Sure Start Children's Centres Census 2014

A national overview of Sure Start Children's Centres in 2014

www.4Children.org.uk

Sure Start Children's Centres Census 2014

A national overview Sure Start Children's Centres in 2014

Contents

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all Children's Centres who took the time to respond to our Census.
We would also like to thank Bojana Sarenac, Pia Jaeger, Zoe Moulton and Hattie White who supported this work.

Follow us @4ChildrenUK

Sure Start Children's Centres Census 2014

Written and published by 4Children
Cover photography © Gary Manhine

www.4Children.org.uk

Foreword

Over the last decade and more over £10bn has been invested in Sure Start Children's Centres to create a new "public service" for children and families of more than 3000 Centres, providing locality-based services and support within their communities. Since their establishment they have sought to change the face of children and family services. Where they work at their best they are successful in identifying disadvantaged children and families and providing specific support where they need it, moving decisively towards multi-agency working bringing together health, education, family support and specialist support. Lessons learnt from these successful Children's Centres offer a beacon for how services can be delivered as an accepted and highly trusted asset for the support of children and their families.

This is 4Children's fourth annual national-level Census of Sure Start Children's Centres. Each year we have surveyed a large number of Centres from which we have sought to build up a national picture of the reach and activities of the network across England, and changes taking place. This year's Census is the most comprehensive and representative survey to date recognising the new landscape in which Centres are operating. Whilst retaining many of the questions asked in previous years, enabling us to compare responses, this is the first to reflect the reality that a majority of Centres now work as a cluster over more than one site. This year's questions, and analysis, has therefore been updated to reflect this.

We are at a critical juncture for Children's Centres with significant pressures upon, and reductions to, budgets in many areas of the country. Research by 4Children[1] reviewing recent and current plans and consultations on Children's Centre service provision across local authorities has found that many sites across the country are proposed for closure, merger, or reductions in the level of service on offer. As an increasing number of local authorities seek to review and reconfigure the future delivery of services, this year's Census sets out to identify what changes are already underway or planned.

The results from this year's survey indicate that, as a network, Children's Centres have "come of age", cementing their position as a trusted and valued community asset. As in 2013[2], record numbers of families – over one million – are benefitting from their support. In many areas they are at the heart of wider strategies to reduce poverty and support for struggling families. Nationally, Centres are supporting two-thirds of the half million most vulnerable families.

1 Internal research conducted by 4Children in May-July and October 2014 of local authority websites

2 4Children (2013) Children's Centres Census 2013 http://www.4children.org.uk/Resources/Detail/Children-Centre-Census-2013

With most Centres still delivered by local authorities, the picture painted by this year's Census is one of some potential for further out-sourcing and commissioning of Children's Centre services, with service delivery currently under review in many areas. In some cases this is part of a conscious shift to more effective and integrated delivery of services; in others these changes are a direct consequence and response to cuts in the available budget. And in many it's a combination of both, with budget cuts the trigger to seek more creative solutions as local authorities seek to deliver "more from less".

Overall there is a definitive shift taking place, away from single-site providers towards "clustering" of Centres' management; and from universal to targeted services, increasingly in partnership with other service providers. Over three percent of sites are also expected to close over the coming year. Overall, we are in the middle of a period of rapid and ongoing reform, change, and some uncertainty over the future shape of the network.

Our analysis of the Department for Education's data has found that, when compared to the level of spending in 2011/12, there has been an overall cut in spending on Children's Centres and Early Years services of 20% over the three years from 2012/13 to 2014/15. The £3.36bn spent over the last three years is around £830m less than it otherwise would have been. This Census has found that over the coming year, cuts in budget will be the single biggest challenge for nearly two-thirds of the network.

This Census has also found that more than half of Centres expect to see changes to their management structure over the coming year. Almost half of those Centres operating as single (standalone) sites at the present time are set to move to become part of a managed cluster of centres, and even just under one-quarter of Centres already in a cluster, expect the number of sites and area their cluster covers to expand. More worrying, from the responses, we estimate that around 112 sites are set to close over the coming year. The aforementioned research carried out by 4Children reviewing local authority consultations suggests that this could even be an underestimate, with over 200 Centre sites - one-third of the current network under review - potentially at risk of closure.

Overall the findings of this Census cement the direction of travel established in previous years' censuses, but suggest the "degree of resilience" and protection that Centres were able to offer – despite the best efforts, creativity and passion within Centres themselves – is being severely tested. The "undercurrent of danger" of service cuts and Centre closures previously identified in the 2013 Census is coming to the surface in a number of areas of the country, and real impacts on children and families are beginning to flow. Yet, whilst maintaining levels of staffing and reaching the most vulnerable families are both seen in the 2014 Census as the biggest challenge for the year ahead by more than half of all Centres, the fact that half also say that their biggest challenge will be in being able to meet and match demand, confirms the crucial role and place of Children's Centres' in our communities.

The 2014 Census has identified a large number of Centres are already providing preventative and targeted work with partners to support families in crisis, on issues including domestic abuse, alcohol and substance abuse, mental health support, child protection and through the Troubled Families Programme. It has also found that this engagement with partners is growing, with around one-quarter expecting this to increase over the coming year, and expecting to decrease in only a handful of cases. The main areas where partnership working is expected to increase is with workers in health services, social care, and local delivery of the Troubled Families programme. Targeted support on domestic violence and child protection are also expected to increase.

These shifts mirror the approach, a tried and tested model already working in a number of areas of the country, proposed by 4Children. Children's Centres should be extended into Children and Family Community Hubs to bring together support and resources in the local area in a holistic and joined-up way, as part of a wider need to redesign services for children and families to deliver Early Intervention rather than wait until crisis. Children's Centres are offering the "social glue" which provides support for over stretched social work staff, and there is real potential for Children's Centres to extend their work more formally into the areas of social care and child protection, recognising the major shift of Children's Centres from universal to targeted and complex support over recent years. Formalising the relationship would enable services to work together, with families as part of a team, to deliver specialist interventions (including "step up" and "step down" support) from 0-19 years, as an expanded network of Children and Family Community Hubs pioneering a new approach to social care and enhance support.

And, crucially, they must remain a national priority for politicians of all political parties if we are to improve the lives of, and make Britain great for, all children and families in the years ahead.

Anne Longfield OBE
CEO, 4Children

Executive Summary

The findings of this year's Children's Centres Census attest to the important role at the heart of their communities they support. For the second year running, demand for services is at record levels, with over one million families supported and receiving services delivered through Children's Centres on a regular basis. Again, as in 2013, Centres are supporting just over two-thirds of the 500,000 most vulnerable families and children, playing a vital role in supporting those in, or on the edge of, crisis. There is also increased recognition of the benefit of Early Intervention and the joined-up and integrated support it is able to deliver for these families.

Yet, at present, there is a degree of uncertainty in some areas of the country as a consequence of rapid changes taking place. The trend of decreasing per-Centre budgets observed in the previous two Censuses continues apace in 2014. We recognise the efforts that continue to be made by so many to "stretch every sinew" and meet the record and growing level of demand for their services. Many are adapting to changing priorities by finding new ways to deliver "more from less", with two main factors that are playing out in this shift:

- the use of new and additional funding streams; and
- a move – from new guidance and direction to local authorities on Centres – to promote increased partnership working and targeting services.

In the case of the former, Centres are utilising new revenue streams from areas including childcare, providing places as part of the national free offer of childcare for the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. Over the last year alone there has been a small but significant expansion of childcare provision under this offer, with half of Centres introducing free two-year-old offer childcare places over the last year. The Census also notes the potential for these places to increase further still over the coming year.

In the case of the latter, whereas in 2013 two-thirds of Centres were expecting to retain or increase their existing service provision, the signs are that changes are beginning this year, with a shift in the balance from universal towards targeted services. These are often provided by partner organisations meaning that Centres are increasingly acting as the "facilitator" or "hub" of services, directing families to services that they may not themselves be directly responsible for providing, albeit in some cases the physical space of the Centre may be used to deliver them from. Centres are therefore often not directly responsible for funding these additional targeted services. This is mirrored by the reported future cuts in services landing predominantly at the door of universal services, particularly play sessions.

A shift towards greater partnership working is particularly noticeable, particularly in the areas of health, the Troubled Families Programme and social care. In the case of the first two of these statutory guidance to local authorities and local commissioners of health services[3] (published in April 2013) requires that the role of Children's Centres in delivering early childhood health services and targeting troubled families be considered. It is expected that, as a minimum, every Children's Centre should have access to a named health visitor. Consideration of targeting troubled families may include helping those using Children's Centres to more easily access family intervention workers (which could be based within Children's Centres themselves). The guidance also says that each Children's Centre should have a link to a named Social Worker, and consider how they can use their network of Children's Centres to greatest effect through links with Social Workers. These are marked by the reported increases in targeted services aimed at families in or 'on the edge' of crisis, as outlined in this Census' Foreword (i.e. domestic violence; substance and alcohol abuse; mental health; child protection).

The Census also finds that almost half of Centres offer regular support for over-5s. Providing services for the over-5s helps ensure that support to families is available as children grow up and this approach, long championed by 4Children, is already in place in many local authority areas as 0-19 provision. This should be extended to all Centres to enable support for all children, young people and families to be brought together within the local community.

All changes must be framed within the big picture of an accelerating pace of changes taking place in the structure and commissioning of Children's Centres and their services by local authorities. Nationally there has been some debate on the extent and level to which Centre numbers are being reduced, and hence the level of service and number of families they are able to support. Figures from the Census on expected changes to structure tally with this research, as does the prediction of 112 Centre closures over the coming year. This is double the number predicted to close in the 2013 Census.

The challenge for local authorities is how to provide joined up, effective and responsive help for all children and families, with specialist support for those with more complex needs. The challenge that flows from this now for Children's Centres is how we can ensure that they demonstrate and become the leaders of change

3 Department for Education (April 2013) Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance: For local authorities, commissioners of local health services and Jobcentre Plus https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/273768/childrens_centre_stat_guidance_april_2013.pdf

within their communities to drive up outcomes, move to Early Intervention and prevention, and narrow the gap. Reduced budgets and changing needs means that services are likely to be reviewed and reconfigured in every area where this has not yet, or is not yet, happening. Even some areas where services have already been reviewed and reconfigured, there may be further reviews and changes that will take place.

Commissioning more provision to external providers can immediately reap dividends. According to our Census, as it stands, over 3 in 4 centres are still directly operated by the local authority, but just 1 in 7 by voluntary sector or community organisations. Yet, there are examples from across the country – for example, 4Children is aware from our own involvement, of what has happened in Hampshire - where commissioning and outsourcing of services to VCSE providers has led to the retention of the existing network, with no closures, more services not fewer, and with a substantial saving in budget, a clear exemplar of delivering "more for less".

Making better use of joined-up resources for across all areas of service delivery is also important. There is evidence in this year's Census results that this is beginning to take place, with increased partnership working with social care, health and the Troubled Families Programme in particular. This marks progress from last year's (2013) Census which showed a mixed picture of success.

However, at the same time, it is clear that a noticeable shift is taking place away from universal services to more targeted provision. Whilst increasing support for those families "on the edge of crisis" who need additional support is welcome, Universal services are the bedrock from which a "holistic" "family-based" approach to family services can be built. This leads Children's Centres and their staff to become trusted and empowered and able to support and intervene with targeted support when and where this becomes necessary to help parents "on the edge of crisis". It is essential therefore to retain a universal "open door" offer across all Centres.

Extending Sure Start Children's Centres into local Children and Family Community Hubs would ensure a Centre at the heart of every community, bringing together local support and resources - from midwives and health visitors to childcare and out-of-school support - in a joined up way, providing: universal as well as targeted services, building Early Intervention in at the; supporting families with complex needs; and supporting children as they grow up from 0 - 19. They would also be part of a wider overhaul of social care, with these "Hubs" as the heart.

Consequently we would urge local authorities to do all they can to maintain existing levels of service through their Children's Centre network. This is not about preserving the national network in aspic: not one size fits all, and we are not calling for every single building in every single area to remain open. It is vital to ensure existing services for children and families are working in the most cost-effective and efficient way. We do know what works, and that whilst retaining a universal offer, an Early Intervention and preventative approach brings the biggest benefits for the most vulnerable families. That's why we are calling on politicians of all parties to support the extension of Sure Start Children's Centres into Children and Family Community Hubs to bring together support and resources in the local area in a holistic and joined-up way. This approach, previously set out in our manifesto for the next Parliament Making Britain Great for Children and Families, is part of a wider need to redesign services for children and families to deliver Early Intervention rather than wait until crisis hits.

