

Government Office for the West Midlands

Research into the take-up of formal childcare by low income working families

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Hempsall
Consultancies



Working to provide equal chances, challenge disadvantage
and promote best practice in services for children and families



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I Introduction

Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) commissioned Hempsall Consultancies to undertake research into the take-up of formal childcare by low income families in November 2008.

The take up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is used as a proxy indicator for child poverty and there is a particular issue for the four Black Country boroughs (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton), where take-up of tax credits is considerably below the national and regional average.

1.1 Key aim

- To investigate the circumstances leading to this disparity and to share findings with stakeholders from across the West Midlands region through two half day good practice seminars

1.2 Key tasks

The research project is primarily a series of interviews and consultations with all four Black Country authorities and their relevant stakeholders: Jobcentre Plus, Children's Information Service/Families Information Service (CIS/FIS), community and voluntary sector etc. In addition, two local authorities within the West Midlands region who enjoy higher take-up rates were included (Coventry and Solihull). The purpose of the research is to:

- Build on local, regional and national data and research held on childcare take-up
- Collect up to date information about each local authority's approach and strategy to encourage take-up and identify the challenges and successes of each local authority
- Collate and analyse the findings to identify opportunities to document practical and achievable methods that all local authorities can use to increase take-up individually and collectively

- Hold a one half-day seminar to outline the report's findings and develop a workshop style response from regional local authorities to further inform the draft report recommendations (participation restricted to priority stakeholders)
- Produce briefing and tool-kit style materials from the research to enable learning to be used by each local authority
- Following the completion of the project first draft final report, facilitate a second good-practice seminar with a wider target audience
- Produce a final report containing all elements of the project.

A list of participants is shown in the appendices.

1.3 Status of this report

This report is the final draft for final approval by Government Office for the West Midlands.

2 The policy context

As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (2007) central Government introduced a single set of 198 national indicators that would be the only measures on which central Government will performance manage outcomes delivered by local government working alone or in partnership¹. The national indicators measure success in local delivery of the central Government's priority outcomes expressed through the Public Service Agreements (PSAs) set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review, or Department's Strategic Objectives (DSOs).

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) demonstrate how local strategic partnerships will deliver measurable improvements to where people live. Local Area Agreements are structured around four policy areas or indicative themes:

- Children and young people
- Safer and stronger communities
- Healthier communities and older people
- Economic development and environment

Local authorities will have chosen up to 35 national indicators as 'designated targets' for improvement when developing their Local Area Agreements. 'Take-up of formal childcare by low income working families' is a national performance indicator (NI 118) and as such may form part of a local authority's Local Area Agreement.

Whilst no West Midlands local authority elected NI 118 as a designated target, increasing the take-up of formal childcare by low income families remains a priority nationally and regionally. NI 118 is one of a set of five indicators related to the Department of Work and Pension (DWP) target to maximise employment opportunity for all². It is linked to PSA 11 (to narrow the gap in educational

¹ National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships, Communities and Local Government

www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/

² Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA)

www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8496128

achievement between low income families and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers) and is a key driver for PSA 9 (to halve the number of children in poverty by 2010-2011, on the way to eradicating child poverty by 2020)³. NI 118 is also relevant to Childcare Sufficiency and the requirement on local authorities to assess the provision of childcare to meet the needs of working parents and those undertaking training that will support employment, including an assessment of affordability and groups of parents with the greatest affordability problems.

2.1 The rationale and definition of NI 118

The rationale and definition for NI 118 is incorporated into Annex 2 'Children and Young People - National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions' (HM Government April 2008) under the economic well-being outcome, which states:

2.1.1 Rationale:

“Driving take-up of formal childcare by low income families brings benefits to children’s learning and development. Formal childcare has positive benefits for children in terms of their social and emotional development as well as giving young children a head start in life and is a key indicator in closing the gap in attainment between children from low income families and their more affluent peers. Research from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project shows there is a strong body of evidence that indicates that good quality childcare and pre-school provision, especially from age 2 upwards, has positive benefits on children’s all round development and that these benefits last through primary school to age 10/11. For older children, research has shown that the benefits of participation in out of school hours activities are considerable, regardless of the activity undertaken. It shows that young people who participate in activities do better than would have been expected from baseline measures in academic attainment. In addition, participants often show an improvement in their behaviour and attendance in

³ National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions, Annex 2: Children and Young People, HM Government
www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/735125.pdf

school, and increased confidence and self-esteem. This indicator is linked to PSA 11 (narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers) but is also a key driver for PSA 9 (halve the number of children in poverty by 2010-2011, on the way to eradicating child poverty by 2020). Provision for childcare is a key enabler to work and contributes to successful entry into the labour market and sustained employment opportunities”. (Pp 176)

2.1.2 Definition and measure

Take up of formal childcare is defined as the number of families who benefit from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, as a percentage of the number of working families receiving more than the family element of Child Tax Credit.

Take up of formal childcare by low income working families is measured by take up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The Guidance states that:

“The childcare element of Working Tax Credit (WTC) is part of the wider tax credit system and is dependent on families being eligible for claiming both Child Tax Credit (CTC) at more than the family element and being in work. The take up of both of these elements is crucial for low income families to claim as part of the package of support to lift families and children out of poverty.

Childcare costs can be a financial burden for families on low income and especially for those families who may be moving from benefit into work. The childcare element is income dependent and for those on the lowest incomes 80% of eligible childcare costs can be claimed each week up to a maximum claim of £140 for one child and £240 for two or more children.

Success will be an increase in the numbers benefiting from the childcare element of WTC. Such an increase and an upward trajectory of the childcare element figures will demonstrate that childcare is flexible and affordable for parents and will also ensure that the children from low income/poor families

are not deprived of the early education and/or the Extended Schools/formal childcare provision that is enjoyed by more affluent peers and which has a positive impact on outcomes and attainment” (Pp 176-177)

2.2 Take-up data and performance

The Parent Childcare Survey 2005 found that take-up of formal childcare by low income families is lower than for higher income families (46% of families in the least deprived quintile used formal childcare compared to 36% in the most deprived quintile). 77% of 3 and 4 year had used early education provision in the past week (2004-2005) compared to 88% (in the general population). Take-up was considerably lower amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups, and some Black groups.

Data regarding the number of families receiving the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is released once a year by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in May. Baseline data is from 2005-2006. The release in May 2009 will relate to the period 2007-2008. The latest confirmed figures are for 2006-2007; data relating to later periods is provisional and should therefore be treated as such.

Where a local authority is at or above the national average figure, good performance will mirror the average percentage increase in numbers benefiting each year.

For local authorities that are currently below the national average, good performance will show them reaching the national average within two years and then maintaining an upward trajectory. (Reference: Pp 179-180⁴)

2.3 Low income

The most commonly used threshold of low income is a household income that is 60% or less than the average British household income. Based on 2006/2007 data, the 60% threshold was worth £189 a week for a single adult with 2 dependent children under 14 years and £270 a week for a couple with two dependent children

⁴ National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions, Annex 2: Children and Young People, HM Government
www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/735125.pdf

aged under 14 years. Sums are measured after income tax, council tax and housing costs have been deducted. In 2006/2007 13 million people (22% of the population) were living in households below this income threshold⁵.

⁵ www.poverty.gov.uk

3 Take up of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit in the West Midlands

Take-up of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit increased year on year in all West Midlands local authority areas 2006/07 over 2005/06.

Take-up in Coventry and Solihull is considerably higher than in England (20% and 23% respectively compared to 17% in England). Take-up in the four Black Country areas is lower, as shown in the following table (participating authorities are in bold):

Take-up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit 2004-2007

Local authority area	Childcare element ratio 2004-2005	Childcare element ratio 2005-2006	Childcare element ratio 2006-2007	Difference 2006-07 over 2005-2006
England	14.48%	15.85%	16.95%	1.10%
West Midlands*	14.65%	15.96%	17.06%	1.10%
Birmingham	15.81%	17.03%	17.53%	0.5%
Coventry	16.79%	18.89%	19.96%	1.07%
Dudley	10.35%	10.90%	12.37%	1.47%
Herefordshire	14.55%	15.74%	16.90%	1.16%
Sandwell	10.90%	12.35%	13.53%	1.18%
Shropshire	13.77%	15.26%	16.84%	1.58%
Solihull	19.41%	21.16%	22.52%	1.36%
Staffordshire	15.55%	16.87%	18.42%	1.55%
Stoke-on-Trent	15.28%	16.54%	17.82%	1.28%
Telford and Wrekin	17.02%	17.84%	18.57%	0.73%
Walsall	9.72%	10.68%	11.63%	0.95%
Warwickshire	16.93%	18.30%	19.34%	1.04%
Wolverhampton	11.52%	13.03%	14.09%	1.06%
Worcestershire	15.37%	16.69%	18.07%	1.38%

Source: Take-up of the childcare element of WTC July 2009, HMRC

Note: data has been updated in this report to reflect the new HMRC data release July 2009.

