two eldest boys are autistic, and for them they chose private nurseries which were expensive but good for what they needed – small groups where they could have individual attention and a variety of activities. The ratio of adults to children was max 1:4. Both boys are doing well and are at mainstream schools.

In terms of quality, Ofsted doesn't mean much to her. When she was looking for support for her sons she was looking for specific things – small groups, ratio of adults to children. For mainstream provision, she's looking for hands on learning, visual and imaginative play, she's not a fan of computers and believes they should be introduced as late as possible!

9. Two Romanian mothers, the first with two children aged one year nine months and two year 10 months and the second mother with a son aged two years old. They use Children's Centres. Her reason for using them is that she believes it is good for her son to interact with others, learn English, and helps her learn English too.

She has been in England for two years. She likes coming to the Children's Centre because she enjoys being able to spend time with her son in a group. She is not using the entitlements to free childcare – at present she only uses around 6/8 hours of childcare per week in the pre-school at the Children's Centre.

She is a part time cleaner and finds it hard to fit work around caring for her son. She believes if she were going to use more childcare it would be expensive.

10. French mother, with one child, aged five months. She started coming to the Children's Centre when pregnant at six months to see the midwife. At present she uses the 'movers and shakers' sessions. She likes the staff, the fact that the centre is organised and clean, and that they provide a variety of activities for different aged children. She heard it's good to go to childcare to help children socialise – at present the baby is quite clingy and cries if taken from her mother.

She isn't using any other forms of childcare at present – her mum lives close by and helps out. At present she is in the final year of studying for her law degree, and her husband works, so having her mum close by to help is very useful.

She comes to the Cedars Centre around three times per week. She's planning to go back to work in July, initially just for 16hrs per week until she finds her dream job. At present she's not looking at formal childcare– her mum will look after the child.

Flexibility is very important to her, especially currently while she is studying, and often has last minute meetings with supervisors, or last minute assignments to complete with less than a week's notice. Her mum comes in very useful.

In terms of affordability she heard from one mum at the centre that she was paying £1400 per month for her 2.5 year old daughter, as both her and her husband were working full time. She believes this sounds very expensive, but she hasn't yet done any research herself.

Whitefriars Children's Centre – 25 January 2016 – sat in on messy play session

11. Pakistani mother, with 12 month old daughter, lived here for two years. Goes to Hillview and Whitefriars. She was going to Hillview to get her daughter weighed, and found out about classes through that. She heard about Hillview through college – she was a full time student before her daughter was born and they signposted her to the Hillview Centre.

She comes to Whitefriars because Hillview only have morning sessions – this doesn't fit with her daughter's routine at present, so she comes to Whitefriars for afternoon sessions. Plus she wanted her daughter to socialise; she felt she was watching too much TV at home!

She's not working and has no immediate plans to as she feels her daughter is too young. She is on a visa from Pakistan (married to a British citizen), and believes that means she is ineligible for the childcare entitlement.

12. Mother, civil servant, with two children, one daughter aged 2.5 years, the other two months old. Mother previously used a nursery for her two year old, but the child did not like it and so uses the Children's Centre pre-school instead. She's going to try her at nursery once she's a bit older – in September she'll go to a private nursery when mother goes back to work. Her youngest child she'll leave with a grandmother for childcare at that point.

What she looks for in childcare changes as her children get older. At first, when her daughter was aged one year, all she wanted was to know was that she was in a caring, nurturing environment. Now she's looking for something that will provide more stimulation. She does look at Ofsted ratings, but prefers mainly to rely on word of mouth, and to use centres that are close and convenient for her.

She isn't eligible for the childcare entitlement for two year olds as the combined family income is over the threshold. She also prefers not to pay for a block of sessions up front, as she doesn't feel able to commit – children are often unwell, or plans change and they ended up missing sessions which is a waste of money. Per session she doesn't feel the cost of those one off sessions she goes to is too bad – £7-8 per session.

