

Children's Centre Engagement

Summary Report

Report Date: July 2019

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Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
Engagement Approach	3 - 4
Executive summary	5 - 8
Overall results analysis	8 - 24
Conclusion	25-26

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Introduction

This report presents the feedback from the boroughwide engagement exercise on the future of Hackney's children's centres.

The engagement campaign sought feedback from current, past and prospective users of children's centres to find out the services they value most and how they could be improved in the future. Feedback was also sought on childcare subsidies, following changes approved by Cabinet in April.

Background

There are 21 children's centres across the borough, offering a wide range of services for expectant parents and families with young children, including early education and child care, 'stay and play' activities, parenting support, child and family health services, advice and training, ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) and employment support.

Many of these centres were developed under the national Sure Start Children Centre programme in 2007 when outcomes for young children in Hackney were well below the London and national averages, and unemployment was high. The most recent figures show a steady increase in the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at five years old, rising from 57% in 2013 to 77% 2018

Engagement Approach

The engagement exercise ran from 23 May to 5 July 2019.

An [A5 leaflet](#) summarising the aims of the engagement exercise, was sent to all parents and carers of children under 5 years old, who use children's centres, encouraging them to take part in the campaign. The leaflets were also sent to all the centres across the borough to further promote the campaign to attendees. [Paper copies of the questionnaires](#) could be requested from the children's centres and the Family Information Service. Forty [posters](#) were also distributed to all the 21 children's centres, and the remainder displayed at other Council public access points - like libraries, the HSC, 2 Hillman street and Neighbourhood Hub offices.

A range of the Council's communications channels were used to promote the engagement exercise.

- It was featured in issue 451 (28 May to 9 June) of Hackney Today, the Council's free newspaper distributed to all homes and businesses in the borough. (<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/13733/Hackney-Today-issue-451-28-May-2019/pdf/ht451.pdf?m=636946378988870000>)
- A press release about the engagement campaign was also issued to local media.
- It was promoted widely on the Council's social media channels with posts on its Facebook account and posts on Twitter highlighting the campaign.

Direct engagement through scheduled events

During May to early July, we attended a variety of [local events](#) targeted at users of children's centres, using it as an opportunity to talk to attendees about the campaign and encourage them to take part. We also attended a variety of Playbus sessions to speak to parents who may not necessarily visit a children's centre.

Online engagement

Feedback was collected using the interactive map-based platform Common Place. The map based platform provides a key way to collect data rich in geo-demographic detail, thus allowing us to develop a deeper understanding of how the range of centres are perceived by the local community. The dedicated engagement website for the campaign was accessible via: www.hackneychildrenscentres.commonplace.is. We also used the following websites to signpost the engagement campaign:

- The Council's online consultation and engagement platform, <https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk>
- The Council's website www.hackney.gov.uk,
- The Hackney Local Offer website www.hackneylocaloffer.co.uk

Interpretation of the data

Percentages in a particular chart will not always add up to 100%. This may be due to rounding, or because each respondent is allowed to give more than one answer to the question. It is also worth noting that the results are subject to sampling tolerances, and not all differences between sub-groups will be statistically significant. We need to exercise appropriate caution where a small group of respondents has been analysed.

Executive Summary

The public engagement consultation received **1403** responses, the majority received via online completions.

Profile of respondents

- 82.39% indicated that they are a current parent/ carer/ guardian of a child(ren) who use children's centres.
- the highest level of responses received were from users of Ihsan children's centre (15.51%), followed by Lubavitch children's centre (8.20%).
- 50% of the respondents were aged 35-44, followed by 35% aged 25 - 34.
- more than 90% of the respondents identified as 'female'.

How do you feel about this children's centre?

- 96.57%, feel positive (very positive and somewhat positive) about the children's centre they visit.
- A very small proportion of respondents (0.71%) , feel negative, (very negative and somewhat negative), about the centre they visit.

What do you like about the children's centres?

- The most popular response chosen was friendly staff (18.48%), followed by stay and play activities provided(17.19%), and short travelling distance from home (15.47%).

What do you dislike about this children's centre?

- the most popular response was that the 'current opening hours weren't long enough (45.87%), followed by the fact that the 'services are oversubscribed' (34.78%)

Which, if any, of the services provided at this children's centre have you used within the last 6 to 12 months?

- The most popular services used within the last 6 to 12 months were: Stay and play activities (34.79%), followed by family support and parenting programmes (10.18%), childcare (10%) and child and family health - antenatal and postnatal (9.65%).

Which of these services do you value and feel have helped you, your child(ren) and family the most?

- ‘Stay and play’ activities were the most popular response (33.43%)

What, if any, improvements would you suggest to the services provided at the children’s centre?

487 responses were received to this question and the comments were analysed according to the recurring themes. The top 4 emerging themes were:

Opening hours - longer opening hours to cater for working parents/ non-term time opening during the holidays/ timetable to allow for late afternoon activity.	72
Over-subscribed services - Not enough nursery and child care places/ more space to accommodate more parents and their children in stay and play activities.	58
More courses/ activities - ESOL/ Adult learning courses/ Parenting support/ exercise classes	40
Greater variety and number of play activity sessions and baby classes	32

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our rationale for ensuring that the child care subsidy is available to families that need it the most?

- The majority of respondents (66%), agreed with the rationale for ensuring that child care subsidies are available to families that need it the most. In contrast, only 17% disagreed.

If the Council were to introduce payments for stay and play activities, how much would you be willing to pay per session?

- The majority of respondents (50%) indicated that they wouldn’t be willing to pay anything for ‘stay and play’ activities, followed by 40% who would be willing to pay between £2 and £4.
 - **66%** of the respondents that are **Council tenants** are unwilling to pay for stay and play activities, compared to **54%** of **Housing Association tenants**. **55%** of those that **own their home outright** also prefer to pay nothing.

- **57%** of those buying their home on **shared ownership** and **51%** who **own their home outright**, would be willing to pay between **£2 and £4**.

Is there anything else you would like to say about fees and charges for childcare?

427 responses were received to this question and the comments were analysed according to the recurring themes. The top four key emerging themes were:

Agree with rationale/ principle	43
Misunderstood the question - thinking it referred to fees for stay and play sessions - against any such fees/ should be a voluntary contribution system if introduced	41
Disagree with rationale/ would like to maintain the status quo	22
Not enough affordable childcare places. Fees too expensive - as expensive as private nurseries	20

If the children's centre was open over the weekend, would you use the services on Saturday and Sunday?

- Nearly four in every ten respondents agree that they'd use the centre on both Saturdays and Sundays if it was open. However, a similar proportion would prefer only on weekdays
 - the preference for weekend opening differs according to the different centres. A significant proportion of respondents said that they would use the children's centres if they were open on Saturdays and Sundays
 - Most of the respondents who use Lubavitch children's centre indicated that they would use the centre if it was open on Sunday, not surprising as Saturday is the sabbath.

Do you feel that the children's centre offers a variety of services that meet your cultural needs?

