

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Sub-committee 2009/10 Early Years Review

Summaries from telephone interviews with local parents about Early Years arrangements

Telephone interviews were held with two Southwark mothers with Early Years aged children who, due to work commitments, were unable to meet with councillors at the proposed times. They found it easier to speak during their lunch break, responding to the questions listed below.

Interview 1.

Ms A has a professional career and works full-time in a job that typically requires 60 working hours weekly. She has a 2 year old son, whom she is raising on her own. Having moved to London from overseas, she has no network of family members on hand to help with childcare.

Ms A has opted to employ a nanny, as this arrangement suits her long work hours. She conveniently found the nanny through a 'flyer' at her workplace, before she had started to look for childcare alternatives. She therefore has not enquired about places with Southwark Early Years providers.

Ms A requires additional care for her son when the nanny is on leave however - and she is currently looking to the Council for assistance in finding appropriate provisional childcare.

Ms A has also already had contact with the Council and Council services through participating in activities for Early Years children. She is impressed by the multitude of free activities, which both she and her nanny have accessed for her son. Ms A receives updates from the Council on activities tailored to son's age group and finds this very effective. Southwark officers have also twice visited her home to ensure that it is child-proof, according to her son's age and mobility. The first visit was free of charge.

Interview 2.

Ms B found it difficult to find cost effective childcare provision that was suitably close to where she lives. She initially hoped to enrol her daughter at the Coin St nursery near Waterloo Station, but the waiting list was too long. (She later heard of a mother who had enrolled her child at Coin St when she was 3 months pregnant, in view of the list's length.)

Ms B therefore looked at 4 other nurseries in her area, none of which seemed appropriate: she found them either too expensive or the premises too unpleasant/dirty.

She also spoke with other mothers; researched for alternative providers on the internet and used networks such as the Riverside Parents' Association. She could not easily find a single source on the web of co-ordinated information about the various alternative providers and options. She did consult the Southwark council website which has a list, but didn't find this particularly useful. She suggested, for example, that it would be handy to access reviews from other parents about the childcare providers they use, and that it would be very helpful to have one website location that co-ordinated all the relevant local information.

The childcare provision that Ms B finally arranged is split between her husband, who is currently looking for work following redundancy, and a relative. She would have preferred her daughter to have been with other children and so to have attended a nursery for at least 2 or 3 days. It makes no economic sense however, for her to use a nursery, when the costs are over £50 to £55 per

day. As an alternative, Ms B arranges for her child to attend a different activity each day with other children. Some of these are organised by council services and are subsidised or paid for by Sure Start.

She would have preferred to use a nursery, but as outlined, found those in her area either unsuitable or unaffordable.

Starter questions for meetings with parents of Early Years children:

1. Have you obtained an Early Years place for your child in a setting of your choice?
2. If your child does not have a place of your choice, why is this?
 - A) There are currently no vacancies at your preferred setting(s)?
 - B) The place(s) of your choice are too far from your home?
 - C) Your preferred provider does not offer the length of hours or combination of days that you require?
 - D) The costs for childcare at your preferred setting are too expensive for you?
 - E) You are unable to find a provider who can cater for your child's special needs
 - F) Other reasons
3. To what extent did you find the steps for finding and securing your child's place straight forward?
4. How far in advance of requiring an Early Years place, did you start to look for one, - and did this give you adequate time to find a vacancy with a preferred provider?
5. To what extent was your search for an Early Years place assisted by the Council and/or by information from the Council?
6. How do you generally view the provision of Early Years education and care for your child? What aspects are you pleased with, - and what aspects would you most wish to improve:
 - A) the quality of the education / care
 - B) the costs
 - C) the standard of the premises and facilities
 - D) the proximity of the centre / nursery / childminder to your home
 - E) the availability of a place at the times and on the days you need them
 - E) the provision for children with special needs
 - F) other aspects