Across the West Midlands in 2006-2007 39,000 families benefited from the childcare element with an average weekly value of £56.91 which totals £2.22m⁶. In 2007/08,

⁶ Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics, finalised annual awards 2006-7, geographical analyses HMRC 2008

this increased across the region to 41,000 families benefiting from the childcare element with an average weekly value of £60.07, equating to £2.46m in total⁷.

Take-up of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit increased year on year in all West Midlands local authority areas 2006/07 over 2005/06; however, the increase across the region was marginally lower than in England as a whole:

Take-up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit 2007-2008

	Childcare element ratio 2006/07	Childcare element ratio 2007/08	Difference 2007/08 over 2006/07
England	16.95%	17.76%	0.81%
West Midlands	17.06%	17.78%	0.72%
Birmingham	17.53%	17.84%	0.31%
Coventry	19.96%	20.40%	0.44%
Dudley	12.37%	13.28%	0.91%
Herefordshire	16.90%	17.90%	1.00%
Sandwell	13.53%	13.99%	0.46%
Shropshire	16.84%	17.46%	0.62%
Solihull	22.52%	23.36%	0.84%
Staffordshire	18.42%	19.60%	1.18%
Stoke-on-Trent	17.82%	18.61%	0.79%
Telford and Wrekin	18.57%	19.37%	0.80%
Walsall	11.63%	12.57%	0.94%
Warwickshire	19.34%	20.19%	0.85%
Wolverhampton	14.09%	14.73%	0.64%
Worcestershire	18.07%	18.94%	0.87%

Source: Take-up of the childcare element of WTC July 2009, HMRC

⁷ Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics, finalised annual awards 2007-8, geographical analyses HMRC 2009

3.1 Take up of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit in the four Black Country local authorities compared to statistical neighbours.

Take-up of the childcare element is lower in the four Black Country areas than in their statistical neighbour authorities (note: these tables are based on data released 2008):

Dudley

Local authority	Childcare element ratio in 2004-2005	Childcare element ratio in 2005-2006	Childcare element ratio 2006-2007	Difference 2006/07 over 2005/06
Dudley	10%	11%	12%	+1%
Wigan	15%	17%	19%	+2%
Doncaster	11%	13%	15%	+2%
Nottinghamshire	14%	16%	17%	+1%

Source: Take-up of the childcare element of WTC July 2008, DWP

Sandwell

Local authority	Childcare element ratio in 2004-2005	Childcare element ratio in 2005-2006	Childcare element ratio 2006-2007	Difference 2006/07 over 2005/06
Sandwell	11%	13%	14%	+1%
Coventry	17%	18%	20%	+2%
Walsall	10%	10%	12%	+2%
Wolverhampton	12%	13%	14%	+1%

Source: Take-up of the childcare element of WTC July 2008, DWP

Walsall

Local authority	Childcare element ratio in 2004-2005	Childcare element ratio in 2005-2006	Childcare element ratio 2006-2007	Difference 2006/07 over 2005/06
Walsall	10%	10%	12%	+2%
Bolton	18%	19%	20%	+1%
Coventry	17%	18%	20%	+2%
Derby	16%	17%	18%	+1%

Source: Take-up of the childcare element of WTC July 2008, DWP

Wolverhampton

Local authority	Childcare element ratio in 2004-2005	Childcare element ratio in 2005-2006	Childcare element ratio 2006-2007	Difference 2006/07 over 2005/06
Wolverhampton	12%	13%	14%	+1%
Sandwell	11%	13%	14%	+1%
Walsall	10%	10%	12%	+2%
Coventry	17%	18%	20%	+2%

Source: Take-up of the childcare element of WTC July 2008, DWP

4 Area profiles – key data

In this section of the report key area statistics are assessed to identify any patterns of similarity or difference that might contribute to the relatively low levels of take-up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit in the Black Country Areas. A review of key statistics does not identify any patterns that may contribute to higher or lower take-up across the local authorities included in this study. For example:

- **Economic activity and the take-up of benefits**

Coventry and Solihull have average or higher than average economic activity levels (compared to the West Midlands as a whole, and GB). Of the four Black Country local authorities, Dudley and Walsall have average or higher than average economic activity levels, Sandwell and Wolverhampton have lower economic activity levels.

All four Black Country local authorities have higher levels of unemployment, as does Coventry.

Take-up of key out of work benefits do not appear to be associated with higher or lower levels of take-up of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit.

- **Earnings and income**

Earnings by residence are higher in Coventry and Solihull than in the four Black Country areas. All four Black Country areas have higher percentages of employees earning less than £7 per hour

- **Population demographics**

The proportion of the population aged 0-14 is broadly similar in each local authority.

Sandwell and Walsall have relatively high proportions of Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations; Wolverhampton and Sandwell have relatively high proportions of Black populations.

4.1 Economic activity and take-up of benefits

Of the four Black Country local authorities, two have economic activity levels below the average for the region (Sandwell and Wolverhampton) and three have higher than average unemployment levels. Both 'control' areas (Coventry and Solihull) have average (or higher than average) economic activity levels; unemployment in Coventry is relatively high and in Solihull, relatively low:

Economic activity and inactivity levels July 2007-June 2008

Local authority area	Economic activity	Unemployment	Economic inactivity
Coventry	77.0%	7.2%	23.0%
Dudley	80.2%	6.5%	19.8%
Sandwell	71.7%	8.8%	28.3%
Solihull	80.1%	5.2%	19.9%
Walsall	77.7%	7.5%	22.3%
Wolverhampton	71.8%	9.5%	28.2%
West Midlands	77.4%	6.2%	22.6%
GB	78.8%	5.2%	21.2%

Source: ONS annual population survey. % is of those of working age. Unemployment (model-based) % is a proportion of economically active

4.1.1 Take-up of key out of work benefits

Key out of work benefits includes job seekers allowance, incapacity benefits, lone parent and others on income-related benefits. Again there are differences in the take-up of key out of work benefits between the six local authorities but these do not appear associated with higher or lower take-up of the childcare element of the WTC:

Take-up of key out of work benefits August 2008

	Coventry	Dudley	Sandwell	Solihull	Walsall	Wolverhampton	West Midlands	GB
Key benefits claimants	14.3%	13.1%	17.6%	10.0%	16.3%	18.5%	13.1%	11.9%

Source: DWP benefits claimants. % is a proportion of the working age population

4.1.2 Earnings and income

Earnings by residence are higher in both Coventry and Solihull than in the four Black Country areas. The average gross weekly income in Solihull is considerably higher than the average for GB and for the West Midlands region. Hourly pay in Coventry is higher than found in the West Midlands region (albeit gross weekly pay is slightly lower):

Earnings by residence 2008

Local authority area	Gross weekly pay	Hourly pay
Coventry	£437.20	£11.18
Dudley	£411.90	£10.56
Sandwell	£405.80	£10.04
Solihull	£548.10	£13.15
Walsall	£419.40	£10.52
Wolverhampton	£425.80	£10.70
West Midlands	£450.00	£11.11
GB	£479.30	£12.01

Source: ONS annual survey of hours and earnings (residence analysis). Median earnings for employees.

