



Setting up childcare

CONSULTATION TOOLKIT

for new and existing childcare settings



Consultation Toolkit

This guide contains information to support new or existing settings in order to gather valuable information as a part of your market research which can be used to:

- ensure there is both need and demand for the services,
- develop your service to meet the needs of its users,
- support grant applications ,
- find out how families and the community view the services you intend to provide/already provide,
- test ideas and develop resources,
- help families/staff/other partners to understand why certain decisions are made,
- build up trust and enable users to feel valued.

All of these will support your long term sustainability and help you to plan financially.

You may also find useful information here www.gov.uk/market-research-business

Please note, if you are a school looking at setting up childcare provision, either run by the school or a private provider, please ensure you use this guide in conjunction with “Developing Childcare Provision: A Guide for Schools” available at www.westsussex.gov.uk/childcaresufficiency

What is need and what is demand?

In order to make sure your business is going to be financially viable you should be able to evidence that there is both a need and demand within the community for the new places you are creating. Need should be based on a lack of either similar provision in the area or lack of places, and demand should be based on evidence of people actually wanting to access your services.

When looking at the need, your Business Plan should also consider how your new places would impact on other local providers in the community. In order to do this you will need to find out where local settings are and what they provide.

At the end of this guide, you will find example questionnaires that you can adjust and use to support you in evidencing if there is demand for the service you are looking at providing. You will also find examples of how to evaluate the information once you have collected it.

What is a consultation?

Consultation...

- Is about seeking the views of others in order to reach an informed decision.
- Requires a structured approach that provides information so people can decide on the issues that are important to them.
- Interprets people’s views correctly and records ideas in an accessible format.
- Puts these views into action.

There are four stages to this process. These are:

1. Planning and preparation of the consultation.
2. Carrying out the consultation.
3. Analysing your findings.
4. Using the results to develop services.

STAGE 1: Planning and preparation of the consultation

This stage is extremely important. What do you want to find out? What is your planned outcome of the consultation? For example, we want to determine if there is sufficient demand to run a financially viable after school club.

If the consultation is not planned well, you may find that the outcome is not clear, or that you have not asked the right questions in the right way to find out what you need. You should consider if you have the skills within your current employees or you may decide to use a consultancy company to do this for you. This can be an expensive option.

Firstly you should identify **who** you need to consult with. This could include:

- parents and carers,
- school staff,
- children and young people,
- wider community e.g. Children and Family Centres, Parish/District/Borough Councils, Health Services such as GP practices, Health Visitors, specialist services and groups.

Then consider **where** you might carry out your consultation. For example:

- Remotely via a postal/online questionnaire.
- In schools.
- Children and Family Centres.
- Parent and Toddler/Baby Groups.
- Libraries.
- Supermarkets/town centres/shopping areas/leisure centres.
- Events e.g. town shows, markets, community events, parents evenings.

You may well decide to carry out your consultation in a number of different places and events to ensure you have reached as many potential customers as possible.

When deciding on how to ensure you are able to evidence a need robustly, you need to consider the **consultation method** or methods you will use. These could include:

- questionnaires e.g. postal, online, telephone, face to face,
- group discussions e.g. focus groups, stakeholder meetings, parent forums,
- interviews,
- participative events e.g. creative voting, post its, suggestions box,
- outside consultant.

The method or methods you chose will depend on your target audience and the resources available to you. You should ensure consistency over the questions asked, whatever method you are using, to ensure you can consistently analyse the responses.

Questionnaires are most widely used but do not always reach everyone you would like to. Consider how you could reach as many of your target audience as possible. For example, full-time working parents may not always have time to complete a lengthy paper questionnaire. Think about how long it is. Could this be an online questionnaire so it does not get lost within a large pile of paperwork and could be completed via a smartphone or online during a lunch break at work? Could you target certain groups via a short telephone questionnaire instead?

If you decide to use an online questionnaire, you must also give thought to how you will promote the link to this.

Appendix 1 talks you through how to structure a questionnaire and gives examples of questions you may like to use and/or adapt for your consultation.

The **timing** of the consultation should also be carefully planned.

- At which stage of the decision making process do you want to consult and why? Consider funding deadlines, when you plan to open, Ofsted registration, staff recruitment etc.
- If you are planning focus groups, what time of day will be convenient for different stakeholder groups?
- Will the time of year affect the consultation e.g. summer holidays/Christmas may not get a good response?
- How much time will be needed for data analysis, evaluation, reporting findings and feedback?