13. Iraqi mother, with one son aged five years, and a daughter aged three years. The daughter will go to nursery in March of this year at Whitefriars, the son is in reception at Whitefriars School. The family has been in the UK for one year. The reason she uses the Children's Centre is she believes learning through play is very important, and she wants her daughter to learn English. She comes to the Whitefriars centre every week, sometimes two or three times per week. It is very convenient for her, as she lives close by and it takes her four minutes to walk.

She herself wants to learn English, and feels that coming to the centre is one way to build her confidence. She has family in the area that helps with child care two uncles and aunts. Her husband works. At present she is not working but she would like to.

Cedars Centre 26th January 2016 - morning in reception

14. Spanish speaking father with two sons, aged 2.5 years and 7 years old. Eldest is in year two at Cedar Manors School, and previously used the nursery at the Cedars Centre.

He uses the Cedars Centre because it is close to where the family live, they knew the staff, and he had heard from neighbours that it was good. Also he wants his son to engage with lots of other cultures from across Harrow and he feels the groups are very mixed at the centre which he likes. Both he and his wife are working so they find it hard to fit work and childcare around each other. At present they only use morning preschool sessions at the centre, and only twice a week. At present they have to pay, as their income is over the threshold, but once their son turns three they'll use more sessions given the funded entitlement. They find the cost fine to manage at present, at £30 per week for two days of sessions, but it would of course be more expensive if they were to use full time.

15. Pashto and Derhi speaking Afghan mother, with two children, aged 5.5 years and 3 years. She is here dropping off her three year old for preschool. She likes the preschool because it is good and close to her house. Her youngest started attending aged 1.5 years, and they now come every day of the week. The child is very happy and he learns English very quickly.

She is not currently working, but is hoping to go to English classes to improve her English when she is able to fit it in.

16. Mother with one child who is 21 months old. Arrived flustered thinking she was late for a 9.30am session, but was actually early for a 10am!

She comes to the Cedars Centre very regularly, normally every day except when the child's naps interfere. It's very convenient for her, being only five minute drive from home. She uses the Cedars Centre because she finds it very flexible in meeting her needs.

She's not working at the moment. She is looking to go back to work, but is looking for part time work and is finding it hard to fit this around caring for her child. Her family is fortunate in not having to pay a mortgage so she feels better off than some.

Her daughter will start at the Montessori nursery from April, and will go daily from 9am-12pm.

17. Grandmother bringing her grandson, but she also has one adopted son aged six and two older foster children. She has used a range of types of childcare, including nursery for her adopted son, playgroups, and summer camps.

At the preschool, she thinks the staff are friendly and welcoming, she brings her grandson twice a week. In general she feels more should be done to make play schemes affordable – she doesn't feel they offer enough concessions.

Hillview Hub Children's Centre, 26th January - late morning/early afternoon

18. Australian mother, with 9.5 month old daughter. Has been coming here since child was three months old. She has no family here, and her husband works abroad too. She was feeling lonely and didn't know where to start in terms of making friends.

She's not working at present, and doesn't plan to as her daughter is too young. Her husband provides for the family. She uses the Children's Centres because they're free. The only session she pays for is Gymboree which is a more active session.

19. Eastern European mother with limited English, with three children, aged 14 years, 10 years and a daughter aged nine months. Today is her first time visiting the Children's Centre. She wants her daughter to see other children and learn to socialise and for herself she enjoys the time spent playing with her daughter.

She is not currently working and is not sure whether she wants to go back. She lives in Sudbury – it is important to her that her childcare is close by.

20. Two mothers, with children aged just under one year old, who had been going to the Pinner Centre until it closed, and at that point last summer starting coming to Hillview.

They use the preschool for two days each week. In terms of affordability, one mum is working part-time, one day per week to pay for it (the other is not working, but partner's salary is paying), and has family in the area who are helping. She feels most of her earnings are going on childcare, but the reason she does it is she feels it's important for her son to interact with others, and for a whole day rather than just for a couple of hours.