In terms of numbers of employees paid less than £7 per hour, all four Black Country areas have higher percentages than Coventry and Solihull:

Proportion of employees paid less than £7 per hour

	Coventry	Dudley	Sandwell	Solihull	Walsall	Wolverhampton
% employees earning less than £7ph	23.6%	28.6%	29.3%	20.7%	29.5%	30.0%

Source: Annual survey of hours and earnings average of 2006 to 2008. District data poverty site:

www.poverty.co.uk

4.1.3 Population demographics

The proportion of the population aged 0-14 years old is broadly similar in each local authority. Walsall has the highest proportion of children (19.5% of the total population is estimated to be aged 0-14 years) compared to Dudley where an estimated 17.7% of the total population is aged 0-14 years old (source: ONS mid 2007 population estimates):

Estimated child population by local authority

Local authority	% of total population aged				
	Under 1 year	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	All 0-14 years
Coventry	1.4%	5.0%	5.6%	6.1%	18.0%
Dudley	1.2%	4.6%	5.6%	6.3%	17.7%
Sandwell	1.5%	5.4%	6.1%	6.4%	19.4%
Solihull	1.1%	4.3%	5.8%	6.8%	18.0%
Walsall	1.3%	5.3%	6.3%	6.6%	19.5%
Wolverhampton	1.4%	5.0%	5.6%	6.1%	18.0%

Source: ONS mid 2007 population estimates. Percentages rounded

Wolverhampton has the most ethnically diverse population – based on mid 2006 population estimates the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in Wolverhampton accounted for nearly a quarter (23.7%) of the total population.

The parent/carer childcare survey (2005) found considerably lower take-up of formal childcare by Pakistani, Bangladeshi and some Black groups. Sandwell and Walsall have relatively high proportions of Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations (4.8% and

5.1% respectively compared to 3.5% in West Midlands). Wolverhampton and Sandwell have relatively high proportions of Black populations (4.8% compared to 1.98% in West Midlands).

Estimated resident population by ethnic group mid 2006

Ethnic group	Local authority, % of total population						
	Coventry	Dudley	Sandwell	Solihull	Walsall	Wolverhampton	West Midlands
White	80.5%	91.6%	77.4%	91.2%	84.7%	76.3%	88.7%
Mixed	2.1%	1.4%	2.4%	1.6%	1.8%	3.0%	1.4%
Indian	8.2%	1.7%	9.5%	2.5%	5.5%	12.0%	3.4%
Pakistani	2.3%	2.5%	3.3%	1.4%	4.0%	1.8%	2.9%
Bangladeshi	0.7%	0.2%	1.4%	0.3%	1.1%	0.2%	0.6%
Other Asian	0.8%	0.4%	0.8%	0.3%	0.5%	0.8%	0.4%
Black Caribbean	1.2%	0.9%	3.3%	1.1%	1.2%	3.5%	1.6%
Black African	1.7%	0.4%	0.6%	0.3%	0.5%	0.9%	0.2%
Other Black	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%
Other ethnic group	2.4%	0.8%	0.8%	1.0%	0.7%	1.2%	0.6%

Source: ONS Estimated resident population by ethnic group mid 2006 (experimental statistics).

Percentages rounded.

5 DCSF pilots and other considerations

5.1 I18 pilot local authorities

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is working with some of the local authorities that have adopted NI 118⁸ (12 have adopted the indicator as the national indicator, and three as the local indicator). The department and the participating local authorities argue that the increase of take-up of formal childcare is dependent upon the return to work journeys of parents.

The projects recognise that the (low income) parental journey into work and the take-up of formal childcare is a complex one and requires effective baton-passing across services. Pilot programmes are organised into seven themes⁹:

Encouraging the take-up of formal childcare	These programmes recognise that many families and communities avoid the use of formal childcare either because parents believe that the child is better with them, negative perceptions of formal childcare or because they prefer the use of family and friends as care providers.
Establishing the awareness of FIS and childcare options	The FIS provides the clearing house and brokerage service between formal care providers and parents. Ensuring that parents contact FIS when considering returning to work and/or looking for childcare that they will get the most accurate information available.
Improving the quality and availability of the supply of affordable childcare	The supporting of childminders and other childcare providers with a range of business and marketing support materials.
Implementing systems via FIS to ensure that supply and demand are linked	Ensuring that parents do receive accurate and appropriate information, and that providers do have occupancy levels that

⁸ Cornwall, Lambeth, Leicester, Merton, Rochdale, Rotherham

⁹ Increasing the take-up of formal childcare and the childcare element of WTC DCSF

	sustain their business, requires excellent information streams, software and IT systems and trained personnel to make the best use of them.
Baton passing – joining up the departments to facilitate the customer journey into work	Considered to be a significant challenge for local authorities – vital that agencies including Jobcentre Plus, DWP, HMRC, local health partners, schools etc. work together at key ‘pinch’ points to facilitate the journey into work and the take-up of tax credits.
Facilitating take-up specifically of childcare element of WTC	The complexity of the application process is exacerbated by parental fear of overpayments and repayment requirements.
Employers’ programmes	Employers need to be supported and encouraged to implement information programmes and providing help for applying for tax credits. Employer programmes are currently scarce.

5.2 Social and scientific marketing

The DCSF’s social and scientific models of marketing are reinforced within these programmes. Social marketing aims to change behaviours, attitudes and beliefs specifically about formal childcare. This includes targeting households that are traditionally less well reached. The model has three basic approaches:

- Outreach – household visiting, working with community groups
- Local publicity/advertising campaigns – targeted at areas of low take-up – using door drops, posters etc.
- Taster sessions – childcare chats, stay and play, fathers groups, open days and childcare taster sessions

The DCSF’s scientific marketing model includes:

- Targeted campaigns for childcare tax credit in areas where take-up is low

- Working with partners to disseminate information and act as information hubs e.g. employers, early years and childcare providers, children's centres, extended schools, Jobcentre Plus, Citizens' Advice Bureau etc.
- Using Jobcentre Plus and HMRC/DWP data to target households around children's centres
- Training for early years and childcare providers, staff in children's centres, the whole range of information providers to provide application and access support
- Web-based tools for parents to find childcare provision, financial support, and activities for older children
- Enhanced information exchange between early years, childcare and activity providers with FIS (including vacancies, waiting lists, costs) and availability of this information for parents

A communications tool-kit for local authorities has been provided on CD Rom and supports choosing the right message for different audiences. It contains a range of resources including order forms for generic leaflets and posters relating to specific messages for marketing purposes.

5.3 Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare

The DCSF's refresh of the 10 Year Childcare Strategy published in January 2009 set new aims to provide more coherent and transparent support for parents with an increased support role through brokerage for the FIS. To support a more proactive approach to tax credit promotion, a tax credit ready reckoner has been developed and is currently being piloted to aid the provision of front-line indicative eligibility information. On a national level, there will also be an increased role for the national helpline number through a contact centre approach.

5.4 Raising the take-up of childcare among BME families

Following strong evidence that take-up is low among some groups, the DCSF has been working with six local authorities to pilot approaches to increase take-up and effect reach. A tool-kit has been developed that aims to support local authorities develop an overall strategy. Key elements of the strategy include understanding the

parents' journey into work, sufficiency strategy and coordination between key stakeholders. Using data effectively has also been identified to target first step actions and to support 'reaching out' to engage stakeholders early on using a range of communication methods as part of a coordinated marketing campaign. Again, the direct promotion of tax credits has been identified as being a key part of the strategy along with the measurement of outcomes and impact. Alongside this work, the DCSF has published a tool-kit to promote free early learning for Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents.

6 Strategies and work to support the take-up of formal childcare and/or the childcare element of Working Tax Credit in the West Midlands

6.1 Introduction to findings

This section describes the strategies and work found in the West Midlands relating to the increase of take-up of formal childcare of low income working families. The in-depth discussions with participating local authorities and key partners identified a wide range of activities to support take-up of childcare and access to support for childcare.

Local authorities and their partners were asked to describe and where possible provide evidence of their work against the following structure:

- Overall strategies or initiatives that have been/are used to increase the take-up of formal childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Families Tax Credit over the past 24 months (including any actions planned)
- The provision of information about childcare, childcare take-up, tax credits including who is involved in the dissemination of information
- The process of keeping all relevant stakeholders and partners up to date with information and how partners/stakeholders are supported to signpost parent/carers. How referrals are tracked and monitored
- How information is held regarding current take-up rates, population as a whole and low income families in particular
- Outcomes of any recent (past 12-18 months) consultations with parents/carers and professional partners that provide insight into barriers and drivers for formal childcare take-up
- Detail of any outreach/development work with low income families, frequently excluded families
- Examples of how data is routinely collected that may support monitoring of take-up and systems in place to monitor this data
- Local media campaigns and marketing drives and how these are linked to national campaigns

Local authority area summaries are shown later in this report; meeting notes from each interview are available as an appendix.

