

OUT OF HOURS CHILDCARE

BRIEFING NOTE

INTRODUCTION

The 2012 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment highlighted that families working shift patterns or out of standard hours continue to express difficulty in accessing childcare.

There are several key factors involved in out of hours childcare:

1. Understanding what out of hours childcare is available
2. How to meet the challenge of childcare remaining sustainable given relatively lower levels of demand
3. How to support families to locate and access appropriate childcare or understand flexible working options.
4. The potential impact on children of unusual patterns or hours of care.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT OUT OF HOURS CHILDCARE IS AVAILABLE

Figure 2 show the profile of when childcare is available based on childcare providers opening hours¹ and when families have said they would like to be able to access childcare². The chart has been adjusted so that 100% represents the maximum level of supply or demand across the day. This has been done so that the relative levels of demand can be easily read.

¹ FIS Database 05/09/2012 – Across all forms of registered childcare

² Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2011 – 2014 parental consultation

Figure 2 shows that for the main part of the day that childcare is largely available at the times being requested by families. However the lines do cross of supply and demand do cross at around 6.30pm where a smaller number of families require childcare later into the evening.

Another key challenge it is worth highlighting is for families that have changing shift patterns where they require different times and days each week. For a childcare provider this means that child is effectively taking up every space possible in the overall shift pattern. For example

- A child needs Monday mornings one week and then Tuesday afternoons the next and then rotates through this pattern very two weeks.
- The childcare provider is unlikely to find another child that will mirror those requirements for the weeks where the Monday or Tuesday sessions are not being used. This will result in the childcare provider either:
 - Charging the parent for all the sessions regardless of whether they are used or not
 - Not charging the parent for the additional sessions but on the understanding that if another parent requests the place on a more regular basis that the arrangement would need to be reviewed.

Childcare providers are generally flexible to try and meet families needs. However the above example is a very real one that presents both challenges for parents being able to afford suitable childcare and for childcare providers sustainability.