21. Mother with two daughters, aged eight and four. She is here with the four year old who will start school in September 2016. In addition to Hillview she uses a playgroup at a local church. She used to use the "Iceland nursery" but didn't like it so left.

She wants her four year old to learn. She's looking for sessions that challenge her daughter and help her to learn. She's been coming to the Hillview afternoon playgroup sessions for around 6 months. Ofsted ratings are important to her but more important was that there was a school attached.

She's not currently working and is in the process of being evicted by her landlord (who wants to develop the block she lives in) and so is looking for housing. She feels there aren't enough hours in the day for childcare, working and sorting out living arrangements. She is aware of the grants for childcare for four year olds, but feels like three hours wouldn't be enough in a day, and also that she couldn't trust just anyone to look after her child.

22. Mother with two children, aged 3.5 years old and eight months. She uses the preschool for her 3.5 year old. She comes because she lives next door, so it was very convenient, and also she'd heard good things about it. She doesn't use any other forms of childcare.

She likes the atmosphere, feels it is a warm and welcoming environment. Ofsted is important to her but not as important as the feeling she has about staff/environment. She had spoken to staff at this Centre before she started coming and liked them. By contrast, she also spoke to staff at some other nurseries and didn't get a good feeling. Also many nurseries were full so she prefers to come here.

She is aware of the NEG 3 grant and is using it to fund her 3.5 year olds preschool sessions. She's not currently working but is planning to go back in September. She hasn't yet explored how flexible childcare will be to fit around her needs.

Cedars Centre, January 26th, mid afternoon

23. Grandparents/carers bringing their granddaughter aged two. Girl also goes to nursery in Bushy, and has been going to nursery since she was one year old. In terms of quality, they are looking at

the ratio of adults to children, whether the nursery uses the EYFS framework, and how stimulated and happy the children are.

They use this Centre because it is on the way to work. The mother went back to work after nine months so they do a lot of the childcare. They have heard about the NEG 2 grants but their grandchild is ineligible due to parental income.

In terms of flexibility, they need sessions that start relatively early in the morning so the Centre timetable works for them, and it is also convenient. They have the impression from word of mouth that childcare is expensive, but it depends how many days a week are being used.

Stanmore Children's Centre, 27th January 2016, morning

24. Group standing outside waiting to get into 10am stay and play session. Two childminders, plus three mums, attached to total of five children and one baby. The two childminders are employed because the parents/carers of the children are at work. Of the mums that are not currently in paid work, one was working until the birth of her second child but she will now wait until her child starts at nursery before going back.

There was collective agreement among the group that childcare and nursery fees are very expensive, and flexibility is limited for those going back to work.

25. Polish Grandfather to seven grandchildren, all of whom use (or used, some are now too old) the Stanmore nursery sessions every day. They use it because they live close by, plus they have always had a good experience. They also like the fact that Stanmore has well protected outside space for the nursery children to use.

Hillview Children's Centre, 27th January 2016, late morning

26. Mother with two children, one boy aged six, girl aged four. Daughter started nursery here in September, and prior to that her son came to the afterschool club here. She uses this Centre because it is on the way to school, so convenient, plus she had heard really good things. She feels they really look after the children here, staff are very enthusiastic and her daughter is happy, which is the main thing.

In terms of flexibility, in general she feels there isn't enough, and doesn't yet feel like she can go back to work. She moved to Harrow from Fulham, and feels like she was spoilt for flexibility in Fulham. Maximum hours she can find in Harrow is 9am-3pm, which when you add on travelling time for work doesn't leave much in between.

On grants, she is using the 15 hours per week for her four year old, and as she's not working she's fine with the morning and afternoon sessions. She would like to see more flexibility on age, and when she could start. The family couldn't afford private childcare and she feels like her daughter missed a whole year of interaction with other children. They did use some playgroups but this is only for short sessions, and not the same as a nursery.