

Holiday childcare and activities



Key learning for sustainability

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Introduction

For many parents, finding and sustaining paid work is dependent on the availability of good quality, affordable childcare that is accessible at the times when they need it. During the school holidays this can become even more of an issue for families. Having access to suitable provision at these times supports families both in enabling parents to work as well as providing opportunities for children to try new experiences, gain skills and have fun in a safe environment.

In 2010-11 the Government funded a holiday childcare provision pilot to test sustainable solutions to key barriers to accessing suitable, affordable holiday provision. The pilot aimed to improve awareness of provision, increase take up among families and improve strategic management and coordination of provision.

The pilot ran in 19 local authorities across England: Bristol; Calderdale; Cornwall; Darlington; Ealing; Lambeth; Norfolk; Northamptonshire; Nottinghamshire; Oxfordshire; Portsmouth; Redcar and Cleveland; Rotherham; Shropshire; Sutton; Stockport; Telford; Walsall; and Warrington. These authorities encompass a mix of deprived and less deprived areas, urban and rural areas, large and small authorities, two tier and unitary authorities.

This publication draws on the learning and good practice from the pilots to highlight information and guidance for local authorities and childcare/activity providers, including voluntary and community sector providers, on delivering sustainable holiday childcare services in the new 'localism' environment. A considerable amount of innovation and learning took place during the pilot – this publication includes a flavour of some of the key learning, excellent work and projects undertaken by each of the pilots. Further details are available at www.learning-exchange.org.uk.

"I have been fortunate in that I have access to a holiday scheme run by the local Sure Start centre. However it only runs for the first four weeks of the holidays, opening at 8:30 and closing at 16:30. Try telling my boss that I need to work for an hour less each day as well as needing two weeks off during school holidays! Also, none of the schemes take children once they're out of primary school. Not all 11 year olds are sensible enough to be left at home alone all day."

Parent, Manchester

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CASE STUDY: Calderdale

Developing demand to support sustainability

Calderdale worked to address the longer term sustainability of the childcare market by targeting families from areas of high deprivation for taster sessions. Many of these areas were not normally perceived as potential areas of demand for the childcare market.

In partnership with family support teams, they identified families based on level of need and the parents' or carers' potential to access work or training in the long term. All the families were offered support from Jobcentre Plus on returning to work or training, better-off calculations and tax credits.

Overall, this was found to be a relatively low cost project taking into account the impact and the numbers of families supported. Another benefit was that feedback from providers was also positive. They enjoyed working with the children and could see the difference they made to them in a very short time period.

Key learning points from the pilots include:

- ➔ The benefits of children and young people influencing the content of holiday provision to meet their needs
- ➔ The need to develop innovative solutions to holiday provision for older children
- ➔ The importance of appropriately trained staff
- ➔ Identifying ways to support settings to be more inclusive and better meet the needs of disabled children
- ➔ The need for local authorities, schools and providers to really know and understand what parents and children in different communities want
- ➔ The benefits of effective business advice and support to providers
- ➔ The importance of maximising opportunities for parents to use the childcare element of working tax credit for holiday childcare and activities
- ➔ Examples of how partnerships and other strategies for pooling resources can both cut costs and improve services

Supply and demand of holiday childcare

Under the Childcare Act 2006 local authorities in England have a duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for working parents – including parents who require childcare in order to take up work or education and training to help them obtain work. Thus local authorities need to assess the demand for different types of childcare across the authority and by sub-area.

This assessment needs to ascertain the number of places, how places will be funded, when they are required, where and how frequently, and any special requirements such as support for disabled children, ESOL support or parental requirements, e.g. to be offered at times that suit shift work hours. The responsibilities around market management also require local authorities to take a strategic lead in the local childcare market to plan, support and commission childcare in partnership with local private, voluntary and independent sector providers.

Pilots recognised that the national data identifying insufficient holiday childcare provision, as gathered from regional childcare sufficiency assessments, needed to be put into a local context. They worked to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the details, issues, challenges and needs within their own local communities. They analysed what might help or hinder the development of sustainable holiday childcare and used the outcomes to complement and build on existing childcare sufficiency assessments and resulting action plans.

Pilots focused on innovative ways to:

- Increase the supply of holiday childcare provision, both generally and for specific groups
- Develop demand from parents/children to support sustainability and employment
- Provide effective market management to support providers and address issues of access, affordability, quality and sustainability.

Increasing supply

Children aged 8 and upwards, in particular those aged 11–14, and disabled children and young people were found to be the groups most commonly lacking suitable holiday childcare and activities.

In order to achieve sustainability of provision tailored to older children, of which there can be limited experience and expectations, the pilots found it important to work on the demand as well as the supply. Demand was successfully stimulated in some areas by offering holiday activity taster sessions that were well received.

Work carried out in some areas with the families of disabled children highlighted a particular need for those parents to have the opportunity to make real choices about their childcare options. The supply of full day (8am–6pm) provision for disabled children during the holidays could be very patchy. However, only by offering full days could parents start to consider returning to work or training. Often there was also a benefit for local authorities in developing and extending trusted, quality provision for this group.

Meeting demand for holiday childcare was found to be a particular issue in areas of deprivation (including rural or where there is a high density of children). To increase, or even to maintain, supply in these areas, it was suggested that providers may need robust ongoing strategic support including financial

and professional advice. And many of the pilots found that there tended to be sufficient supply of holiday provision in areas which were potentially profitable and sustainable. However, this was not always the case – in some more affluent areas supply was poor because demand had not been adequately assessed.

Overall, pilots found that raising awareness amongst parents, providers and communities, providing professional support and financial advice were the most effective ways of increasing the number of providers offering holiday childcare. Probably unsurprisingly, new holiday provision was much more likely to be developed by providers already offering other types of childcare or activities.

Market management

Local knowledge was identified by the pilots as being a key issue in terms of managing the market. In particular, the importance of making sure that extended services in and around schools (that are still often free to access) do not displace and threaten the sustainability of local childcare providers.