Recommendations

1

Stop any more budget cuts to Sure Start Children's Centres - nationally and locally

Children's Centres are an investment to save – but, by definition, to achieve those savings investment is required. The overall budget for Children's Centres and Early Years over the last three years has been cut and has been 20% lower than it would otherwise have been which, at a time more families than ever before in the most deprived areas of the country are turning to their local Children's Centre for support, will impact on these children and families in terms of the network of services and support available to them. Central Government should, as a minimum, pledge not to implement any further cuts to this budget.

2

Increase targeting, but maintain the universal "open door" offer

Children's Centres' services have been increasingly targeted, particularly at the most disadvantaged families. This has included the closure of Centres in less deprived areas. Given the need for more support for our most vulnerable families, we support further increases in the scope and availability of targeted services. However, if alongside this there are further reductions in the universal provision on offer then this could mean creating an unhelpful reputation as a provider of services focused specifically on "failing" families and hinder their ability to reach those who need them most. It is essential that whilst increasing targeted support the network retains a baseline remit of universality, an approach known to be the most effective way of reaching disadvantaged families in the first instance for services such as childcare, health checks and even play. It is important to remember that one in three of the most disadvantaged children live in areas that are considered relatively affluent as a whole.

3

Extending Centres into Community Hubs

We believe there should be a Centre at the heart of every community for support and advice, bringing together and coordinating services, from midwives and health visitors to childcare and out-of-school support, building Early Intervention in at the core, and including support for families with complex needs, safeguarding, child protection and social care. This extended and new approach would build on an existing infrastructure providing the springboard needed to revolutionise wider services and social care into an integrated family approach. In summary, the approach: extends Sure Start Children's Centres into local Children and Family Community Hubs; places these at the heart of communities bringing together local support and resources in a joined up way; provides universal as well as targeted services, building Early Intervention in at the core as well as support for families with complex needs; supports children as they grow up from 0 – 19; and is part of a wider overhaul of social care with these Hubs at the heart of developments. Further details of this proposal are available in a separate policy document Children and Family Community Hubs[4], to be published by 4Children in late October 2014.

4 *4Children (Forthcoming 2014) Children and Family Community Hubs*

4

Early Intervention for families

There needs to be an integrated plan for children and family support from the early years onwards, with Early Intervention and targeted services for those families who need additional support, backed up by increased pooling of budgets and services. Before consulting on plans to reduce Children's Centre numbers or services, local authorities should demonstrate that they have made a full assessment of the extent to which professionals are working together, and whether maximum use is being made of pooling budgets and integrated service delivery through Centres.

As extended Community Hubs (see Recommendation 3), Centres can be positioned at the centre of Early Intervention and prevention initiatives and at the heart of work with troubled families, child protection and social care, with specialist help on hand for families with greater needs and tackling many of the underlying causes of illness and family crisis early: help with parenting, debt and housing, as well as support to tackle many of the underlying issues of family crisis such as domestic abuse, alcohol and drug addiction and poor mental health for families. By intervening early to prevent problems escalating and tackling family crisis head on, centres can begin to reduce the tens of billions we spend annually in dealing with the crises after they occur.

5

Revolutionise support for Social Care and Child Protection

Many really effective Centres are already providing support that can turn families around, including those at the edge of care, with a "family-based" approach that means that they give the "social glue" which provides support for over stretched social work staff. There is real potential to extend all Centres, as extended Children and Family Community Hubs (see Recommendation 3), formally to work in the areas of social care and child protection. Formalising the relationship would enable services to work together, with families as part of a team, to deliver specialist interventions (including "step up" and "step down" support) from 0-19 years (see Recommendation 6). We believe that these new arrangements would provide a platform from which social care and child protection, currently overstretched and failing in too many areas to protect children, could be transformed. Embedding Early Intervention in every community with a renewed focus on improved outcomes for looked after children would build on an existing infrastructure and provide the springboard needed to revolutionise wider services and social care into an integrated family approach.

6

Extend the age range and support children from 0 to 19 years

Over time, as Children's Centres build on their core work around 0-5 years to become "whole family" 0-19 multi-purpose Community Hubs (see Recommendation 3), we believe that the network can be expanded to provide services across the whole 0-19 age range. This would enable support for all children, young people and families to be brought together within the local community. We know from where this already happens that this covers the whole "life journey" from pregnancy right through to a child's teenage years (0-19 years), where appropriate to local demands and resource allocation, an approach that 4Children has long championed and is already in place in many local authority areas.

Recommendations continued

7

Increase support for the Troubled Families Programme

The potential role in the delivery of local Troubled Families programme needs to be maximised, recognising the announcement made in mid-2014 that the programme is being extended in its next stage to work with families with under-5s, and bring in a wider focus on health outcomes. All Centres should be integrated into, and at the heart of the programme's delivery, as it goes forward to support a further 340,000 families over the next five years (as proposed at the present time).

8

Maximise integration with Health and Wellbeing Boards

Both local authorities and Health and Wellbeing boards should put Children's Centres at the heart of their Early Intervention and preventative strategies, and Children's Centres have an opportunity to act as a wider community base for health, particularly once Health and Wellbeing Boards become much more aligned with local authorities from 2015. The network can deliver and co-ordinate vital support from conception to age two, including the delivery of perinatal services including midwives, health visitors, social workers and (for 0-18 years) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). As the latest regulations set out, all should work to ensure that they occupy a central position in the delivery of the Healthy Child programme, as well as having access to a named health visitor. Resources provided to Centres from local authorities should be tailored to reflect this and the savings that can be achieved by integrated working.

9

Increase childcare provision

The network has the capacity to more than double the number of childcare places being provided, and make a particular contribution to the delivery of the offer of free places for two-year-olds. There should be a duty on local authorities to make efforts to deliver early education childcare places for two, three and four-year-olds through Centres where a shortfall of places is identified as part of their duty to assess local provision and secure sufficient . Centres could either provide this childcare directly themselves, or "open up their doors" to become a community space with delivery by other providers/partners. This would be supported further by expanding the support for free early years childcare support from 15 to 25 hours a week, and to all two-year-olds (not just the 40% most disadvantaged). The Early Years Pupil Premium should also be increased to the same level as for the school-level premium to allow targeted investment for the most disadvantaged pre-school children, and providing an additional income stream Centres can access. Childcare signposting should become the responsibility of Centres, co-ordinating and blending childcare in an area to offer parents the flexible and coordinated support they need, a model developed by 4Children and currently being successfully trialled around the country.

10

Data sharing and evidence

There needs to be a presumption of sharing of data between health visitors, midwives, social workers and Centres in order to target services effectively. This would include live birth data, helping Centres to identify families in their "reach" area much more easily. Centres should also be enabled to provide birth registration, either bringing in registrars or training their own staff to provide the service. Furthermore, every single Centre should be using evidence and impact assessments.

11

Increased family support

Centres should provide a range of other additional support, including the development of a volunteer "peer programme" to support 'hard to reach' families; increased direction and provision of relationship support for couples and family therapy; more widespread fathers' groups; expansion of Job Centre advice sessions, particularly for the 16-18 year old age group.

12

Statutory footing

The network should be placed on a statutory footing, along a similar basis to schools, to ensure they become a central feature of a thriving community for all families to offer support and advice.

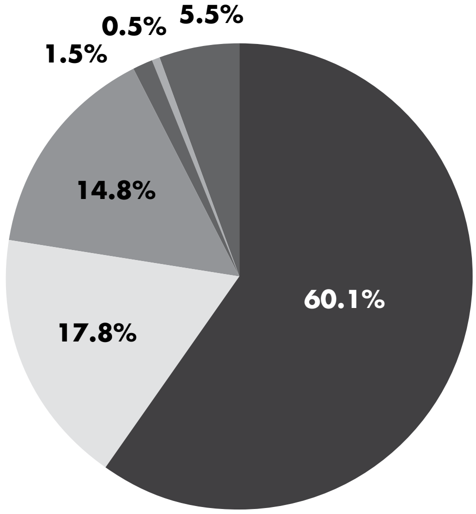
Key characteristics of Children's Centres in the 2014 Census

This is the fourth year in which 4Children has conducted its annual Children's Centres Census, which aims to give an overview of the significant trends and developments amongst Centres, as well as looking ahead to the challenges and opportunities for the coming year. In this opening section we provide an overview of some key top-level statistics, including figures on who is running Centres and operating models.

Who is running Children's Centres in 2014?

The majority (60%) of Centres which took part in this year's Census reported that they are run by a local authority, while schools are responsible for around one fifth (18%) of Centres. Meanwhile, voluntary sector providers run around 15% of Centres. This suggests that there is considerable potential for the voluntary sector to become more involved in delivery and, wherever local authorities are under pressure to close Centres or reduce service levels, this is one alternative option which should always be explored as part of commissioning of services. The Census also reveals that other providers, including private and community sector organisations, are responsible for running just over 7% of Centres.

Figure 1: Who is your Centre(s) operated by?[5]



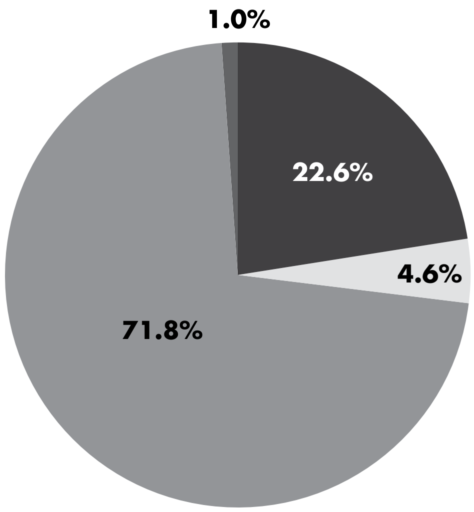
By the local authority – 60.1%
By a school – 17.8%
By a voluntary sector provider – 14.8%
By a community organisation – 1.5%
By a private sector organisation – 0.5%
Other – 5.5%

Operating Models

When asked about their operating model, nearly three-quarters of Centres (72%) reported that they are part a multiple site model, such as a cluster or a "hub-and-spoke" arrangement. This illustrates how widespread such multiple site models have become in recent years, as local authorities look to respond to financial pressures by restructuring their provision and finding new ways to deliver services whilst keeping buildings open. Meanwhile, 23% of Centres in this year's Census are run as stand-alone sites, and just under 5% operated on a collaborative basis (involving a partnership arrangement with other Centres).

5 n = 879 base

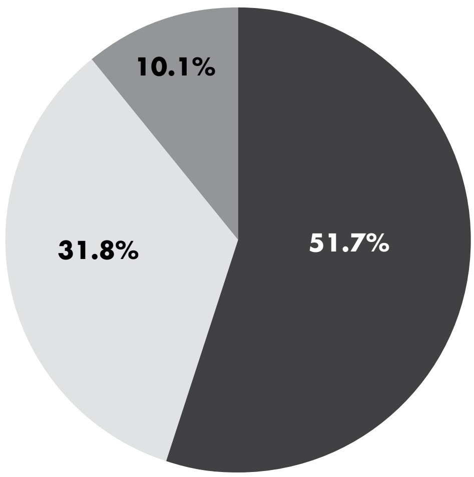
Figure 2: What type of Centre model are you?[6]



Stand-alone – 22.6%
Collaborative – 4.6%
Multiple Sites – 71.8%
Other – 1.0%

In addition to examining the distribution of Centre models at the present time, the Census also sought to examine whether Centres expected their model to change over the course of the coming year. Over half (52%) said that they believed that their operating model will change, with 32% saying it would stay the same and around 10% unsure.

Figure 3: Do you expect your Centre model to change in the coming year?[7]



Yes – 51.7%
No – 31.8%
Do not know – 10.1%

Of those Centres that anticipate a change, many are anticipating a move towards a multiple site model – around 45% of stand-alone Centres believed they will become part of a group structure, while around 22.5% of Centres that were already part of in a multiple site model thought there will be a move towards further clustering or grouping in the future.

Furthermore, the Census also reveals that even where Centres expect a change in some form, considerable uncertainty can often remain over what future provision will look like. Around 30% of those stand-alone Centres which expect a change say that they simply do not know what their model will ultimately look like, and this is also the case for over a third (36%) of multiple site Centres that anticipate changes.