You must also consider what **resources** this will require and any potential cost implications. For example:

- Ensuring you have enough copies of paper questionnaires.
- Do you need to purchase a programme to design an online questionnaire? There are free versions available but you will need to check if these will meet your needs.
- What staff time will you need to prepare, carry out and analyse the questionnaire?
- Do you need to book a venue for a focus group? Is there a cost to this?

STAGE 2: Carrying out the consultation

If stage one has been carried out in full, this should in theory be the easy part! Follow your plan in full and prepare to be flexible to ensure you get the most out of this stage. For example, you are at a focus group to develop pre-school provision and a parent suggests you share this consultation at a Parent and Toddler group that you were not aware of. Just because it is not on your plan, does not mean you cannot add it in.

STAGE 3: Analysing your findings

Following your carefully planned consultation, the next step is to collate the findings into an easily accessible format in order to make informed decisions about your project.

- What were the findings? And how will you present these?
- Did the consultation answer the questions you needed?
- Did you get enough feedback to make informed decisions? Is any further consultation needed?
- What were the most important findings? And why? Are there conflicting views?
- What action are you taking as a result?

In Appendix 1 you will also find example evaluations to support you.

STAGE 4: Using the results to develop services

You have now carried out the consultation and analysed the findings. The final piece to this puzzle is using this information to ensure you create a service that really meets the needs of the users.

You should now consider:

- Did you get the outcome you had expected?
- Did the questions/format give enough information to make decisions?
- How have the consultation findings influenced/may influence decisions and how is this to be communicated?
- Which groups will need feedback about the consultation?
- What kind of information and formats will various audiences need e.g. website, noticeboards, newsletters, displays, written reports?

It is also important to reflect on the whole consultation process to support you in any future consultations you may wish to carry out. Questions you could ask include:

- Was it successful?
- What went well?
- What went not so well?
- What would you do differently next time?

Other uses for consultations

Consulting about your services should not just be something you do prior to opening. This is a tool that can be used regularly to ensure you continue to meet the needs of your service users.

Other potential uses for consultations include:

- a short questionnaire following a show round to see why parents chose to book a place or why they didn't,
- a questionnaire for parents when their child leaves the nursery,
- an annual staff questionnaire to ask their views (some settings do this anonymously to ensure honesty),
- parent satisfaction questionnaires to ensure you continue to offer quality services that meet the needs of your community.

Appendix 1 – Example questionnaires

Helpful Hints!

- The example questionnaires are designed to promote clear answers that can be collated easily and give a true picture of demand based on the respondents.
- You should start with an **introduction** – explain the purpose of the questionnaire and what you will use the information for. Use this to set expectations. For example, if you are carrying out a questionnaire through a school to look at demand for an after school club, be clear that this will open **only** if demand is evidenced and the potential timescales for this.
- Do you have any **incentives** to completing the questionnaire e.g. for every completed questionnaire we will enter you into a draw for a box of chocolates?
- Ensure you include a **closing date** and **where** the completed questionnaires should be returned to. Or you may also want to include a link to an online questionnaire.
- Following the explanations you should then start asking your consultation questions. If you do not ask **the right questions** in the right way you will not be able to clearly evidence a need. When wording your questions, think about the sorts of answers you require. Consider the objectives of the setting and what you want to find out. Will the questions asked give you enough evidence to be sure the service you are providing will meet the needs of the community? For example, if you only ask if a parent would use the setting with a yes/no response you would have no idea how many days, what hours etc. they would use making planning difficult.
- You must always either ask a question or make a statement about fees. This is particularly important if your provision is run by the school as there can be an assumption that it will be either heavily subsidised or free.
- Only ask questions on things you can actually do something about. If your rental costs mean you cannot charge under a certain amount, don't allow the opportunity for those completing it to say they would only attend if the fees were lower than you could afford to charge.
- If you are setting up early years provision you should be clear to parents that securing a place in the pre-school or nursery does not guarantee them a place at the school.
- Remember that this is potentially the parent's first contact with you and you want to come across as professional from the start. Consider the format, language you use, font, pictures etc. Even the paper you print this on can have an impact on **first impressions**.
- It is important to keep the questionnaire **jargon free** and easy to understand for those completing it.
- Once the questionnaire has been sent out, and the results collated, it is important that these are recorded in a **summary document**. Examples of what this could look like are also included.

