



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

# Extended Schools Childcare Pilot: Final Report

Education



# **EXTENDED SCHOOLS CHILDCARE PILOT: FINAL REPORT**

**York Consulting Limited**

**Scottish Executive Social Research  
2006**

The views expressed in the report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Scottish Executive or any other organisation(s) by which the author(s) is/are employed.

The Scottish Executive is making this research report available on-line in order to provide access to its contents for those interested in the subject. The Executive commissioned the research but has not exercised editorial control over the report.

This web only report is accompanied by the Research Findings document "Evaluation of the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot. June 2006 ", also available online.

Both reports are published by Information and Analytical Services Division, Scottish Executive Education Department, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ. If you have any enquiries about these reports please contact the Dissemination Officer on 0131-244-0894.

Both reports were published in November 2006.

# CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION &amp; BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Background and Context</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Extended School Childcare Pilot</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Evaluation Aims and Objectives</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Report Structure</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: SET-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Conceptualising the Pilots: Model Adopted in Each Area</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Understanding of the Pilot Aim</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Co-operation with Local Stakeholders</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Staffing and Workload</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Monitoring Information</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Marketing and Referral</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: PILOT OUTCOMES</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Availability of Childcare: Developing the Childcare Infrastructure</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Take-up of Childcare by Lone Parents and Partners</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Entry to Work by Lone Parents</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Additional Outcomes</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: SUPPLY-SIDE FACTORS</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Availability of Venues</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Ability to Staff Provision</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Funding and the Child Tax Credit</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Transport</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Hours Required</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Youth and Childcare</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DEMAND-SIDE FACTORS</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Economic Factors</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Childcare Factors</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Parent Factors</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Child Factors</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Logistical Factors</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Managing the Transition into Work</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>51</b>

<b>CHAPTER SIX: DIFFERENT BARRIERS FOR DIFFERENT LONE PARENTS</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Interview Findings</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Removing barriers for Lone Parents disposed to formal childcare</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Removing barriers for Lone Parents disposed to parental childcare</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: REMOVING THE CHILDCARE BARRIER: ACCESSIBILITY, AFFORDABILITY, QUALITY</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Affordability</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Quality</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: GOOD PRACTICE AND LESSONS LEARNED</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Time</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Pre-delivery planning and set up</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Partnership and collaboration</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Awareness raising, marketing and referral</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Childcare as both a push and pull factor</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Identification and Solutions</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Issues in developing Childcare</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Employment issues</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Monitoring and Tracking</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Summary: Meeting the Research Aims</b>	<b>75</b>

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction and Background**

1) Research suggests that a lack of affordable, accessible childcare is the single most important barrier to work for lone parents on Income Support. The Extended Schools Childcare Pilot aims to address that barrier through providing “a virtual childcare guarantee” to lone parents that are not in work. In doing so, the pilot aims to help lone parents and partners of benefit recipients into work.

2) The pilots commenced in October 2004 in two areas of Scotland, Aberdeenshire and Fife, and ran until March 2006. The pilots were co-ordinated by the Local Authority in close co-operation with other stakeholders (Jobcentre Plus and childcare providers). It was envisaged that a “virtual childcare guarantee” would be provided through existing childcare provision available in each area and through the development of additional childcare to meet identified gaps in provision.

3) Findings are presented from the evaluation of the Scottish pilot undertaken by York Consulting Limited (YCL) in 2005-2006 and commissioned by the Scottish Executive. The evaluation comprised three distinct strands: a study of implementation, a ‘survey’ of lone parents and an analysis of available monitoring information. Methods of data collection included: qualitative interviews with delivery staff (Local Authority staff, Jobcentre Plus advisors, advisor managers and childcare providers), over 40 in-depth telephone consultations with lone parents and discussions with a small number (5) of parents using new childcare developed.

### **Findings**

4) To supplement existing childcare, both areas developed new provision. In Fife this involved increasing formal childcare for the pre-five age group and developing Extended Hours provision (evening and weekends) for parents working unconventional hours. In Aberdeenshire the focus was on developing childcare for the over twelves by developing non-registered, activity-based provision and by enhancing a pre-existing Sitter Service for the full age range. In this way both areas sought to ensure a broad range of childcare was available during conventional and non-conventional hours.

5) It took considerable time to implement the pilot and establish new provision. This is not surprising given that both areas were pioneering inventive forms of childcare during unconventional hours.

6) Overall, take-up of existing and newly established childcare was mixed. Notably, take-up by lone parents on benefits referred by Jobcentre Plus was extremely poor. The available records show that over a hundred parents referred to the pilot via Jobcentre Plus elected not to access the pilot. Qualitative evidence suggests three lone parents were in employment due to the availability of formal childcare. Only one outcome (entry into work) can be directly attributed to the pilot.

7) The research identified a range of factors (supply-side and demand-side) that affect the extent to which the childcare barrier can be removed. On the supply-side this included factors such as:

- the available timescale that was considered insufficient to set up and deliver new forms of formal childcare and establish an effective relationship with lone parents
- difficulties in sourcing venues to accommodate provision and that complied with Care Commission requirements
- location and type of provision that matched the needs of parents and local labour market opportunities
- developing mechanisms to ensure childcare was affordable, that could be sustained post-pilot
- staff recruitment
- balancing the competing tensions of addressing childcare business viability with the desire to meet parent need.

8) On the demand-side, factors influencing lone parents' decisions about work and childcare included:

- economic factors: including employment levels and job opportunities, the financial viability of work, extent of employer flexibility and concerns over the tax credit system
- childcare factors: such as lone parents' preferences for parental or informal childcare
- parent factors: including low levels of confidence, skills and health issues
- child factors: such as the presence of additional support needs (for which parents perceived there was no childcare available) and the child's age and life-stage
- logistical factors: including transport and the level of contact between the lone parent and Jobcentre Plus.

