Life in Lancashire
Childcare

Fieldwork 14 September – 14 October 2005

Prepared by   Steven Knuckey
Research and Strategy Officer
Lancashire County Council
October 2005

Contents

Table of Figures

1 Executive Summary

This special survey of the Life in Lancashire panel focuses on the provision of childcare within Lancashire County Council. All 816 members of the panel saying they had children aged 16 or less were mailed a copy of the questionnaire. In total 520 replies were received at a response of 64%.

1.1 Main findings

- Almost half of all parents surveyed use some form of formal childcare (46%). Three-quarters (77%) of respondents with children aged from 0 to 3 years use some formal childcare, most likely a private day nursery (28%) or a pre-school playgroup (27%).

- The most common reason for parents not using formal childcare is that respondents prefer to either look after their child themselves (54%) or have a relative or friend look after their child (46%).

- Three-quarters of parents use some form of informal childcare, most usually a relative (62%).

- Safety (94%) is the top concern of parents about childcare, followed by the quality of activities (47%), the cost (39%) and cleanliness (38%).

- To find out about childcare generally, the greatest proportion of respondents prefers the word of mouth of a friend (42%). Three in ten would contact Education Services (32%) and the Childcare Information Service (30%).

- About two in five (41%) respondents have tried to get childcare information in the last 5 years. Half of these (47%) found the information very useful. However, just over half (56%) of respondents do not feel informed about childcare.

- The vast majority of people expressing an opinion consider that childcare has become more expensive (44%).

- The majority of respondents had heard of Sure Start (63%). Only a quarter say they have heard of the Childcare Information Service.

- Childcare is seen as too expensive by two in five of the panel (41%), especially those from socio-economic groups DE (54%) and those with a child aged less than six years (54%).

1.2   Action points

- Improve awareness of both the service and the childcare available locally. Uninformed respondents are least likely to consider there is sufficient local childcare. It may be that childcare is available but people are unaware of it.

- Look at how childcare can be more flexible for parents. More than half of parents with a child under six agree that they would prefer more flexibility in the hours available.

- One in six non-users of formal childcare cite high price as a reason. Provide information for parents to help with affordability.

- Conduct future research in two years to look for quantifiable differences. This needs to be of a consistent method, either postal to compare with this survey, or face-to-face to compare with 1999.

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Life in Lancashire regularly since August 2001. A panel of willing participants is recruited and is approached on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics and themes. Panel members are voluntary participants in the research they complete and no incentives are given for completion.

The panel has been designed to be a representative cross-section of the county's population. The results for each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the county's population.

The panel provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population so that reliable results can be reported at a county wide level. It also provides data at a number of sub-area and sub-group levels.

The panel is refreshed periodically. New members are recruited to the panel and some current members are retired on a random basis. This means that the panel remains fresh and is not subject to conditioning ie the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be representative of the population as a whole. The current panel was recruited in September 2003 with a top-up recruitment undertaken in June 2004, so this effect should still be small.

3 Research Objectives

The main questions areas looked at:

- Usage and satisfaction with formal childcare.

- Reasons for non-use of formal childcare.

- Sources of information on childcare.

4 Methodology

This childcare survey was sent to all 814 members of the panel, (who answered they had children in their household on the recruitment survey of Life in Lancashire), on 14 September. The fieldwork ended on 14 October 2005.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 524 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 64%.

All data are weighted by ethnicity and district to reflect the Lancashire overall population, and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.

4.1 Limitations

The table below shows the sample tolerances that apply to the results in this survey. Sampling tolerances vary with the size of the sample as well as the percentage results.

Number of respondents	50/50 + / -	30/70 + / -	10/90 + / -
50	14%	13%	8%
100	10%	9%	6%
200	7%	6%	4%
500	4%	4%	3%
524	**4%**	**4%**	**3%**
1000	3%	3%	2%
2000	2%	2%	1%

On a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 1,000 respond with a particular answer, the chance are 95 out of 100 that the answer would be between 47% and 53% (ie +/- 3%), versus a complete coverage of the entire Lancashire population using the same procedure.

This research follows on from a major project undertaken in 1999 by BMG research on behalf of the Lancashire Early Years Partnership. This was a face-to-face survey of 2064 parents and so not directly comparable with a self-completion survey such as this due to the differing methodologies. It does however cover some of the same areas as this project and may be used to identify trends, though they will not be proven. To check for a factual change would require a direct repeat of the first survey.

5 Main Research Findings

A marked up questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8.2.

5.1 Children in the household

The childcare questionnaire was sent out to all 816 panel members who said that they have children aged less than 16 years in their household on the panel recruitment questionnaire. There were 524 replies to the questionnaire, and about three-quarters of these answered that they still had a child of less than 14 years living with them.

Chart 1 - Are you a parent or carer of children aged 14 or under living in your household?

Yes	76%
No	24%
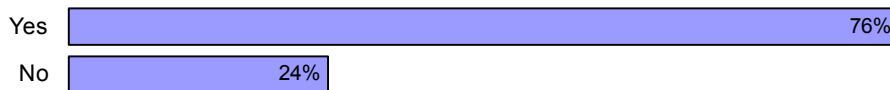
Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

Of those that had children, the mean age was just over 7 years and the mean number was 1.8 children per respondent.