EXAMPLE 1

Supertown Play Clubs Ltd
Playhouse
1 Treehouse Drive
Supertown
ST1 PLY

01234 5678910

supertownplayclubs@playwork.co.uk

www.supertownplayclubs.co.uk



Monday 4 January 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

We are Supertown Play Clubs and we are excited to have been selected to run an After School, Breakfast and Holiday club at Supertown Primary School. Our aim is to ensure your children have the opportunity to play in a fun and safe environment.

Should there be demand, we are hoping to open the Breakfast and After School Club from September 2016, and a Holiday Club during the October Half Term and then every holiday following that.

We would be very grateful if could take a few moments to complete our questionnaire so we can assess your interest in this and understand what would work best for you and your children.

We understand your time is precious and with this in mind for each completed questionnaire we will enter you into a prize draw for a family pass to Supertown Zoo for February half term.

Please return completed questionnaires to the school office by Friday 22 January.

We look forward to meeting you soon.

Mr P Worker

1. What childcare do you currently use on a regular basis? (Please tick all that apply)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Childminder					
After School Club					
Breakfast Club					
Holiday Playscheme					
Family/Friends					
Other (please state)					
Not currently required					

2. Our fees are set based on staffing costs, rent and other outgoings. They are, however, comparable with other local and national clubs. We will be charging £3.50 per hour. Based on this, please rate how likely you are to use our proposed clubs? *We will offer discounts to families with two or more children attending.*

	Unlikely	Likely	Definitely
Breakfast Club			
After School Club			
Holiday Playscheme			

Should there be demand, we plan to open in September 2016. With this in mind, please answer the remaining questions.

3. Would you be interested in using a Breakfast Club for your child/ren?

Please enter the number of children against the relevant days

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
YES					
NO					
UNSURE					

4. Would you be interested in using an After School Club for your child/ren?

Please enter the number of children against the relevant days

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
YES					
NO					
UNSURE					

5. Would you be interested in using a Holiday Playscheme for your child/ren?: Please enter the number of children against the relevant holidays

	Half Term's	Christmas	Easter	Summer
YES				
NO				
UNSURE				

6. Would you be likely to also use ad-hoc sessions for any of the proposed clubs?

Yes/No (please delete)

7. Please comment on why you may need ad hoc sessions:

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8. Which opening times would you most prefer? Please tick one choice for each type of care that you would be likely to use

	7.15-8.45am	7.30-8.45am	8-8.45am
Breakfast Club			
	3.30-5.00pm	3.30-5.30pm	3.30-6.00pm
After School Club			
	8.00am-6.00pm	9.00am-3.00pm	Morning or afternoon session
Holiday Playscheme			

9. What is your primary reason for considering using the Breakfast Club/After School Club/Holiday Playscheme?

To help with childcare whilst you are working	
To help with childcare needs whilst you are studying	
To increase your child’s social and play opportunities	
Other (please state)	

10. Would you be interested in any employment opportunities at the club? Yes/No

We would like to keep parents informed of the development of the new club. Please leave contact information for your preferred method

Email	
Telephone Number	
Text (SMS)	

Many thanks for your time

Evaluation of Consultation: 25 January 2016

Total Number of Questionnaires sent out – 214

Number received = 72 (34%)

1. What do childcare do you currently use on a regular basis? (Please tick all that apply)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Childminder	6	4	9	7	4
After School Club	0	0	0	0	0
Breakfast Club	0	0	0	0	0
Holiday Playscheme	3	3	3	3	3
Family/Friends	31	32	28	38	24
Other	4	2	0	3	1
Not currently required	28	31	32	21	40

2. Our fees are set based on staffing costs, rent and other outgoings. They are however comparable with other local clubs. Based on this we will be charging £3.50 per hour. Please rate how likely you are to use our proposed clubs? We will offer discounts to families with two or more children attending.

	Unlikely	Likely	Definitely
Breakfast Club	21	16	35
After School Club	15	27	30
Holiday Playscheme	32	15	25

3. Would you be interested in using a Breakfast Club for your child/ren?

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
YES	15	16	25	25	15
NO	37	35	26	23	37
UNSURE	24	23	23	26	24

11. What is your primary reason for considering using the Breakfast Club/After School Club/Holiday Club?

To help with childcare whilst you are working	26
To help with childcare needs whilst you are studying	8
To increase your child's social and play opportunities	14
Other (please state)	

Conclusion

Based on the responses, we intend to run the following services;

- Breakfast club 7.30-8.45am, 5 days per week, term time only
- After School Club 3.30-6.00pm, 5 days per week, term time only

It is our intention to commence these clubs from September 2016, Ofsted registration dependant.