The research project found that local authorities in the Black Country and in Coventry and Solihull are delivering a wide range of interventions, general support and information strategies. The hub of activities is around the work of CIS/FIS and Jobcentre Plus. In addition, there are examples of how other teams, services and organisations appear to be contributing to the take-up objective. However, resources allocated to these goals and capacity to deliver, supported by partnership working is inconsistent. There remains a need to ensure appropriate resources and capacity and to link this effectively through a coordinated set of actions to the local authorities' and Government's strategic objectives (including anti-poverty, economic development, narrowing gaps in educational achievement, childcare sufficiency duty).

Coventry and Solihull local authorities, as comparators, do not appear to be planning or delivering strategies that are substantially different to the Black Country local authorities. However their take-up rates are higher. A key issue is that impact measurement is not in place to inform a view of the effectiveness of interventions across the region (this is in line with other regions).

The research project has been able to identify a core framework of suggested actions that could be used by local authorities to support their take-up strategies outlined in section seven.

In summary, we found actions grouped into: information; monitoring the impact; and marketing.

6.2 Information

A number of strategies are targeted at improving the dissemination of information, either within a local authority area, between partners or direct to parent and carers.

Local authority participants identify on-going marketing activities that contribute to the dissemination of information to parent/carers. For example, promotion of

information on childcare in libraries, leisure centres, family events and shopping centres. Information is distributed to parent/carers via childcare providers, at children's centres and via Children's or Families Information Services (CIS/FIS) and in **Wolverhampton**, via surgery sessions at employers' premises.

Parents and carers are offered support, information and advice from a range of support and outreach activities including: family support workers, HMRC outreach (**Wolverhampton** pilot), and Citizens' Advice Bureau outreach via children's centres.

There are examples of activities that specifically target either the take-up of formal childcare and/or support for the cost of childcare. Jobcentre Plus play a pivotal role in supporting parent/carers to access information and to work with parent/carers to identify barriers to work. A number of Jobcentre Plus initiatives are targeted specifically at supporting parent/carers to advise, inform and support (e.g. the Work Focus Services pilot in **Sandwell**) and outreach work in children's centres (e.g. **Dudley**). Work trials and in-work credit schemes (e.g. **Coventry**) offer support to meet the costs of childcare. Additional support to meet the costs of childcare is offered at a local level, e.g. works undertaken by the Workshop Employment project in **Coventry** and supported nursery places across a number of settings in **Wolverhampton**.

Other initiatives are targeted at addressing perceptions and barriers. A number involve working with parent/carers to deliver peer support and advice within the community (e.g. peer engagement project in **Walsall**; 'champions' in **Walsall** and a Family Engagement project in **Coventry**). A 'confidence in childcare' project in **Walsall** aims to support families by removing barriers to work including childcare, and offering childcare taster sessions to families engaging with a FIS outreach worker.

The identified initiatives and strategies highlight the centrality of the CIS or FIS and Jobcentre Plus and the involvement of a wider range of other staff and partners. Efforts may not however be closely coordinated, particularly in terms of targeting,

planning, monitoring and measuring the success of initiatives and strategies to increase the take-up of formal childcare.

6.3 Monitoring the impact

It has been difficult to establish any quantifiable outcomes arising from the range of strategies and initiatives identified by participating local authorities and partners. A number of initiatives are new, and may yield useful data to inform an assessment of the impact of the initiative in the future, for example:

- In-work credit scheme and work trials via Jobcentre Plus in **Coventry**;
- Work Focus Services pilot in **Sandwell** (one of ten local authority areas involved);
- Outcomes of recent 4Children research looking at the take-up of childcare in extended services;
- Confidence in childcare project in **Walsall**;
- HMRC outreach support pilot in **Wolverhampton** (one of a number of local authority areas involved in the pilot);

Other initiatives and strategies, some of which form part of wider marketing and support work, are not subject to specific impact/outcome assessment.

Jobcentre Plus routinely monitors outcomes of childcare discussions (a statutory duty introduced between clients and lone parent advisors) and referrals to the C/FIS. However, some local authorities expressed concern regarding how robust some of the data is. For example, local authorities reported only limited tracking of clients who have been signposted and that data may be recorded without challenge or brokerage support (e.g. where childcare has been identified as a barrier to work).

Data regarding the take-up of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is available, and is released in the May of the following year (so, for example, data for the year ending April 2008 will not be available until May 2009). Snapshot data is available and not all those local authority officers interviewed were aware of how much data may be available to them, and at what level data it is presented (e.g. at

sub-locality area level as well as at local authority level). Combined with a lack of outcome planning in advance of instigating a specific initiative or strategy, this means that local authorities find it hard to evidence any impact. Identifying priorities in targeted work can also be hindered by a lack of up-to-date data and small area data.

It would be useful to assess take-up against the age of child. A number of initiatives and strategies outlined above are targeted, either by design or as a result of the means of communication, to parent/carers of younger children (e.g. with the delivery of information, advice and support within children's centres).

Free early education entitlement is not taken into account in the measure adopted for the take-up of formal childcare but may be a central strand in any local authority's strategy. Similarly, take-up of formal childcare where families are using childcare vouchers and/or salary sacrifice schemes will not be taken into account but may represent good progress towards the target of increasing the take-up of formal childcare.

Given the frequency of publication of tax credit take-up data and the development of other areas of support including free flexible entitlement, two year old funding, childcare vouchers etc., it may be useful for local authorities to look at a wider data set to evidence the impact of this range of initiatives at a local level.

There is evidence of closer working relationships being developed between local authorities and partners, and within local authorities, as work to promote a range of strategies including the take-up of formal childcare, the child poverty agenda and childcare sufficiency, continue to be developed.

6.4 Marketing

Local authorities have established collections of information leaflets to support the promotion of FIS. However, specific materials and activities for promoting the take-up of formal childcare are reported to be very limited. This is particularly true for targeted media and marketing activities or campaigns, beyond what may be considered as core FIS activities. There are a number of general activities but again,

it has been difficult to identify the specific impact that many of these initiatives have had.

There is a need to design and deliver clear, appropriate and coordinated marketing campaigns that provide different messages for different audiences, delivered by a range of partners working together.

Opportunities to link with national marketing campaigns are generally welcomed. However, one barrier to this occurring appears to be the late release of information or inefficient information flow regarding national campaigns – reducing opportunities to piggy-back and gain maximum benefit from linking to such campaigns.

There is a reported lack of supporting promotional materials available to local authorities and partners.

6.5 Promotion of tax credits and other support

The provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits is not uniform. Parent/carers receive different levels of information and support depending on the local authority area. Local authorities report that some parent/carers have access to bespoke information packs but not in all cases. Some parent/carers have access to HMRC information direct (e.g. via the internet) and some are able to get information support and advice via children's centres but this may exclude a number of parent/carers. Clients of Jobcentre Plus benefit from information about financial support for childcare but links between Jobcentre Plus and the CIS or FIS are not fully established in all cases.

Anecdotally, local authorities are at the early stages of developing the Ofsted voluntary childcare register as a means of increasing the affordability (and sustainability) of childcare provision for older children within childcare sufficiency action plans. This aim will require close and effective working protocols between extended services and early years and childcare, and further support may be beneficial.

7 A framework for increasing the take-up of formal childcare with low income families

The areas identified in the following framework represent key elements of a coordinated strategy that could be used by a local authority to plan, instigate and measure the increase of take-up of formal childcare by low income working families.

7.1 Strategy, leadership and planning

The take-up of formal childcare, particularly for low income families is central to many key local authority and central government objectives, notably: PSA 11 to narrow the gap in educational achievement between low income families and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers; PSA 9 to halve the number of children living in poverty by 2011 on the way to eradicating child poverty by 2020; NI 118 is one of a set of five indicators related to the DWP target to maximise employment opportunity for all; and is highly relevant to the childcare sufficiency duty in meeting the childcare needs of families to support their work and work-related activities.

- Childcare take-up should be formally recognised and incorporated at a strategic level e.g. within the local authority' childcare sufficiency action plan, the Children and Young People's Plan, and at Children's Trust level regardless of the status of NI 118 in local area agreements
- Whilst the FIS and Jobcentre Plus have pivotal roles in delivering targeted and responsive actions that contribute to the objective, leadership is required in each local authority to ensure that actions are strategically placed. This will support internal and external partners to dedicate appropriate capacity and resource to achieve stated aims across: economic development; regeneration; training agencies; voluntary sector community projects; children's centres; extended schools; early years and childcare providers; Citizens' Advice Bureau (and other information, advice and guidance services); and other local partners.
- Strategic and operational partners could be brought together to map their contributions and to develop and agree a shared vision to inform action planning and to established regular measurement and review processes.

