
**Economic and City Development Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

29th January 2013

Report of the Assistant Director Governance and ICT

Draft Final Report – Out of Hours Childcare Scrutiny Review

Summary

1. Members are asked to consider the draft final report and its associated recommendations and indicate any amendments they may wish to make prior to them being submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Background

2. At a meeting of Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th July 2012 Members considered a briefing note that had been prepared in response to a potential scrutiny topic that had been submitted by Councillor Douglas. The topic put forward was '*women working in York: impact with lack of childcare or independent care*'. Councillor Douglas attended this meeting and spoke to her proposed topic highlighting how she felt there was a lack of available childcare in the evenings and that recent changes to tax credits had reduced the amount that could be used to pay for childcare.
3. After further discussion the Committee agreed to progress this topic to review and appointed a Task Group¹ to undertake the work.
4. On 17th September 2012 both Councillor Semlyen and Councillor Douglas met with the Family Information Service Manager and the Head of Childcare Strategy and Business Management who provided the information at **Annex A** to this report. It was also, at this stage thought the general topic for review should be around the availability of out of hours childcare in general and the information available advertising this, rather than specifically focusing on '*women working in York*'.

¹The Task Group was comprised of Councillors Runciman, Semlyen and Watt

5. At the 17th September meeting Councillor Douglas highlighted issues that some parents had accessing childcare outside of normal working hours. She talked about problems encountered by single parents who worked in the evening and how they found it difficult to find childcare when they were working outside of standard hours. Standard hours for childcare are 8am-6pm. Cllr Douglas mentioned the high cost of out of hours childcare and how this was unaffordable to many. She also said that the parental workforce's ability to either get a job or access training in the evening could help to improve York's evening economy if there was better out of hours childcare provision and information. It could help York to grow its economy and keep more families and children out of poverty.
6. The Family Information Service (FIS) Manager said that the support available to families to find and access childcare had developed considerably over the last seven years. The key channel of support is through the York FIS, which operates a system of categorisation for enquiries to describe the level of support provided.
 - Level 1** Contact enquiry – this is a simple enquiry e.g. a request for a particular childminder's number
 - Level 2** A named enquiry – this is where FIS provide a more in-depth service and follow up information is provided and the outcome monitored
 - Level 3** The Childcare Brokerage Service – this began operating in 2006. The purpose of the Brokerage Service is to provide a higher level of support to families needing to access childcare who may be struggling for any number of particular reasons e.g. urgent request as a new job starts tomorrow or there are personalised needs such as out of hours. FIS staff contact childcarers on the parents' behalf.
7. Information was also available online. The focus of the online search was to try and keep search options as straightforward as possible. A potential development would be to allow for some advanced search features to support people looking for out of hours childcare.
8. Further discussions were had around the provision of information on City of York Council's website and the FIS Manager assured Councillors that there was currently a comprehensive website of information available.
9. The Councillors then looked at childminder details on the YorOK website and noted that this included a section with information on hours offered by childminders and any special training they had.

On consideration of the information currently available on the website the Councillors asked that further information on the out of hours availability of childminders be added and to improve the search functions on the website a 'flag' or 'flags' to the following windows of availability be added:

- Past 6pm at childminder's home on a weekday
- Past 6pm at parent's home on a weekday
- Overnight stay at childminder's home
- Overnight stay at parent's home
- Weekend daytimes at childminder's home
- Weekend daytimes at parent's home
- Past 6pm at childminder's home at the weekend
- Past 6pm at parent's home at the weekend
- Overnight stay at a weekend in the childminder's home
- Overnight stay at a weekend in the parents home