The response for the Holiday Playscheme does not currently show that it would be viable to run this service at this point. However, we will continue to work closely with the school and monitor the demand. We will develop this service should there be a need in the future.

Next steps:

- Share and discuss consultation results with the school and agree our intentions as above.
- Share consultation results with parents via school newsletter, Facebook page, email, website and SMS as appropriate.
- Carry out prize draw for those who completed a questionnaire and announce winner via school newsletter.
- Move forward with Ofsted registration, staff recruitment, marketing and other related actions as per the club opening action plan.
- Consider how we can offer flexible ad hoc sessions within our business plan.
- Consider how we can run different sessions within the After School Club to meet parent's needs, balanced with staffing and our cash flow.

EXAMPLE 2



Little Quackers Pre-School
The Lake House
Pond Street
Waterville
W1 L56

01479 000000

manager@little-quackers.com

www.little-quackers.com

Monday 1 February 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

We are Little Quackers Pre-School and we are excited to have secured premises at the wonderful Lake House to open a childcare setting for the local community. Our ethos is to ensure your children have the opportunity to learn and develop through natural environments, curiosity and personal interests in a safe, secure and stimulating environment.

We would be very grateful if you could take a few moments to complete our questionnaire so we can assess your interest in this and understand what would work best for you and your children.

Should there be demand, we are hoping to open a term-time only Pre-School for 2-5 year olds from September 2016.

We know your time is precious and with this in mind, each completed questionnaire will be entered into a prize draw for a delicious hamper.

Please return completed questionnaires to the school office by Friday 12 February.

We look forward to getting to know you and your families soon.

Jemima

Nursery Manager

1. Do you currently use any of the following childcare on a regular basis? (Please tick all that apply)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Childminder					
Pre-School					
Day Nursery					
Family/Friends					
Other (please state)					
Not currently required					

2. Our fees are set based on staffing costs, rent and other outgoings. They are, however, comparable with other local Pre-Schools. We plan on charging £4.85 per hour. Based on this, please rate how likely you are to use our Pre-School?

(Please note, all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds will be entitled to 15 hours free childcare per week.)

Definitely	Likely	Unlikely

3. How many children would you need places for?

4. What will the ages of the children be in September 2016?

Should there be demand, we plan to open in September 2016. With this in mind, please answer the remaining questions.

5. Which days and sessions would you be interested in using a Pre-School for your child/ren?

Please enter the number of children against the relevant days

	Morning 9.00-12.00	Lunch 12.00-1.00	Afternoon 1.00-4.00	All day 9.00-4.00	Not Required
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					

6. Do the proposed session times meet your needs?

	Yes	No (please why state in comments)	Comments
Morning 9.00-12.00			
Lunch 12.00-1.00			
Afternoon 1.00-4.00			
All Day 9.00-4.00			

7. What is your primary reason for requiring childcare?

For childcare whilst you are working.	
To support with childcare needs whilst you are studying.	
To increase your child's social and play opportunities.	
Other (please state)	

8. Would you be interested in any employment opportunities at the Pre-School? Yes/No

We would like to keep parents informed of the development of the new Pre-School. Please leave contact information for your preferred method

Email	
Telephone Number	
Text (SMS)	

Many thanks for your time

Jemima and team

Evaluation of Consultation: 25 January 2016

Total Number of Questionnaires sent out – 117

Number received = 52 (44%)

1. Do you currently use any of the following childcare on a regular basis? (Please tick all that apply)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Childminder					
Pre-School					
Day Nursery					
Family/Friends					
Other (please state)					
Not required					