7.2 Operational issues

To achieve the strategic objectives planning needs to identify clear and measurable operational delivery. All stakeholders need to be clear about their individual roles and how they relate to the roles of others. Everyone should be allocated measurable responsibilities with accountability for inputs, outputs and outcomes. All work should be delivered under the shared vision and aims. To enable this to happen, time could be allocated to train, support and challenge stakeholders. Leadership should take a coordinating role to monitor performance of the plan and ensure a seamless support service throughout parents' journey into work and using formal childcare.

- To fulfill their role, delivery partners may require away day and regular meetings to share roles, explain work priorities and objectives and develop effective working relationships
- Standardised resources could be developed to include local tool-kits, packs and guidance to provide supporting information for contacts, effective referrals and to achieve a seamless journey into work
- Progress on delivering the action plan could be brought to review meetings each quarter
- Include early years and childcare settings in operational delivery by providing support and training to promote childcare take-up, information provision and tax credit and other financial support for parents. This also aims to support the sustainability of childcare settings
- Ensure that all types of settings for children of all ages are included in operational delivery, recognising that children's centres have target age ranges that are not representative of all children and families

7.3 Promotion, advertising and awareness of childcare options and financial support

The childcare sufficiency assessment is a useful starting point for assessing barriers and support needs for increasing the take-up of formal childcare. More targeted work may also be required in particular geographical areas or amongst particular populations. This research will inform the need for delivering the right message, to the right person and the right time. There is a strong need for clear messages on childcare provision (including supply and range, use of childcare, meeting individual needs, the free flexible entitlement, extended schools, and children's centres); along with information about support to pay for childcare (childcare element of Working Tax Credits, childcare vouchers, help for students, and other local support). Additionally, the different benefits of accessing childcare need to be identified promoted and communicated e.g. educational achievement, child development, and economic well-being.

- Annually update the childcare sufficiency assessment
- Adopt a campaign style approach to marketing and promotion of take-up and build in review and measurement of impact and use opportunities to track parents through the journey into work
- Promote the supply, range and type of childcare provision and how parents can find and use such provision
- Provide clear initial information on the range of financial support available and easy routes to finding out more from a choice of sources (including where to go for application support)
- Roll-out the use of the DCSF/HMRC tax credit ready reckoner across children's centres, FIS, early years and childcare settings and other information sources and offer support and training to ensure its effective and appropriate use
- Promote multiple messages on the benefits of childcare to the target audience
- Use appropriate communication methods above and beyond standard tools e.g. leaflets and posters, through outreach and brokerage work, DVD, community projects, information providers, delivery partners etc.

- Support employers to use the ready reckoner, access childcare information and disseminate childcare and tax credit information to their workforce and potential workforce

7.4 Monitoring impact

Despite the many different and often creative, wide ranging initiatives across the region, it was not possible to identify data that could demonstrate the impact and outcomes of this work. The key data set provided by HMRC/DWP is not consistently disseminated, accessed nor understood.

Local data collection could support the measurement of counter-strategies that may also increase the take-up of formal childcare e.g. free flexible entitlement and increased use of childcare vouchers. This is important as they contribute to the achievement of NI 118 whilst not directly impacting on tax credit take-up levels.

- Use HMRC/DWP data provided in May of each year and snapshot data provided throughout the year at local authority and super output area levels to monitor impact and inform targeting
- Local monitoring and measurement needs to be built into all projects at the outset (establish baselines to enable the measurement of progress and impact)
- The impact of the roll out of new initiatives such as the free flexible entitlement and two year old funding etc. need to be included in analysis of progress to increase the take-up of formal childcare, so that tax credit take-up is not the only measure at a local level
- Annual updates and the full three year review of the childcare sufficiency assessment provide an opportunity to monitor annual progress on take-up of tax credit and other childcare take-up strategies

7.5 The role of FIS

The role of the FIS is pivotal but not exclusive in this area. There are essential roles that the FIS needs to deliver, one of which is equipping other partners (including community information providers, early years and childcare settings and other local authority teams) to provide general information and awareness raising activities.

Where FISs are already experiencing capacity and resource challenges, it requires the local authority to review delivery in line with section 12 of the Childcare Act (2006) to achieve the information duty. In addition, the FIS needs to act as a hub, with effective outreach and brokerage linked and co-delivered with external partners. FIS is in a unique position to routinely collect data on supply and demand from providers, and demand and need from individual parents and families. As a central information point, the FIS needs to put in place processes to measure and track levels of enquiries and outcomes generated from marketing campaigns, referrals and other strategy activities. This also requires a close relationship with the on-going childcare sufficiency assessment process.

- The FIS should have a central role in promotion, advertising and awareness campaigns as a point of contact and referral
- The Childcare Act (2006) Section 12 information duty provides a structure for the provision of the FIS
- Outreach work is important as part of a coordinated strategy for reaching communities most often excluded and providing targeted awareness raising in identified locations. This may involve working with voluntary and community groups and key partners
- The FIS' brokerage role is key to matching childcare supply to parental need, in this role there is a great deal of potential to collect and analyse informative data for strategy and policy
- The FIS should arguably take the lead in ensuring that the tax credit ready reckoner is appropriately and effectively utilised in the field by the FIS and partners and that routes to application support are clear

7.6 The role of Jobcentre Plus

As with the FIS, Jobcentre Plus holds a central role in information, advice and guidance – with a discrete focus on parents' journey into work. Childcare barriers to work are a consideration of Jobcentre Plus within the process of supporting parents into work. Removing these barriers benefits from access to up-to-date information about childcare supply and ready access to working with FIS to achieve effective brokerage support where needed. Jobcentre Plus should also inform the childcare sufficiency assessment.

A key role is the provision of individual advice and information for parents including 'better off calculations', fast track tax credit applications and effectively referring parents to the FIS and additional support such as childcare taster sessions.

- Jobcentre Plus should be included in strategic and operational planning
- Outreach working requires action over and above changing location of work and should include proactive reach strategies, targeting where needed and generating significant new case loads, relationships and awareness
- Jobcentre Plus role and contribution to marketing and campaign based projects should be clearly specified
- There should be regular sharing of data to monitor impact of strategies and to inform the childcare sufficiency assessment and duty

7.7 Pilot programmes and test project

There is much to learn from projects developed and delivered across the region, from other regions and nationally. The DCSF is also working with some local authorities on NI 118 test programmes. These approaches offer opportunities to inform and shape new local projects or revise existing programmes. Of crucial importance is that outcome measurement is included in pilot and test projects from the outset.

- Consider the different approaches that provide case studies within this report

- Work with other local authorities to consider their strategies and use this information to inform your own plans
- Dedicate funding to resource pilot and test programmes and carefully monitor success and outcomes prior to inform decisions to roll-out across your local authority area
- Take benefit from the learning of the DCSF NI 118 test programme local authorities (as outlined in section five)

8 Participating local authority summary findings

Individual meeting notes were prepared under agreed areas of investigation:

- Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned;
- Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits (to parent/carers and to providers and partners);
- Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit);
- Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families);
- Monitoring systems;
- Media campaigns and marketing drives

Meeting notes have been summarised to produce area reports detailed in the remainder of this section.

8.1 Local authority: Coventry

Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
February 2008 – joint campaign with Warwickshire FIS' focused on promoting tax credits	A poster and postcard campaign was developed and information widely distributed to childcare providers and children's centres.	Level of impact is not known but there were requests for additional materials necessitating a second print run. Reported that the campaign was not thought to be effective.	
On-going – a Joint Working in Childcare Group/Committee	Cross-boundary committee/group (Coventry and Warwickshire) externally facilitated, coordinating employer support. Two sub-groups, training and recruitment and business and employer. The training and recruitment sub-group has been involved in a marketing campaign to broaden knowledge of	No data held; Warwickshire may have monitoring data on the impact of the project.	

