



4Children and Daycare Trust Children's Centre Survey: summary



Background

In October 2010 the government pledged to protect Sure Start funding in cash terms, while removing the ringfencing of the grant “giving local authorities more flexibility and freedom over how they design services that truly meet the needs of the communities they serve”.¹ The money to pay for Sure Start Children's Centres has since been assigned to local authorities as part of a new Early Intervention Grant (EIG) – a larger grant which replaces a number of previous funding streams.

The information on what is going to happen to Sure Start Children's Centres in various localities is patchy at best. Decisions are yet to be made or finalised and many proposals are not in the public domain. As such, 4Children and Daycare Trust decided to consult Children's Centre managers on what their perceptions were of what was going on around them. Children's Centre managers, collectively, are very well placed to give an overall picture of the situation nationally.

Survey Results

Demographic information about the centre they managed

We asked Children's Centre managers where they were based and what type of Centre they managed (Phase 1/2/3, voluntary sector/Local authority-run) and can confirm that the proportions of respondents from these different areas broadly reflect the proportions nationally.

What Children's Centre managers know about closures and cuts

Budget cuts

523 Children's Centre managers - 60% - told us that they had received indications as to their budget for the coming year while 348 (40%) said they had not. Of these, 9 (2%) said they had heard they would be receiving an increased budget, 64 (12%) said they had heard their budget would remain unchanged and 450 (86%) said they had been told they would have a decreased budget. This equates to budget cuts in more than 3000 Children's Centres nationally.

Redundancy

874 Children's Centre managers answered our question on ‘at risk of redundancy notices’, with 241 (28%) saying that such notices had been issued in their Centre (though the percentage of staff receiving them varied). When this is scaled up to a national level, it can reasonably be said that around 1000 Centres will have been affected nationwide.

Closures and cuts

Of the 839 Children's Centre managers who answered our question on the future of their Centre, 58 (7%) said that this time next year they expect their Centre will be closed or expect to close. When this is scaled up to a national level we estimate that this equates to around 250 Children's Centres who are looking at closure around the country. Moreover, Some 467 (56% of) Children's Centre managers said that in a years' time they expect to be providing a reduced service – an estimated 2000 Centres when scaled up nationally. 314 (37%) of Children's Centre managers expect to be providing broadly the same service as they do now.

¹ “The Minister's View – To each child a fair start”, *Nursery World*, Sarah Teather, 27 October 2010: <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/1037011/Exclusive-Ministers-View---child-fair-start>

Opinions about the future of Sure Start

Perception of the future

Finally, we wanted to investigate the morale among Children's Centre managers and their staff in the current climate. When asked how they felt about the future of Sure Start Children's Centres, some 53 per cent of Children's Centre managers said "negative", while 47 per cent said "positive". This indicates that although only a proportion of Children's Centre managers may be about to see their centres close, threats of reduced funding and staff numbers are creating an unease among managers.

Methodology

The survey took place between Thursday 20th and Tuesday 25th January 2011 following an email mail-out to the centre managers listed on the Family Information Service/Directgov database. A total of 917 Children's Centre Managers took part in the survey using surveymonkey.com.

Of the 917 Children's Centre managers taking part, the number of participants from each local authority broadly reflected the number of Centres in that authority. The data was analysed and the results scaled up to reflect the situation nationally.²

Survey Questions

1. Which Local Authority is your Centre based in?

2. Which of the following statements apply to your Centre? (please tick all that apply)

- It is a Phase 1 Children's Centre
- It is a Phase 2 Children's Centre
- It is a Phase 3 Children's Centre
- It is a voluntary sector-run Children's Centre
- It is a Local Authority-run Children's Centre

3. Approximately how many families use the Centre you manage?

- Fewer than 50
- 51-150
- 151-300
- More than 301

4. Have you had any indications about your likely budget for 2011-12?

- Yes
- No

5. If yes, are these indications that you will have

- An increased budget
- An unchanged budget
- A decreased budget

² So if 7 per cent of Centre Managers responding to the survey gave a certain response we multiplied the total number of Children's Centres (around 3578) by 7 per cent to find the approximate number of centres affected nationally.

1 February 2011

6. Have any staff at your Children's Centre been issued with 'at risk of redundancy notices?'

- Yes (fewer than 10% of staff)
- Yes (11%-40% of staff)
- Yes (41%-60% of staff)
- Yes (61%+ of staff)
- No
- Don't know

7. What do you think of the removal of the requirement to employ a member of staff with both QTS and EYPS?

- It's a good thing
- It's a bad thing
- I don't know whether it's a good or a bad thing

8. This time next year, do you expect your Centre...

- ...will be providing broadly the same service as it does now
- ...will be providing a reduced service from what we provide now
- ...will be closed or expected to close

9. Overall, how do you feel about the prospects for the future of Sure Start Children's Centres in your local authority area?

- Positive
- Negative

10. How do you envisage your Centre changing over the next three years?

For further information, please contact the 4Children Public Affairs team on 0207 522 6991