6 n = 879 base

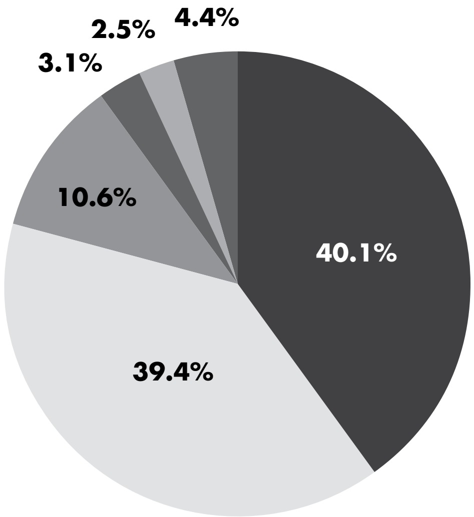
7 n = 779 base

How many staff do Children's Centres employ?

As part of the Census survey, we also sought to determine the numbers of staff employed by individual Centre sites, while recognising that many others (such as volunteers) often support the work of Children's Centres, and that wherever a Centre is part of a multiple-site model staff may work across sites.

The data suggests that 40% of Centre settings employ between 0 and 4 staff, with a further 39% employing between 5 and 9. In total, around 16% of sites employ between 10 and 24 members of staff, while just over 4% employ more than 25.

Figure 4: How many staff does your Centre(s) currently employ?[8]



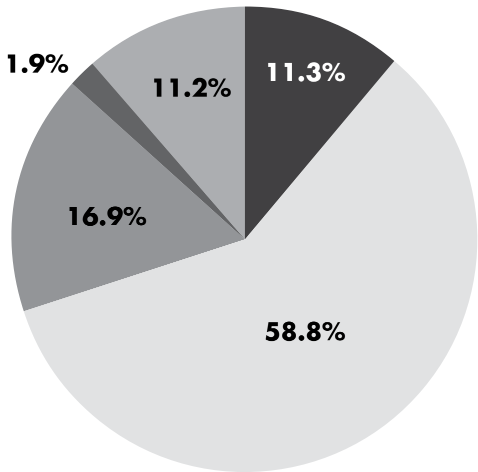
0 to 4 – 40.1%
5 to 9 – 39.4%
10 to 14 – 10.6%
15 to 19 – 3.1%
20 to 24 – 2.5%
More than 25 – 4.4%

Notably, the retention of staff is also seen as a major issue by those responding to the Census, with 54% of Centres citing maintaining staffing levels as a key concern when asked about what their biggest challenges would be for the year ahead (see page 39).

Ofsted Ratings

The Census invited Centres to provide data on the outcome of their most recent Ofsted inspection, with the vast majority choosing to provide this information. Overall, 59% of respondents said that they had received a "Good" rating, and a further 11% reported that they were rated as "Outstanding". 17% of Centres received a "Satisfactory" or "Requires Improvement" rating, and 2% reported an "Inadequate" rating. Around about 11% of Centres were unable give their rating as they had not yet been subject to an Ofsted inspection.

Figure 5: What Ofsted rating did your Centre receive?[9]



Outstanding – 11.3%
Good – 58.8%
Satisfactory/Requires Improvement – 16.9%
Inadequate – 1.9%
Not yet inspected – 11.2%

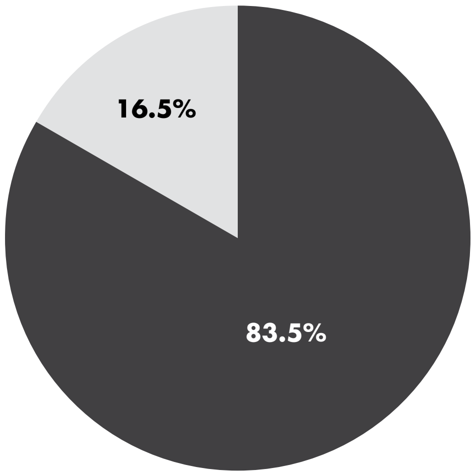
8 n = 858 base

9 n = 805 base

Strategic Governance Boards

The Census also examined Centres' governance arrangements, particularly the make-up of strategic governance boards, which offers a valuable insight into a Centre's relationships with the wider community and its links with other service providers. Of those Centres who gave a firm response to this question, a significant majority (83.5%) reported that they do have such a board in place, with just 16.5% saying they do not.

Figure 6: Is there a strategic governance board?[10]



Yes – 83.5%
No – 16.5%

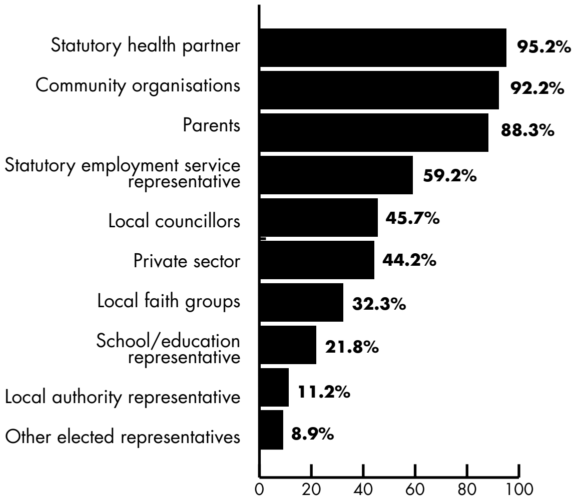
Amongst those who do have a strategic governance board in place, the make-up of the representatives who sit on it is particularly informative. 95% of these Centres have representation from statutory health partners on their statutory governance board, suggesting that strong relationships are being forged between Children's Centres and health services at a local level.

Unsurprisingly, a very high number of Centres, 88%, also said that parents are represented. In well over half of cases (59%) Centres' boards include representation from statutory employment service partners, while 44% have a representative from the private sector on their board, suggesting that significant numbers of Centres recognise the value of supporting parents to return to work. Around 22% of Centres indicated that their statutory governance board includes a school or educational representative, and roughly 11% include a representative from the local authority.

10 n = 814 base

In terms of Centres' wider engagement with the community, the findings also suggest that these relationships are strong. 92% of respondents reported that community organisations are represented on their strategic governance boards, while local councillors are represented in around 46% of cases, and 32% of respondents said that there is someone from a local faith group on their board.

Figure 7: Who is represented on your strategic governance board?[11]



11 n = 669 base
Note that in the original Census questionnaire, "school/educational representative" and "local authority representative" were not included as options. Instead, respondents could select an "Other" option and self-report the additional types of representatives that sat on their statutory governance boards. However, when responses to the "Other" option were analysed, significant numbers said that representatives from schools and the local authority are part of their boards, so the data in Figure 7 presents these as specific categories in their own right.

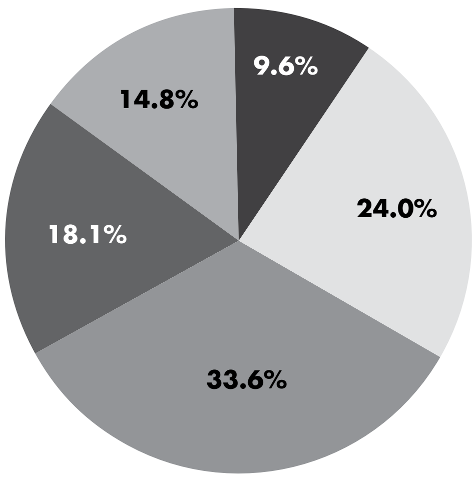
What is the usage level of Children's Centres' services?

High levels of demand represent a key issue for Children's Centres, with over half stating that meeting demand will be one of their biggest challenges for the forthcoming year. This year's Census provides an up-to-date estimate for the number of families that now frequently use Centres, which we believe to be around 1.05 million, confirming that the network is now playing a major role in the lives of huge numbers of children and parents across the country.

How many families are Children's Centres working with?

In total, around 33% of Centres are working with more than 300 families on a frequent basis (within this, 18% work with between 301 and 600 families, and a further 15% work with over 600 families). A further 34% of Centres are working with between 101 and 300 families, and around a quarter (24%) frequently work with between 51 and 100 families.

Figure 8: Approximately how many families use your Centre(s) on a frequent basis?[12]



0 to 50 – 9.6%
51 to 100 – 24.0%
101 to 300 – 33.6%
301 to 600 – 18.1%
More than 600 – 14.8%

Using the data provided by respondents to the Census, we have been able to produce an estimate of the total number of families using Children's Centres across the country as a whole, and believe that approximately 1.05 million families are now using Centres on a frequent basis. A decade on from the beginning of the national roll-out of Children's Centres in 2004, this clearly indicates that Centres have now become established community assets.

Furthermore, high demand for Centres' services is a trend that looks set to continue into the future. When asked about what they felt their biggest challenges will be for the year ahead (see page 39), 53% said "meeting the demand for services". Therefore, the indications from the 2014 Census are that the need for the services and support that are provided by Children's Centres remains large.

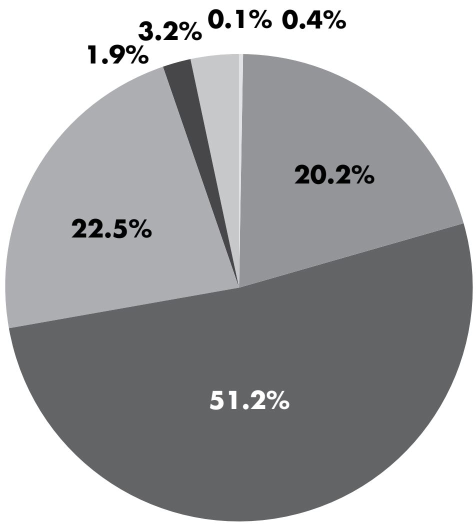
12 n = 813 base
Note that due to changes in the methodology used to calculate the total number of families that are using Centres, these figures on per centre numbers by category are not directly comparable with those from the 2013 Children's Centres Census.

What proportion of vulnerable families are Children's Centres reaching?

Children's Centres' engagement with the most vulnerable families has always been a fundamental part of their work, and one that has become particularly significant recently given changes to the Ofsted inspection framework which has made this a key factor in determining a Centre's rating. The Census therefore asked respondents about the proportion of vulnerable families that their Centres were reaching against the baseline for their area.

Over half (51%) of Centres are reaching 50%-79% of vulnerable families in their area, with a further 22.5% Centres reaching 80-99% such families. Around 2% of Centres said that they were now reaching all the vulnerable families in their area, and just 0.5% of Centres were reaching less than 19% of these families.

Figure 9: Approximately what proportion of vulnerable families are you reaching against the baseline for your area?[13]



None – 0.1%
1 to 19% – 0.4%
20 to 49% – 20.2%
50 to 79% – 51.2%
80 to 99% – 22.5%
100% (All) – 1.9%
Unknown – 3.2%

On the basis of the Census data, we estimate that across the country as a whole Children's Centres are currently working with 67% of all the vulnerable families identified, indicating that they remain a crucial way of providing much needed support to those in the greatest need.

13 n = 792 base

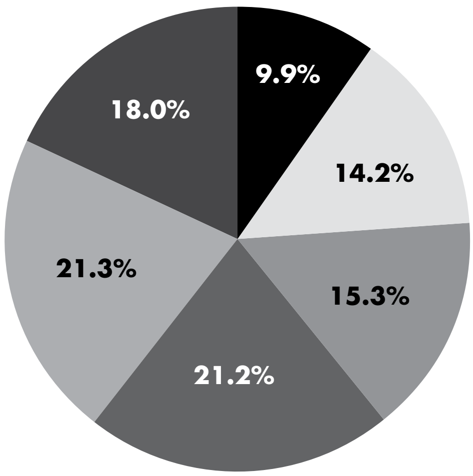
How are Centre budgets changing and what will be the impact?

Pressure on budgets has been a major issue for Children's Centres in previous years' censuses, and 2014 has been no exception with large numbers expecting further budgetary decreases over the coming year. The figures indicate that after years of financial constraints, we may now be reaching a "tipping point" with in excess of 100 Centres potentially at risk of closure.

What are the current levels of Children's Centre budgets?

The Census invited Centres to set out the level of their current annual budget. Of those who responded, the data suggests that just under half (42.5%) have an annual budget that was somewhere between £150,000 and £249,999, with a further 18% of Centres having a budget in excess of £250,000. Around 10% of Centres have much smaller budgets of less than £50,000, while just over a quarter (29.5%) have an annual budget somewhere between £50,000 and £149,999.