5.1.1 Formal Childcare

The introduction to the questionnaire gave examples of both formal and informal childcare, shown in the table below.

Formal childcare examples	Informal childcare examples
Pre-school play group	Mother and toddler group
School nursery	Nanny
Nursery (not attached to a school)	Au pair
Workplace nursery	Grandparent or relative
Private day nursery	Friend or neighbour
Before school club	
After school club	
Registered childminder	

The first question on formal childcare asked for the usage of formal childcare, shown in chart 2 below.

Chart 2 -   Do you use any of the following types of <u>formal</u> childcare?

None of these	56%
Before-school or after-school club	18%
Private day nursery	11%
Pre-school playgroup	11%
Nursery school (not attached to a school)	7%
Nursery school (attached to a school, non-paying)	6%
Registered childminder	5%
Workplace nursery	1%
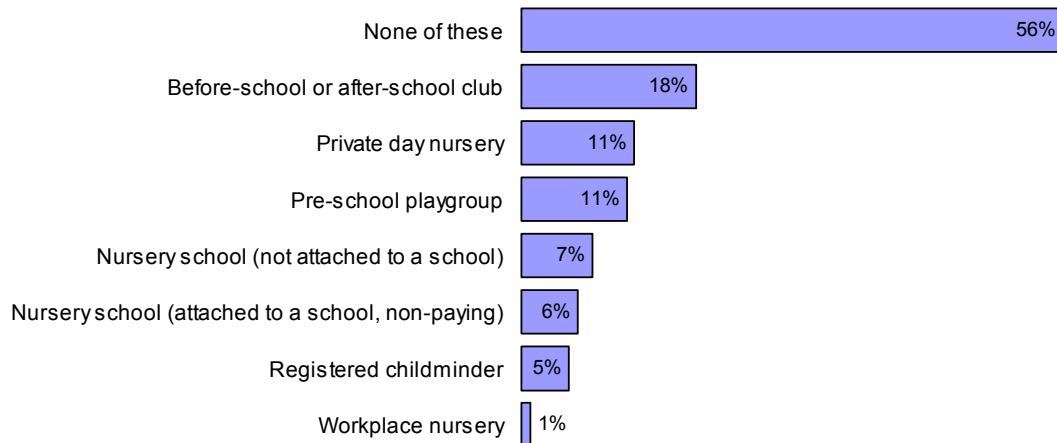
Base: All respondents with children under 14 (Weighted 372)

Almost half of all parents surveyed use some form of formal childcare and, perhaps unsurprisingly given the examples, the greatest predictor of usage is the age of the child. Three-quarters (77%) of respondents with children aged from 0 to 3 years use some formal childcare, most likely a private day nursery (28%) or a pre-school playgroup (27%). These were also the top methods for caring for this age group in the 1999 research. Use of before and after school clubs appears to have increased greatly since 1999. The highest usage of before and after school clubs was by full-time employees with children aged 4-7 years at 9% in 1999. This was now 18% in the current research overall and 23% for parents with a child aged 4-7 years[1].

Chart 3 -   Which of the following best describes how you make use of <u>formal</u> childcare?

I use formal childcare almost every day	47%
I sometimes use formal childcare	31%
I hardly ever use formal childcare	22%

Base: All respondents with children using formal childcare (Weighted 201)

About half of those who use formal childcare do so every day, (about a quarter of parents replying). This is significantly higher amongst families with a child under 6 (52%) compared with 38% of those without. Users of formal childcare who do not use any informal childcare are significantly higher to use this every day (67%) than those that do (42%), reflecting the lack of another option.

Respondents who use formal childcare were then asked to rate their satisfaction with a wide array of factors of the service.

---

[1] This is an appearance of an increase, but may not be factual, due to the different methodologies and variations in the wording of the question. See limitations 4.1

Chart 4 - How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the <u>formal</u> childcare you use…?

Aspect	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know/DNA
A welcoming atmosphere	68%	20%				8%
Its convenient location	67%	15%	6%			10%
The safety of my child	66%	19%	5%			8%
The staff service	62%	23%				8%
The cleanliness	59%	27%	5%			9%
The service overall	57%	33%				9%
The range of activities	54%	29%	6%			9%
The quality of activities	53%	31%				9%
The opening hours	50%	31%	5%	5%		9%
The outside play area	45%	28%	8%			14%
The cost of childcare	26%	29%	15%	11%		14%

- ■ Very satisfied
- □ Fairly satisfied
- □ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ■ Fairly dissatisfied
- ■ Very dissatisfied
- ■ Don't know/DNA

Base: All respondents with children using formal childcare (Weighted 201)

Only the cost of the childcare caused a noteworthy dissatisfaction (17% fairly or very dissatisfied) and the satisfaction overall is high for most factors. No panel members said they were dissatisfied with the service overall, which is an encouraging result.

Those who responded that they did not use formal childcare were asked why, shown in chart 5 below.

Chart 5 - Which of the following reasons best describes why you do not use any of the types of <u>formal</u> childcare?