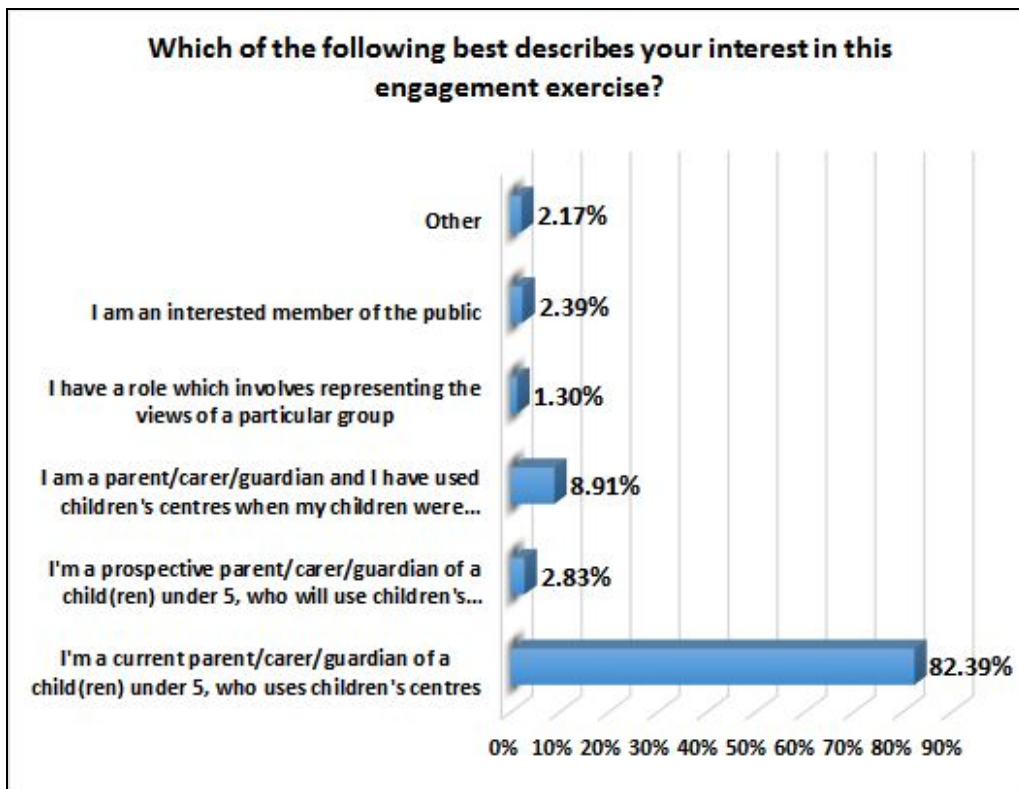
- more than nine out of ten of those that responded agreed that the children's centres offer a variety of services that meet their cultural needs.
 - an overwhelming majority of the respondents across all the children's centres agree that the variety of services offered meets their cultural needs. All the respondents at Lubavitch children's centre agreed that the services met their cultural needs.

Overall Results Analysis

The public engagement consultation received **1403** responses, the majority received via online completions.

Which of the following best describes your interest in this engagement exercise?

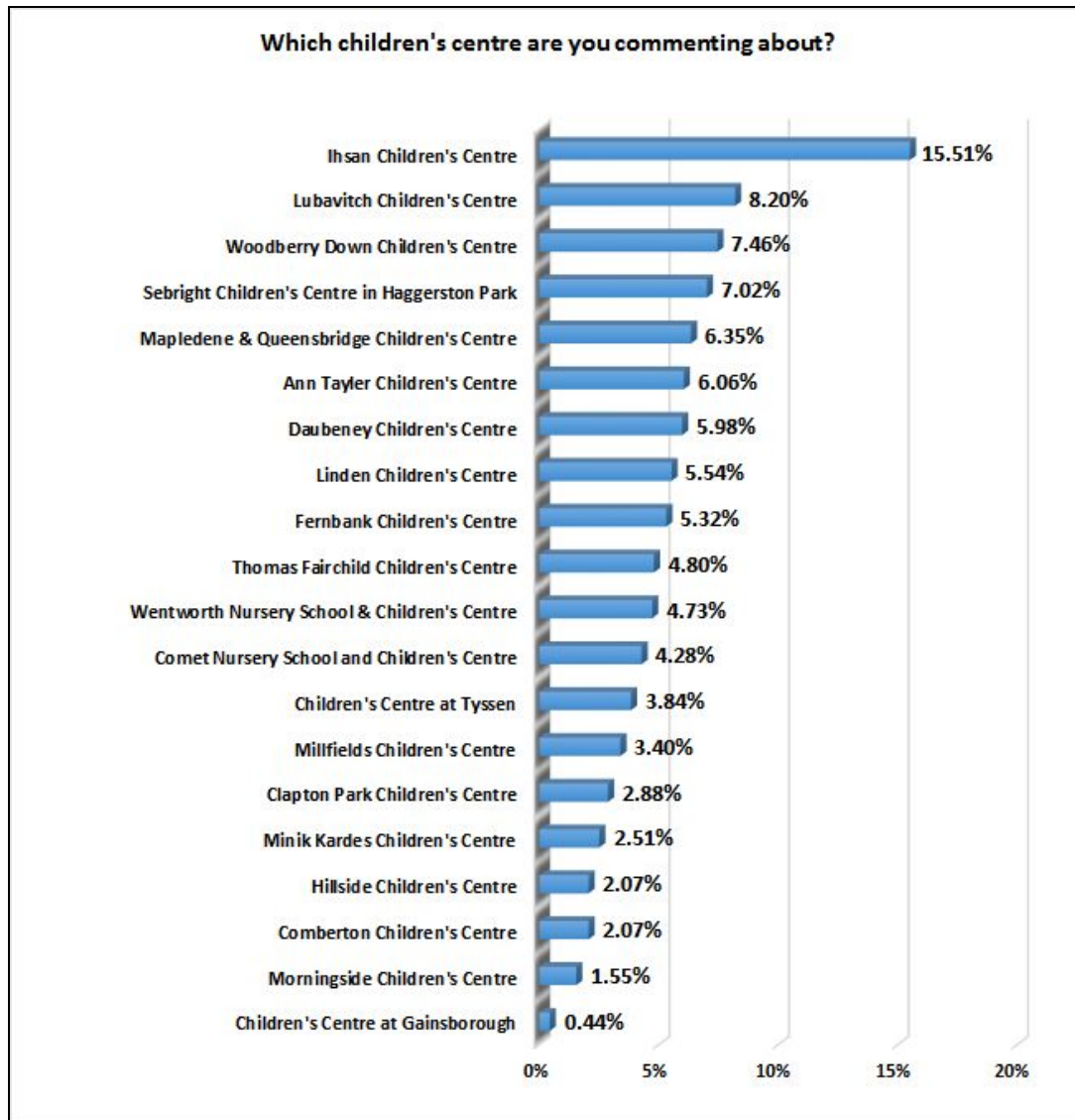
As the graph below shows, the majority of respondents, (82.39%) indicated that they a current parent/ carer/ guardian of a child(ren) who use children's centres. Responses to the 'other' option included: 'ESOL Student', 'Volunteer', 'One O'clock club' grand parent, 'staff member' and 'Nanny'.



Base (1380)

Which children's centre are you commenting about?