Ways of maintaining this balance included:

- Local authorities making schools and governors aware of the authority's sufficiency duties so they could make decisions about when and how to develop their own provision in a strategic and joined-up way
- Organising market place type events where schools could meet providers, to actively support and develop partnerships between schools and providers
- Considering implementation of transparent charging policies for all activities

Other points highlighted by local authorities as supporting effective market management were:

- The need for a strategic approach in terms of identifying local priorities linked to other strategies such as sustainable communities, economic regeneration and child poverty
- The importance of supporting appropriate training for holiday childcare and activity staff
- The benefits of bringing providers together through network meetings



Strategic co-ordination and partnership working

Networks

In most areas, provider network meetings were seen as a useful way to link up with settings for strategic co-ordination. Networks generally worked as forums for discussing opportunities, exploring demand and supply, sharing ideas and experiences and developing professional working partnerships and relationships. Popular and successful formats for the meetings covered areas such as service updates, networking opportunities, and good practice sharing tips and ideas about what worked well within settings.

Settings looking at provision for the over-8s were generally aware of the need to develop more age appropriate activities for older children. However, Calderdale also identified that until they built up to a viable number of older children to make this possible, any additional costs may have to be passed onto parents. They had the idea of supporting providers to develop a cluster delivery/network approach where settings come together to provide holiday activities. Calderdale saw that this could alleviate some of the problems and offered many potential benefits such as:

- Sharing of resources and equipment including premises and outdoor facilities
- Reduced costs including staff time spent planning activities
- Providers could benefit from group discounts or cheaper rates
- Children having a better time as they are able to meet other children their age
- Driving up quality as providers working together share best practice
- Making best use of staff skills from different settings ensuring a wider range of options/activities for young people

The idea was well received by the providers who recognised the potential benefits and the opportunities for a more sustainable model. They identified that a cluster agreement would need to be developed to clarify key issues such as responsibilities and policies. This in itself was also felt to be beneficial to settings and was likely to improve the quality of provision through shared learning.

Planning

The London Borough of Ealing found that potential holiday childcare providers could benefit from support to develop a strategic vision and approach to their business – helping them to decide on the most appropriate type of business, identify gaps in the current holiday childcare market in order to select a location, and develop a pricing plan suitable for the area. The authority found that the most effective way of providing information about gaps in the market was by providing access to and support to interpret visual/pictorial resources, for example Geographical Information Systems mapping.¹

¹ A geographic information system (GIS) enables users to view, understand, question, interpret and visualize data in many ways that reveal relationships, patterns and trends in the form of maps, globes, reports and charts.

Strategic links

Developing holiday childcare impacts on the planning and strategy of various agendas and teams within a local authority. To support the long term sustainability of the work undertaken by the holiday pilots there was a general acknowledgement of the importance of ensuring effective cross-team and cross-departmental communication. This included providing information to existing local authority teams such as workforce, inclusion and childcare sufficiency. In this way, learning is shared and effective work becomes strategically embedded going forward.

In addition to having an overall Lead Officer to co-ordinate the project, the London Borough of Lambeth identified strategic leads for each strand of their project at the outset. This meant that the appropriate officers had a knowledge of and responsibility for the outcomes most relevant to their particular service areas. They were able to shape and influence progress and direction based on specific knowledge within their particular strategic area and could cascade information to relevant teams. The project also benefited from the strand leads regularly meeting together as a group to update one another on progress and ensure that links, shared outcomes and overlaps between the different components were identified and integrated.

CASE STUDY: Oxfordshire

Maximising effective delivery

Oxfordshire County Council developed holiday activities for children and young people aged 8-16 in one area of the county. The provision was conceived and planned as a partnership involving a very large and diverse range of stakeholders including schools, the college, the town council, the police, a housing federation and RAF Brize Norton.

The provision aimed to provide a joined-up way of meeting a variety of needs and issues raised by children, parents and the various partners. These included the need:

- For more activities for the 8+ age group
- To raise the profile of and access to various community resources for local families
- To aid the transition for children approaching secondary school age
- To link with other providers to best support working parents in their childcare requirements
- To wrap around existing activity programmes to ensure that provision is complementary and not detrimental to existing provision.
- To link a number of stakeholders in order to maximise access to resources, funding streams, skills and knowledge

In order to achieve these aims a steering group was set up and funding was contributed by a range of partners. Seventy one children from 50 families, covering all of the target groups, attended 'Get Stuck In' during the two weeks and engaged in activities including climbing, street dance, drumming, archery and drama.

The feedback from children, families, partners and the community was overwhelmingly positive and it is hoped that the provision will run again over four weeks in summer 2011.

Commissioning

Important lessons learnt from the pilots on how to effectively commission childcare and activities included:

- The necessity to understand the needs of parents and children and to put outcomes at the heart of the process.
- The importance of ensuring that the commissioning procedure itself is clear for providers and that processes are not overly prescriptive (which can reduce the ability of the sector to innovate)
- The text of the specification must be clear and unambiguous
- Considering whether formal training is required to help providers understand the functions and navigate computerised procurement websites
- The need for a clear understanding of the difference between the procurement of goods and the commissioning of services for children and families
- Support for the sector to recognise and respond to the benefits of collaborative working, particularly regarding the submission of joint tenders commissions
- The potential benefits of parental participation on the commissioning panel and the need to consider and work to reduce any barriers to involvement. For example, one local authority planned to involve parents on their panel but because of the tight timescales of the pilot there was insufficient notice given to enable parents to get involved
- Developing systems to engage and consult a wide range of providers early on in the process and enabling two-way communication between the commissioner and the sector
- Seeking feedback in order to review the effectiveness of the commissioning process

Darlington found that presenting draft information about the commission to holiday providers well in advance of the formal commissioning process was extremely beneficial. It enabled providers to begin background research and to start to explore their ideas on what they could offer to meet the commission brief. Additionally, feedback from the information event helped to inform the final brief.

Partnerships

Almost all pilots highlighted the extensive benefits and huge range of possibilities presented by effective partnerships in developing sustainable holiday childcare and activities. Many of the local authorities who took part already had very positive and well established partnerships with the third sector. However, many found that this project enabled them to think even more broadly about whom other potential partners might be and enabled them to join up with a range of agencies that may not have previously been considered.