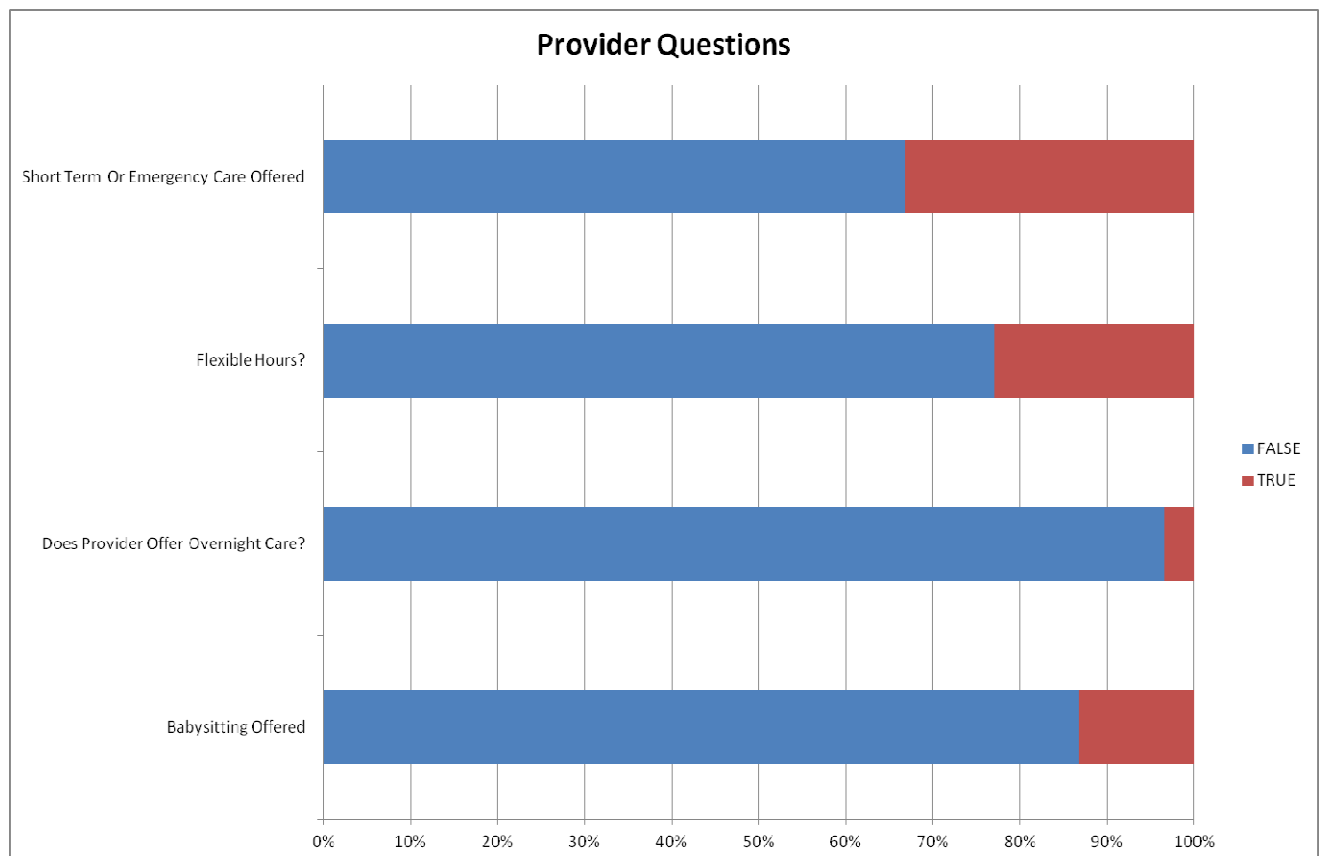


Figure 1 - Provider Questions

Figure 1 shows the profile of how childcare providers have responded to certain questions around the availability and flexibility. Key messages from this figure are:

- 33.26% of childcare providers say they will provide short term or emergency cover however this is likely to be within their standard opening hours.
- 22.94% of childcare providers say they will offer flexible hours. This may be in relation to supporting flexible patterns of take up within standard hours or offering slight extensions to opening or closing times.
- 3.44% of childcare providers offer overnight childcare. Overnight childcare is offered by childminders in the childminders own home.

- 13.30% of childcare providers say they will offer a babysitting service. This service is generally provided by childminders where the figure rises to 22.96%. This means that the childminder is willing to make themselves available for babysitting in the child's home in the evenings for ad-hoc. This gives families the option of using a babysitter who is a childcare professional and has a current Criminal Records Bureau check and up to date first aid training.

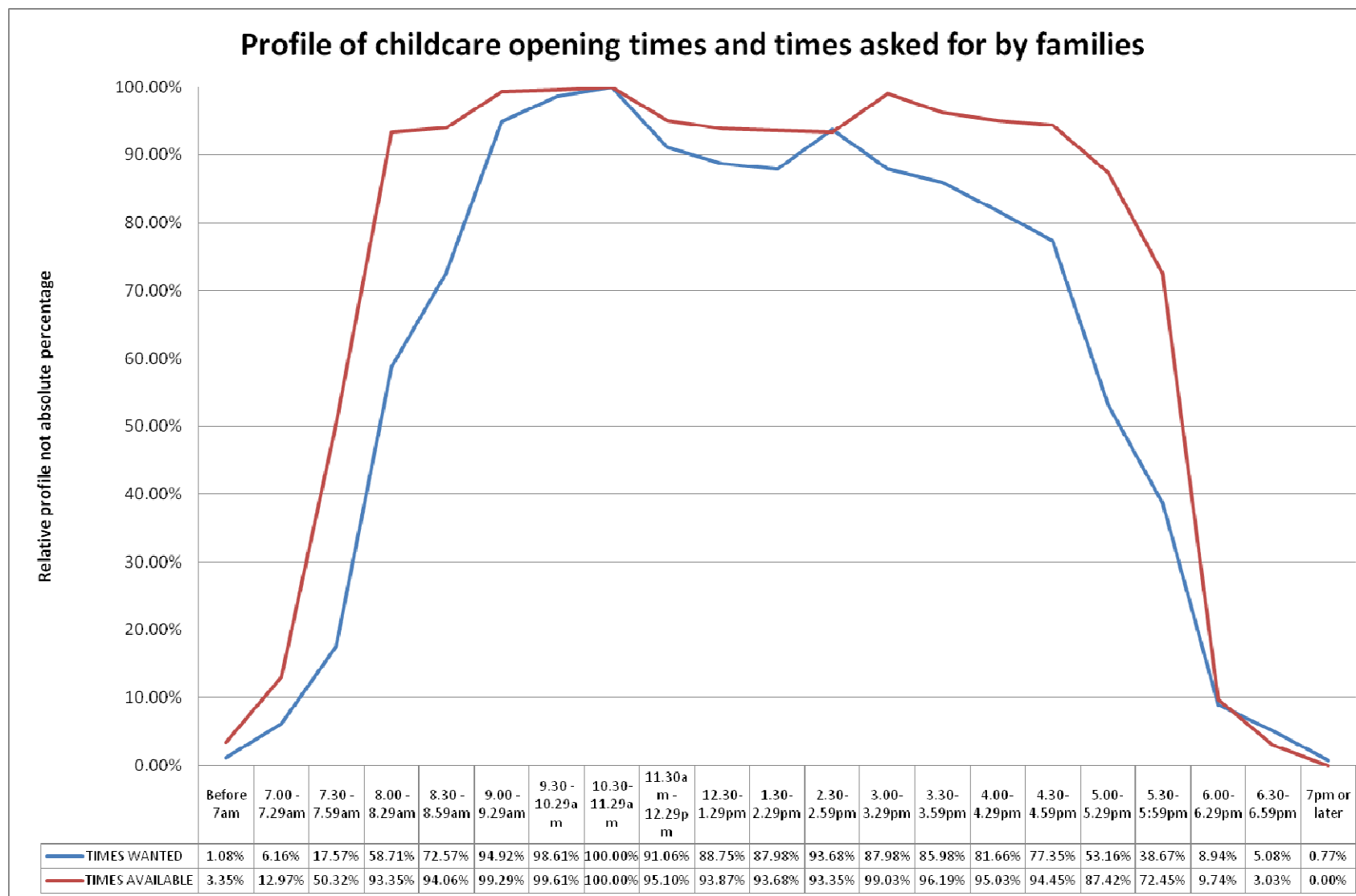


Figure 2 - Profile of all childcare based on opening times and times asked for by families

HOW TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF CHILDCARE REMAINING SUSTAINABLE GIVEN RELATIVELY LOWER LEVELS OF DEMAND

The childcare market tends to be fairly flexible and does respond to parental need where this can be accommodated and it does not affect the overall financial viability of the business. At the same time it is also recognises that there is a balance to be struck between supporting parents to manage their work and family responsibilities and ensuring the best learning and development opportunities for all children.

During this period of economic challenge where for example premises and utility costs have increased, we are increasingly seeing the impact on the financial viability of childcare providers thus reducing any flexibilities there might have been previously. Many childcare settings are struggling to maintain break even points and to maintain adequate levels of reserves. However, as a local authority we work closely with childcare providers to resolve and support sustainability issues quickly and effectively.

The government recently consulted on flexibility as part of a response to Supporting Families in the Foundation Years. Following the consultation they have issued guidance for those children who will receive an early education place at two, three and four. This sets out that there should be increased flexibility but within the limits of not before 7am or after 7pm. The government considers that these limits recognise the balance for families managing their responsibilities, learning and development of the child and also the costs of delivering places such as staffing, premises and other additional costs.

HOW TO SUPPORT FAMILIES TO LOCATE AND ACCESS APPROPRIATE CHILDCARE OR UNDERSTAND FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

York Family Information Service provide a number of options for families to support them locate and access appropriate childcare.

- Online – www.yor-ok.org.uk/childcare allows families to navigate information that explains different childcare options, search for childcare and explains ways to reduce their childcare costs.
- By phone (01904 554444), email (fis@york.gov.uk), text message (077624 802244) or via outreach – York Family Information Service is available 08.30-17.00, Monday to Friday to answer questions from mums, dads and carers of 0-19 year olds on anything and everything to do with family life. Information is available outside of these core hours at outreach events or in response to a particular issue requiring additional support.
The childcare information covers a very wide range of potential information including talking parents through different childcare options and providing them with tailored lists of childcare based on their needs. For families struggling to access childcare a childcare brokerage service is available (see below).
- Via a third party – York Family Information Service is also contacted by practitioners working in children’s centres, libraries, Jobcentre Plus, schools, social services etc who are seeking information on behalf of families they are working with.

CHILDCARE BROKERAGE

York Family Information Service have been running a brokerage service since May 2006. In almost all cases a solution has been found for parents. Childcare brokerage is additional support for families that may be struggling to access childcare for any reason.

There are set pathways for standard childcare enquiries to become brokerage cases. This may be due to difficulty in finding childcare, referrals from partner agencies or through the Information Officer assessing the enquiry as requiring brokerage.

Once the brokerage process has begun a detailed account of the childcare needs and barriers are taken. The Information Officer agrees a course of action, states what they will try to do and agrees a call back date with the enquirer.