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	options available to families beyond working patterns that fit around school.		
Current (until 2010) – supporting parent/carers to access local childcare for attending training courses and/or interviews for employment	Work undertaken by the Workshop Employment Project which aims to provide job brokerage; training in job seeking skills; information, advice and guidance. Operate a shop front premises and a training centre, with ten staff. The main focus of their work is to support clients back into work.	<p>The Workshop attracts approximately 500 new residents a year (main target group) with an additional 500 from outside their target area (work with these people is not covered by the funding). Of these approximately 200 residents per year would enter employment.</p> <p>It is reported that access to local childcare has not been successful for a number of reasons including a lack of short-term places; requirements for children to attend an induction period; lack of funding to finance</p>	Supported by New deal for Communities funding

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
		childcare places and; a lack of trust in formal childcare provision.	
Ongoing - The Job Bus	The 'Job Bus' is used to target specific geographical areas (including Local Enterprise Growth Initiative wards). Jobcentre Plus advisors offer information, advice and support. Information includes childcare options available, in-work calculations and signposting to FIS.	Level of enquiries re: childcare believed to be low attributed in part to majority of users being male and/or cultural expectations.	
On-going - Jobcentre Plus Child Benefit Marker system	All Jobcentre Plus clients are asked about childcare as a barrier to work (formally only return to work clients). Referrals are made to the FIS where childcare is identified as a barrier.		
On-going – In-work Credit scheme	Via Jobcentre Plus, can contribute £40 a week for up to 52 weeks.	Believed to have been a motivator for clients to return to work.	
On-going – Work Trials	Via Jobcentre Plus, are able to pay up-from childcare costs which do not need to be repaid by the client.		

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
Planned – a series of road shows	Joint project (with the policy development manager, LSC and early years) as part of the Economic Well Being Strategic Partnership sub-group		Pending approval

Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits

Information for parent/carers

- The FIS distribute a wide range of information on Childcare Tax Credits, including: postcard and poster marketing (produced with Warwickshire, not thought to be effective); sign-posting (e.g. for in-work calculations, to websites); Government information leaflets;
- An information leaflet on tax credits is provided to all FIS enquirers;
- Updated information is held at children’s centres;
- Wrap-around settings have a supply of tax credit leaflets to distribute directly to families;
- Jobcentre Plus signpost to the FIS and/or access information on a clients behalf if childcare is identified as a barrier to employment;
- Via contracted partner organisations (e.g. training providers and the CAB). Information on childcare and in-work calculations forms part of the support work (monitored by the Jobcentre Plus contracts team);
- Via the Job Bus;

Information for providers and partners

- Provider newsletter articles;
- Email updates to early years services;
- ‘Make it Real’ campaign provided case studies for Connexions and Jobcentre Plus staff to extend understanding of the type of work undertaken by childcare professionals;

- Business events for childcare providers (across Coventry and Warwickshire) – reported to attract large numbers to the forums;
- Processes in place via the Jobcentre Plus to support partner organisations to keep up to date, e.g. written information and invitations to communications meetings (via Jobcentre Plus information officer); stakeholder events; childcare partnership manager;
- Internal processes at Jobcentre Plus (e.g. via the Childcare Partnership Manager) ensure that advisors are clear on the priorities of the Jobcentre Plus in supporting clients to engage in training or employment;
- Use of the FIS database by Jobcentre Plus staff;

Potential improvements

- Jobcentre Plus report that they do not distribute information on tax credits to partners as they do not hold the information themselves (query)
- Ensure a systematic approach to giving information at the enquiry stage;
- Use community venues to offer drop in sessions on tax credits;
- Offer support to vulnerable families to access information and to complete tax credit claim forms;
- Provide information and support using a personal approach;
- Develop a childcare take up strategy and campaign;
- Nurseries to spend time with parents viewing childcare facilities and offering information and support with tax credits.

Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit)

- FIS provider data;
- Evaluation of all FIS enquirers – any significant issues raised are included in the action plan;
- Log of unmet childcare needs via FIS;
- Count of referrals by the FIS to benefits advice (data available but not used);
- Childcare barrier to work data/Childcare Benefit Marker data (Jobcentre Plus);

- 2007 data on children in workless families in receipt of benefit (Jobcentre Plus);
- Number of referrals to FIS and children’s centres (Jobcentre Plus)

Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
FIS	The FIS report undertaking outreach work in a variety of settings and locations including: drop-in sessions; children’s centres; extended services; work with refugees and; child health clinics.		
Family support workers	Provide support to vulnerable families (albeit providing information on tax credits is not part of the role).		
Volunteer schemes within three children’s centres	The schemes developed ‘mentor friends’; members of the local community who could befriend and mentor other parents to support a move into employment.	The project secured a ‘Partners in Excellence’ Award from the Sure Start Unit for their work with BME groups.	Funded from the Children’s Fund
Family Engagement project	Recruitment of local people to undertake outreach work to engage lone parents who were not accessing the services	Believed to have achieved low outputs over the two year period. Some anecdotal	Managed by Pertemps. Funded by an under spend in programme

	of Jobcentre Plus. Required outcomes included attendance at an interview with a Jobcentre Plus advisor and other support to facilitate a return to employment.	evidence collected as part of the project indicated a strong culture of worklessness.	funding
The Job Bus	Delivered in partnership with the LSC and Jobcentre Plus; offers outreach services including better off calculations.		

Monitoring systems

Identified monitoring systems		
District Employer Engagement Manager, Jobcentre Plus	Events organised for employers capture data on potential areas of support identified by employers. This information is used to establish local links and offer information and support.	
Local authority settings offering wrap-around provision	Collect data on the number of parents in receipt of benefit and present quarterly	
Lone parent advisor Job Centre Plus	Limited tracking of clients who have been signposted – only possible if clients want to attend training and/or there are adjustments to benefit payments	

Media campaigns and marketing drives

Jobcentre Plus reported that activity relating to media and marketing is coordinated through Head Office and that the focus of the (current) HMRC campaign was to encourage clients to report changes to their circumstances to ensure that over payment of benefits was not made.

The District Employer Engagement Officer (Jobcentre Plus) identified past campaigns which included:

- Options and choices events held at employer's premises (well-attended);
- Events to target the take-up of employment opportunities by matching the needs of client groups with employer options (e.g. lone parent events to promote opportunities with Barclays Bank who have flexible working patterns)

The Job Bus has attended local events such as job fairs. See also 'provision of information' (section 2 above).

8.2 Local authority: Dudley

Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
Ongoing – Jobcentre Plus advisors outreach	Jobcentre Plus advisors are working in children’s centres to offer support for parent/carers seeking employment and better off calculations.	Regional case studies have been developed	
CIS	The CIS report undertaking outreach work in children’s centres, baby clinics and school open events	Attendance at high profile events in July and December was reported to have generated 7,000 enquiries	
Ongoing - CAB advisor	A CAB worker offers support and advice working within children’s centres		
Pilot – information kiosks	The local authority is piloting information kiosks in eight venues (including children’s centres, extended services, children’s services reception)	Kiosks will support the work of the information champions – a network of employed staff who act as a central point of contact.	
Recent – take up of childcare in extended services	National project with 4Children. Looking at the take-up of childcare within extended services. Research included the	Average response rate of 11%. Anecdotal evidence (?) suggested that parent/carers found	

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	distribution of questionnaires to parent/carers measuring their level of knowledge and understanding of tax credits.	the application forms complex and reluctance to apply based on knowledge of others who had been required to return payments	
Ongoing-Promotion of CTC as a sustainability strategy	Childcare Support Team and the Business Support Team promote Childcare Tax Credit and childcare vouchers as strategies to support sustainability		
Ongoing - Neighbourhood Employment and Skills Partnerships (NESP's)	Provide a forum (multi agency) to provide a co-ordinated approach to local areas with the aim of returning to work and/or training.	Business plans have been developed to inform the work of the partnership	

Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits

Information for parent/carers

- The CIS provide information to parent/carers on tax credits and as part of any interaction check if families are aware of the support and promote the services of Jobcentre Plus;
- A 'hot phone' which links people accessing children's centres to Dudley council departments;
- CAB worker offers information and advice via children's centres;
- Jobcentre Plus advisors are working in children's centres offering support for seeking employment and better off calculations;
- The FSA publication 'A Parent's Guide to Money' is distributed as a resource to families;
- Options and Choices information sessions offered by Jobcentre Plus to inform lone parents of the changes to the Lone Parent Regulations (2008)

Information for providers and partners

- Information on tax credits, childcare vouchers and Care to Learn is distributed at training sessions with childcare providers;
- A business support toolkit is given to all registered childcare providers;
- Staff members (Early Years) are kept up to date on changes and new initiatives and through information champions supported by the CIS working out of children's centres and extended schools

Potential improvements

- Information kiosks in children's centres are being considered/piloted;
- An information and communication strategy is being considered

Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit)

- Participants did not identify any specific data held regarding current take-up rates.

Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families)

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
Family support staff	Family support and outreach staff are based in children's centres. A new role – family support intervention and parent support advisors is being developed and will be based in some children's centres from April 2009		
Funded childcare places	Childcare places are funded centrally in children's centres; one place per centre (17 centres) offering 10 sessions per week. Annual commitment is £6,700 per centre	Data will be available at the year end	Funded by the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant
Outreach work funded by the Deprived Area Fund	Intensive support offered to (?) to support people to prepare for employment	Reported that childcare has been a barrier preventing a return to employment	
Information Champions	A structure of 'Information Champions' based in children's centres and extended services act as a central point of contact for information		There are plans to extend the network to include the recruitment of parents to undertake the role

Monitoring systems

Identified monitoring systems		
Jobcentre Plus data	Monitoring data is collated by Jobcentre Plus – no details given	
CIS data	Data is routinely collected on the number of enquiries for childcare tax credits and summary advice from the CAB who offer information and advice in children’s centres.	

Media campaigns and marketing drives

The CIS is involved in local campaigns including attendance at the Himley Park Fun Day (a two week event hosting an under 5’s fun day).

It was reported that notification of national campaigns can be received at short notice.

8.3 Local authority: Sandwell

Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
Ongoing- marketing activities to promote childcare take-up via FIS	A range of activities including promotion in local press; bus adverts; adverts and promotions in libraries and leisure centres; information via plasma screens in shopping centres; via outreach brokers; promotional materials (e.g. mugs)	Reported to increase enquiries to the FIS	Funded by the marketing budget
Current - Family and Parenting Support Strategy	Launched September 2008. Strategy to support parents; includes membership of a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Partnership where more strategic staff are involved in the monitoring of the work of the strategy. The Strategy was written with support of a steering group with membership from early years, the childcare sufficiency agenda and the FIS. Parents were also involved in the	Improved joined-up work; parenting support issues placed at a strategic level within the authority.	Supported with funding from the Family Intervention Programme

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	development process via focus groups.		
Current – Work Focus Services pilot	<p>The Work Focus Services pilot is being delivered in 10 local authority areas 2009-11. New outreach worker posts are being funded in each area; the aim is to target non-traditional Jobcentre Plus clients offering information, support and advice on issues relating to return to training and/or employment.</p> <p>In Sandwell, outreach work being undertaken in 3 children’s centres. Post funded for 30 hours a week offering; support to lone parent families on low income; conducting mandatory Jobcentre Plus interviews; outreach work with other partners; promoting the services of children’s centres.</p>		Central funding
Planned – Strategy to support attainment of NI 118 in being developed	Action plan anticipated summer 2009		Part of the Child Poverty Agenda

Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits

Information for parent/carers

- Information packs via the FIS containing information on financial support for childcare (including information from HMRC and a local authority leaflet);
- In work calculations via the FIS;
- Home visits and surgeries in children's centres facilitated by Welfare Rights (review benefit entitlement);
- Citizens Advice Bureau offers advice on benefit entitlement;
- Work Focus Services project places Jobcentre Plus advisors in children's centres to offer information, advice and support – pilot commenced February 2009;
- Options and Choices information sessions offered by Jobcentre Plus to inform lone parents of the changes to the Lone Parent Regulations (2008)

Information for providers and partners

- Children's centres access childcare information via the Childcare Link website, supported by regular outreach work by FIS staff in children's centres;
- FIS undertake regular checks with childcare providers to ensure that information on tax credits is being disseminated to parent/carers using their services;

Potential improvements

- Data regarding numbers of Jobcentre Plus referrals to FIS – system in place but reported that it is not being used in preference to using telephone calls or emails to refer;
- Extend knowledge and understanding of staff in undertaking in-work calculations (via FIS)
- Consultation with parent/carers (to inform the Family and Parenting Support Strategy) identified provision of information as an area for development; included as a key priority in the Strategy);
- Central dissemination of information on tax credits to children's centres.

Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit)

- Participants did not identify any specific data held regarding current take-up rates.

Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families)

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
FIS	FIS report undertaking outreach work in a number of community settings including children's centres, schools, baby clinics and at events organised for professionals		
Maternity Support Officers	Part of the core staff for children's centres, visit all new births ensuring data is robust. Information on childcare provided as part of the visiting schedule	Reported that 90% of new birth data is collected via MSOs.	Employed by the hospital trust, funded by the children's centres
Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights support in children's centres	Offer support in children's centres (2-3 sessions per week) providing information and advice including debt counselling and benefit entitlement.		
Work Focus Services pilot	As before (see 1 above)		
Family support staff	Employed by children's centres. Home visits are undertaken with links to	Outreach work is reported to be effective,	

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	maternity outreach workers.	demonstrated by the reach of children's centres monitored quarterly and annually. Data is available to children's centres to identify non-users of services and this data is used to inform outreach strategy.	

Monitoring systems

Identified monitoring systems		
FIS data manager	Ongoing monitoring includes enquiries to the FIS; ethnicity data; families with disabilities; vacancy data; events attended and; signposting to other organisations	Included in the Unit and Divisional plans
Maternity support officers	New birth data (at least 90% of total data is collected via maternity support officers)	

Media campaigns and marketing drives

The local authority did not identify any media campaigns or marketing drives but acknowledged that notification of forthcoming national campaigns was received from the DCSF.

The local authority reported that there was no evidence of any impact from the (recent) tax benefit fraud campaign.

8.4 Local authority: Solihull

Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
May 2008 – childcare chats	Offered in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, one day a month in a local venue over a three month period. Chats aimed to explore available childcare options and remove perceived barriers to work	Only one interview conducted (reported by FIS). 904 interviews conducted across Solihull and Birmingham (reported by Jobcentre Plus)	
Pertemps discovery weeks		Reported to have been unsuccessful; clients from Birmingham accessed the service	
Ongoing – communications and marketing strategy	Includes strategies for keeping staff up to date on initiatives		
Planned – outreach and monitoring strategy			

Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits

Information for parent/carers

- Information was distributed in Sure Start month with local leaflets and advertisements in the local press;
- A childcare bus was used to promote childcare services and deliver outreach information at a local carnival (2006);
- Information packs are sent to FIS enquirers, including HMRC leaflets, Jobcentre Plus contact details and signposting to the national helpline;
- Information is distributed in libraries and community venues

Information for providers and partners

- Information was distributed to childcare providers in Sure Start month via events (e.g. tea parties);
- Childcare development team distribute information to childcare settings, raising the profile of tax credits;
- Information on tax credits is distributed at childminder training and to prospective new providers via the Pathways to Registration for all types of provision;
- Information on average childcare costs available to Jobcentre Plus advisors via the intranet

Potential improvements

- Jobcentre Plus data from 6 monthly interviews with clients is not currently shared with the FIS. Plan to capture relevant data including source of referrals and take-up of training or work;
- Better information for parents to support the use of tax credits to extend care beyond the free flexible entitlement;
- Engaging with employers – extended services/work:life balance officer leaflet;
- Work with HMRC and other agencies including Jobcentre Plus;
- Development in the brokerage service

Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit)

- Identified a potential to collate data re: take-up of childcare and/or tax credits via Jobcentre Plus/FIS referrals

Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families)

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
Jobcentre Plus advisors allocated to children's centres	Children's centres are allocated a Jobcentre Plus advisor who acts as a central point of contact for queries. The advisor makes regular contact (telephone and visit)	Reported that there may be some resistance to undertaking outreach work as this can increase workload by having to enter data onto the system twice (manual on site and into the IT system on return to the Jobcentre)	
Library staff	Library staff have received training to increase their awareness of the FIS and the childcare options available		
Child and family support workers and mentors			
New post in children's centres			
Planned – outreach in 'patch' areas	Support tailored to meet the needs of groups and individuals and links to		

	other services delivered in the local area		
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Monitoring systems

Identified monitoring systems		
FIS data monitoring	Ongoing monitoring of level of enquiries to the FIS	
Jobcentre Plus	Data re: childcare as a barrier to employment. Referrals to the FIS and follow up discussions Childcare Marker System – the number of in-work calculations undertaken	Identified that data may be recorded without challenge by Jobcentre Plus advisors. Reported that the number of referrals is increasing and the number of barriers decreasing

Media campaigns and marketing drives

The local authority did not identify any media campaigns or marketing drives.