CASE STUDY: Walsall

Community partnership approach

Walsall's childcare sufficiency assessment identified that the take-up of childcare in the local authority was well below national average. Initiatives to overcome this issue previously mainly involved subsidising places which had led to a lack of understanding of the true costs and value of childcare in some areas.

In discussion with providers, it was found that sustainable solutions were needed for a number of underlying problems: a lack of detailed knowledge about what potential customers wanted, staffing issues and problems with fee recovery. An innovative partnership approach was adopted involving providers, the local authority, Walsave (the local credit union) and Wolverhampton University (Walsall campus).

To address gaps in market knowledge, providers were awarded small grants to undertake innovative consultation and awareness raising events through Sure Start Children's Centres, schools, places of worship, community centres and retail outlets. They were run on different days and at different times in order to reach as many parents as possible. Key learning included the need to provide advice and support on effective consultation methods to avoid questionnaires becoming the default approach.

In response to the staffing issues, Wolverhampton University established an employment agency providing internships, volunteering opportunities and possible employment to local students within the childcare sector. Students from the PE, Drama and Education departments were particularly targeted. The agency acted as a first port of call for providers seeking additional staffing and support at relatively low cost. It also provided students with valuable work-based experience and skills and is now firmly embedded into the University's learning portal.

The fee recovery issues were addressed through the innovative partnership with Walsave. The credit union provided financial advice and support to improve the financial literacy of the most vulnerable parents. Parents were also enabled to set up Walsave accounts and have the childcare element of their working tax credit paid in directly. Their childcare costs were then deducted at source and paid straight to the providers, significantly reducing their bad debts.

Developing responsive services to meet needs

The majority of the pilot local authorities recognised that parents and children both want provision that is challenging, interesting, stimulating and original.

Therefore, carrying out really effective consultation with children and parents regarding their childcare needs as well as involving them in the development and design of provision was identified as a key priority. Where this was done well, holiday childcare providers were able to plan services that were much more responsive to the needs of the local community, leading to a higher take up of services. This was particularly true for settings working with older children (aged 8 and above).

Tips for effective consultation

Norfolk carried out extensive consultation with children and young people as part of their pilot and came up with the following hints and tips:

- Best friends often have opposing views on key areas of childcare. Whilst it is essential to ascertain key trends it is important to remember that childcare has to appeal to the widest possible audience whilst also being flexible enough to meet individual needs. There is no 'one size fits all' approach.
- Consultation is only of use if those being asked understand the questions. Consider the age of the children and young people and their reading ability, and use simple language. Avoid jargon as well as leading and complicated questions.
- Children and young people need to see the value in what they are being asked to do and may not co-operate if they do not see the relevance to their lives. Also, questions where a particular response leads to further questions can result in children and young people changing their answers in order to complete questionnaires more quickly.
- The person asking the questions is fundamental to getting good quality data. Children and young people tend to be suspicious when a stranger is introduced. This can be particularly the case with looked-after children. Ideally, use someone already known to the children or allow time in advance to build up a rapport.
- Consider a variety of consultation methods and be creative. Questionnaires are often the least effective way of consulting!
- Reward children and young people for their time. Find something attractive to those who are being consulted. For example, when consulting children at the roller disco Norfolk rewarded them with glow sticks.
- Make sure the consultation is inclusive. Consider, for example, how rooms are set out and whether all children and young people are able to move around freely and join in activities.

CASE STUDY: Stockport

Supporting transition from primary school

Stockport ran a holiday activity scheme in partnership with a secondary school in a deprived area in response to need identified by the school. The provision was developed to offer 'a bridge' between primary and secondary school for the most vulnerable Year 6 pupils, and all feeder primary schools were involved. The scheme was very successful, popular with both children and parents. It enabled the children to familiarise themselves with the school premises and offered parents the chance to meet school staff in more relaxed and informal circumstances.

Children were nominated by their primary school according to agreed criteria. The scheme offered a range of trips and activities as well as an 'Activity Record Card' encouraging children to try something new. Issues associated with moving to secondary school, social communication, co-operation and team work were explored and children were given taster sessions in some of the after school clubs. At the end of the scheme a celebration and awards event was held for children and parents.

Particular successes of the project were:

- The co-operation between the primary schools and the high school
- Improved relationships between schools and parents
- A quicker and easier transition for children involved in the scheme at the beginning of Year 7
- While a charge was made for participation on the holiday scheme, it was oversubscribed

Provision for older children

Pilot providers and local authorities worked hard to address some of the familiar barriers and challenges involved in developing appropriate provision for the over-8s.

Some innovative solutions and ideas were generated. Again, effective consultation and involvement was found to be helpful in changing the mindsets and pre-conceptions of some children and their parents that childcare/activity programmes only cater for younger children and are unsuitable and not enjoyable for older children. It also assisted providers in identifying small but important details about how their services operate.

In the pilots this type of intelligence was found to be absolutely crucial when developing over-8s provision. For example, one setting issued high visibility jackets to younger children but through consultation identified that these were not something older children would be comfortable to wear.

CASE STUDY: Nottinghamshire

Young people staffing the Safe Place to Be

A 'Safe Place to Be' model for 11 to 14 year olds was developed in Nottinghamshire. It focused on offering a safe, relaxed environment where young people could socialise, play games or chill out.

The workforce for the project was sixth form pupils, who were trained to an introductory level in playwork, first aid, food hygiene and child protection. The project had many positive outcomes, including:

- Significantly increased attendances throughout the summer, increasing from around 2-3 young people to 18-20 per day
- The development of a practical training course for the sixth formers with course material appropriate for those working with 11 to 14s, building workplace skills and experiences of older pupils
- The development of positive peer role models for younger children

CASE STUDY: Rotherham

Co-ordinating access to activities

Rotherham Council addressed the issue of gaps in provision by linking formal childcare, predominantly childminders, to their holiday activities. Childminders were given a list of activities that were being provided in each area and asked to identify the activities they could travel to. Parents were informed of the initiative through the Mega Active programme which goes to every child in Rotherham, the Families Information Service and via area based holiday childcare information leaflets on the website www.rotherham.gov.uk/amazing.