Reason	Percentage
I prefer to look after my child at home	54%
I prefer relatives/friends to look after my child	46%
Local childcare is not suitable for my needs	16%
Local childcare is too expensive	16%
None of these	8%
Lack of information on childcare locally	5%
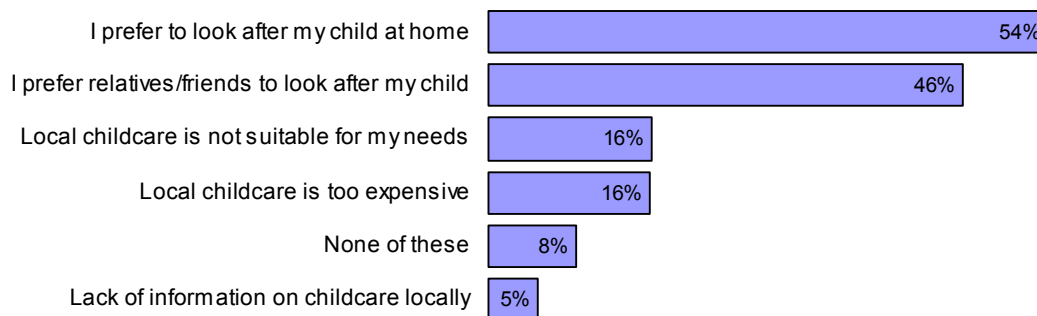
Base: All respondents with children not using formal childcare (Weighted 189)

The most common reason is that respondents prefer to either look after their child themselves (54%) or have a relative or friend look after their child (46%). Looking after the child at home is understandably less preferred by respondents in full-time work (35%). Only one in six respondents mention that the price is a problem (16%) and one in twenty say there is a lack of childcare information locally (5%).

5.1.2 Informal Childcare

The next question of the survey dealt with informal childcare. All respondents were asked which forms of informal childcare they used, as shown in chart 6.

Chart 6 - Now, thinking about informal childcare, do you use any of the following types of <u>informal</u> childcare?

Category	Percentage
A relative	62%
None of these	26%
A friend	25%
A parent and toddler group	14%
A nanny	1%
An au pair	1%
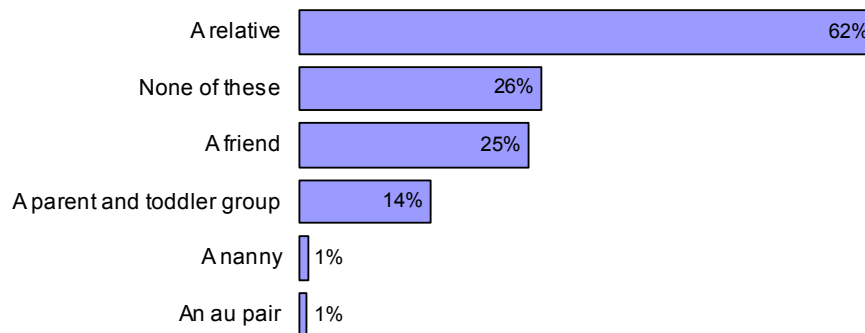
Base: All respondents with children under 14 (Weighted 372)

A relative (62%) is by far the most frequent source of informal childcare. A quarter of respondents do not use any though (26%).

5.2 Childcare generally

All parents of children of 14 years or less were asked their priorities for childcare.

Chart 7 - Thinking generally about the various aspects of childcare services, which <u>three</u> or <u>four</u> of the following are the most important?

Aspect	Percentage
The safety of my child	94%
The quality of activities	47%
The cost of childcare	39%
The cleanliness	38%
A welcoming atmosphere	33%
The staff service	33%
The range of activities	31%
Its convenient location	31%
The opening hours	27%
The outside play area	6%
None of these	3%
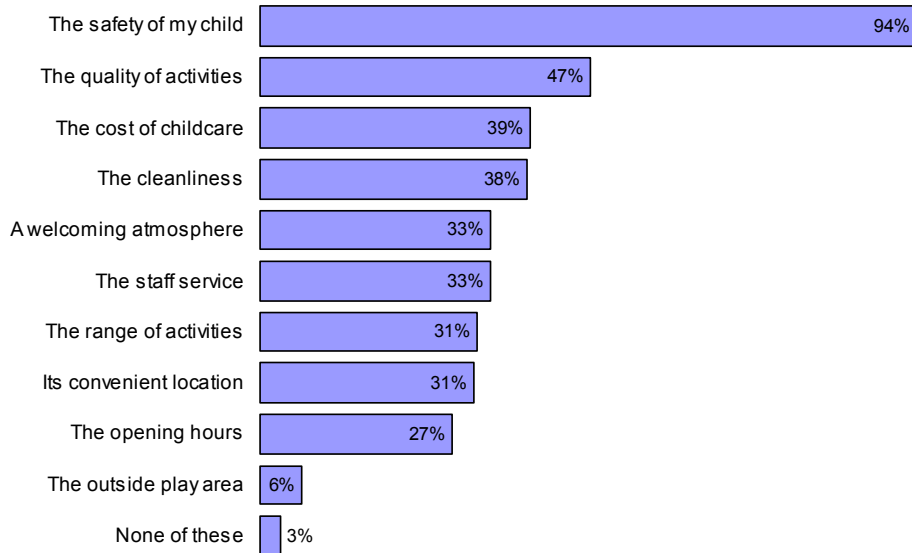
Base: All respondents with children under 14 (Weighted 372)

Safety (94%) is the top concern, followed by the quality of activities (47%), the cost (39%) and cleanliness (38%). There were no significant differences between parents who use formal childcare and those who do not. Comparing the questions on satisfaction with childcare factors and the importance of them gives the scatter chart below.