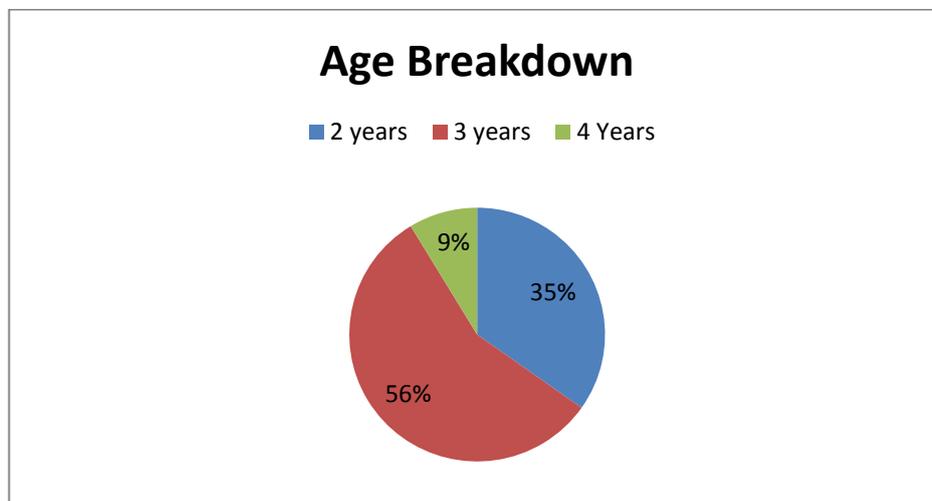
2. Our fees are set based on staffing costs, rent and other outgoings. They are, however, comparable with other local Pre-Schools. We will be charging £4.85 per hour. Based on this, please rate how likely you are to use our Pre-School?

(Please note, all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds will be entitled to 15 hours free childcare per week).