10. There should, ideally, be flags for at least the overnight stays and out of hours (outside of 8am to 6pm on weekdays) and ideally a cost or indication of costs should also be included in the out of hours information on the website.
11. Further discussion identified that there was no page on the website specifically giving details of babysitters. The FIS Manager informed Councillors that the Childcare Act (2006) set out a legal responsibility on the Council to do everything 'reasonably practicable' to ensure there was sufficient childcare to allow families to work or train. Childcare, in this instance, was defined as provision where support with childcare costs could be utilised e.g. formal Ofsted registered childcare. This did not include babysitters. Whilst there was not an issue with adding an extra page to the website (in fact this was done following discussions with Councillors Semlyen and Douglas), it was felt any further work around this would be moving away from the remit of both the Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the focus of this Task Group's work.
12. The Task Group met as a whole for the first time on 29th October 2012. They considered the information at **Annex A** that Councillors Semlyen and Douglas had received at their pre-meeting on 17th September and a draft action plan (**Annex B** refers) to address the concerns that had been raised to date. The purpose of the meeting was to set a remit for the review and this was agreed as follows:

Aim

To look at the Council's information about Out of Hours childcare provision so that parents are better able to access work outside of standard hours². Also to look at ways of improving the quality of information provided and the way that it is marketed.

13. In light of the above aim, Members of the Task Group discussed the information at **Annexes A** and **B** to this report, in particular the action plan at **Annex B**. They felt that this addressed many of the concerns that Councillor Douglas had raised and thought, in particular, that using the annual childcare audit was a good idea to gather the additional information about out of hours provision that was wanted.
14. In response to a question around babysitting the FIS Manager explained that the Red Cross 'babysitting development training programme' mentioned in the action plan at **Annex B** was costly, with an estimated cost of £1250 to train 15 people. Members felt this was too cost prohibitive and not good value for money. They asked that this be removed from the action plan.
15. Further discussion ensued and moved on to the family friendliness of employers and the FIS Manager indicated that he had, in the past, offered a course to employers in York around being family friendly. This, however, was fairly costly to provide. Members asked about the possibility of running another course of this nature being keen that this should be offered again if at all possible
16. With this in mind the FIS Manager proposed the following options for holding another event of this nature:

Option 1 'employer childcare strategies' – delivered with the Daycare Trust. In 2009 the Daycare Trust was commissioned to deliver an 'employer childcare strategies' workshop for free to local employers. Despite low take up the feedback from employers was very positive. The session focussed on how employers can support families working for them and also realised benefits for the business by doing so. It was a full day course but has not been repeated due to cost constraints. The session would cost £850 plus any venue and refreshment costs. This is not currently factored into any budget.

² Out of Hours being outside of 8am and 6pm on weekdays and anytime at the weekends

- Option 2** 'employer childcare strategies' – developed and delivered locally. An alternative option to the above would be to locally develop and deliver a similar session. However this presents challenges in itself in that the materials for the session would need to be developed and that no staff capacity is currently available to support this.
- Option 3** An alternative approach – the third option would be to work with colleagues in the Economic Development Unit to develop a different way of engaging with employers. The session described above worked well but only reached those who wanted to book onto it. The employers who could benefit most would probably be the least likely to actually attend. Because of this it would be worth exploring if there may be a different way to reach these employers and highlight the benefits of family friendly working. Depending on the scope of potential actions this may also be limited by staff or financial capacity.

17. On consideration of these three options the Task Group felt that **option 3** was the best way forward having the most holistic and joined up approach. They agreed to add this to their recommendations along with those already identified in the draft action plan at **Annex B** to this report (barring the Red Cross babysitting programme).
18. In addition to this the Task Group asked that the FIS Manager report back to the Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee after the next Annual Childcare Audit, which was due in the early part of 2013, to give an update on its outcomes and to report on progress against the implementation of the recommendations arising from this review more generally.

Further Developments and Additional Information

19. As part of the review process the Chair of the Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked that the following question be posted to the GeniUS website:
- 'How can the Council raise the supply of out of hours childcare providers/babysitters that are Ofsted approved and information to parents about the out of hours childcare available?'*
20. One response was received in response to this question and this is detailed below:

'What about having a section on the CYC website under 'Health and Family Care' called out of hours childcare. It could have information saved in a format that was like a database.