Chart 8 - **How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the <u>formal</u> childcare you use…? Vs Thinking generally about the various aspects of childcare services, which <u>three</u> or <u>four</u> of the following are the most important?**
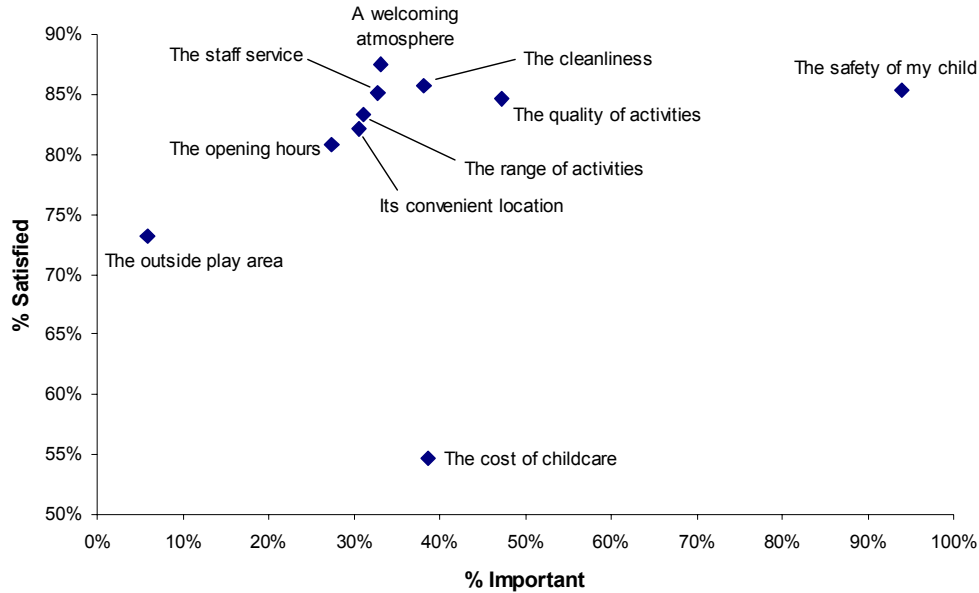
Base: All respondents with children using formal childcare (Weighted 201)
Vs All respondents with children under 14 (Weighted 372)

The safety of the child is of highest importance, but also high satisfaction. Only the cost of childcare has a relatively high importance and low satisfaction.

Chart 9 - **Which of the following, if any, would you contact first to get information on <u>free part-time childcare for three and four year-olds</u>?**

Category	%
Lancashire County Council Education Services	43%
A friend	39%
Health visitor	34%
The Childcare Information Service	29%
A childcare provider	26%
A school	26%
Lancashire County Council Social Services	17%
Library	14%
The Office for Standards in Education	11%
Citizens' Advice Bureau	10%
The Department for Education and Skills	6%
None of these	5%
Someone else	3%
District council	2%
Parish council	1%

Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

The greatest proportion of respondents would contact Lancashire County Council Education Services (43%), with a sizeable minority also going to the Childcare Information Service (29%).

Chart 10 - **And, which of the following, if any, would you contact first to get information on <u>general</u> childcare?**

Category	%
A friend	42%
Lancashire County Council Education Services	32%
The Childcare Information Service	30%
Health visitor	30%
The internet	28%
A childcare provider	27%
A school	27%
Lancashire County Council Social Services	20%
Library	13%
The Office for Standards in Education	10%
Citizens' Advice Bureau	8%
Someone else	7%
None of these	5%
The Department for Education and Skills	3%
District council	3%
Parish council	1%

Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

More generally, as opposed to the specific example in the previous question, respondents prefer the word of mouth of a friend (42%). This is especially true of users of informal childcare (48% compared to just 34% of those who do not). This implies that people not in the loop of formal childcare may not know where to look for information. In other methods of information gathering, three in ten would still contact Education Services (32%) and the Childcare Information Service (30%).

Chart 11 - Have you tried to obtain any information about childcare arrangements or facilities in your local area in the past 5 years for your child/children?

Yes	41%
No	58%
Don't know	1%
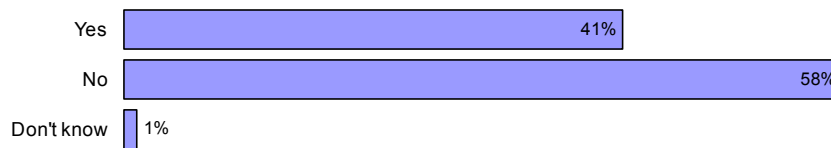
Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

A majority of respondents have not tried to obtain childcare information, however this does vary by demographic group. Men (32%) are less likely to have looked for information than women (45%) and panel members with children under six years are much more likely to have (71% compared with 25%). Users of both formal (68%) and informal childcare (53%) are significantly more likely to have looked for information.