Figure 10: What is your current annual budget?[14]



£0 to £49,999 – 9.9%
£50,000 to £99,999 – 14.2%
£100,000 to £149,999 – 15.3%
£150,000 to £199,999 – 21.2%
£200,000 to £249,999 – 21.3%
More than £250,000 – 18.0%

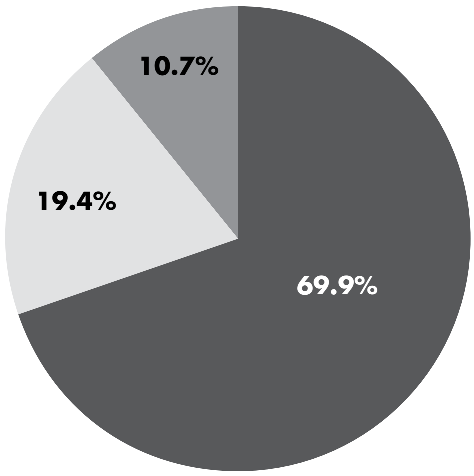
Overall, the Census data indicates that budgets are relatively evenly spread across income categories. However, the indications are that there is likely to be continued downward pressure on Centre budgets in the year ahead.

14 n = 627 base

How will budgets change in the year ahead?

Large numbers of Centres said that there would be changes to their budgets in the year ahead. A significant majority (70%) reported that they expect their budget to change for the forthcoming year, while just under a fifth (19%) expect no change. Around 11% of Centres were uncertain or did not wish to say.

Figure 11: Do you expect a change to your budget over the coming year?[15]

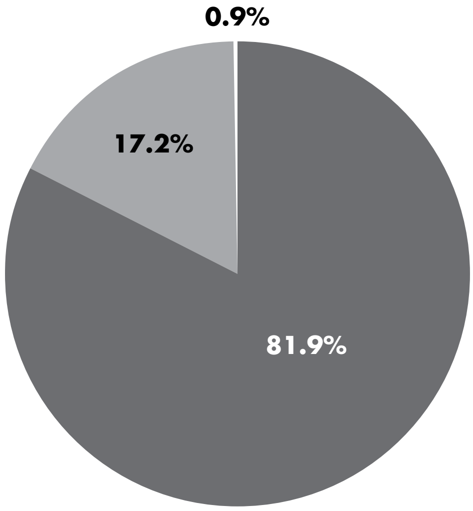


Yes – 69.9%
No – 19.4%
Do not know – 10.7%

When those expecting a change were asked what was taking place, an overwhelming proportion (82%) reported that their budget will decrease. The number who said that they will have an increased budget was marginal (less than 1%), whilst around 17% of Centres are uncertain or do not wish to say. Overall this means that 52% of Centres are expecting a decline in budget over the coming year, with 23% uncertain of what will happen, and only a handful saying it will increase.

15 n = 775 base

Figure 12: How will your budget change over the coming year?[16]



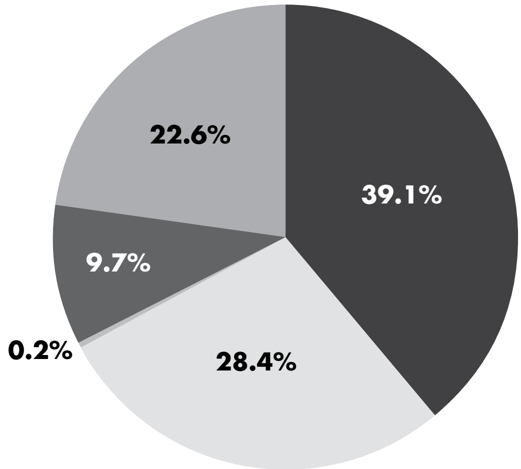
We will have an increased budget for the forthcoming year – 0.9%
We will have a decreased budget for the forthcoming year – 81.9%
Do not know/wish to say – 17.2%

It is also notable that when asked about the biggest challenges they will face in the year ahead (see page 38) close to half (44%) of Centres cited "sustaining funding", indicating that budgets are expected to remain a significant concern in future.

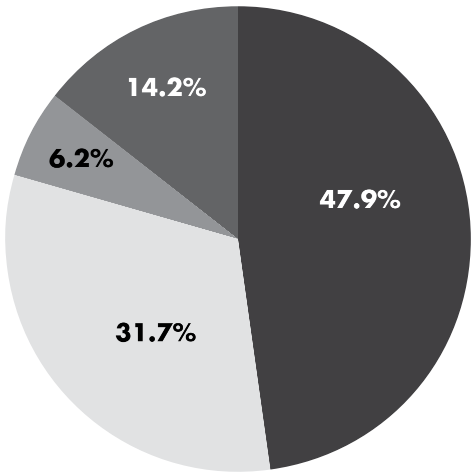
Why are Children's Centre budgets changing?

The Census also examined the reasons why Centre budgets were changing. Looking specifically at those Centres who expect to have a decreased budget, nearly half (48%) cited the impact of budget cuts at either a local authority or central Government level, while a further 32% gave commissioning as the key factor. The results seem to provide a clear indication that financial constraints at both local and national level are filtering down to affect Centres' budgets in an immediate and very tangible way. A relatively small number of Centres (just over 6%) indicated that there are other reasons for their decreased budget, whilst around 14% were uncertain or did not wish to say.

Figure 13: Why is your budget changing?[17]



Budget Cuts* – 39.1%
Commissioning – 28.4%
Childcare funding – 0.2%
Other – 9.7%
Do not know/wish to say – 22.6%



Budget Cuts* - 47.9%
Commissioning – 31.7%
Other – 6.2%
Do not know/wish to say – 14.2%

16 n = 535 base

17 n = 438 base
*Note that in the original Census questionnaire, "Budget Cuts" were not included as a specific option. However, a very significant number of those who responded under the "Other" category indicated that local or national budget cuts were the main factor driving decreases in their budget, so the data in Figure 13 has extracted these and created a stand-alone category.

How many Centres will close?

Last year's Census identified an "undercurrent threat of closures" across the Centre network, and suggested that this trend could begin to increase. Figures from this year's survey suggest that, worryingly, this prediction is starting to be borne out.

Data from the 2014 Census suggests that as many as 112 Centres expect to close over the forthcoming year. It appears that the funding pressures which Centres have been under for several years are now beginning to bite sharply, and that we are approaching a genuine "tipping point".

While Centres have been managing to do more for less for a number of years, meeting increased demand with greatly reduced resources. Concerted action is urgently needed, not only to protect budgets but also develop new ways of thinking about how we use Centres to ensure they can continue to meet families' needs in a profoundly difficult funding environment – this will involve building on the hard work that has been done in recent times to draw local services together, and developing new models of integrated delivery, such as 4Children's proposal for extended Children and Family Community Hubs (see Recommendation 3).

What services are Children's Centres currently providing?

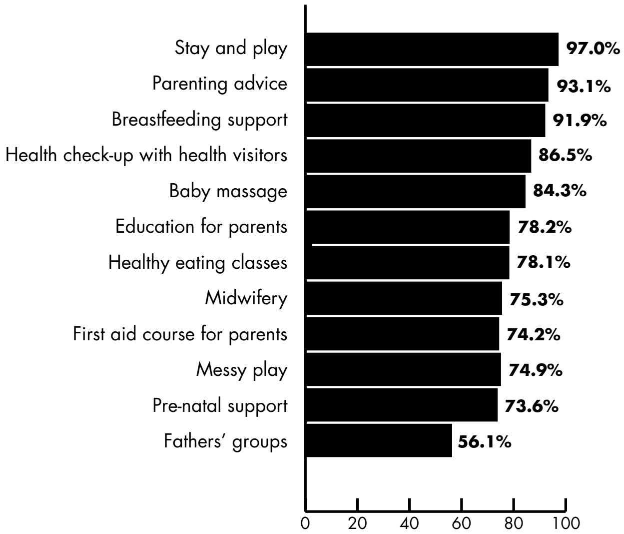
This year's Census illustrates that despite an often difficult funding situation, Children's Centres are currently managing to maintain provision of universal services, which represent a key part of their offer. Almost all Centres are providing Stay and Play and parenting advice, while the prevalence of services such as health visitor check-ups and midwifery support demonstrate strong links with local health services. Meanwhile, very large numbers of Centres are also providing targeted support to help families who are either in crisis or on the edge, such as help for victims of domestic abuse or child protection services.

Universal services

Stay and Play was the most widely cited universal service offered by Centres (indeed, it was the most widely cited service of any type) with almost all those Centres in this year's Census (97%) offering such activities. Parenting advice and breastfeeding support are also offered by over 90% of Centres, while 84% provide baby massage. Notably, nearly 87% of Centres offer health check-ups with health visitors, and 75% of respondents provide midwifery services, indicating strong links with local health services in many cases. 74% of Centres also offer pre-natal support, illustrating the importance that many Centres place on engaging with families at the earliest possible stage, before the birth of their child.

In addition, the results of the Census reveal that a significant number of Centres (78%) are providing education for parents such as literacy and numeracy courses, which demonstrates that many Centres see improving parental skill levels as an important part of their remit. Just over half of Centres (56%) are also currently offering fathers' groups. This is one area in which provision has traditionally been quite low, so it is encouraging that over half of Centres are now providing dedicated groups for fathers. However, given how crucial the involvement of both parents is to a child's development, this is one area where Centres should be looking to do more work in future.

Figure 14: Which of the following universal services does your Centre(s) currently provide? (Top 12)[18]



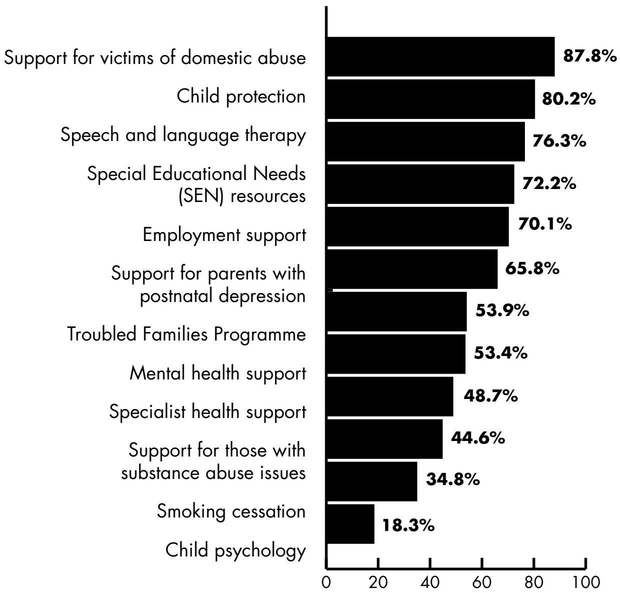
18 n = 813 base

Targeted services

Providing help for families in or on the edge of crisis is a particular area of focus where Centres are delivering targeted services, with 88% of Centres offering support for victims of domestic violence and 80% providing child protection services. Meanwhile, speech and language therapy is offered by 76% of Centres, and resources for children with special educational needs (such as sensory rooms) by 72% of Centres.

Notably, 70% of Centres also offer some form of targeted employment support, illustrating again that many now see supporting parents into work as a key aspect of their work. Two-thirds of Centres (66%) offer support for parents with post-natal depression, while over half provide mental health support (53%) and targeted services as part of their local Troubled Families Programme (54%).

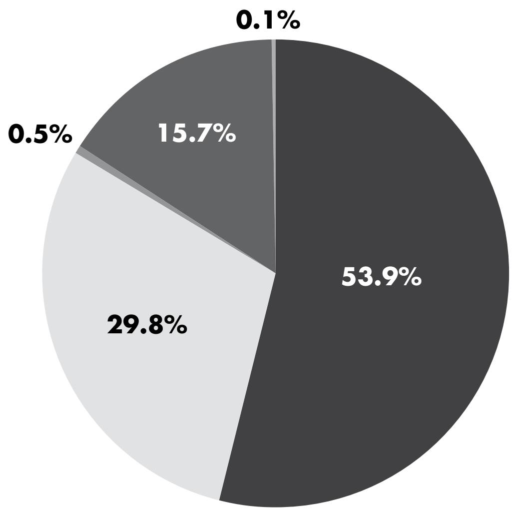
Figure 15: Which of the following targeted services does your Centre(s) currently provide? (Top 12)[19]



How are targeted services delivered?

As well as probing the sorts of targeted services that Children's Centres offer, the Census also sought to examine how such services were delivered. Over half of Centres (54%) said that they provide targeted services in partnership with other organisations and agencies, while a further 30% of Centres provide targeted services by themselves. Less than 1% of respondents said that they provide targeted services through community groups, but a further 16% indicated that they offer targeted services through a mixture of these various delivery mechanisms.