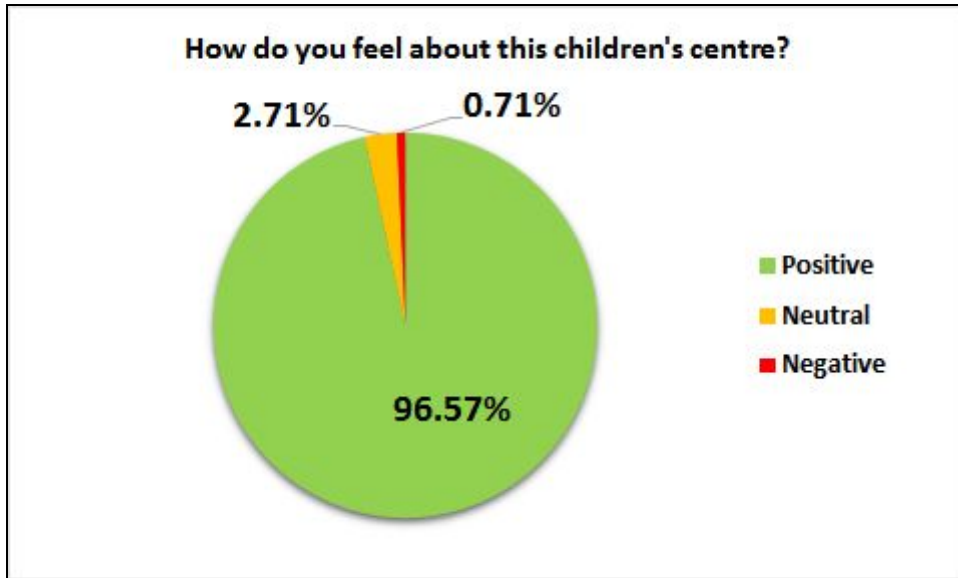
There were a good mix of responses across all the children's centres, with the highest level of responses received relating to Ihsan children's centre (15.51%), followed by Lubavitch children's centre (8.20%).



Base(1354)

How do you feel about this children's centre?

As the pie chart shows, a significant proportion of respondents (96.57%), feel positive (very positive and somewhat positive) about the children's centre they visit. In contrast, a very small proportion of respondents (0.71%), feel negative, (very negative and somewhat negative), about the centre they visit.



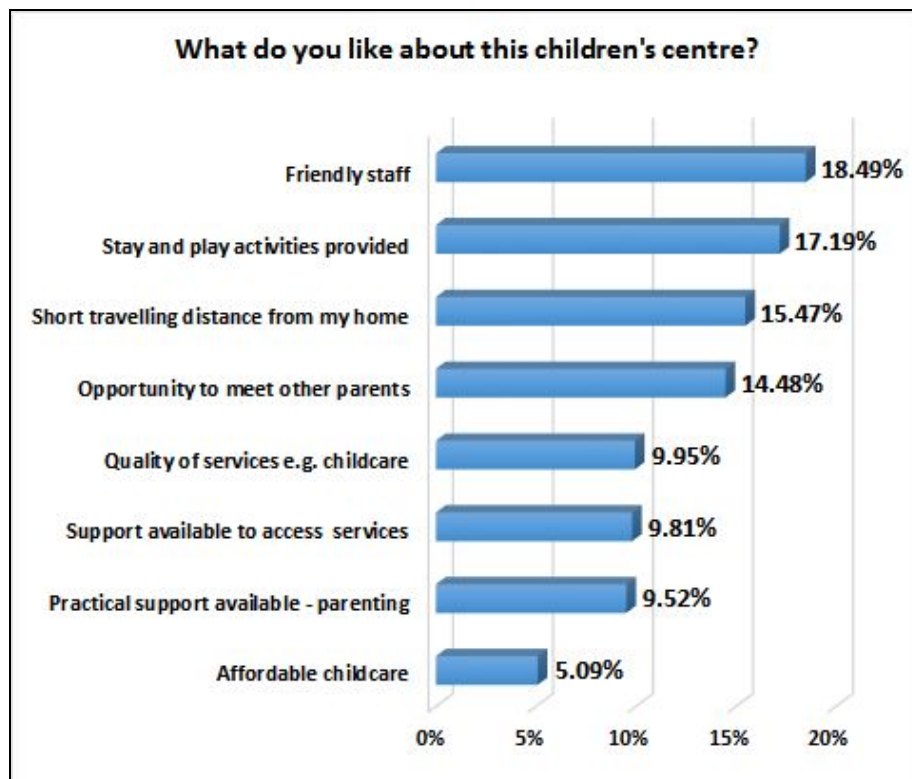
Base (1401)

The 0.71% identified as negative related to:

Children's centre	Very Dissatisfied (Number of responses)	Fairly Dissatisfied (Number of responses)
Ann Taylor		1
Tyssen	2	
Comberton		1
Comet Nursery School	1	
Ihsan		1
Millfields	1	
Morningside		2

Woodberry Down	1	
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What do you like about the children's centres?



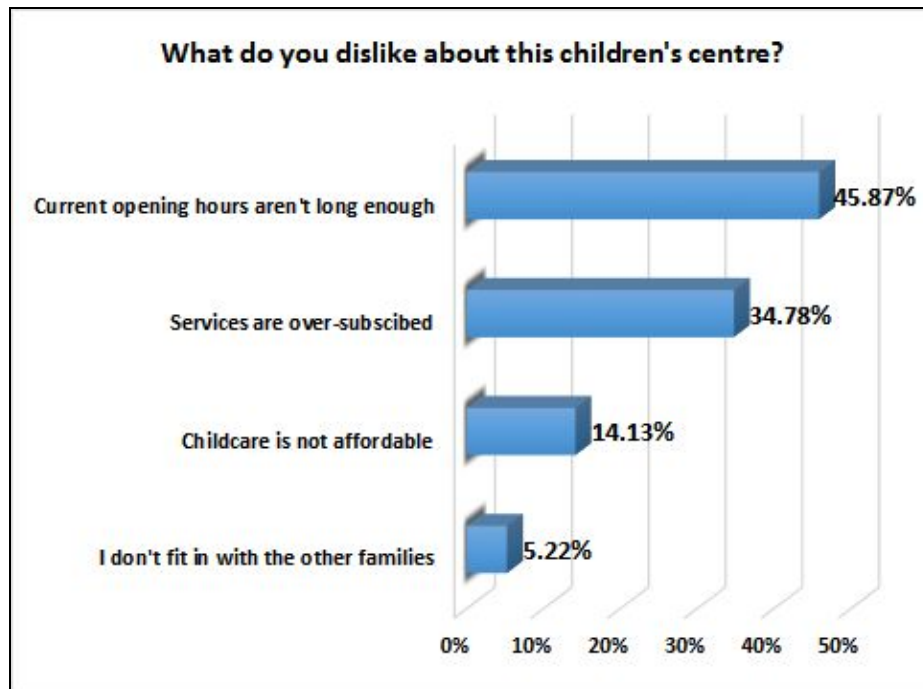
Respondents were asked to identify what they liked about the children's centre they visit. The most popular response chosen was friendly staff (18.48%), followed by stay and play activities provided (17.19%), and short travelling distance from home (15.47%).

Base (6230)

Respondents could also provide additional comments under 'other'. 138 comments were received in the 'other' section, the majority relating to:

- Courses provided at the centres, such as ESOL classes
- Music sessions
- Speech/ speaking
- Woodberry Down One O'clock club
- Activities for fathers
- Support available for parents applying for jobs
- Woodberry Down Under 1's session.

What do you dislike about this children's centre?