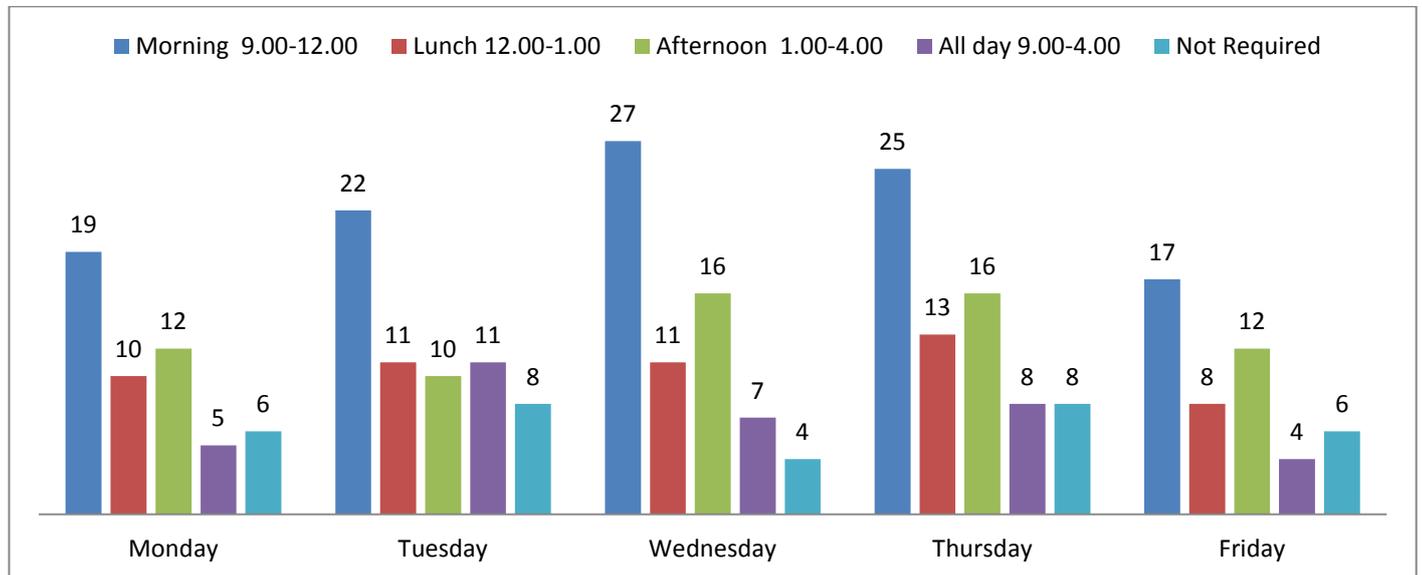
Definitely	Likely	Unlikely
37	7	8

3. How many children would you need places for? Total = 57

4. What are the ages of the children?



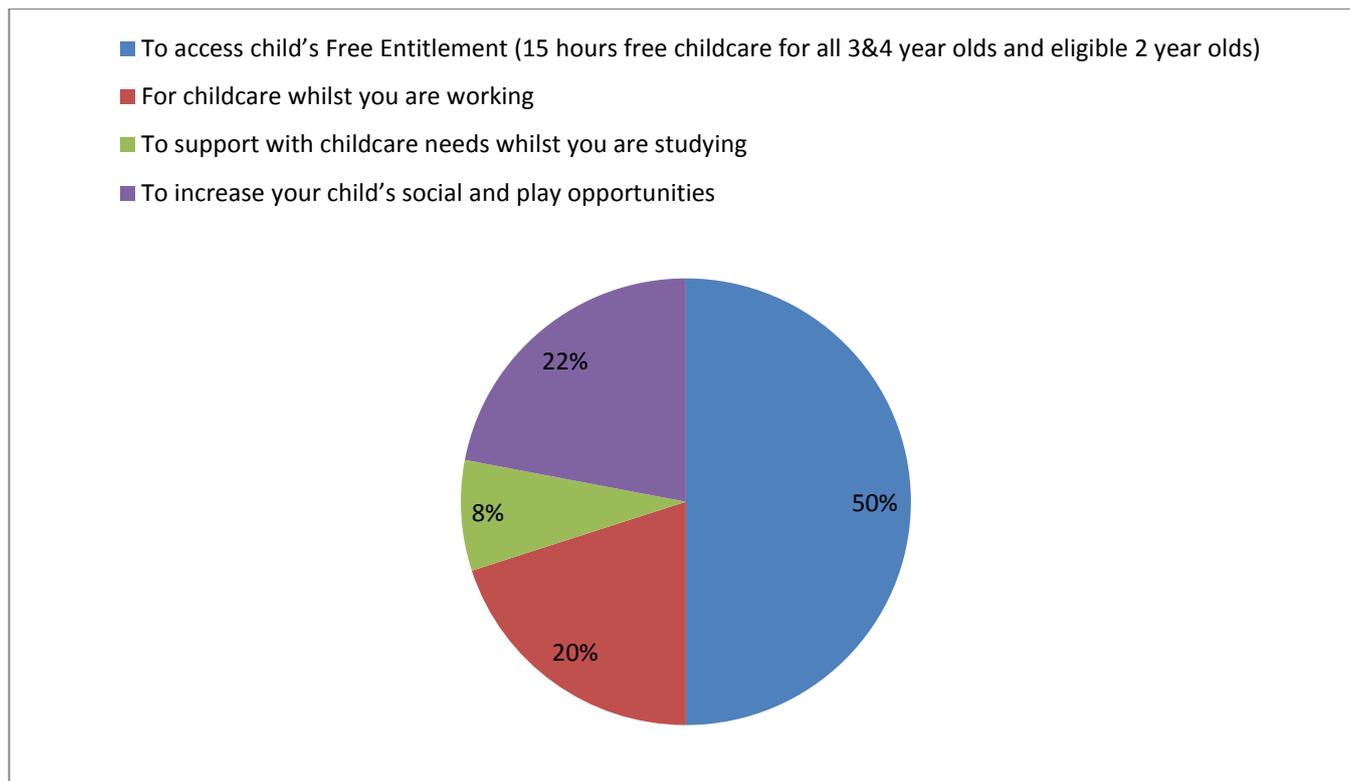
5. Which days and sessions would you be interested in using a Pre-School for your child/ren?
Please enter the number of children against the relevant days



6. Do the proposed session times meet your needs?

	Yes	No (please why state in comments)	Comments
Morning 9.00-12.00	51	1	8.30-11.30 would be better as fits with our sons lunchtime.
Lunch 12.00-1.00	35	17	Make lunch shorter so afternoon finishes earlier to fit with school pick up (17 responses).
Afternoon 1.00-4.00	31	21	Clashes with nap time (12 responses). Long time from school pick-up to hang around (9 responses).
All Day 9.00-4.00	30	22	Not long enough to cover working day (6 responses). Doesn't fit with school times (14 responses).

7. What is your primary reason for requiring childcare?



Conclusion

Based on the responses, we intend to move forward with the Business Plan and registration process.

Our breakeven is based on an average of 18 children per session and based on the responses we are confident we can achieve this within a year. Funds are in place to cover the interim period. The results showed that families are, on the whole, happy to pay the proposed fees.

As a result of the consultation we will now:

- re-consider session times to fit more closely with village school times,
- share consultation results and action we will take with those who completed the questionnaire via their chosen form of communication,
- share consultation results on our Facebook page and website including changes we are making as a result,
- move forward with Ofsted registration, staff recruitment, marketing and other related actions as per the club opening action plan.

Contact Us

You can contact the Family Information Service for further information and guidance.

WEBSITE

www.westsussex.gov.uk/family

POST

**West Sussex Family Information Service
Early Childhood Service
First Floor, The Grange
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RG**

PHONE

01243 777807

EMAIL

family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk

OPENING HOURS

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm