

Swindon Sure Start Partnership
Childcare Sufficiency Assessment March 2008

Executive Summary

The childcare sufficiency assessment is a requirement of the Childcare Act 2006. Each Local Authority in England is required to assess the supply and demand of childcare and early education to meet the needs of parents who are in work or returning to the workforce.

Assessment of the supply and demand of childcare in Swindon shows that there is under utilisation of the childcare market. There is over supply of childcare places and simultaneous unmet demand from parents.

Currently, for many parents in Swindon the childcare market works extremely well albeit that most parents acknowledge its expense. It is, however, a very fragmented market with a wide variety of providers delivering different services, for the most part, in isolation. Parents have a wide range of needs to be addressed to make the childcare market work for them including the age of their children, the number of children they have, whether any of their children have a disability, the location of the childcare, their ability to drive and access to transport, whether they need one or more settings to cover their needs, their knowledge of the childcare system and their cultural expectations. Matching complex demand with fragmented supply presents huge challenges.

Swindon Sure Start Partnership manages the General Sure Start Grant from the Department of Children Schools and Families. This funds services to support the provision of childcare in Swindon. Actions for market improvement identified in this assessment will be factored into Swindon Sure Start Partnership's annual business plan for the financial year 2008 – 2009. They focus on:

- Filling geographic gaps in services where they still exist, for example increasing the number of early education places available to meet local demand
- Targeting information for parents, for example about the availability of tax credits
- Offering incentives to providers to offer more flexible care for parents
- Offering targeted support to parents at key transition times, for example when their child starts primary school
- Consolidating services by working with a range of providers to offer comprehensive packages of care to suit an individual family's needs.
- Maintaining communication with key partners to ensure childcare is not a barrier to work.

The implementation of these actions will contribute towards the Local Authority's requirement to secure sufficient childcare for parents in work or training by March 2009. Market developments will be reviewed in a process of continuous improvement in advance of the next childcare sufficiency assessment due to be published in March 2011.