Figure 16: Generally, how do you provide your targeted services?[20]



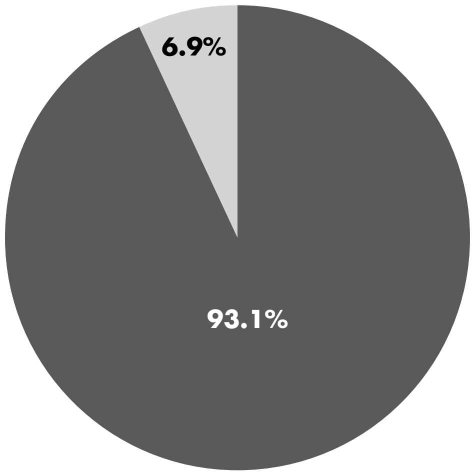
Partnerships – 53.9%
Ourselves – 29.8%
Community Groups – 0.5%
A mixture* – 15.7%
We do not provide targeted services – 0.1%

19 n = 813 base

20 n = 813 base
Note that in the original Census questionnaire, "A mixture" was not included as an option. Instead, respondents could select an "Other" option and self-report how targeted services were delivered. However, when responses to the "Other" option were analysed, almost all were indicating that they delivered targeted services via a mixture of the other options provided, so the data in Figure 16 presents this as a specific category in its own right.

The Census also found that referrals play a significant part in many Centres' targeted work. Over 93% of Centres receive referrals to their targeted services through partnerships allocation groups or multi-agency groups, while less than 7% do not.

Figure 17: Do targeted services get referrals through partnership allocation groups / multi-agency groups?[21]

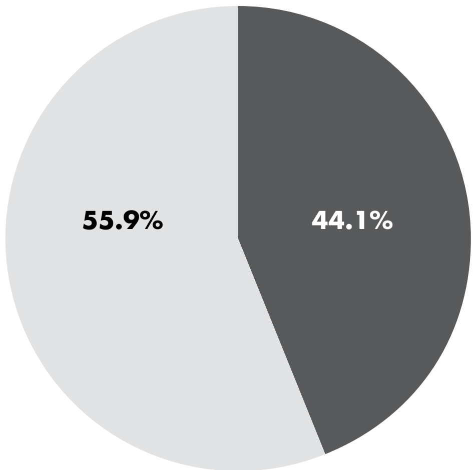


Yes – 93.1%
No – 6.9%

Services for over-5s

The Census also examined the degree to which Centres are providing services for children over the age of 5. This helps provide an indication of the level of provision for older children in Centres, and the extent to which they are looking to provide continuing support after children have started school. Overall, just over 44% of Centres offer regular services for over-5s, whilst around 56% do not.

Figure 18: Do you offer regular services for children over the age of five?[22]



Yes – 44.1%
No – 55.9%

Amongst those Centres that said they were working with older children, significant numbers reported that they offered holiday activities for over-5s, while the provision of out-of-school clubs also featured prominently. These are crucial services, particularly for working parents, and Children's Centres clearly have a key role to play in their delivery.

21 n = 806 base

22 n = 787 base

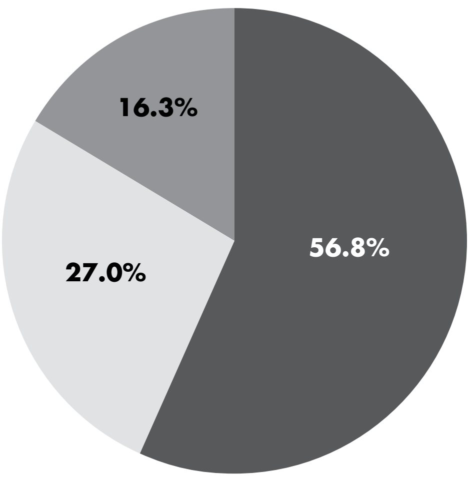
How will Centres' service offer change in the future?

Understanding the way in which Children's Centres services are set to change provides an important insight into the changing needs of the families they serve, and Centres' key priorities at a time of limited resources. The Census shows that providing early education places as part of the two-year-old offer is set to be a key growth area, while services to support parental employability and crisis families are also being expanded. Where services are being reduced, it is often aspects of the universal offer that are most frequently being cut.

How are Children's Centre services changing?

Over half of Centres (57%) reported that the services that they offer will be changing (which could mean either an increase or a decrease in provision), whilst around one quarter (27%) indicated that there will be no change. 16% of Centres are uncertain about what will happen to their service offer.

Figure 19: Are the services you provide changing?[23]

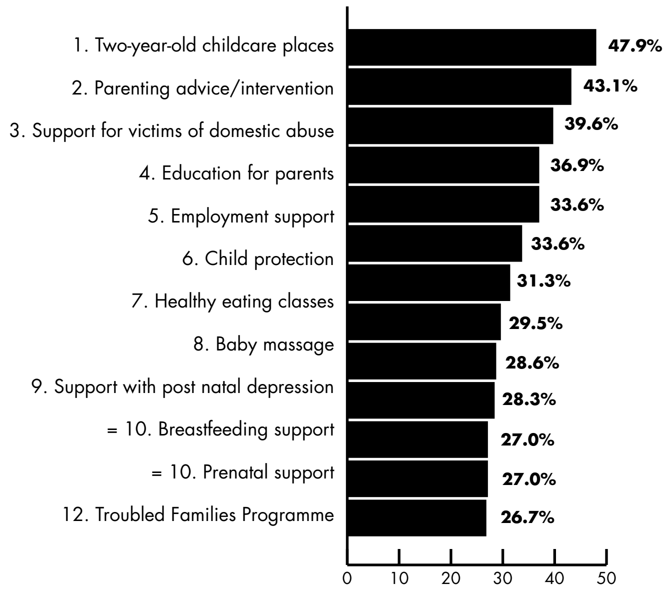


Yes – 56.8%
No – 27.0%
Do not know – 16.3%

Those Centres who anticipate a change were then asked about what services they expect to increase over the year ahead. Nearly half of Centres (48%) indicated that they are intending to expand the number of two-year-old places they offer as part of the free entitlement, illustrating that this represents a key growth area across the network (we address this issue in further detail in the childcare sections of this report, see pages 28-32). Centres also intend to extend a number of core services such as parenting advice (43%), healthy eating classes (29.5%), baby massage (29%) and breastfeeding support (27%). They are also supporting parents to develop their employment prospects by expanding education (37%) and employment support (34%) services.

Significantly, large numbers of Centres also plan to offer further support to families at risk of falling into crisis through the extension of support for victims of domestic abuse (40%) and post natal depression (28%) as well as child protection services (31%), while just over a quarter (27%) intend to expand their involvement in the Troubled Families Programme.

Figure 20: What services do you expect to increase?[24]



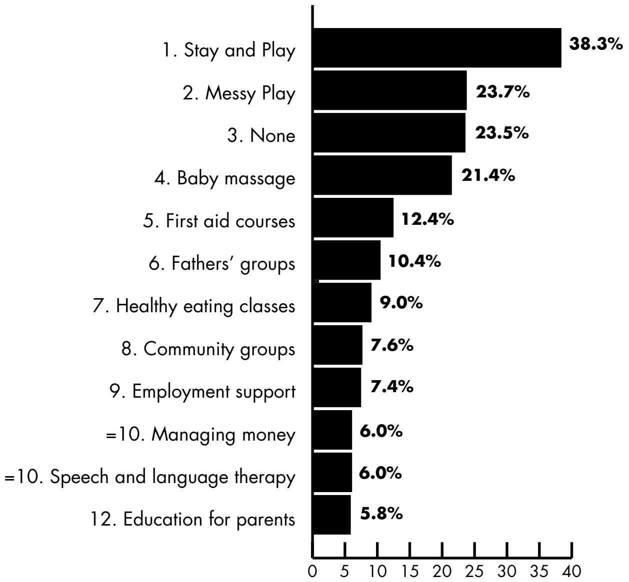
23 n = 768 base

24 n = 434 base

Where Centres will be reducing their services, universal services are predominantly at risk. 38% of Centres that expect a change in their service offer anticipate a reduction in their Stay and Play provision, while roughly a quarter (24%) expect to cut back on Messy Play sessions, and just over a fifth (21%) expect to reduce their baby massage services. Approximately 10% of Centres also indicated a likely cut back on fathers' groups.

Strikingly however, nearly a quarter (23.5%) of those who said they expect a change in their offer are not planning to cut back on any services at all, suggesting that in a significant number of cases there is a real determination to maintain a stable base of provision despite significant budgetary pressure.

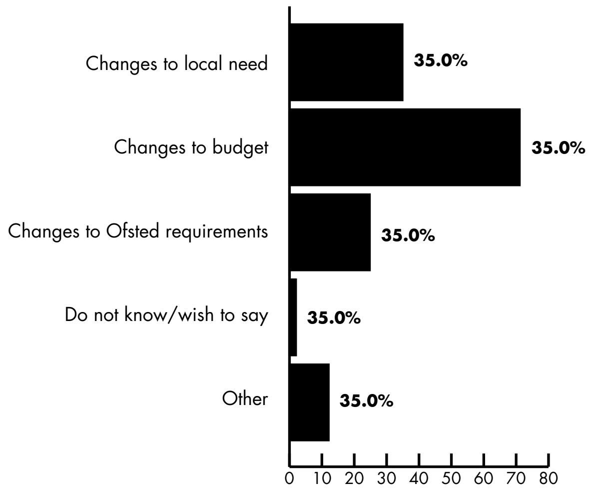
Figure 21: What services do you expect to cut back?[25]



Why are services changing?

When asked for the reasons why their service offer is changing, budgetary issues were cited by nearly three-quarters (71%) of Centres, clearly demonstrating that financial issues are the main factor underpinning decisions about provision. However, over a third (35%) said that changes in services are at least in part a response to changes in local need, demonstrating that they are seeking to adapt to the needs of their local communities. A quarter (25%) of Centres identified recent changes in Ofsted requirements as an important factor in shaping changes in their service offer, and around 12% also referred to other factors driving change, often involving the re-commissioning or re-organisation of services by the local authority.

Figure 22: Why are your services changing?[26]



25 n = 434 base

26 n = 434 base

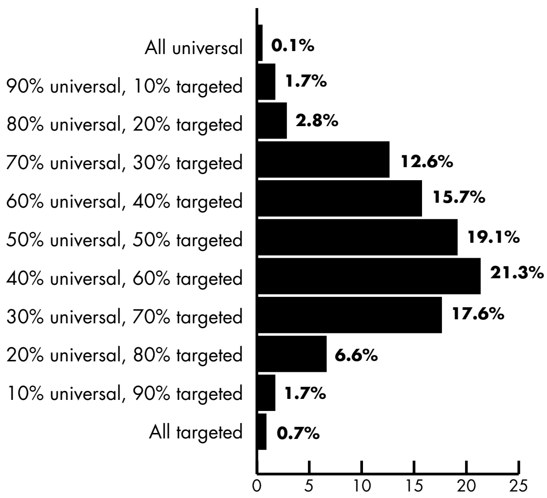
How is the balance between universal and targeted provision changing?

The results of the Census show that there is likely to be a general shift towards more targeting in the future, but that despite this maintaining a universal base to provision is still core to many Centres.

What is the current balance between universal and targeted services?

The Census examined the current balance between universal and targeted service provision in Centres, with Figure 23 illustrating the findings.

Figure 23: What is the approximate balance between universal and targeted services at your Centres(s)?[27]

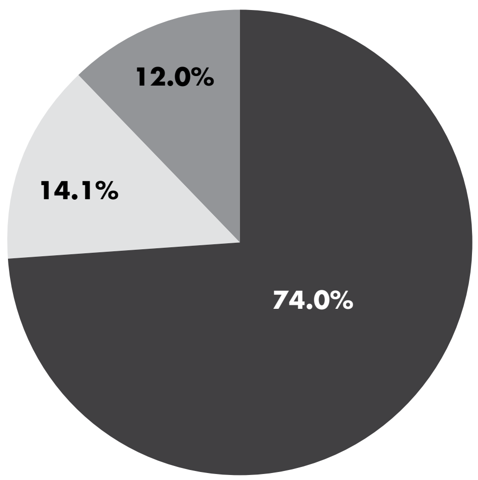


The most common arrangement is that services are split so that 40% are universal and 60% targeted, which is the case for 21% of Centres. The remaining responses are evenly distributed around this peak, with the second most common arrangement being a 50%-50% split (which is the case in 19% of Centres) and the third most common being a balance of 30% universal and 70% targeted services (which is the case in around 18% of Centres).