8.5 Local authority: Walsall

Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
On-going – 'confidence in childcare' project	This project employs a CIS outreach worker to offer intensive support to families. Support will focus on removing identified barriers to work including transport, benefits and childcare. Taster sessions will be available (2 weeks per family). The project is being delivered in partnership with Early Years and starts April 2009.	Monitoring systems have been developed	Working Neighbourhoods Fund funding Funding secured (£100,000) in partnership with the regeneration team
Planned – communications strategy	No details		
Ongoing-work with employers	Work to ensure that childcare provision is available to meet the needs of families outside of the traditional working day (9am to 5pm). It was reported that work is underway to match childcare provision in		

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	local areas where employers have vacancies for non traditional working patterns. This will involve mapping current provision and developing links with partners		

Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits

Information for parent/carers

- Members of the CIS team are trained to undertake in-work calculations and will refer to the HMRC helpline;
- Assistance can be provided by the CIS to support parent/carers to complete paperwork to apply for tax credits;
- All enquirers to the CIS are provided with information on tax credits (15% of enquiries relate to tax credits);
- Cluster coordinators for Extended Schools services provide general information on childcare provision alongside raising awareness of the Childcare Tax Credit;
- Enquirers signposted by Extended Schools cluster coordinators to the CIS (proportion of role dedicated to promoting take up of formal childcare reported as minimal);
- Jobcentre Plus staff signpost clients to the CIS and distribute a leaflet on CIS services;
- In-work calculations undertaken by Jobcentre Plus advisors and distribution of literature to reinforce available support distributed as part of the mandatory interview process

Information for providers and partners

- CIS links with Jobcentre Plus including CIS staff visits and a secondment from Jobcentre Plus support sharing of information;
- Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Group and the Early Years Consultative Group. The former met to support the production of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Report (CSA). The Early Years Consultative Group meets quarterly with representation from Family Information Service (CIS), Jobcentre Plus, training, and other related partners. Their current focus is to address a number of targets within the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment plan.

Potential improvements

- Jobcentre Plus advisors providing outreach work in children's centres

Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit)

- Participants did not identify any specific data held regarding current take-up rates.

Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families)

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
CIS	The CIS deliver outreach work as part of their core service. It includes visits to children's centres; anti-natal sessions; attendance at local events.	The number of enquiries has increased significantly	
Peer engagement	Project undertaken between October 2007 and March 2009. The project engaged local service providers (steps to work) who employed local residents familiar	The development of trust was cited as a major factor in attracting over 700 residents to engage with the project. To date it is	Deprived Area Fund funding. Reported that other funding sources have been secured and project will be

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	<p>with the local area and members of the community to engage with hard to reach groups.</p> <p>Part of the work aimed to identify barriers to work, one of which was childcare. Support included signposting to the CIS</p>	<p>reported that over 50% of those engaged maintained contact and developed an individual action plan; 200 have engaged in training and skills development; 8 people have secured employment.</p>	<p>re-tendered March 2009.</p>
Supporting homeless residents	<p>Support services to address barriers to employment experienced by homeless people. Includes services of the CIS.</p>	<p>60 families have been supported.</p>	<p>Deprived Area Fund funding</p>
Horizon project, Jobcentre Plus	<p>Two outreach events are held annually, including presentations to parents accessing IT training.</p>	<p>It is felt that this strategy yields more success as clients are more receptive when advice and support are provided in community buildings.</p>	

Monitoring systems

Identified monitoring systems		
Joint procedure for Jobcentre Plus referrals	<p>The four Black Country local authorities have jointly agreed a procedure for</p>	<p>Estimated conversion rate from referral to enquiry = 20%</p>

Identified monitoring systems		
	Jobcentre Plus referrals to the C/FIS.	
Childcare barriers to work	Childcare barriers to work data identified by lone parent advisors is collated and distributed by the childcare partnership manager, Jobcentre Plus.	
Children's centres	Children's centres are now collecting data on the take up of tax credits as part of the Self Evaluation Form.	
Economic regeneration	Data is collated but is restricted. Type of data held not known.	

Media campaigns and marketing drives

It is reported that advance notification of national campaigns is not available. Local events to support a national campaign had been organised via the DCSF in a local supermarket. General marketing activities, including advertisements in the local press and publications are undertaken on a regular basis.

Economic regeneration organises local job events with CIS presence.

8.6 Local authority: Wolverhampton

Strategies for increasing the take-up of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit over the past 24 months, including any planned

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
Ongoing - tax credit information sessions	Delivered in children's centres. Informal contact is made with families participating in activities; meeting room is available for confidential discussions if required	Estimated that three information sessions had been held to date, with information being delivered to nine families.	A further ten information sessions are planned to the end of March.
On-going – tax credit and improved services pilot	<p>Outreach support from HMRC to provide advice on benefits from a base within nominated children's centres. Five children's centres have been identified for the pilot which launches in April 2009.</p> <p>Employer engagement officer will offer support with the take-up of tax credits to those children's centres not included in the pilot</p>		This may impact on the ability to monitor the impact of the HMRC initiative?
Ongoing - work with employers	Includes offering surgery sessions (over break and lunch times) within employer's premises to gather information and/or generate queries on issues	FIS enquiry forms have been used to log and monitor interaction and the nature of enquiries (data not provided).	

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	relating to the take up of tax credits.		
On-going – marketing strategy	Marketing via Children’s Village (children’s centre) supports the take up of childcare, including information on childcare tax credits and childcare voucher schemes		
On-going – fee policy at one children’s centre	Children’s Village supports families by not charging when th nursery is not open and by organising payments by standing order and standard monthly payments. A family support worker will work with families who may be experiencing difficulties paying fees to assess entitlement to benefits and eligibility for funding.		
On-going – supported nursery places	Funding to support access to nursery provision across a number of centres	October – December 2008 14 children accessed an assisted place. There is some evidence (not assessed) that families who had accessed support took up childcare places at a later time (the scheme	Matched funding with Early Years

Strategy	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
		acted as an entry route).	
Ongoing – up front childcare fees	Payment of childcare fees for clients of the Jobcentre Plus accessing training		
Planned – employers assessment pack	To include information on the FIS, children’s centres, tax credits and signposting to other support and information services.		

Provision of information about childcare take-up and tax credits

Information for parent/carers

- FIS information leaflet ‘Financial Information for Families’ supported by printed information from the HMRC website distributed via outreach work;
- Signposting to appropriate agencies (e.g. FIS/HMRC);
- Sure Start information leaflet ‘Looking for Childcare’;
- FSA guide for parents distributed via children’s centres (not universal);
- FIS kiosk in a children’s centre provides parent/carers with information via touch screen facilities (usage variable across centres)
- Links to Jobcentre Plus with poster and notice board displays in children’s centres;
- Tax credit applications can be processed via the Jobcentre Plus fast track system, enabling payments to be made within ten days;
- A range of information is available via Jobcentre Plus including ‘better off’ calculations and FIS information;
- A ‘warm phone’ in children’s centres providing free telephone access to council departments

Information for providers and partners

- Via the HMRC website;

- A newsletter is distributed to childcare providers; a newsletter for employers is being planned

Potential improvements

- Identified that training of Jobcentre Plus staff was being planned by the childcare partnership manager – information given on childcare options would be cascaded to Jobcentre Plus clients as part of the ongoing support offered by Jobcentre Plus advisors

Information held regarding current take-up rates (of childcare and/or the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit)

- Participants did not identify any specific data held regarding current take-up rates.

Outreach work with low income families (outreach work undertaken specifically with low income families and hard to reach families)

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
HMRC outreach work	As before (see 1 above)		
FIS	The FIS undertake outreach work in children's centres (every half term) supported by information kiosks. Promotional activities in shopping centre are delivered during Childcare Week and at the annual City show in July		
Children's Village children's centre	Satellite provision is offered in two schools and a community centre which includes a rolling		

Specific outreach work	Outline	Outcomes	Comment
	programme of services. CAB surgery support, including support with tax credits	16 families accessed CAB support in quarter 3 2008/9	
Jobcentre Plus outreach work	Outreach work in children's centres (see 1 above) Outreach work offered by Adult education and Wolverhampton college – advice and information on funding options	Estimated that 17 clients had been supported over a three month period	

Monitoring systems

Identified monitoring systems		
Jobcentre Plus	Advisory Activity Tool – a system that quantifies activity of Jobcentre staff. Data is reviewed every six months.	
Employer engagement	FIS enquiry forms completed when undertaking outreach work in employers' premises.	

Media campaigns and marketing drives

Notification of national campaigns can be received at short notice. The 2008 campaign generated a high level of enquiries to the FIS.