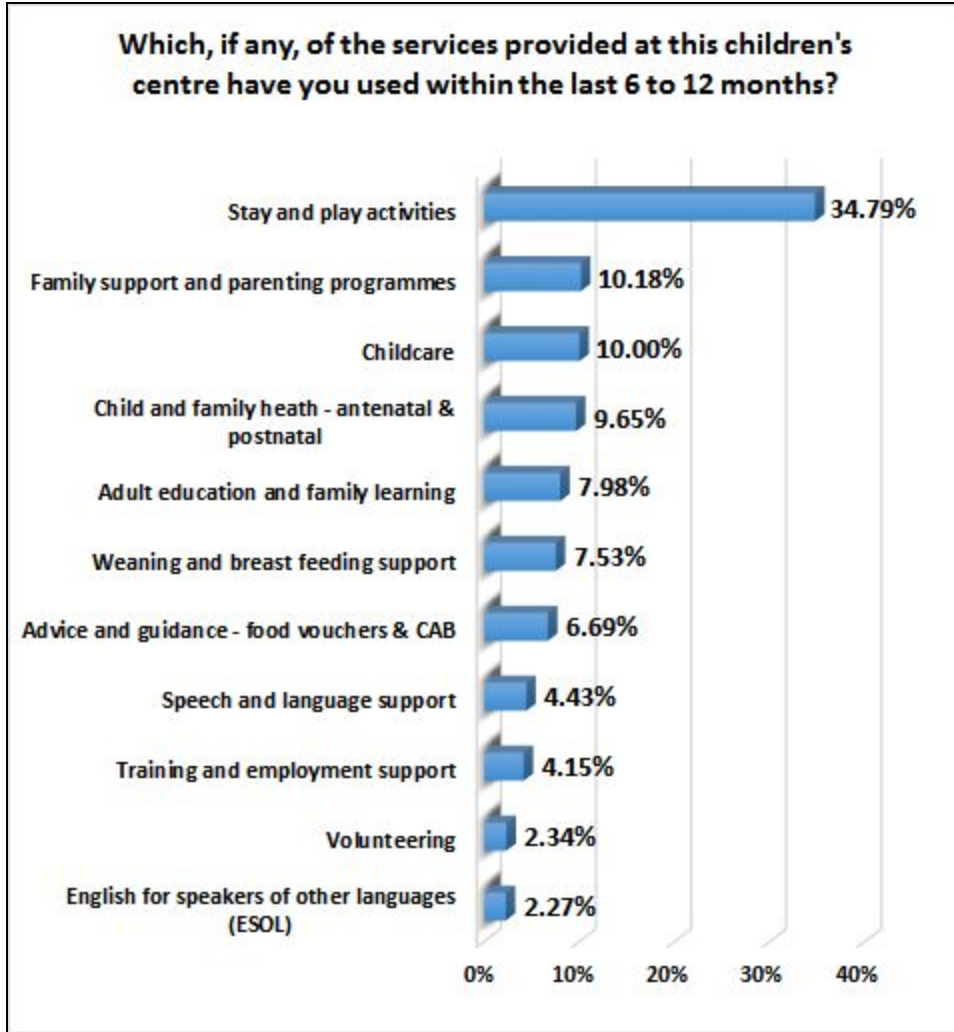
When asked to identify what they disliked about the children's centre they use, the most popular response was that the 'current opening hours weren't long enough (45.87%), followed by the fact that the 'services are oversubscribed' (34.78%)

Base (460)

Respondents could also provide additional comments under 'other'. 188 additional comments were received in the 'other' section:

- Most of the responses highlighted the fact that they didn't dislike anything about the children's centres.
- Staff attitude/ customer service
- Providing healthier less processed food at the centres.
- Current timings of 'stay and play' sessions in the afternoon are too early.
- More activities for children with special educational needs.
- More transparency in criteria and waiting time for the allocation of childcare and nursery places
- Opening hours aren't long enough/ could include weekends
- More child care places
- More activities involving fathers.
- More variety of toys/ newer toys

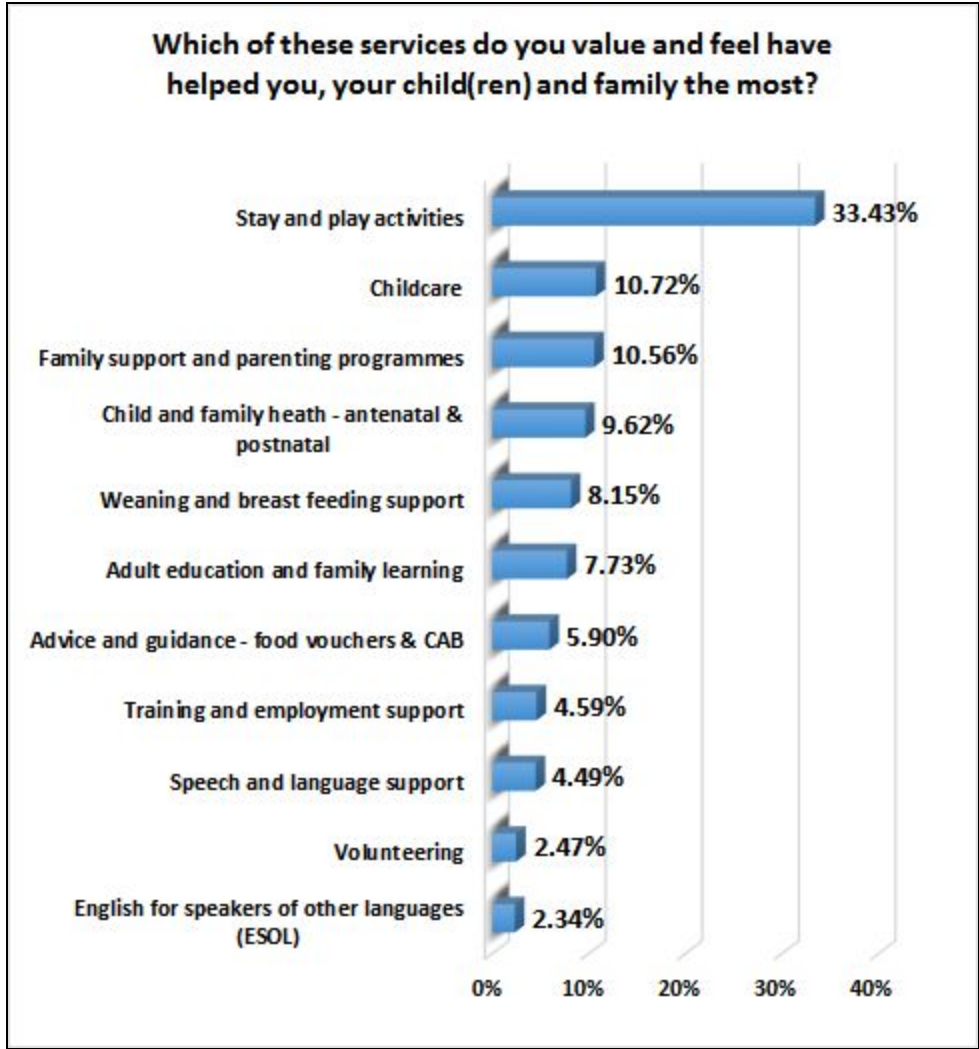
Which, if any, of the services provided at this children's centre have you used within the last 6 to 12 months?



As the graph shows, the most popular services used within the last 6 to 12 months were: Stay and play activities (34.79%), followed by family support and parenting programmes (10.18%), childcare (10%) and child and family health - antenatal and postnatal (9.65%).

Base (2869)

Which of these services do you value and feel have helped you, your child(ren) and family the most?



When asked which of the services do they value and feel have helped them and their children the most, once again, 'stay and play' activities were the most popular response (33.43%)

Base (3117)

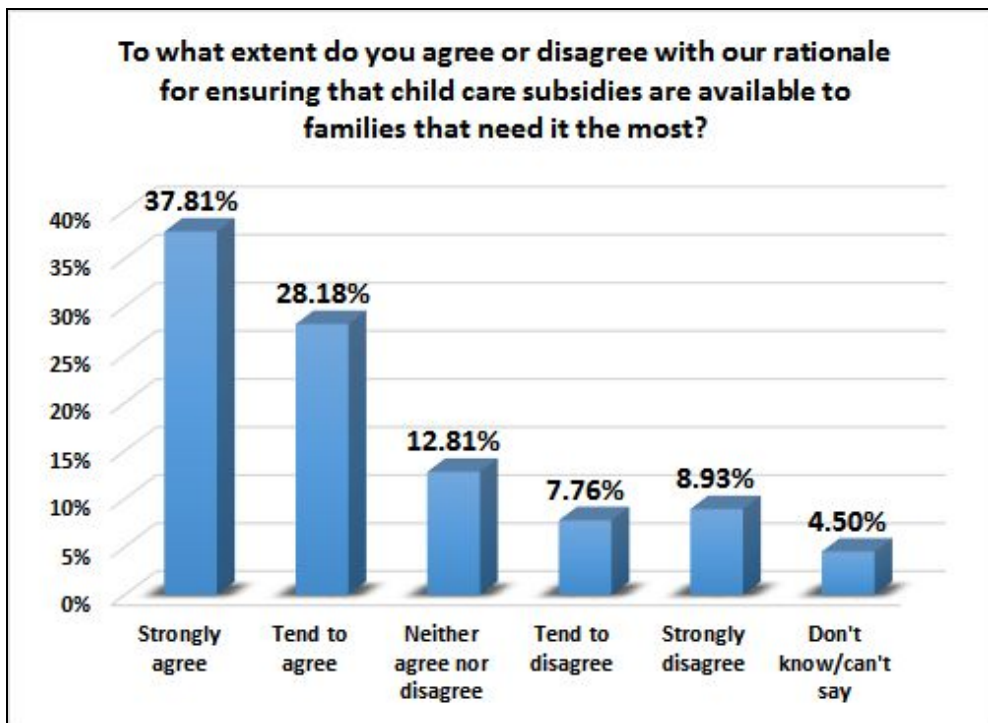
What, if any, improvements would you suggest to the services provided at the children's centre?

487 responses were received to this question and the comments were analysed according to the recurring themes. The key emerging themes were:

Opening hours - longer opening hours to cater for working parents/ non-term time opening during the holidays/ timetable to allow for late afternoon activity.	72
Over-subscribed services - Not enough nursery and child care places/ more space to accommodate more parents and their children in stay and play activities.	58
More courses/ activities - ESOL/ Adult learning courses/ Parenting support/ exercise classes	40
Greater variety and number of play activity sessions and baby classes	32
Better communication : of range of services available / feedback on child's progress/ updating parents on availability of childcare and nursery places and/or waiting times for places	23
Staff attitude/ customer service	21
More activities that incorporate nature/ wildlife/ garden/ outdoor facilities	12
Food and snacks - provide healthier food and snack options/ less processed foods.	10
Nursery places - improvement in the way nursery places are awarded/ clarity on admissions criteria	10
More staff needed across the centres.	9
Toys - more variety in the toys available/ adding newer toys more regularly.	8
More affordable child care - expensive for the poor and vulnerable	6
Creche facilities should be provided, to enable parents to attend courses on site	4
Real Nappies - rather than disposables ones should be provided.	4
Child care fees increase is too high for the upper band/ non prior consultation with parents/ no improvement in service for increased charge.	3
Better support for children with additional support needs.	2

The Council currently invests over £6m a year to provide varying levels of childcare subsidy for all families. From September 2019, we will be making changes to children’s centre nursery fees structure to ensure that those on lower incomes will receive more of this subsidy, while families on higher incomes will receive less or no subsidy. This will be monitored to inform future decisions.

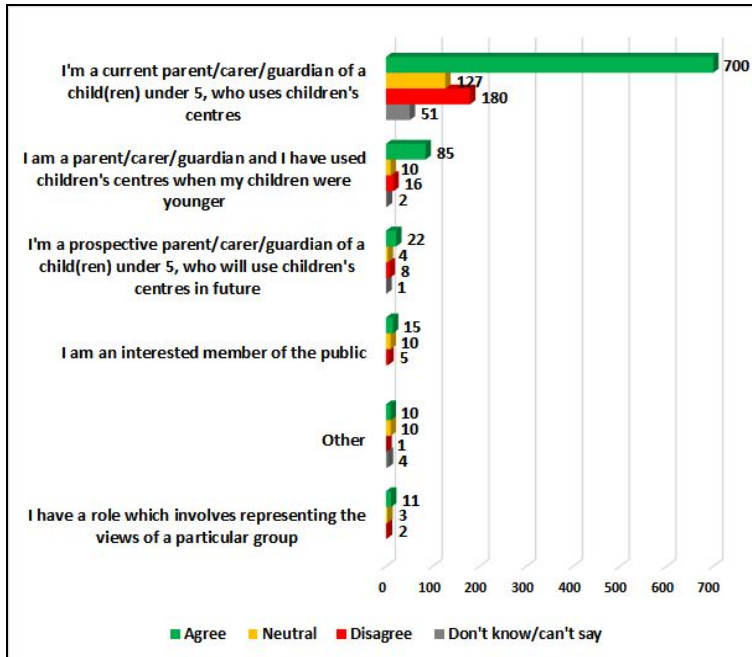
To what extent do you agree or disagree with our rationale for ensuring that the child care subsidy is available to families that need it the most?



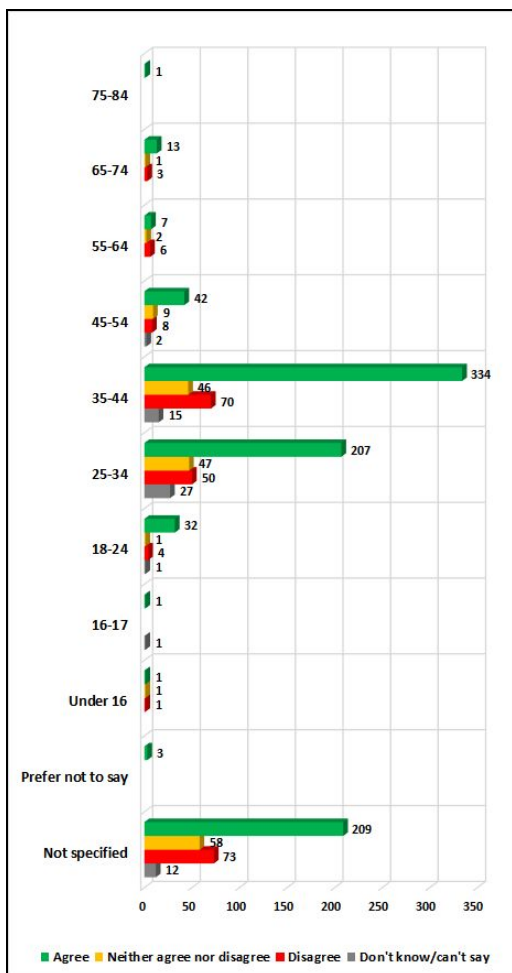
The majority of respondents (66%), agreed with the rationale for ensuring that child care subsidies are available to families that need it the most. In contrast, only 17% disagreed.

Base (1288)

As the graph below shows, a greater proportion of those that identify as a ‘current parent/ carer of a child under 5 who use children’s centres’ agreed with the rationale. This trend is similar when looking at ‘parents/ cares/ guardians that have used children’s centres when their children were younger’.

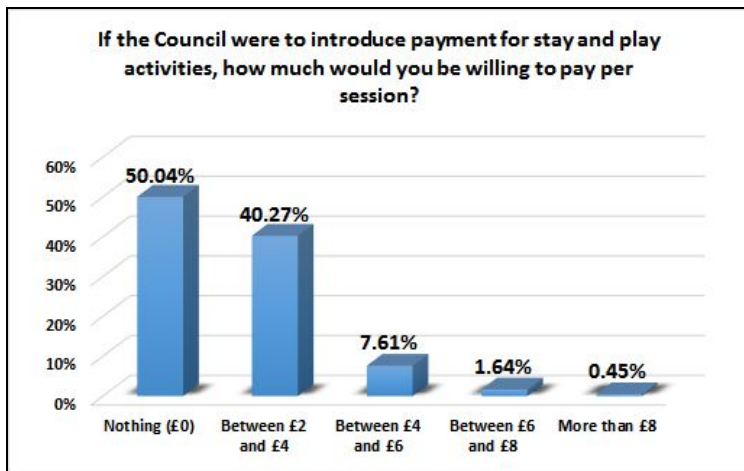


Base (1277)



As the graph shows, a greater proportion of respondents across the 18 to 54 age profiles agree with the rationale for ensuring that child care subsidies are available to families that need it the most.

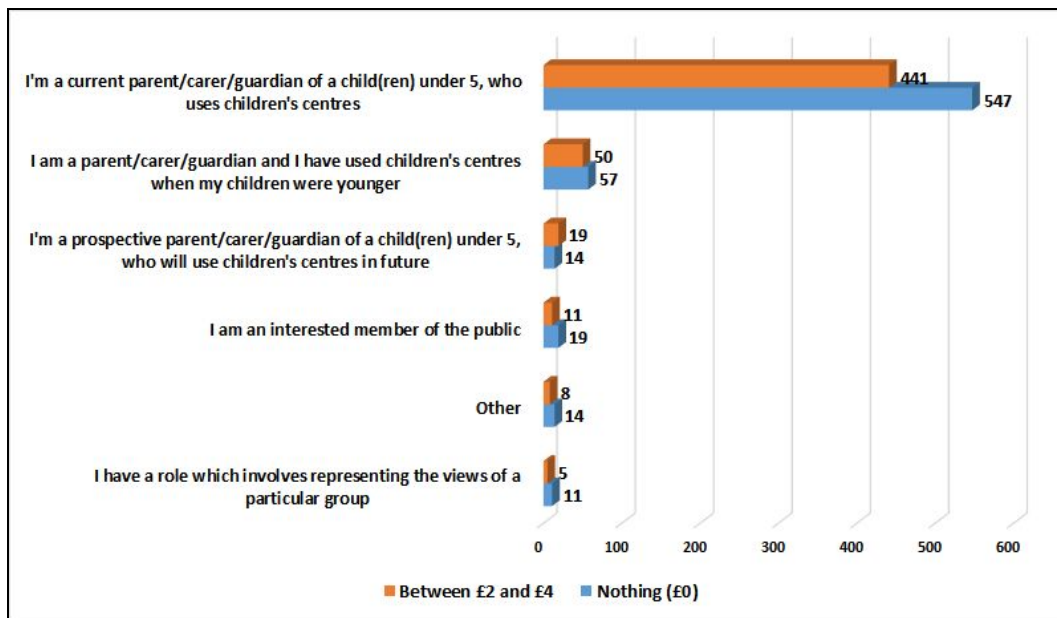
If the Council were to introduce payments for stay and play activities, how much would you be willing to pay per session?



50% of the respondents indicated that they wouldn't be willing to pay anything for 'stay and play' activities, followed by **40%** who would be willing to pay between **£2 and £4**.

Base (1341)

Further analysis was carried out to understand the characteristics of those willing to pay nothing £0 and those willing to pay between £2 and £4. We haven't included further analysis of those willing to pay £4 and above as the low numbers make means further sub-group analysis doesn't yield useful insight.



Base (534)

When the question was also analysed according to housing tenure:

- **66%** of the respondents that are **Council tenants** are unwilling to pay for stay and play activities, compared to **54%** of **Housing Association tenants**. **55%** of those that **own their home outright** also prefer to pay nothing.
- **57%** of those buying their home on **shared ownership** and **51%** who **own their home outright**, would be willing to pay between **£2 and £4**.

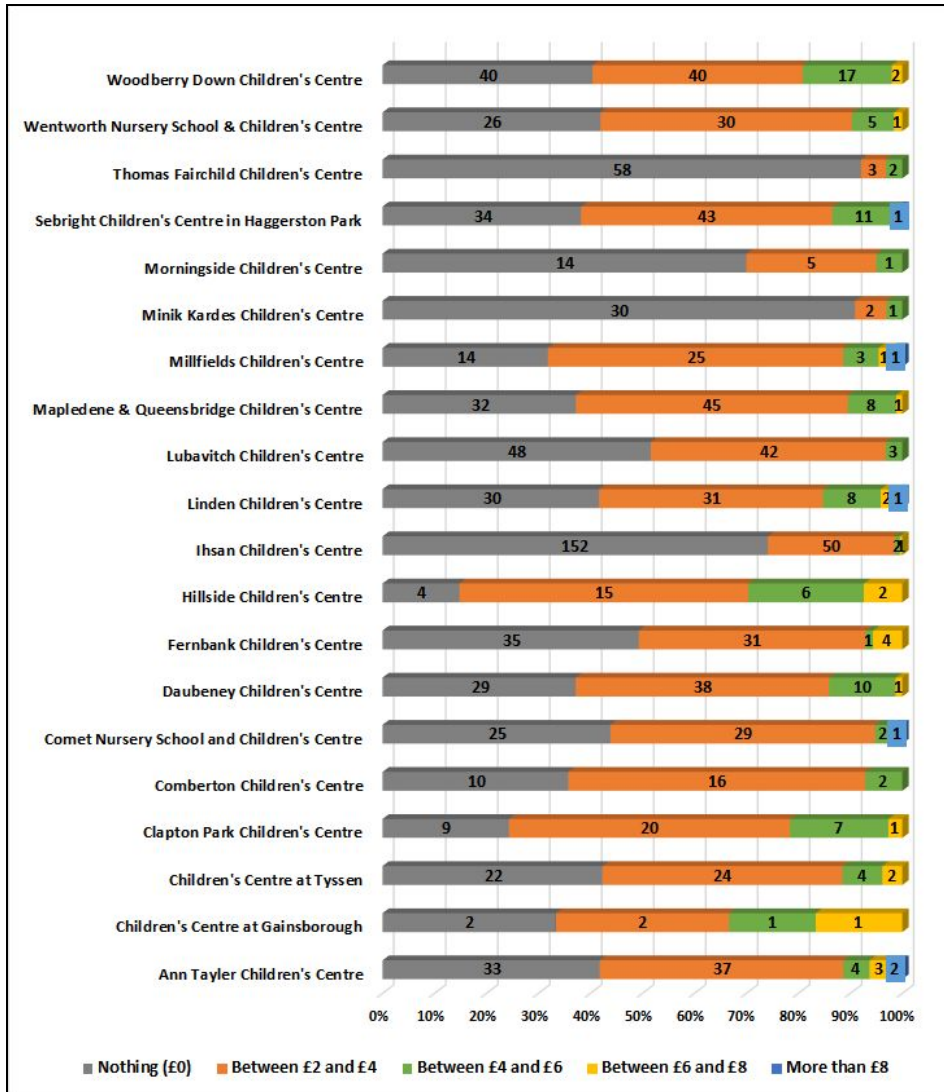


A higher proportion of respondents at the following centres are unwilling to pay for stay and play activities (**£0 Nothing**)