How is this balance set to change?

Looking ahead however, nearly three quarters (74%) of Centres expect the balance between universal and targeted services to change, with 14% saying that it will not and 12% unsure.

Figure 24: Is the balance between universal and targeted services changing?[28]



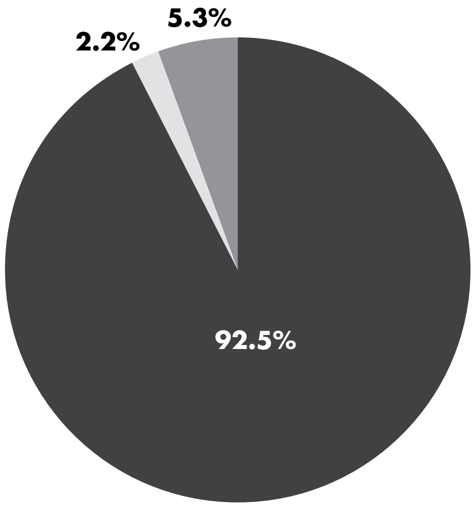
Yes – 74.0%
No – 14.1%
Do not know – 12.0%

27 n = 813 base

28 n = 434 base

Of those Centres that anticipate a change, the overwhelming majority (92.5%) indicated that this will involve a shift towards more targeted services, with a little over 2% suggesting there will be a shift towards more universal provision.

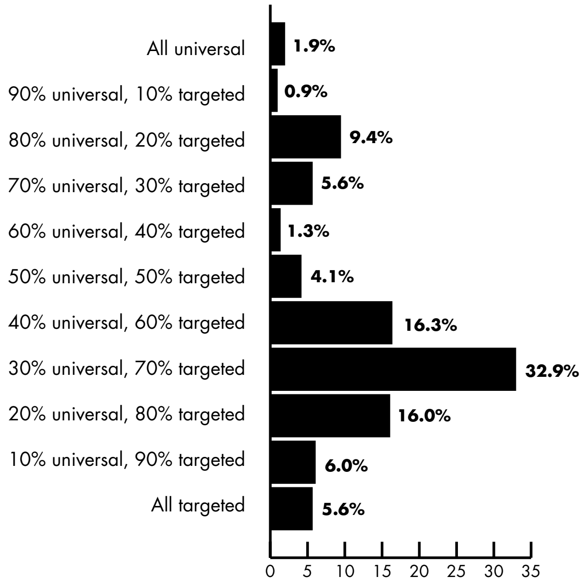
Figure 25: How is the balance between universal and targeted services changing?[29]



Shift towards more targeted services – 92.5%
Shift towards more universal services – 2.2%
Other – 5.3%

However, when asked to specify what the new balance between universal and targeted services will be, the results suggest that many Centres are still looking to retain a base of universal provision. As Figure 26 illustrates, two-thirds (65%) of Centres still expect to be delivering between 20% and 40% of services on a universal basis in the future, with the most common arrangement being a 30% universal-70% targeted split (which is the expectation of 33% of Centres). Less than 6% of Centres anticipate that they will only deliver services on targeted basis.

Figure 26: Approximately what will the new balance between universal and targeted services be?[30]



Therefore, the Census indicates that while a significant number of Centres are increasing the proportion of their services that are targeted, many still recognise the importance of maintaining a universal element to their offer.

29 n = 319 base

30 n = 319 base

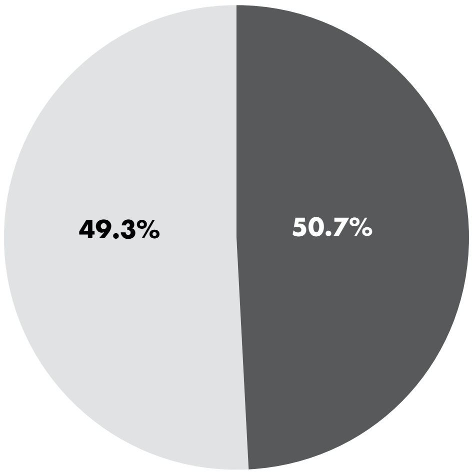
What is the current level of childcare provision in Children's Centres?

Since September 2013, fifteen hours of free childcare has been made available to the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds in England. In September 2014, this offer was extended in to cover the 40% most disadvantaged two-year-olds. What role are Children's Centres playing in delivering the two-year-old entitlement, and other childcare provision?

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

Of those Centres taking part in this year's Census, just under half (49%) are involved in the provision of childcare.

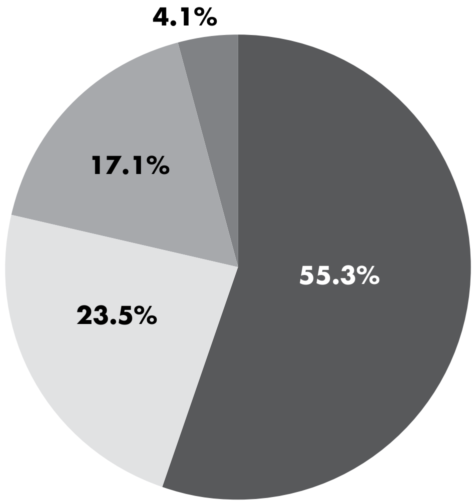
Figure 27: Do you offer childcare places at your Centre(s)?[31]



Yes – 49.3%
No – 50.7%

Of those Centres that do offer childcare places, over half (55%) provide between 1 and 20 places in their setting. Nearly a quarter (23.5%) offer between 11 and 20 childcare places, and around 17% provide between 51 and 100 places. Just over 4% of Centres provide over 100 childcare places. The type of model that a Children's Centre sits within, be it a stand-alone, collaborative or multiple site arrangement, appears to have no significant impact on whether childcare places are provided or the number of places offered.

Figure 28: How many childcare places are available at your Children's Centre(s), as of 31st March 2014?[32]



1 to 20 – 55.3%
21 to 50 – 23.5%
51 to 100 – 17.1%
More than 100 – 4.1%

On average, we estimate that if the data from our Census sample were scaled up to the national level, it would indicate that around 54,000 childcare places are currently provided through Children's Centres, which is the equivalent of 3-4% of the total number of early years childcare places available nationally.

31 n = 813 base

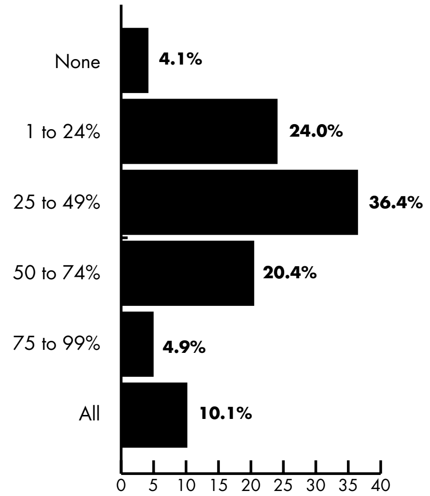
32 n = 387 base

Childcare provision as part of the two-year-old offer

Turning to specifically examine the provision of two-year-old offer places available in Children's Centres, the results of the Census indicate that of those Centres that provide childcare places, the vast majority (96%) offer places through the two-year-old entitlement. This equates to roughly 47% of all Children's Centres nationally.

In just over a third (36%) of Centres, the two-year-old offer accounts for between 25% and 49% of all the childcare places provided, as shown in Figure 29. In a further quarter (24%) of Centres the two-year-old offer accounts for between 1% and 24% of childcare places. In roughly 10% of Centres all childcare places are provided as part of the two-year-old offer.

Figure 29: Approximately how many places are funded through the two-year-old offer?[33]



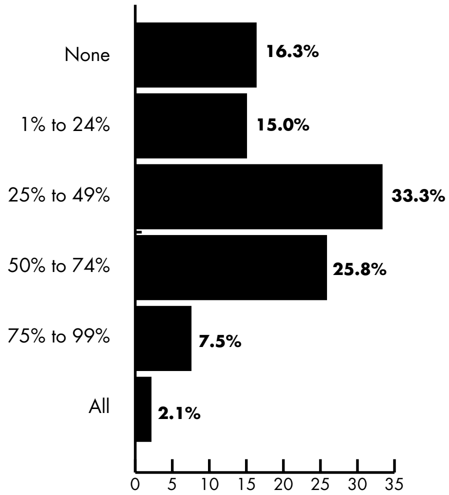
We estimate that, overall, around 39% of their childcare places available through Children's Centres are provided as part of the two-year-old offer, which equates to an average of around 13 places per Centre. Scaled-up nationally, this would mean that Children's Centres are providing around 20,000 two-year-old places (equivalent to around 15% of the total number of places available through the first phase of the offer introduced in September 2013).

Childcare provision as part of the three and four-year-old offer

The results of the Census indicate that slightly fewer providers are offering places as part of the three and four-year-old offer of free entitlement. We estimate that around 84% of Centres that offer childcare are providing places as part of three and four-year-old offer, which is equivalent to roughly 41% of all Centres nationally.

As Figure 30 shows, in a third (33%) of Centres the three and four-year-old offer accounts for between 25% and 49% of childcare places, and in a further quarter (26%) of Centres the offer accounts for between 50% and 74% of total places. In approximately 2% of Centres all childcare places are provided as part of the three and four-year-old offer.

Figure 30: Approximately how many places are funded through the three and four-year-old offer?[34]



33 n = 387 base

34 n = 386 base

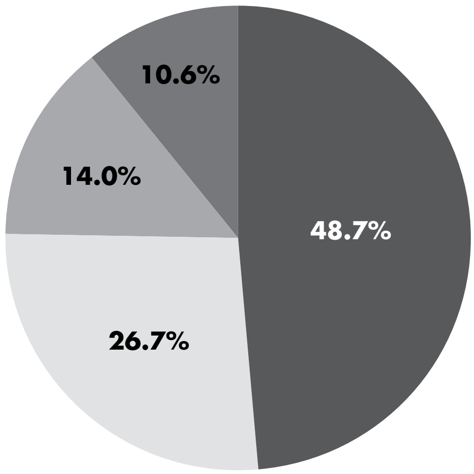
Despite the fact that fewer Children's Centres actually offer childcare places through the three and four-year-old offer, on average the entitlement funds 17 places in every Centre which provides childcare. Scaled up nationally, would mean that around 26,000 three and four-year-old places are offered though Children's Centres – more places than are available through the two-year-old offer, even though there are fewer participating sites.

Overall, this suggests that around 85% (46,000) of childcare places available in Children's Centres are provided as part of either the two-year-old or the three and four-year-old entitlements.

Children's Centres which do not offer childcare

Where Centres do not offer childcare places, the Census also sought to probe reasons for this. Of those Centres which are not involved in childcare provision and have no intention of offering places in the future, around a quarter (27%) said this is because there is sufficient provision by other childcare providers in their area. Notably however, a further 14% of Centres reported that there is a demand for childcare that they are unable to meet. Around 11% of Centres said that they had previously offered childcare but withdrawn provision, and just under half (49%) of Centres said that they have never provided childcare and have no plans to do so.

Figure 31: Which of the following best describes your Centre(s) circumstances with regard to childcare provision?[35]



We have never offered childcare – 48.7%
We do not offer childcare as there is sufficient/adequate provision by other providers in the area – 26.7%
There is demand for childcare, but we are unable to offer it – 14.0%
We have offered childcare in the past, but withdrawn – 10.6%

35 n = 386 base

What capacity do Children's Centres have to extend their childcare provision?

With 49% of Children's Centres providing childcare, including 46,000 places through the two-year-old and three and four-year-old offers, what is the scope for expanding provision, and how many more places could be provided with additional support?

Plans to extend provision through the free entitlements

The results of the Census indicate that significant numbers of Centres are intending to expand their levels of childcare provision, with increased involvement in delivering the free entitlements representing a key growth area. When asked about the services that they intend to increase, 48% of Centres said that they expect to extend the number of two-year-old places being offered. Of these, over half are already providing two-year-old places, so any extension would come on top of existing provision.

Moreover, in 61% of these cases any expansion would come on top of existing two-year-old delivery, the Centres in question currently deliver less than half of their childcare places through the entitlement, meaning that they do have capacity to do this.