Chart 12 - Where did you (try to) get this information from?

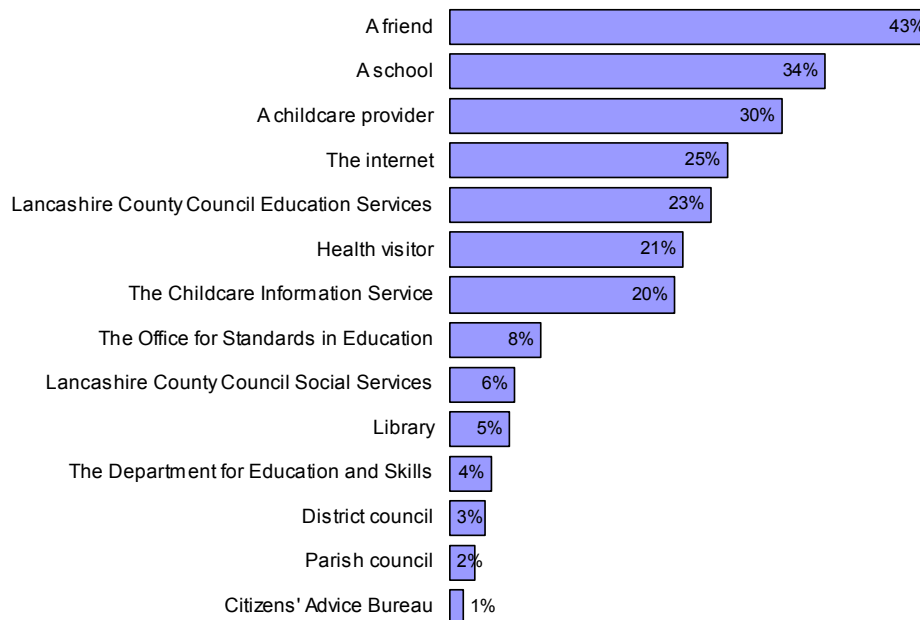|	
A friend	43%
A school	34%
A childcare provider	30%
The internet	25%
Lancashire County Council Education Services	23%
Health visitor	21%
The Childcare Information Service	20%
The Office for Standards in Education	8%
Lancashire County Council Social Services	6%
Library	5%
The Department for Education and Skills	4%
District council	3%
Parish council	2%
Citizens' Advice Bureau	1%

Base: All respondents seeking childcare information in the last 5 years (Weighted 200)

Respondents are most likely to try to get information from a friend (43%), particularly in rural areas (54%) and those with a child of less than six years

(52%). People with a child over six are most likely to try to get their information from a school (42%). Users of formal care are about twice as likely to use a childcare provider for information (37%) or the internet (32%) as those who do not use it.

Chart 13 - How useful was this information to you?

Very useful	47%
Fairly useful	41%
Not very useful	8%
Not at all useful	3%
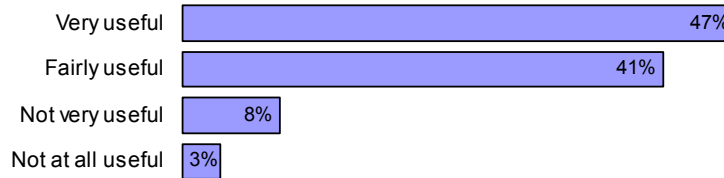
Base: All respondents seeking childcare information in the last 5 years (Weighted 200)

About half of those seeking childcare information found it useful (47%), but nearly as many only found it fairly useful (41%), indicating there is some room for improvement. There were no significant differences by sub-group or information media however.

Chart 14 - Generally, how well informed do you feel about childcare services in Lancashire?

Very well informed	6%
Fairly well informed	38%
Not very well informed	32%
Not at all informed	15%
Don't know	8%
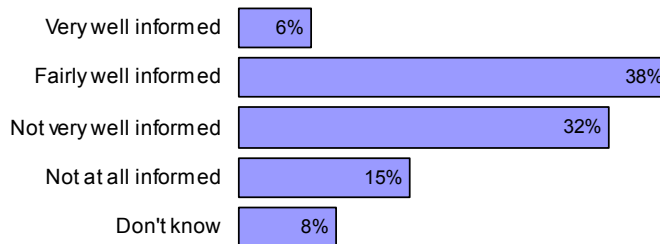
Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

Less than half of the panel feel that they are informed about childcare services in Lancashire (44%). Women (50%) feel more informed than men (33%) and users of formal childcare feel more informed (56%) than non-users (38%).

Chart 15 - Thinking about the <u>number</u> of childcare places available locally, in the last 5 years would you say there are more or less places available, or is it about the same?