- Thomas Fairchild
- Morningside
- Minik Kardes
- Lubavitch
- Ihsan
- Fernbank

A higher proportion of respondents at the following centres are willing to pay between **£2 and £4** for stay and play activities:

- Wentworth
- Sebright
- Millfields
- Mapledene & Queensbridge
- Hillside
- Fernbank
- Daubeney
- Comet
- Comberton
- Clapton
- Ann Taylor



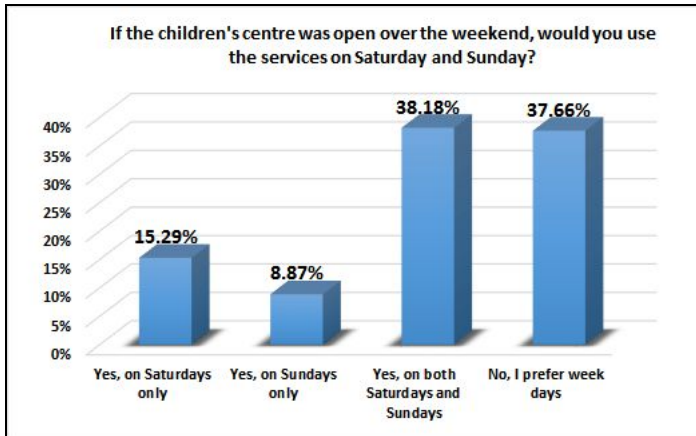
Is there anything else you would like to say about fees and charges for childcare?

427 responses were received to this question and the comments were analysed according to the recurring themes. The key emerging themes were:

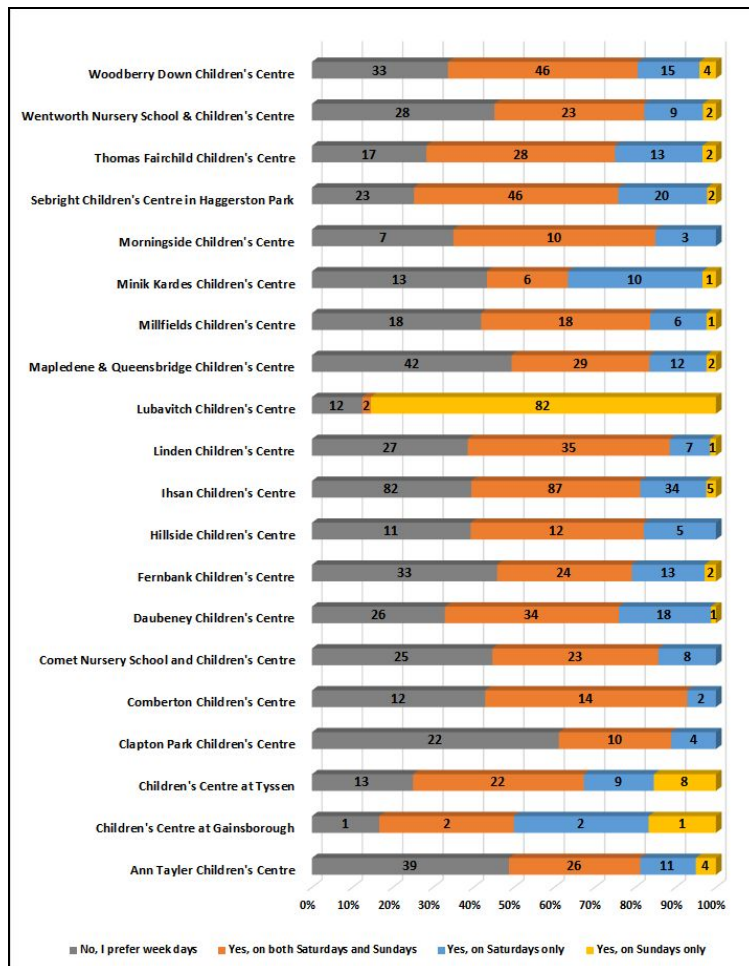
Agree with rationale/ principle	43
Misunderstood the question - thinking it referred to fees for stay and play sessions - against any such fees/ should be a voluntary contribution system if introduced	41
Disagree with rationale/ would like to maintain the status quo	22
Not enough affordable childcare places. Fees too expensive - as expensive as private nurseries	20
Higher income families already have higher costs as have no access to benefits/ Will move to private nurseries - offering more for the fees charged	19
Middle income families - disproportionately impacted by the increase to child care fees and charges/ lack of financial support having detrimental impact on disposable income.	18
Detrimental impact on social cohesion and the socio-economic mix of service users.	18
Cost increase too high and should have been gradual	17
Impact on working parents and on mother's returning to workforce (pos & neg)	15
The Council should lobby Government for the additional funding	3
No prior consultation or advance communication with parents before increase to child care fees.	3

If the children's centre was open over the weekend, would you use the services on Saturday and Sunday?

Nearly four in every ten respondents agree that they'd use the centre on both Saturdays and Sundays, if it was open. However, a similar proportion would prefer only on weekdays



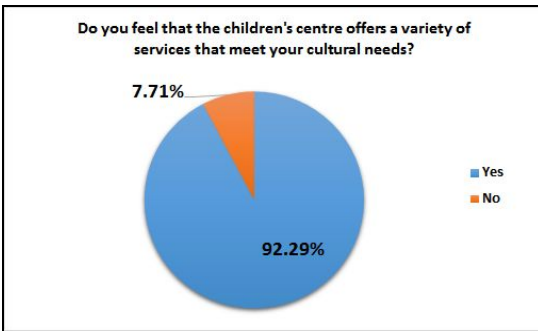
Base (1341)



The graph shows how the preference for weekend opening differs according to the different centres. A significant proportion of respondents said that they would use the children's centres if they were open on Saturdays and Sundays

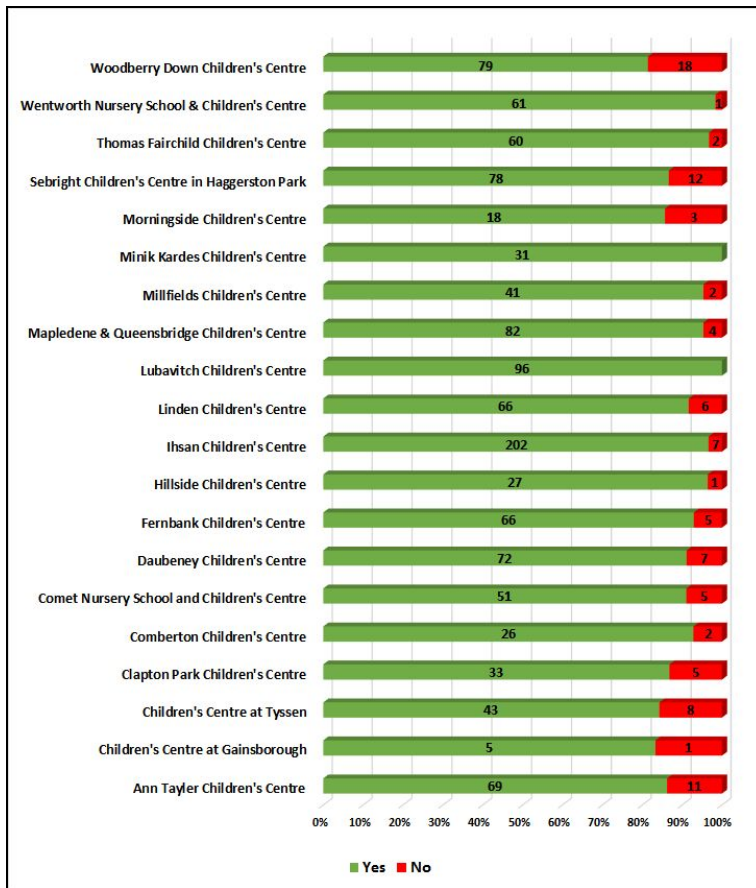
Most of the respondents who use Lubavitch children's centre indicated that they would use the centre if it was open on Sunday, not surprising as Saturday is the sabbath.