All local suitable childcare is identified and contacted to see if they can meet the childcare needs. This contact is combined with an update of the providers overall information to remove duplication with the updating schedule.

If childcare can not be found then this area of needs to assessed to see if this is a gap in childcare provision. Information on difficulties from brokerage cases are fed into the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

Figures 3 and 4 show a summary of brokerage outcomes by year and the reasons for the brokerage by year respectively.

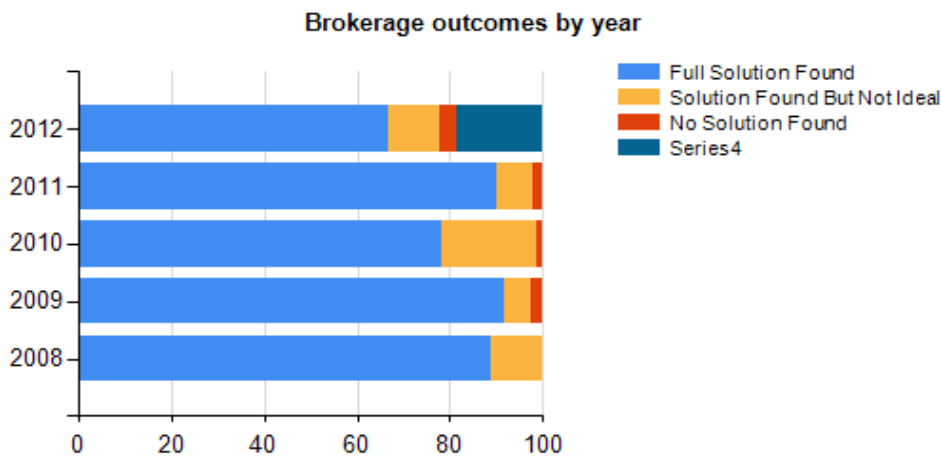


Figure 3 - Brokerage outcomes by year (“Series 4” shows active brokerages)

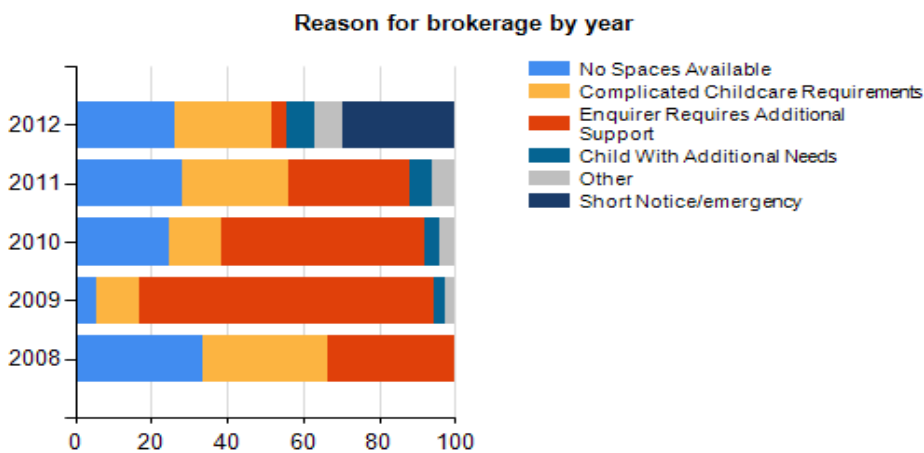


Figure 4 - Reasons for brokerage by year (The "Short notice/emergency" category was only added in 2012)

THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON CHILDREN OF UNUSUAL PATTERNS OR HOURS OF CARE

A key question is how far it is reasonable to go before the potential impact on the well-being of the child is such that it would no longer be appropriate. As an authority and area York does not have a clear definition on this However several brokerage cases have highlighted the challenge this presents.

Below are two anonymised examples of requests that have been made:

- A four year old child needs childcare from 6.30am to 8am where the child will be dropped off for a morning session at a school, then transferred to an afternoon session at a different nursery and then picked up and cared for until 18.00 at another provider. Full day childcare required both Saturday and Sunday.
The concern here is the length of time 6.30am-6pm seven days a week at (given the requirements) potentially five different childcare providers.
- Childcare for an 8 year old starting at 5.30am to drop off a school for 9am. A pick up at the end of a school day and care through to 11pm. Care was required Monday to Friday.
Potential concern about how this as a routine would affect the well-being of the child and their ability to succeed at school.