The person who was offering the out of hours service would complete an on-line form, saying the days/times that they were available, whether they were Ofsted approved, it would give their postal area for location information and their hourly rate and contact details and how long they had been looking after children.

The person wanting the service would have to register also, and then once their details were conformed they could then access the information, including contact telephone numbers. Hopefully this would make the service available 'out of hours' and also keep administration costs to a minimum.

I have just found a website called childcare.co.uk which appears to be do what I was suggesting, have a look, it seems to be very good.'

21. As can be seen from the information contained within the report many of the ideas and concerns mentioned above have been addressed; in particular adding a section about out of hours childcare to the Council's website. It was also noted that all childcare information was already stored within a database which could be searched online via www.york.org.uk/childcare by postal area and included detailed information relating to the childcare provider. People can search this information freely without needing to register or pay (as is the case for childcare.co.uk). Nevertheless, the Task Group expressed their thanks for this response.
22. And finally, the FIS Manager confirmed that based on an advertisement that had been placed in the December 2012 edition of 'Your Local Link' magazine, which mentioned out of hours childcare, responses had been received from potential childminders who could offer out of hours childcare. These were currently being followed up by the FIS Manager.

Consultation

23. The Task Group consulted officers within the Council, as referenced in the paragraphs above and the public via the GeniUS website.

Options

24. There are no direct options associated with the recommendations in this report.

Members are asked to consider the report and its associated recommendations and indicate any amendments they may wish to make prior to them being submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Analysis

25. The analysis of the evidence gathered along with details of the discussions had is contained within the body of this report, and its associated annexes.

Council Plan 2011-15

26. This is linked with the create jobs and grow the economy priority set out in the Council Plan 2011-15 which states *'all of the city's residents will enjoy the opportunity to achieve their potential within York's economy.'*

Implications

27. **Financial** – Much of this work can already be accommodated within existing work to support families and the childcare market. The only potential implications would be further reductions in funding in this area restricting capacity or discussions with Economic Development generating approaches requiring additional resource.
28. **Human Resources (HR)** - The work detailed in this paper can be covered within existing resources. York Family Information Service has recently completed a restructure which will ensure that it is better placed to respond to these types of challenges.
29. **Other** – No other implications have been identified.

Risk Management

30. The actions associated with this paper will be incorporated into the overall action plan and associated controls and management of the wider Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan.

Recommendations

31. Members are asked to approve the following recommendations prior to them being submitted to Cabinet for consideration:

- Recommendation 1** That the Family Information Service Manager, by means of the childcare audit, audit childcare providers to gather more detailed information on their out of hours availability
- Recommendation 2** That the Family Information Service Manager update search routes online to:
- Allow families to search for out of hours or flexible childcare
 - Introduce an advanced search feature allowing families to specify required windows of time
- Recommendation 3** That the Family Information Service Manager ensures that a new page be created on the YorOK website providing parents with advice on finding informal childcare/babysitters
- Recommendation 4** That as the Council has recently taken back in house the work relating to the recruitment of childminders the Family Information Service Manager ensure that future work targets existing and potential childcarers in key areas to highlight the need for some out of hours and flexible childcare
- Recommendation 5** That the Family Information Service Manager incorporates into the Family Information Service's Awareness Strategy support options around out of hours childcare to:
- parents and carers
 - potential providers of flexible childcare
- Recommendation 6** That the Family Information Service promote and market the additional information and search functions on out of hours childcare on its website to parents and carers through press releases and additions to any printed information such as leaflets and posters

Recommendation 7 That the Family Information Service Manager organise a further event for employers around being family friendly as identified in **option 3** at **paragraph 16** of this report

Recommendation 8 That the Family Information Service Manager report back to Economic and City Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee after the next Annual Childcare Audit to give an update on the outcomes of the audit and progress on the implementation of the recommendations arising from this review

Reason: To complete this scrutiny review

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Report Approved



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Specialist Implications Officer(s) None

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A Information from the Family Information Service Manager and the Head of Childcare Strategy and Business Management

Annex B Draft Action Plan