Do you feel that the children's centre offers a variety of services that meet your cultural needs?



As the pie chart shows, more than nine out of ten of those that responded agreed that the children's centres offer a variety of services that meet their cultural needs.

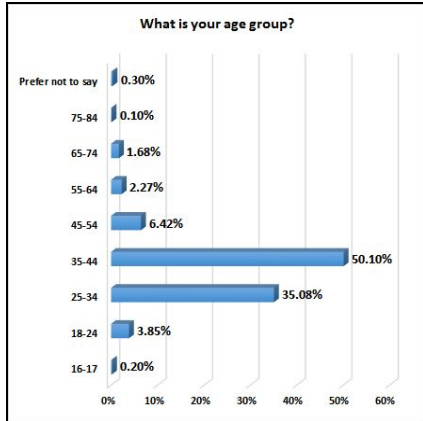
Base (1349)



Analysis of the question according to the different children's centres shows that: an overwhelming majority of the respondents across all the children's centres agree that the variety of services offered meets their cultural needs. All the respondents at Lubavitch children's centre agreed that the services met their cultural needs.

Profile of respondents

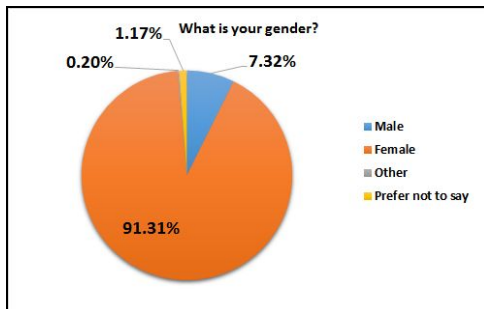
Age group:



50% of the respondents were aged 35-44, followed by 35% aged 25 - 34.

Base (1012)

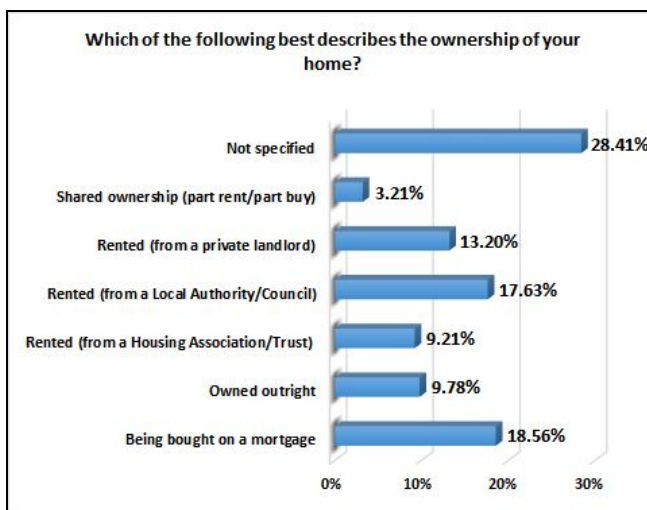
Gender:



As the graph shows, more than 90% of the respondents identified as 'female'.

Base: (1326)

Housing tenure:



18.56% of the respondents indicated that they were buying their home on a mortgage, followed by 17.63% who are renting from a Local Authority/ Housing Association.

Base (1401)

Conclusion

The boroughwide engagement exercise yielded more than fourteen hundred responses, the majority via online completions. **More than 80%** of the respondents are current service users, with responses from a cross-section of the centres borough wide.

The general trend of comments about the centres were overwhelmingly positive, with more than **96% feeling positive** about the children's centre they visit. **More than nine out of ten** of those that responded agreed that the children's centres offer a variety of services that meet their **cultural needs**.

Respondents highlighted '**friendly staff**', '**stay and play**' activities and the fact that the centres are **short travelling distance** from home as key positives. When asked which services they'd used in last 6 to 12 months, once again, '**stay and play activities**' was the most popular response.

When asked to identify what they didn't like about the centres, '**current opening hours are not long enough**' and '**services are oversubscribed**' were the most popular responses.

It's clear from the trend of responses that '**stay and play**' activities are very popular and valued amongst parents and carers. It is the service that parents and carers feel have helped them and their family the most. There was a feeling that the 'stay and play' activities provided an opportunity for people from different socioeconomic backgrounds to mix, playing a role in maintaining community cohesion. Parents and carers felt that the timings for some of the sessions should be more flexible, to allow more people to benefit. There was recognition that the popularity of '**stay and play**' activities means that they are often **over-subscribed**, thus some suggested that more space is needed to enable more people to get involved. Some respondents suggested that **longer opening hours and flexible timetabling** could allow working parents and Fathers to access the service as well.

When asked what they would be willing to pay for 'stay and play' activities, **50%** of the respondents chose nothing (£0) followed by **40%** who would be willing to pay between **£2 and £4**. Some respondents felt introducing fees for 'stay and play' activities is likely to affect the **socio-demographic mix of people** using the centres, resulting in attendees of the centres not being a true reflection of the local community. There were suggestions that some sort of **voluntary contribution** towards the sessions from users could be an option to explore, rather than mandatory fees and charges.

More than **66% agreed with the rationale** for ensuring that child care subsidies are available to families that need it the most; whilst only **17% disagreed**. The majority of respondents agreed with the rationale in principle, some critical about the lack of consultation with parents before the decision was made and felt that the status quo should be maintained. Some respondents also alluded to the fact that there aren't enough **affordable childcare places**, as the fees are relatively high, in some instances comparable to private nurseries. Some respondents felt that the changes to child care fees **disproportionately affected middle income families** who don't qualify for financial support, thus substantially reducing their disposable income. Some respondents also alluded to the fact that a **gradual increase in child care fees over time** would have been preferable, allowing them to adapt their financial plans.

The main areas for improvements identified related to the fact that the **current opening hours weren't long enough**, with some suggestions for **flexible timetabling** to allow for late afternoon activities and non-time activities. There is clearly demand for weekend opening, as shown by **nearly four in every ten** respondents agreeing that they'd use the centre on both **Saturdays and Sundays**, if it was open. Respondents using Lubavitch children's centre indicated a preference for Sunday opening, given that Saturday is the sabbath.

Respondents also felt that **communication** in general across the centres could be improved. This could involve keeping parents updated on the child(rens) progress, information on the availability of childcare places and/ or likely waiting times for childcare/ nursery places.

Respondents also felt that **services were oversubscribed** - with long waiting times for childcare/ nursery places and less room available for 'stay and play' activities. Respondents also highlighted the fact that they'd like to see **more parental/ adult support courses** such as ESOL and support that helps parents access employment opportunities.