Over the period leading up to the summer holidays 700 leaflets were downloaded from the website and as a result children were able to access a wider range of activities during the holidays. The childminders gained additional income and relationships with parents who may not have previously considered using a childminder. Parents had peace of mind that a suitably qualified person was caring for their child and their child was not bored during the holidays.

Making sure that parents could see that their children were enjoying going to the provider and that they had access to age appropriate activities and resources was identified as playing a major part both in the take-up of services and also in what parents were willing to pay.

Rotherham found that sports programmes and activities weren't run every day or for long enough during the holidays to make them easily accessible for working parents. This meant that parents had to use complicated arrangements involving friends and extended family to care for their children and/or provide the link between home and the activity. For many, this situation puts significant pressure on families and can restrict the options available to children.

Allowing parents to book full days or half days worked well in Calderdale, with providers reporting a considerable increase in numbers when this was offered. Following that feedback, the local authority planned to extend this approach further by breaking the day into sections, allowing parents to choose to purchase particular components rather than just full or half days. In practice this worked by parents being able to pay for specific activities or trips and whole day or half-day sessions.

Calderdale identified that some providers delivering to the more traditional childcare age ranges had already considered delivering holiday childcare to older children and were aware of the potential market. The local authority used some of its funding from the pilot to support providers to 'test' the holiday childcare market for older children without bearing the full financial risk. This enabled providers to explore what worked, identify new ways of working and generate ideas for further development. One provider who took part said, "Prior to the grant we were a little scared of offering this service – fear of the unknown". Calderdale reported that the availability of the funding "acted as the catalyst for change for providers to meet the needs of working parents".



Marketing – communicating with parents

Having a comprehensive, joined-up promotion, marketing and communication strategy to inform parents and carers about the range of provision on offer was identified by most of the pilots as being vital to improving the take-up of places. There were significant differences found between the information parents require and what children and young people want to know.

Effective strategies for informing parents during the pilots considered:

- Appropriate ways of developing ongoing communication between providers and parents. This involved asking parents how they would like to receive information and carefully considering different methods for different groups of parents. For example, face to face, telephone, posters, flyers, Family Information Service (FIS), texts and websites. The importance and impact of good communication with parents of disabled children was noted as being even more significant.
- The range of possible organisations who could be utilised to support the communication, e.g. FIS, schools, Sure Start Children's Centres, leisure centres, libraries, youth and Connexions services, community organisations, Jobcentre Plus and GP surgeries.
- The timing of the communication. Many parents start to plan arrangements for school holidays, particularly the summer holidays, well in advance. Therefore, there is a need to provide adequate notice and to inform them about what would be available well in advance. The 'right' timing may also be something worth asking parents about when consulting as it is likely to vary among different groups.
- Requiring all providers to have a standard range of key policies and practices in place to make parents feel more confident about the provision

Supporting childcare providers to develop their skills and resources in marketing their services can reap benefits. One local authority, Rotherham, provided settings with training in and access to iDesign (a user friendly web based application for creating marketing materials, with tips and online networking), as well as basic marketing skills training.

Inclusive provision

Having opportunities to play, socialise and try new things in a safe and welcoming environment is important for all children. For children and young people with disabilities, it is particularly important that providers are able to respond to their needs and offer personalised support; which in turn reassures parents of the quality of the care.

Some key elements identified through the pilots to developing more inclusive provision included:

- Good communication and partnership with families and, where relevant, the other key agencies working with the child or young person
- Building networks – including talking with other settings about what they are doing to include disabled children and young people
- Asking parents/carers and children what works at home and aiming to replicate that in the setting
- If something works well when the child or young person is at a setting – telling the parent/carer as it may be transferable into the home

Some successful approaches to inclusion used in the pilots were Stay and Play sessions, free 'taster' sessions for disabled children

and a brokerage worker to support families to find provision to best meet their child's needs. All of these were effective in breaking down barriers and building parents' confidence.

CASE STUDY: Rotherham

Wraparound childcare for existing activities

Specialist wraparound holiday childcare was offered by Rotherham Council in response to a survey where parents stated they would prefer provision designed specifically for children with additional needs.

The sports development team were already providing holiday activities for disabled children at different special schools across the borough. These ran between 10am and 3pm and were subsidised so that parents were only charged a nominal fee. The childcare was wrapped around the activities and provided at the same venue. Parents were charged a small additional fee.

During October half term all of the children who accessed the sports activities also attended the wraparound childcare. The childcare and sports activities were delivered on a 20 children to 7 carers ratio. To improve this costly delivery model, a volunteers' programme was developed in conjunction with the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH) programme, to create a pool of volunteers who could substitute some of the paid carers.

The volunteers all had disabled children themselves and will now be deployed across the borough to support both wraparound childcare delivered in special schools and identified children who attend mainstream holiday clubs. In this way all disabled children can be supported, irrespective of where the care is delivered, while also reducing the cost to the holiday childcare provider.

Small financial incentives for settings can make a significant difference to the inclusion of disabled children. For example, £180 spent by Warrington enabled appropriate adjustments to be made, resulting in a child being able to attend provision for all future holidays. And providers working in partnership can make inclusive provision more affordable through shared training, learning and resources.

Sharing resources can help in areas where transport for disabled children may be a challenge. Stockport used mentors to teach independent travel skills, which offered a creative solution to transport issues for some individual children and parents.

CASE STUDY: Warrington

Supporting development

Warrington carried out an initial baseline audit with providers (including childminders) to identify issues and knowledge gaps. From this, they produced an 'Inclusion Matters' resource pack for each provider and visited settings to enable them to 'sign up' to an inclusive approach.

During the visits and one to one meetings they discussed any concerns, training or equipment needs and provided a range of information which helped to 'demystify' inclusion. Face to face contact with settings was critical for engagement. Following sign up, providers received a certificate and badge.