More childcare places are available	26%
About the same number	17%
Fewer childcare places	12%
Don't know	45%
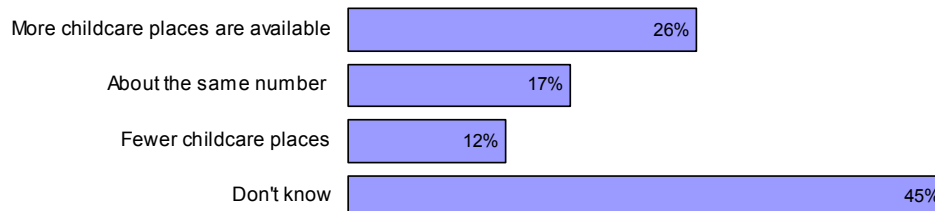
Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

Respondents without a child aged less than 6 years (29%) are significantly more likely than those with (20%) to say there are more places available. Residents of East Lancashire are twice as likely to say there are fewer childcare places now than 5 years ago (18%), as residents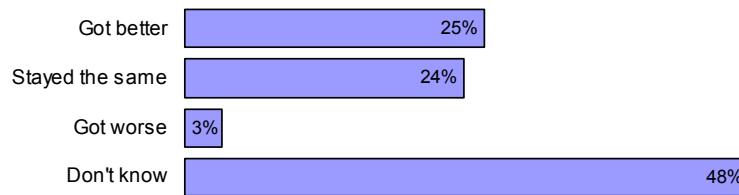 of the rest of Lancashire (9%). People who considered they were informed were twice as likely to think there were more places available (37%).

Chart 16 - And thinking about the <u>quality</u> of childcare locally, in the last 5 years would you say it has got better, got worse, or stayed the same?

Got better	25%
Stayed the same	24%
Got worse	3%
Don't know	48%

Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

Most people expressing an opinion think that childcare is better (25%) or stayed the same (25%). The greatest number say they don't know however (48%). There was no difference by use of formal childcare. Again, people who considered they were informed were twice as likely to think there were more places available (37%).

Chart 17 - And thinking about the <u>cost</u> of childcare places available locally, in the last 5 years would you say it has become more expensive, cheaper, or stayed about the same?

More expensive	About the same	Cheaper	Don't know
44%	12%	2%	43%
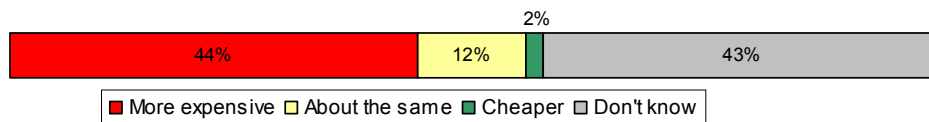
Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

The vast majority of people expressing an opinion consider that childcare has become more expensive (44%). There are no variations by sub-group.

Chart 18 - Which of the following services, if any, have you ever heard of?

Sure Start local programmes	63%
None of these	25%
Childcare Information Service	25%
Neighbourhood nurseries	19%
Children's centres	19%
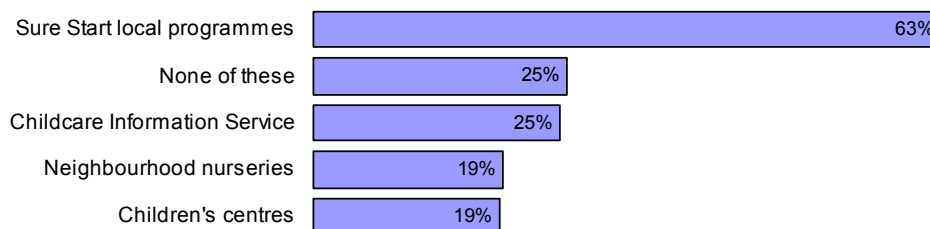
Base: All respondents (Weighted 524)

The majority of respondents had heard of Sure Start (63%), which is encouraging, though men are less likely (49%) than women (69%). Only a

quarter say they have heard of the Childcare Information Service, which is less than the three in ten saying they would contact the service if they needed information on childcare.

The panel were next given a list of possible services the Childcare Information Service provision provides. The correct options are coloured green.

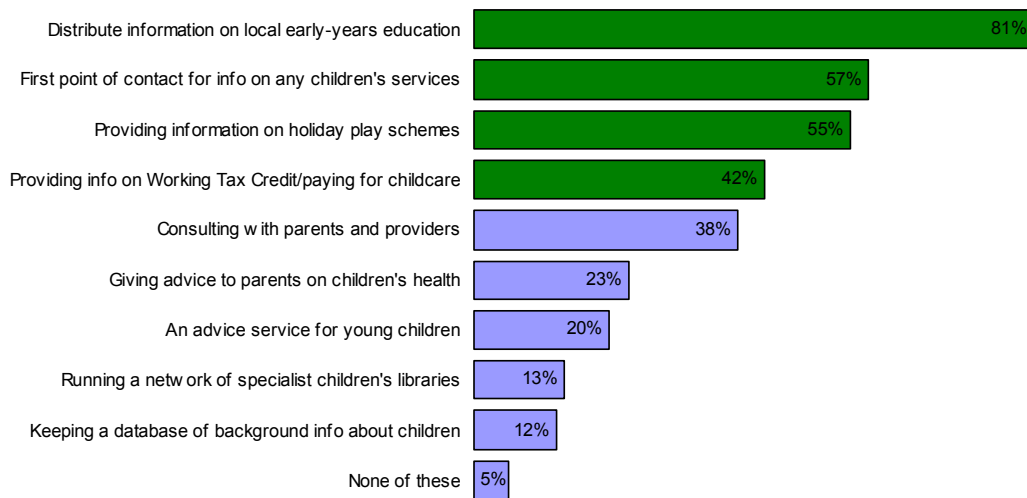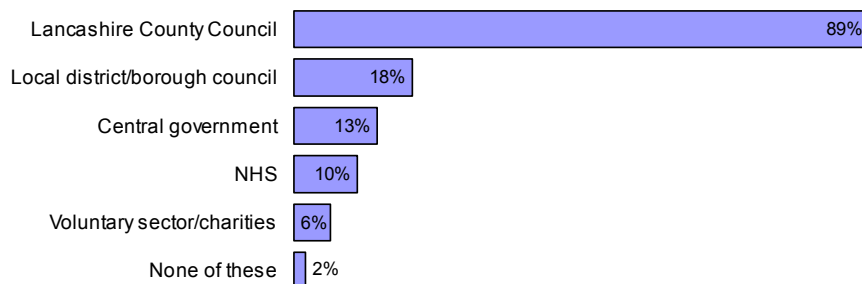### Chart 19 - The Lancashire Childcare Information Service is responsible for providing childcare advice. Which of the following things, if any, do you think they do?