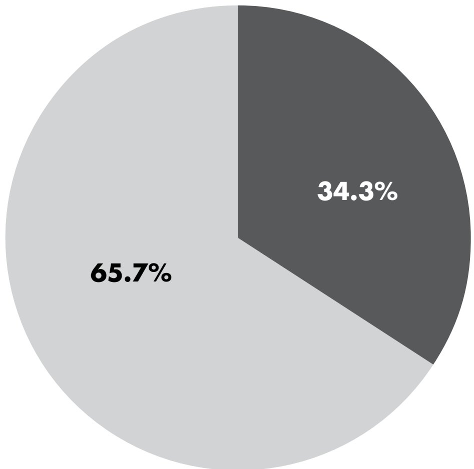
From the data collected as part of the Census, we estimate that this will lead to between 9,000 and 15,000 extra two-year-old places being provided in the coming year. This would increase the total number of two-year-old places offered through Children's Centres to between 29,000 and 35,000.

Meanwhile, a smaller percentage of Centres (11.8%) say that they expect to extend their three and four-year old offer places. However, only a negligible number of Centres plan to cut back on either their provision of two-year-old places (0.7%) or three and four year-old places (1.6%).

Is there additional capacity for expansion?

Looking at childcare provision in Centres more generally, the Census suggests that just over a third (34%) of Centres have the space to provide more childcare places in principle.

Figure 32: Do you have space to provide more childcare in principle?[36]



Yes – 34.3%
No – 65.7%

Of those Centres that could offer more childcare, 57% already provide places and 43% do not. Consequently, we estimate that just over a quarter (28%) of Centres which do not offer any childcare places at present have the space to do so in principle.

If these Centres were to begin offering places then, at a national level, the overall number of Centres providing childcare would increase from 49% to 62%. Based on the average number of places per Centre, we estimate that this could represent as many as 29,700 additional childcare places being offered through Children's Centres, on top of existing provision.

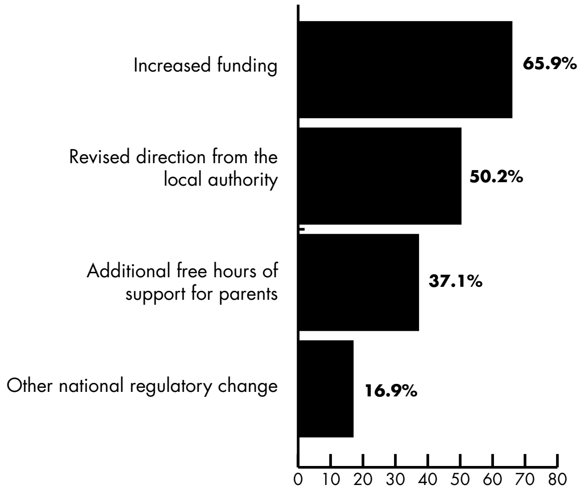
36 n = 797 base

What will enable Children's Centres to offer more childcare places?

Given Children's Centres' potential to offer more places, the Census also sought to examine what measures would be necessary to enable them to overcome any barriers that might preclude any expansion.

For two-thirds of Centres (66%), increased funding would allow them to offer more childcare places, while in half of cases (50%) revised direction from the local authority would also support this. Additional free hours of support for parents were cited by over a third of Centres (37%), while 17% identified the need for other types of regulatory change.

Figure 33: What would enable you to offer more childcare?[37]



Local authorities should consider the potential for more childcare places in Children's Centres, and work with partners to deliver these. In some cases this will mean reinstating childcare that many stopped providing when the requirement to provide was removed in 2011.

We estimate that roughly 7.8% of Centres are in a position where they do not provide childcare where a demand exists, or have offered childcare in the past but withdrawn it and, in both cases, do not currently have capacity to extend their provision. Were these Centres to be provided with the necessary support to enhance their childcare offer, we believe that this could provide as many as 8,600 additional places.

Moreover, a further 20,300 places could potentially be created if those remaining Centres which do not have capacity to expand, and are operating in a context where there is not appropriate provision elsewhere in their area, were supported to offer more places. Overall, this could represent a potential additional 28,900 places. Combined with the 29,700 places prospectively available in Centres currently not offering childcare but with the capacity to do so, this could represent an additional 58,600 places, more than doubling the present level of childcare provision in Children's Centres up to 112,600 places.

37 n = 267 base

What partners are Children's Centres working with and how are these partnerships changing?

Children's Centres' partnerships with other local service providers are an essential part of their ability to meet families' needs effectively, and ensure they offer the integrated and joined-up support that is so often needed. Furthermore, increasingly partnerships are being developed as a way of delivering a wider range of services and support, particularly targeted support for children and families in or on the edge of crisis, through Centres. The Census reveals that there are very encouraging signs in this regard, with many Centres having already built strong links with key local partners.

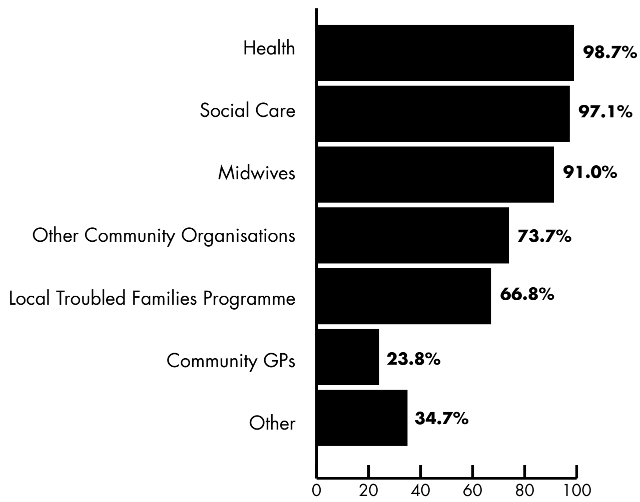
What partners are Children's Centres currently working with?

The Census reveals that Centres are building extensive links with health and social care services at a local level. This is extremely positive, as integrating additional targeted services into Centres is a fundamental aspect of what Children's Centres are expected to deliver.

Almost all Centres are working frequently with health (99%) and social care (97%) services and identify these as key partners. 91% of Centres also work closely with midwives, further highlighting the importance of the relationship between Children's Centres and those providing prenatal support.

In addition, two-thirds of Centres (67%) are currently working frequently with their local Troubled Families Programme. However, there is still scope for further development in this area, and given the imminent extension of the programme to work with an additional 380,000 families rolling out from this year, there is capacity to forge even deeper the relationships between Centres and Troubled Families initiatives to support those in greatest need.

Figure 34: What partners do you frequently work with?[38]

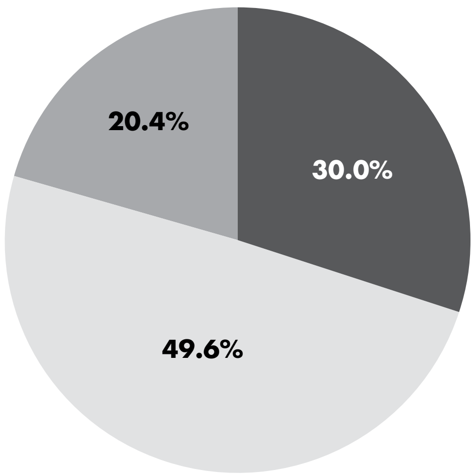


38 n = 787 base

How are Children's Centres' partnership arrangements changing?

Looking ahead, the Census sought to examine how Centres expect their partnership arrangements to change in the future. Half of Centres (50%) indicated that they do not expect any changes, indicating an important level of stability in this crucial area. 30% of Centres anticipate that there would be a change in the future and around 20% are uncertain.

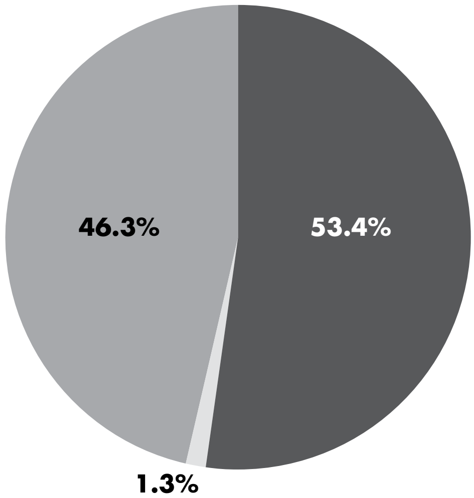
Figure 35: Are your partnerships changing?[39]



Yes – 30.0%
No – 49.6%
Do not know/wish to say – 20.4%

Where Centres expect a change in their partnership arrangements, the majority (52%) anticipate that this will involve greater engagement with partners, whilst just 1% believe this will involve less engagement. In around 46% of cases Centres expect that future changes will involve a mixture of more engagement with some partners and less engagement with others.

Figure 36: How are your partnerships changing?[40]



Greater engagement with partners – 52.4%
Less engagement with partners – 1.3%
A mixture – 46.3%

In those instances where Centres believe they will be engaging more with certain partners in the future, it is again health (75%) and social care (71%) that they expect to forge further links with, illustrating the importance of these services to Centres' work and the strength of the relationships that are being built. Encouragingly, over half of Centres (54%) also indicated that they are planning to expand their partnerships with the Troubled Families Programme locally.

39 n = 764 base

40 n = 229 base

Figure 37: Which partners are you engaging more with?[41]

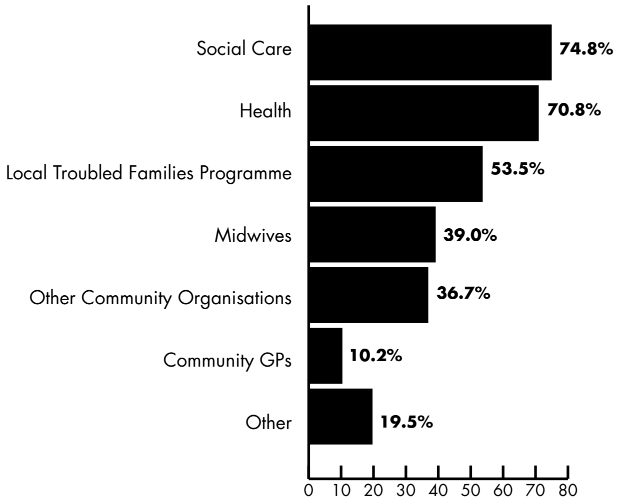
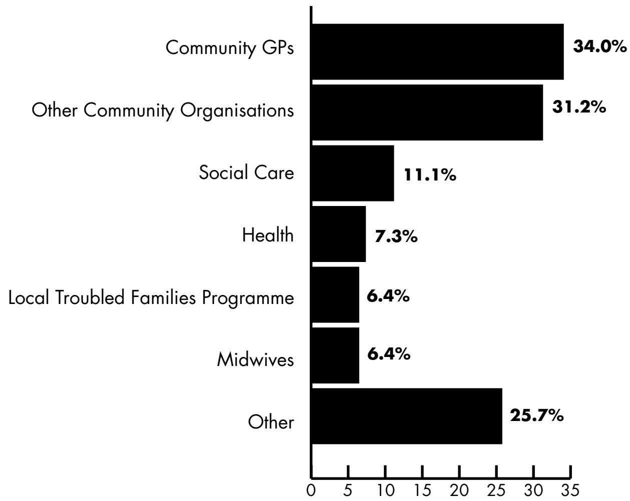


Figure 38: Which partners are you engaging less with?[42]



Meanwhile, where Centres believe they will be engaging less with certain partners, it is relationships with community GPs (34%) and community organisations (31%) that are being rolled back. However, it appears that even where Centres are under pressure to reduce partnerships in certain areas, a concerted effort is being made to preserve key relationships with social care, health, Troubled Families Programme initiatives and midwives, with comparatively low numbers of Centres saying they will be engaging less with these agencies.

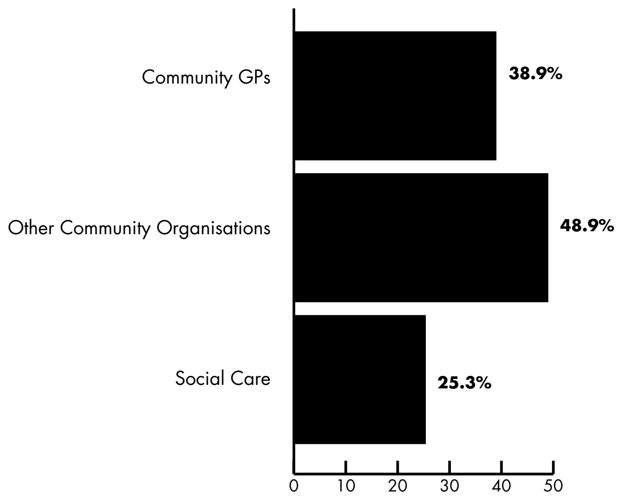
41 n = 226 base

42 n = 109 base

Why are Children's Centres' partnerships changing?