Certification will be renewed annually for providers who demonstrate their continued commitment to inclusion, including attending training.

CASE STUDY: Redcar and Cleveland

Learning through shadowing

Childcare providers in Redcar and Cleveland were given the opportunity to shadow experienced staff at settings which care for children with a range of disabilities, such as special schools and specialist resource centres. This gave them the chance to gain valuable experience and confidence in a different environment; peer to peer support; skills and knowledge on a range of disabilities; insight into best practice; and supportive, potentially ongoing relationships with individuals and the specialist settings.

The initiative was found to be cost effective and sustainable, and it often led to increased enthusiasm and motivation amongst providers to include disabled children. It also enabled participants to cascade their knowledge to other members of staff in the settings and could be used as a 'stepping stone' to further training.

Training

Effective training for all staff was widely acknowledged by the pilots as being crucial to ensuring that holiday childcare is inclusive. One of the ways local authorities supported this was to focus some resources on looking at ways to increase the confidence and capability of childcare staff to support children with disabilities. Common areas where significant training needs were frequently identified by the pilots included:

- Caring for older children (aged 11–17) with special needs
- Building confidence of staff to care for children with a range of special needs and disabilities
- Up-skilling the holiday childcare workforce to meet the childcare needs of all families
- Lack of awareness and understanding of the support required for children with complex needs

One of the suggestions from the pilots was that specialist voluntary sector providers could be commissioned to support, train and mentor childcare settings to develop their knowledge and skills about the needs of disabled children.

Commissioning inclusive provision

Darlington found that using the commissioning process as a way of meeting strategic objectives to ensure responsive and inclusive provision had mixed results. An initial meeting with providers before commissioning began had some unexpectedly positive outcomes related to inclusion. The meeting provided the opportunity for local settings to engage in open discussion with the Aiming High for Disabled Children team. This helped to increase the understanding of some of the groups about delivering services to support children with complex disabilities and needs and made them aware of gaps in provision.

Yet Darlington also reported that the process was challenging and not entirely effective because of the significant gap between the theory underpinning the commissions (that every child has a fundamental right to be included) and the ability of the holiday childcare sector to be sufficiently inclusive in their everyday practice. It was felt that using the commissioning process to address gaps in inclusive provision was not necessarily the best way to support providers to build their resources and skills in this area.

Supporting parents

In some cases parents and carers may lack confidence in childcare in general, which can impact on the perceived demand for childcare as well as the development of inclusive provision. In response to this, the London Borough of Sutton investigated the main barriers for parents/carers to using childcare and looked at actions that could be taken to reduce these.

Using a Senior Family Information Service Participation Officer funded through DCATCH and two focus groups, parents were asked two questions as below (with the main responses listed).

Q: What would improve your confidence to use childcare?

- Confident, experienced, well-trained staff who demonstrate their desire to support disabled children
- Staff who ask questions and show an interest in the needs of the individual child
- Provision which caters for siblings
- Regular feedback and reassurance on settling in, progress and any issues



- The opportunity to spend time in the setting while the child settles in – over a period of time as opposed to taster sessions or visits
- The opportunity to provide advice to the settings on any problems

Q: What questions on childcare would you like the answers to (if you use Sutton FIS)?

- Level of practitioner training and experience in relation to working with disabled children
- Ability to meet specific medical, health care, behavioural, communication hearing or visual impairment needs
- Accessibility and security of location
- Funding issues including availability, duration and where to get help and support
- Access for siblings

The Sutton survey found that parents want to be signposted to where they can find information; rather than having to spend a lot of time finding out where to go for information. They prefer honest answers to questions and clear, straightforward, jargon free information to avoid them feeling overwhelmed. Additionally, parents with disabled children want answers to the same questions any parent seeking childcare might ask, for example about opening hours, fees and Ofsted reports.

As a result of the consultation findings, Sutton were also able to identify areas for development within its own services, such as a review of information held by FIS and regular staff visits with some specialist parent groups.

Content and quality

A cornerstone of any quality service is how well it matches the needs of those using it. Consultation with children, young people and parents to find out what they want helps to ensure a 'best fit' and promotes ownership of and good take-up of the service. It can also highlight items that may otherwise not have been considered.

During the pilots, providers, young people and parents all emphasised the importance of separate provision for older children (i.e. 8 years and over). One setting commented, "What a difference it makes being able to split the children into age appropriate groups." There was also agreement on the benefits for both parents and providers of having clear, timetabled activities and trips – and having this information available as early as possible to assist parents in organising their work and holiday periods.

Feedback from the pilots found that sharing good practice in relation to what high quality holiday childcare might look like can help providers to more effectively plan their service. A number of pilots found this to be even more significant when considering older children. When considering issues around quality and content of provision for older children some pilot authorities, including Cornwall, developed quality improvement frameworks for settings.

Additionally, a need was recognised for local authorities to encourage settings to offer more challenging play opportunities. Northamptonshire County Council took a co-ordinated, targeted approach to promoting this message and supported settings to develop more risky play. This included offering short workshops and risk-benefit training through Playlink, as well as themed network meetings to share good practice.

Delivering 'split' provision that meets the needs of both younger and older children can be easier for some types of providers than others. For example, Calderdale identified that childminders would only be able to offer split provision if they delivered childcare with a co-childminder or assistant or if they only worked with school aged children. As a result, work was undertaken to encourage childminders providing a service solely for school age children to join the childminder network where they were supported to build viable businesses. Co-ordinators also worked with the childminders to reduce the amount of paperwork attached to joining the 'quality assured' network.



CASE STUDY: Bristol

Trying a new tack

The pilot in Bristol enabled existing holiday schemes and settings to take children and young people to taster sessions at a range of activity providers during the holidays, for example, rock climbing, abseiling and skiing.

As well as enabling children to access exciting opportunities and try new skills, the aim was to inspire and challenge holiday providers about the content of their own provision. And in turn, for activity providers to benefit through the potential generation of new markets and the opportunity to develop ongoing partnerships with the holiday providers.