Service	%
Distribute information on local early-years education	81%
First point of contact for info on any children's services	57%
Providing information on holiday play schemes	55%
Providing info on Working Tax Credit/paying for childcare	42%
Consulting with parents and providers	38%
Giving advice to parents on children's health	23%
An advice service for young children	20%
Running a network of specialist children's libraries	13%
Keeping a database of background info about children	12%
None of these	5%

Base: All respondents (Weighted 445)

The top answers were all correct, with the top priority the top answer. Over a third of panel members thought that the service consulted with parents and providers however. In addition to the above options, there was also space to add an open comment. Almost a tenth of respondents, (42 people), spontaneously said they didn't know it existed or that it was poorly publicised. Clearly raising awareness of the service needs to be a priority.

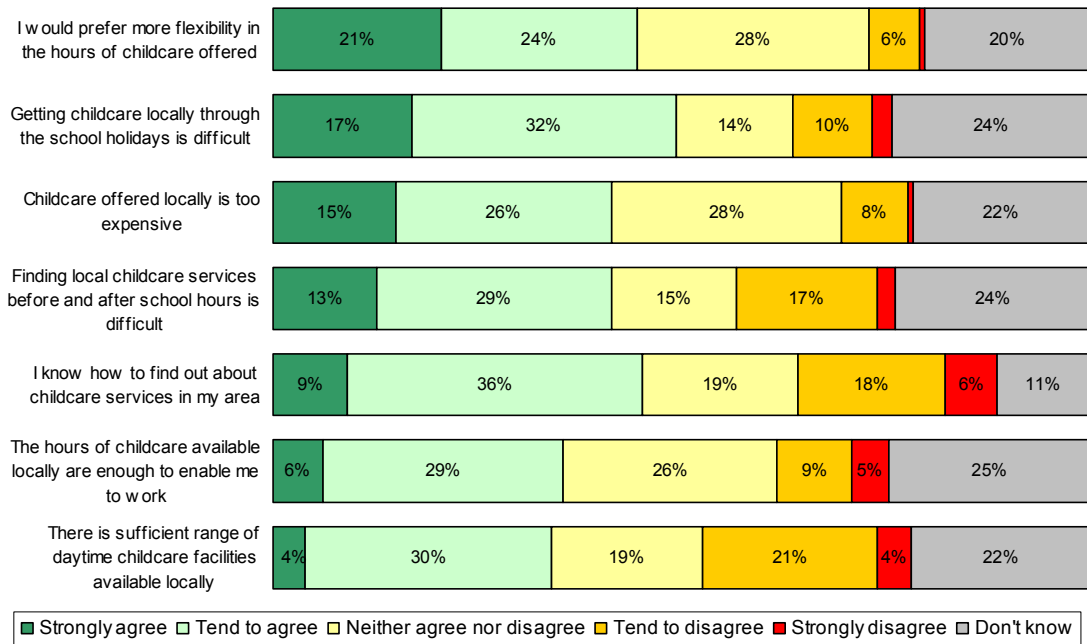### Chart 20 - And which, if any, of the following organisations do you think has responsibility for the Lancashire Childcare Information Service?

Organisation	%
Lancashire County Council	89%
Local district/borough council	18%
Central government	13%
NHS	10%
Voluntary sector/charities	6%
None of these	2%

Base: All respondents (Weighted 472)

The vast majority of respondents correctly named Lancashire County Council as being responsible for Lancashire Childcare Information Service (89%). This may be due to awareness amongst respondents that the panel is run by Lancashire County Council however.

Chart 21 - How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements…?