Where Centres are anticipating a change in their partnership arrangements, the Census sought to probe the factors underpinning this. In nearly half of cases (49%), budgetary factors were reported as a key issue driving changes to partnerships. However, while in some circumstances this may reflect the fact that Centres have fewer resources and are having to limit their partnership working, in other situations it may also be that budgetary constraints are driving greater engagement with partners as Centres look to deliver services in new and more integrated ways. 39% of Centres say they are adapting their partnership arrangements in response to local need, showing an important degree of sensitivity to the needs of the local community, while in a quarter of cases (25%) there are also other factors at play.

Figure 39: Why are your partnerships changing?[43]



43 n = 229 base

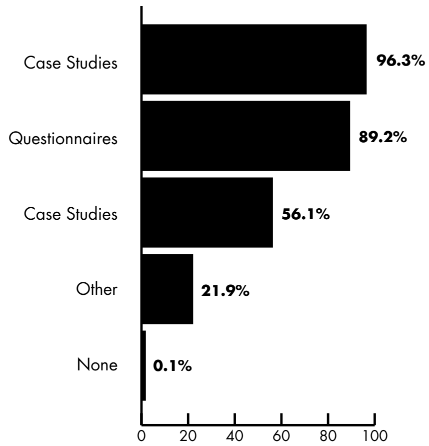
How are Centres measuring their impact and what evidence-based programmes are being provided?

The need for Children's Centres to measure the impact of their work has become increasingly important in recent years, as concerted efforts are made across the network to make the very best use of the limited resources available. The findings of the Census reveal that the overwhelming majority of Centres recognise this and are using at least one type of tool to measure impact. Furthermore, the delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes is also widespread, with almost all Centres delivering evidence-based support of some kind.

How are Children's Centres measuring impact and outcomes?

Almost all Centres in this year's Census said they use some form of tool for measuring the impact of their work. Case studies (96%) and questionnaires (89%) are used by vast majority of Centres, indicating that a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques are being employed. The majority of respondents (56%) also said they use a case management system as part of their work, and one in five (21%) reported using other tools as well such as Assessment Wheels and Family Outcome Stars. The number of Centres not doing any work at all to measure their impact and outcomes is negligible (0.1%).

Figure 40: What tools do you use to measure impact and outcomes?[44]

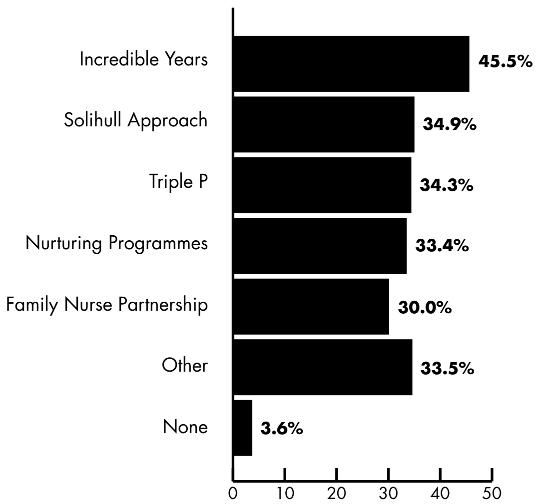


Evidence-based programmes

In addition to the activity that Centres are undertaking to measure impact themselves, the Census also sought to determine how widespread the provision of evidence-based parenting programmes is across the network. It appears that such programmes are now being extensively delivered within Children's Centres, with just 3.6% of Centres which gave a firm response reporting that they do not run any.

Incredible Years is the most widely delivered programme, with 46% of Centres saying that they run this. One third of Centres (35%) also deliver the Solihull Approach, Triple P (34%), and Nurturing programmes (33%), whilst Family and Nurse Partnerships were reported as running in 30% of Centres.

Figure 41: What evidence-based programmes do you run?[45]



The results also show that around 35% of Centres are offering other forms of evidence-based parenting programmes, including the likes of Parenting Puzzle, Strengthening Families and Mellow Parenting.

44 n = 776 base

45 n = 770 base

What are the challenges for the year ahead?

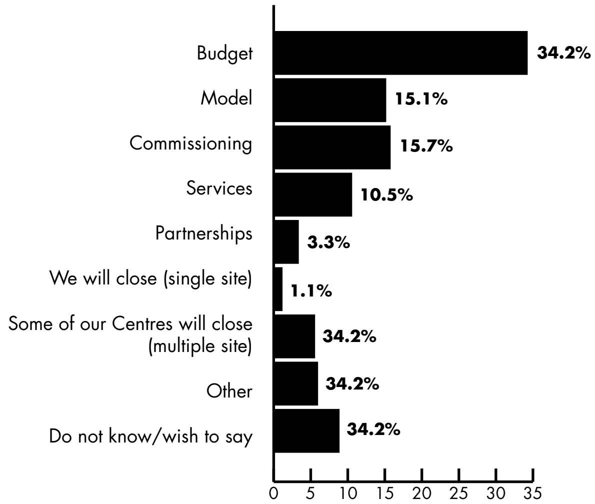
Looking ahead to the next 12 months, the Census sought to examine what the biggest changes and challenges are likely to be over the coming year. While budgets and demand were unsurprisingly identified as key issues, large numbers of Centres also highlighted the need to maintain staffing levels in circumstances where there is continual pressure to achieve better outcomes and reach more families with fewer and fewer resources.

What will the biggest changes be for Children's Centres?

In order to build an understanding of the key issues that are on the horizon for Children's Centres, those taking part were asked about what they felt the single biggest change would be in the year ahead. For over a third of Centres (34%), budget is set to be the biggest change they will experience – this was by some distance the most widely cited response, illustrating once again that financial constraints will continue to be a significant issue moving forward.

For around 16% of Centres, commissioning arrangements are set to be the biggest source of change, while a further 15% of Centres identified their operating model as the area in which the most significant shift will be taking place. Notably, just under 7% of Centres cited closures as the single biggest change, either because they were a stand-alone site which will be closing down or part of a multiple site model which are set to experience closures. As suggested in the section on "How are Centre budgets changing and what will be the impact?" (page 18), we estimate that if the data provided through responses to the Census were scaled up to a national level it would indicate that somewhere in the region of 112 Centres could be set to close over the next 12 months.

Figure 42: What do you think will be the single biggest change to your Centre(s) in the year ahead?[46]



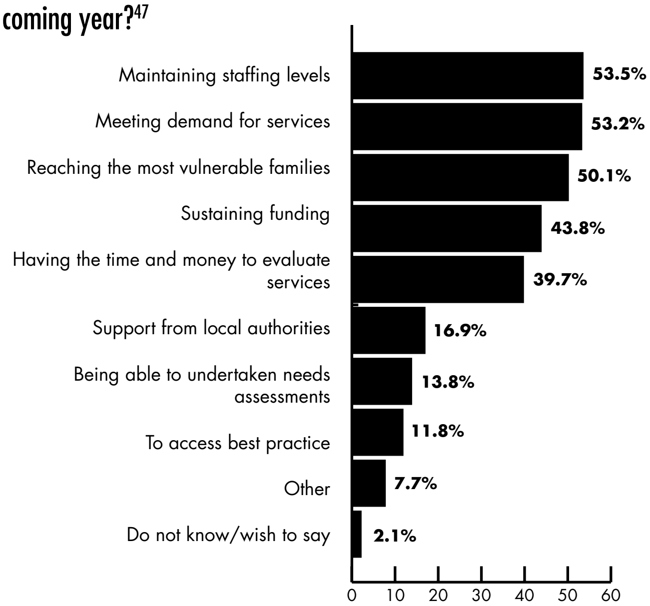
46 n = 763 base

What will be the biggest challenges for Centre managers?

Turning to examine the major challenges that Centres anticipate having to deal with over the coming year, meeting demand is set to be a significant issue for 53% of Centres, illustrating that the need for their services remains very real. Half of Centres (50%) also expect reaching vulnerable families to be one of their key challenges, whilst unsurprisingly a very large number (44%) said that sustaining funding will be a significant issue.

However, the biggest challenge for Centres in the year ahead will be maintaining staffing levels, with 54% of Centres expecting this to be a major challenge. This indicates that, amidst the dual pressures of budgetary constraints and rising demand, sustaining the Children's Centre workforce represents a hugely important concern.

Figure 43: What do you think will be the biggest challenges for you in the management of your Centre(s) over the coming year?[47]



47 n = 763 base

Conclusion: Moving forward as Children and Family Community Hubs

Overall, the results of this year's Census illustrate that while many Children's Centres are still operating in a very difficult financial situation, they continue to make the best of where they are. Centres are clearly hugely valued by their local communities and there is considerable demand for their services. This Census illustrates that Centres are making every effort to meet this, and provide all the support they can to parents and children in key areas such as health and employability, as well as help to avoid the causes of family crisis.

However, the continuing downward pressure on Centre budgets remains undeniable, and this represents a major driver of change in several areas. In this context, Centres have real concerns over maintaining both funding and staffing levels, and if current trends continue we may soon reach a point where the situation becomes unsustainable. Many Centres already indicate that they may close. We have now reached a point where meaningful and concerted action is necessary to preserve the Centre network, and decision makers at all levels of government must make a clear commitment to stand behind Sure Start Children's Centres and recognise the enormous difference they are making in the lives of over a million families.

However, while the network faces serious challenges, there are a number of ways in which to respond. The results of the Census shows that there is definite potential for the voluntary sector to become more involved in provision, and this alternative should always be considered before closing sites. It is encouraging to note that there appears to be a general movement towards the delivery of more targeted services. However, it is important to recognise a need to retain a base of universal services to ensure Centres do not become stigmatised as services for "failing families". Most Centres are still seeking to maintain a universal base to their provision, but these are in many cases under pressure from cuts to their budget.

Most significantly however, now is the moment to begin to think about new models of delivery, and consider how we can use current challenges as an opportunity to take Children's Centres on to the next stage of their development. For us, the centrepiece of this work involves the transformation of Children's Centres into extended Children and Family Community Hubs, which would draw together a much wider range of services for children and families across a far broader age range, and become a central focus for support within local communities. In light of this, one of the most important findings of this year's Census is that the building blocks of this "Hub" model are already in place, in particular the strong links already in place with local health and social care services, and the fact that in many cases Centres are already involved in delivery in these areas. In most cases these will be further expanded in the future, providing a platform for the delivery of fully integrated early support. What is needed now is for politicians of all parties and policy makers to show the ambition and determination necessary to achieve this and realise the potential huge benefits for children and families throughout the country that such a transformation of services and support would deliver.

Annex A: Background to Children's Centres

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

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

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

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

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

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

The actual number of Centres across England remains the subject of some debate. Official figures state that on 28 February 2014 there were 3,019 main Children's Centres and a further 531 additional sites, and that since 2010 76 Centres have closed and 6 have opened,[48] although these numbers are contested. Management of Children's Centres is now provided in a number of different ways and models. In some cases, for example, management has merged, with services provided as a "cluster" at a number of sites.

48 http://childrenscentresfinder.direct.gov.uk/snapshot-childrens-centre/

Annex B: Methodology

Between Wednesday 23rd July 2014 and Friday 5th September 2014, 4Children undertook an online survey of managers and staff working in Children's Centres across England. In doing so, we utilised a contact list which was downloaded from the Directgov website on Tuesday 10th December 2013, which represented the most up-to-date contact data available at the point that the 2014 Children's Centres Census survey was issued.[49]

In total, we received 421 responses to the Census survey from Children's Centre managers and staff working in 127 local authorities across England. Using data provided as part of the Census, these 421 respondents were collectively responsible for 879 Children's Centres, representing just over a quarter of the overall network.[50] The data presented in this document is shown on a "per Centre" basis, with respondents answering on the basis of all of their sites.

At points, we have used data collected as part of the Census to provide national level estimates. In doing so, we have taken the base number of Centre sites that are currently open nationally to be 3,300 – this is based on internal research undertaken by 4Children earlier this year, which indicated that the number of sites that are either themselves a full site, or are an "additional site" that provides a level of service equivalent to that which might reasonably be expected in a full Children's Centre.

49 Shortly after Tuesday 10th December 2013, the contact data was removed from the direct.gov website for several months so that the Department for Education could undertake a data cleaning exercise.

50 Respondents could be responsible for more than one Centre if they managed a cluster. One of the initial questions in the Census survey asked respondents to specify how many Centres they managed.