An excellent example of this working in practice was a canoeing instructor at Bristol Docks who was “delighted to be working with holiday clubs during half-term”. He confirmed that usually very little work was available during these periods. He considered that as well as increasing his income, the project had also given lots of children the chance to try canoeing and he felt that this may well lead to more casual canoeists. The holiday club reflected that they would want to use the activity again in the future as it was safe and well run and, most importantly, enjoyed by the children.

Pilots found that effective evaluation of the delivery and suitability of the provision was an important part of the quality process. Bristol worked with their Participation Team who supported a group of young people to evaluate the settings. As part of their holiday project, they evaluated all of the ‘taster’ activities the children took part in. They produced evaluation reports with pictures, narrative and statistics which can be used to demonstrate impact and help with future funding bids. Children, playworkers and partners all participated in the evaluations.

Financial stability

In order to maximise financial stability it is important to make sure that all possible links are made between holiday childcare and activities and other areas of work and potential funding streams; and that these links are clearly communicated within the local authority and to partners. For example, many of the pilots were able to make effective links with Aiming High for Disabled Children projects.

Supporting providers who are not already Ofsted registered to go onto the appropriate Childcare Register was recognised as being important to the financial stability of holiday providers as well as supporting sufficiency and good practice. Pilots who worked on this identified some of the main benefits as:

- Enabling parents to access the childcare element of working tax credits to pay for holiday childcare activities
- Supporting the sustainability of organisations seeking to move from grant funded activity to full cost recovery delivery models
- Broadening access to affordable experiences during the holidays for children, young people and families through the link to working tax credits
- Diversifying the range of holiday care and activity available
- Creating an informal network or ‘pool’ of providers and signposting to engagement with FIS

Various methods used to increase numbers of registered providers included: identifying and engaging organisations already delivering activities to children and young people; working to change perceptions about ‘childcare’ – what it looks like and who delivers it; and challenging any misconceptions about Ofsted registration and promoting the opportunities it offers providers.

CASE STUDY: Darlington

Tax credits advice for parents

In Darlington, there was a perception amongst parents of school age children that holiday childcare was unaffordable. All parents who accessed the holiday pilot were offered an advice session with the Mobile Advice Co-operative to look at eligibility for benefits and tax credits.

This kind of income maximisation could then be utilised to purchase future holiday childcare and activities. Additionally, through gaining detailed information and support about benefits and tax credits, in some cases parents recognised that the cost was not prohibitive.

A number of pilots developed various toolkits and resources targeted both at parents and providers to support financial sustainability. For example, Lambeth produced a Holiday Activity Project Sustainability Toolkit, developed in partnership with their settings. This was done in conjunction with a leaflet for parents on help with childcare costs to address affordability issues.

Generally, pilots found that offering holiday providers (including those working with over-8s) access to business planning support and training was extremely beneficial to ensuring robust, sustainable business models and long-term financial security.

Another support mechanism suggested was to identify and create a specific role to advise and support potential holiday childcare providers through the whole business start-up process, from initial planning issues through to Ofsted registration and ultimately opening for business.

CASE STUDY: Northamptonshire

Business and financial capability support

As part of their approach, Northamptonshire made business support available to all their settings. This focused particularly on ways of developing partnerships with other providers to provide an improved level of holiday childcare provision; and supporting them to register on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register to enable parents to claim the childcare element of working tax credits.

The local authority also commissioned the Citizen's Advice Bureau to deliver 'financial capability' support to workers in the sector around childcare benefits for parents. This included providing direct support and information, specific case advice and resources to settings.

Providers who had previously delivered some activities free of charge, when supported to explore financial sustainability, were surprised to discover that well researched charges were not necessarily a barrier to demand. In general, services that implemented this type of pricing found that their take-up increased.

Working collaboratively in partnerships and clusters was found to be an effective way of making holiday provision more cost-effective and financially sustainable. Bristol's approach was to develop a number of Play Hubs around the city. The local authority purchased a range of play and craft equipment to be held in the hubs, enabling local groups to access the equipment rather than having to buy it individually. Partnerships were developed with local training providers to offer playworkers across the city new skills in a variety of areas. These skills were also shared between clubs, keeping individual costs down while improving the quality of the settings.

The other aim of the Play Hubs was to bring different settings together as a collective to negotiate 'bulk' prices for activities and equipment. It was anticipated that hubs would eventually become self-sufficient rather than being co-ordinated by the local authority.

Ealing also piloted a joint purchasing scheme run through a local community forum. They provided a shop front and equipment store and were able to negotiate significantly lower procurement costs for providers.

Marketing

Effective marketing of holiday childcare provision can have a significant impact on the financial stability of providers. Some of the pilots concluded that 'word of mouth' was the most effective way of advertising holiday childcare, backed up by a promotional leaflet or website.

Others found that in the case of older children, initial publicity needed to appeal to the children themselves as only advertising that they found interesting would be passed onto their parents.

Online marketing was done by both London Borough of Lambeth and Rotherham Council, who set up Facebook pages to inform families about holiday provision. Rotherham also used a range of other innovative methods to communicate with families, including text messaging and Bluetooth. In addition, they developed a website within the main council website detailing holiday activities in each area. The website was cost effective, accessible and quick to update. Over the summer period it had over 1,200 unique 'hits'.

Workforce

Qualified and experienced staff, and comprehensive policies and procedures, are key components in delivering quality provision.

The majority of the pilot local authorities found that more needed to be done to help develop and up-skill staff providing holiday childcare and activities. A key theme was a lack of appropriately qualified or experienced staff to work with older children. Most local authorities recognised that the majority of training available to providers is more focused on the 0-5 market and that many of the skills taught are not easily transferable into work with older children.

CASE STUDY: Northamptonshire

Playing Up!

Northamptonshire developed a modular, accredited playwork training programme focused on older children. 'Playing Up! – Understanding the play needs of older children and how to support them' was delivered to a range of practitioners such as playworkers, childminders, recreation staff and sports coaches.

The workforce development team took ownership of the training and, given the potential for income generation, planned to make it available externally by running it as a social enterprise.