Statement	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I would prefer more flexibility in the hours of childcare offered	21%	24%	28%	6%		20%
Getting childcare locally through the school holidays is difficult	17%	32%	14%	10%		24%
Childcare offered locally is too expensive	15%	26%	28%	8%		22%
Finding local childcare services before and after school hours is difficult	13%	29%	15%	17%		24%
I know how to find out about childcare services in my area	9%	36%	19%	18%	6%	11%
The hours of childcare available locally are enough to enable me to work	6%	29%	26%	9%	5%	25%
There is sufficient range of daytime childcare facilities available locally	4%	30%	19%	21%	4%	22%

Base: All respondents (Weighted 493)

Respondents were most likely to strongly agree that they would prefer more flexibility in the hours of childcare offered (21%), and most likely to agree generally that getting childcare during the school holidays is difficult (49% strongly agree or tend to agree). Parents with a child under six years are significantly more likely to agree that finding childcare outside of normal working hours is difficult (46%), as are users of informal childcare (47%). Childcare is seen as too expensive by two in five of the panel (41%), especially those from socio-economic groups DE (54%) and those with a child aged less than six years (54%). Parents of children aged less than six are also significantly more likely to consider that there are not sufficient hours of childcare available to allow them to work (57%). Panel members who consider themselves uninformed are less than half as likely as informed members to agree that there is sufficient range of local childcare (18% compared with 55%). Again this highlights the importance of keeping residents informed.

6   Summary

6.1   Childcare

- The survey consisted of the parents and guardians of 661 children, with a mean age of just over 7 years and a mean number of 1.8 children per respondent.

- Almost half of all parents surveyed use some form of formal childcare (46%). Seven in ten (70%) of respondents with children aged under 6 use some formal childcare, most likely a private day nursery (23%) or a pre-school playgroup (22%).

- The most common reason for parents not using formal childcare is that respondents prefer to either look after their child themselves (54%) or have a relative or friend look after their child (46%).

- Three-quarters of parents use some form of informal childcare, most usually a relative (62%).

- Safety (94%) is the top concern of parents about childcare, followed by the quality of activities (47%), the cost (39%) and cleanliness (38%).

- To find out about childcare generally, the greatest proportion of respondents prefers the word of mouth of a friend (42%). Three in ten would still contact Education Services (32%) and the Childcare Information Service (30%).

- About two in five (41%) respondents have tried to get childcare information in the last 5 years. Half of these (47%) found the information very useful.

- However, just over half (56%) of respondents do not feel informed about childcare.

- Respondents giving an opinion are most likely to say there are more childcare places available than 5 years ago (26%).

- Most people expressing an opinion think that childcare is better than 5 years ago (25%) or stayed the same (25%). The greatest number say they don't know however (48%).

- The vast majority of people expressing an opinion consider that childcare has become more expensive (44%).

- The majority of respondents had heard of Sure Start (63%). Only a quarter say they have heard of the Childcare Information Service.

- Childcare is seen as too expensive by two in five of the panel (41%), especially those from socio-economic groups DE (54%) and those with a child aged less than six years (54%).

7 Conclusions

7.1 Childcare usage

As in 1999, about a quarter of all parents are frequent users of childcare, with significantly more relying on relatives and friends for informal childcare. This does not mean there has been no significant change in the proportion of parents using childcare; to test this would require another large face-to-face survey as in 1999. This does mean that there is still a sizeable use of regular formal childcare however.

Part of the 1999 recommendations were to increase the number of places at before and after school clubs. Comparing the figures, there does appear to be an increase in this, however again this requires further investigation.

Most parents not using formal care simply say that they prefer to look after their own children.

About a quarter of respondents say that childcare services have got better in the last five years, (37% of people considering they were informed). However the amount flexibility may be a problem. While a majority of people expressing an opinion consider there is more childcare available than five years, a quarter do not agree that there is a sufficient range of childcare available during the day. More than half of parents with a child under six agree that they would prefer more flexibility in the hours available.

7.2 Price

For those parents currently using formal childcare, satisfaction is high with all areas apart from the cost. One in six non-users of formal childcare cite high price as a reason.

The majority of respondents giving an answer say they consider childcare has become more expensive (43%). Two in five respondents agree that the price of local childcare is too high, especially those from lower socio-economic groups.

7.3 Information

Only one in twenty non-users of formal childcare answers that not having enough information the reason for their non-use. This contrasts with the fact that the majority of panel members do not consider themselves informed about childcare in Lancashire. As uninformed members are least likely to consider there is sufficient local childcare, this along with the high proportion considering themselves uninformed generally, makes information provision a priority. Awareness of Sure Start appears high at 63%, but only a quarter say they have heard of the Childcare information service, which is an opportunity to improve.

Also to look for quantifiable differences, conduct future research in two years. This needs to be of a consistent method, either postal to compare with here, or face-to-face to compare with 1999.

8 Appendix

8.1 Socio-Economic Group Definitions

These groups are based on Market Research Society definitions and on the respondent. They are graded as A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Group A
- Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows

Group B
- Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications
- Principle officers in local government and civil service
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments
- Retired people previously grade B, and their widows

Group C1
- Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements
- Retired people, previously grade C1, and their widows

Group C2
- All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers for responsibility for other people
- Retired people, previously grade C2, with pensions from their job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group D
- All semi skilled and unskilled manual workers, and apprentices and trainees to skilled workers
- Retired people, previously grade D, with pensions from their late job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group E
- All those entirely dependant on the state long term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons
- Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months (otherwise classified on previous occupation)
- Casual workers and those without a regular income

8.2 Marked Up Questionnaire