Developing links with organisations that have expertise in specific areas that support the identified training needs of providers can be useful. Pilots found that this approach helped to ensure good quality, appropriately targeted training and was found to be often more cost effective and delivered more quickly. Additionally, making links with new training providers was suggested as a way of ensuring that training could be delivered longer term if needed.

Lambeth and Sutton both commissioned specialist voluntary sector organisations to support, develop and train providers around inclusion. Calderdale identified agencies working with older children who could offer training and developed new courses such as 'Safeguarding for the Older Child'. They also created a portfolio of popular training that demonstrated a real impact, available to all providers.

Training was found to be not always accessible to all types of childcare providers. Some of the ways this issue was effectively addressed included:

- Locality based training, for example, using venues in schools and Sure Start Children's Centres
- Running courses at least twice, at different times of the day
- Promoting training in a variety of ways to ensure a wide reach/ awareness
- Giving a clear description of the training to make it easier for providers to decide on its relevance for them
- Working with Play Service teams to access locality based summer playschemes, i.e. enabling providers to effectively job-shadow Play Services staff
- Ensuring that lists of providers are accurate and up to date (this was identified as a particular issue with holiday providers) and making sure that different local authority teams market in a joined-up way so providers receive more targeted information

Training costs were identified as a potential barrier by Calderdale, so settings were offered free sessions. Although this did encourage some additional providers to attend, it also resulted in people booking but not turning up. One of the lessons learnt in this case was that offering subsidised training may be more effective than offering it completely free.

In contrast, Ealing found that online training for Level 2 and 3 qualifications was popular when effectively promoted and offered free of charge. Many of those who enrolled were students or employed elsewhere during term time, so the online option was a viable way of obtaining qualifications.

Accredited short courses, such as first aid, child protection, food hygiene, and health and safety, need to be offered in the run up to the summer holidays to meet the demand from holiday childcare providers who use casual staff and students. Without this, some providers were left unable to meet their statutory requirements.

Pilots identified that parents can sometimes be confused about what to look for and expect from holiday providers in terms of safeguarding policies. Holiday childcare and activity providers offering services to children under age 8 are expected to have basic standards of safeguarding policies and practices already in place, as they are a fundamental requirement for Ofsted registration. For those working with over-8s the picture is less clear. Important considerations include:

- Encouraging and supporting holiday providers to register on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register. This ensures that parents can be actively reassured and local authorities can be confident that basic safeguarding standards are in place.
- Providing specific training and support to holiday providers to explore safeguarding issues and protocols and ensure that effective policies and procedures are in place
- All holiday providers having a named person within the local authority who they can contact to seek further advice or information

Areas of training need most commonly identified by the pilot authorities included:

- **Disability awareness and inclusion:** Additional support in this area leads to many long term, sustainable improvements. To ensure maximum benefits, consider the training needs of all staff within a setting, including administrative and catering staff.
- **Business skills:** Key areas where support is often needed include pricing and unit costing, fundraising, marketing and debt management.
- **Play:** Increasing playwork qualifications for holiday providers.

To short-circuit the need faced by colleges to make a profit, Portsmouth City Council registered as an NVQ centre and delivered a Level 3 programme with internal tutors. They established an online learning environment through the schools' network to support distance learning and established a new base of assessors from local settings who could offer training in the first year and take over the delivery of the programme in year 2.

- **Help with childcare costs:** Building up knowledge of the full range of support available through working tax credits and other initiatives (e.g. help from employers, funding for Further Education and Higher Education students) and how staff can assist parents to access help.
- **Working within a commissioning model:** Including further training to help providers to understand the functions as well as navigate computerised procurement websites.



Provision for Service families

Families serving in the armed forces face particular challenges with childcare, particularly when partners are away within the UK or posted abroad. Usually, they have no family nearby to provide childcare back up, which can cause isolation and affect employment choices.

And children of armed forces personnel may have different needs to other children. Frequent moves and long absences by (mostly) fathers to war zones mean that organised fun activities and places for these children to play are vitally important. Providing new experiences for children who live on isolated bases can also be important.

Needs, issues and barriers to childcare can be very complex and vary amongst the forces and from base to base. Clear, ongoing patterns of need can be hard to 'pin down' due to the sometimes unpredictable lifestyle of many Service families. Yet it is vital to explore these needs and issues in detail before considering what support might be required.

Some observations from the pilot local authorities who worked with Service families included:

- Relationships between Service families and the wider community can be under-developed, with assumptions made by both groups. It is important to identify any issues and consider ways to reduce barriers before (or as part of) any work.
- Where relationships and partnerships with the Services are not already well established it can take time and effort for these to be built up.
- It is helpful to identify other organisations or departments within the local authority who already have relationships with Service families or commanding officers as they can act as a useful link. Schools and Sure Start Children's Centres, community development workers and service welfare organisations can all be useful contacts.
- Chains of command can make decision making slow and sometimes bureaucratic. Accept that even good ideas may not get approval and issues may have to be revisited. Ensure contingency plans are in place.
- More positively, involving chains of command in projects usually means that when agreements are reached things will actually happen, which can be very useful.
- Carefully consider methods for disseminating information to military families. Effective communication channels for this group may be different to the wider population. Shropshire found that the Ministry of Defence used Facebook as one method of communication with families.
- Transport links for Service families may need to be considered, as housing can be spread out and military bases can cover very large areas.

Shropshire identified research by the Army Families Federation (AFF)² that stresses the importance of access to high quality, consistent childcare for mobile Service families. The provision must be affordable to women whose earning potential has often been damaged by frequent relocations. Service families can also have issues with sourcing benefits, finding jobs and lack of support networks.

CASE STUDY: Shropshire

Developing holiday childcare at Tern Hill

When developing their project, Shropshire found that they had no accurate, up to date information available on the number of armed forces families in the County. School census data was used to provide an estimate for planning purposes.

Working with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the regiment based at Tern Hill, the initiative aimed to provide holiday childcare for 2010/11 and develop sustainable ongoing holiday provision, including developing relationships with the local community as the regiment will be at the base until 2018. The project coincided with the deployment of the regiment to Afghanistan from September 2010 to April 2011.

To ensure that the children from Tern Hill benefit from the project in the long term, it was planned to develop a Forest School site at Tern Hill. An area of land on the base was identified but with the chain of command being in Afghanistan no final decision could be made.

Interim sites for the younger children, at the local infant school, and for the Army Youth Club, at a local farm, were developed. Four Forest School leaders were trained; two teachers from the school, one MoD Development Officer and an army parent volunteer. During the October half term younger children took part in Forest School sessions and older children did a residential course. The sessions were repeated for the February half term.

Parents from the base were offered two courses, 'Making Choices' and 'Take 5 for Play', to help them decide if childcare is a possible career choice. Those who took 'Take 5 for Play' were subsequently offered a place on a course to attain a Certificate in Playwork (Level 2). The training was also offered to non-Service families from the local area to open up the facilities on the base to the wider community.

CASE STUDY: Portsmouth

Training parents as childminders

Portsmouth City Council targeted Service parents to access training and to register as childminders. The aims of the initiative were to increase childcare places in their local area; provide additional income for parents; support their development within the workforce; and reduce some of the barriers to accessing childcare for these families, including fears about using childcare from outside the naval community.

The accredited training, through the National Childminding Association, was tailored specifically to Service family needs. A strong partnership was also built with the Naval Personal and Family Service who oversaw the community centres and worked face to face with Service families. This proved very useful in providing insight into the needs of Service families and as a communication link.

² www.aff.org.uk

Provision in rural areas

Research by some rural pilots identified a large number of children from rural areas who wanted to attend provision during the holidays but were unable to do so due to their location.

Norfolk found that a lack of transport was one of the main barriers limiting access to provision for children in rural areas. They concluded that having holiday activities for rural communities that were based in local schools could help with this issue because transport arrangements and links were already in place during term-time. These sometimes had the potential to be extended into the school holidays. Parents and children also recognised schools as being safe places and consultation undertaken showed that the majority of children were happy to attend activities at their school.

Rural communities also offer significant challenges in resource allocation for developing services that are both sustainable and can overcome rural isolation and deprivation. Building creative partnerships between providers, other allied organisations and the community is one strategy to address this issue.

CASE STUDY: Cornwall

Engaging with rural communities

Cornwall County Council commissioned voluntary sector fundraising agents to work in close partnership with selected sites and communities to plan and implement: consultation with communities; participation from communities; partnership working; data collation for successful bid submissions; informal training and learning; project meetings support; progress reporting; and establishment of an exit strategy.

This project led to improved engagement with isolated rural communities, more effective consultation with children and young people, interest in resources and where they could be located locally, greater capacity within the community to develop opportunities, identification of funding sources and improved partnerships with the voluntary and community sector.

Key learning points included:

- External support is valued by rural communities but it takes time to engage effectively and build relationships and capacity
- The initial project aims may have been too broad and 'aspirational'
- There is often cynicism amongst small voluntary and community groups who have often been refused grants in the past
- The effectiveness and commitment of management committees can make or break a project
- Community champions are key
- Schools are generally harder to engage due to other agendas/red tape
- To engage the community you need to go to where they are, e.g. walking dogs or in the local Post office or shop

Finding innovative ideas and solutions to equipment and resource issues for small providers in rural areas is essential to supporting quality and sustainability. One potentially cost-effective resource identified during the Cornwall pilot was Play Pods. The 'pods' come in various shapes and sizes ranging from a dustbin up to a shipping container, and are filled with hundreds of scrap objects, materials and equipment. They contain a very broad mix of items including, for example, tyres, foam, dressing up clothes and cardboard boxes.

The pods help to facilitate and enhance children's play, creativity and imagination. Many of the items can easily be re-stocked and replaced, often at no additional cost as many of them are freely available within the community. The pods are usually 'hosted' by a setting for a period of time. This means that in rural areas children are able to access a wider range of equipment and resources and the portability of the pods means that all rural communities can have access to them periodically.

In order to target rural areas where there was limited demand for provision, Nottinghamshire developed two Play to Care holiday clubs. The clubs, which were a partnership between the Play Service and local primary schools, planned to provide a stepping stone to childcare and to address affordability and sustainability. The schemes started off running for two to three days between 8am and 6pm. The aim was to then increase sessions as demand grew, ultimately building into full childcare provision. All the parents consulted said that they would use the service again and would recommend it.

CASE STUDY: Telford and Wrekin

Rural Rangers Holiday Club

Following a need identified through the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for holiday childcare in a rural area of Telford, Telford and Wrekin developed Rural Rangers. The provision has 30 places and operates five days a week between 8am and 6pm during school holidays.

Through the pilot, free taster sessions and an open day were offered to children across the local area. Active links were also made to encourage service families, families needing respite placements and disabled children to access the service. The childcare provider had researched transport costs including taxi companies, mini bus hire, leasing agreements and purchasing a vehicle.

Information Point

The Learning Exchange

www.learning-exchange.org.uk

An online hub of resources, news, information and forums: for all those working in schools and communities to improve the lives of children, young people and families. Find further information about the holiday pilots here.

Ofsted

www.ofsted.gov.uk

For all Ofsted inspection and registration queries.

4Children

www.4Children.org.uk

National charity that develops and shapes national policy, and works with a wide range of partners to deliver real support for children and families in their community.

ContinuYou

www.continyou.org.uk

Leading community learning organisation supporting the development of out-of-school-hours learning opportunities, including sports activities and breakfast clubs.

Consultation

Consultation toolkit: Community consultation tools to support the development of extended services

TDA, 2007 – available from www.4Children.org.uk

Customer focus and community engagement: Getting it right!

Improvement Network, www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/imp/aio/1000352

Inclusion

Contact a Family

www.cafamily.org.uk/professionals

Information and support for professionals working with disabled children, plus a wide range of support for families with disabled children.

KIDS

www.kids.org.uk

Charity supporting disabled children, young people and their families; with training and guidance for professionals.

Safeguarding

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/

Information, advice and useful factsheets for anyone working to safeguard children.

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Information Helpline 020 7512 2100

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