9) Using the typology developed by Bell et al.<sup>1</sup> the lone parents interviewed were classified into four key types to identify their orientations towards work and childcare:

- those that had high orientations to work and high orientations towards parental childcare (Type 1)
- those that had high orientations to work and low orientations towards parental childcare (Type 2)

---

<sup>1</sup> Bell, A., Finch, N., La Valle, I., Sainsbury, R. and Skinner, C. (2005). A Question of Balance: Lone parents, childcare and work. NCSR and York University on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Research Report 230.

- those that had low orientations to work and high orientations towards parental childcare (Type 3)
- those that had low orientations to work and low orientations towards parental childcare (Type 4).

10) Of the 41 lone parents interviewed, one-quarter (11) were of Type 1. They wanted to work but also wanted to look after their children. Around two-fifths (16) were of Type 2. They were keen to work and willing to use formal childcare to enable them to do that. These parents considered formal childcare to have positive benefits for their children. Around a third of lone parents (13) were of Type 3. These lone parents were not strongly motivated to work and saw their main role as the parental care giver. Only one (1) of the lone parents interviewed was of Type 4. These lone parents had low motivations to work but did not feel strongly obligated to provide full-time parental childcare. They were therefore amenable to using formal childcare.

11) Overall, around two-fifths of lone parents (17) were orientated to using formal childcare. These lone parents could therefore have benefited from the “virtual childcare guarantee” envisaged through the pilot. However, many of these lone parents had limited awareness of the provision available in their area. This, alongside other factors, such as the availability of part-time work during school hours, affected their decisions about work.

12) Conversely, three-fifths of lone parents (24) had deeply entrenched orientations towards the use of parental or informal childcare. Through focusing on formal rather than informal childcare (relative, friend), the pilot could not have assisted this group without *changing* parental attitudes towards childcare.

13) Both pilot areas worked hard to ensure that some form of childcare was available during conventional and unconventional hours. The evidence suggests that the pilot only partially met its aim to remove the childcare barrier in terms of its accessibility, affordability and quality. The extent to which childcare was considered accessible by lone parents depended on its location, type (e.g. club versus Sitter Service) and the extent to which parents were aware of its existence. Affordability was addressed, although where this depended on tax credits rather than a subsidy, negative perceptions of the tax credit system may have adversely affected take-up. In relation to quality, much of what was developed was registered and therefore regulated. Activity-based clubs for children over 12 were not registered. This was because the activity-based clubs were testing a novel form of ‘childcare’ within the limited timeframe of the pilot.

14) It must be acknowledged that *removing the childcare barrier* is by no means a straightforward task, not least because parental preferences for the type and level of childcare vary. The childcare barrier can mean different things to different lone parents. This has implications for the extent to which the supply-side can respond by providing childcare that meets differing parental demands.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Developing the Childcare Infrastructure***

15) Both areas worked hard to implement the pilots and develop new and innovative forms of childcare within a demanding timescale. To supplement existing provision, the Scottish pilots provided childcare that was additional (i.e. operating outside of conventional hours and tailored to an older age group). In this way, enhancements to the local childcare infrastructure were a key outcome of the pilot.

### ***Testing the Pilot Hypothesis: Is lack of childcare the single most significant barrier for lone parents?***

16) Overall, the evidence suggests that the availability of formal childcare presents a significant barrier for some, but not all lone parents. For a considerable proportion of those interviewed (24/40), deeply-entrenched beliefs that it is a parent's *job* to look after their children affects their attitudes towards both formal childcare and work.

17) The evidence also suggests that childcare is not the only barrier affecting lone parents' entry into work. Often it is one of a number of complex and interlinked barriers. This suggests that childcare is perhaps not best addressed in isolation and that, given the heterogeneity of lone parents, different solutions are required for different lone parents.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

### Introduction

1.1 The report presents the findings of research, undertaken by York Consulting Limited, to evaluate the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot, on behalf of the Scottish Executive.

### Background and Context

1.2 Research<sup>2</sup> has found that a lack of affordable, accessible childcare presents a significant barrier to work for lone parents in receipt of benefits. Lack of childcare is also an important barrier for partners of benefit recipients.

1.3 As a result, the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot was developed to address particular issues related to lone parents, workless couples, work and childcare. The pilots were initially run in three areas of England from April 2004, with additional pilots being added in England, Scotland and Wales.

1.4 This report **focuses on the Scotland pilots**. In Scotland, the areas of **Aberdeenshire and Fife were selected to run an Extended Schools Childcare Pilot**.

### Extended School Childcare Pilot

1.5 The aim of the Extended School Childcare Pilot was to offer a “virtual childcare guarantee” to parents that are not in work. The central objective of the pilots was to help lone parents and partners of benefit recipients into work. A further key priority group were recipients of Working Tax Credit who were not using registered childcare. The pilots commenced in Scotland in October 2004 and ran until March 2006.

1.6 Co-ordinated at the local level, via the local authority, the pilots were intended to work in close co-operation with local stakeholders. It was envisaged that any new provision developed to meet identified need would primarily be based on networks centred around secondary schools. However, it was envisaged that other facilities, for example Sitter Services, might be developed. It was intended that schools might provide childcare themselves, or might well work with other providers in line with the extended schools concept.

---

<sup>2</sup> Verwaayen, B. (2003). *What Works. Final report of the National Employment Panel's Steering Group on Lone Parents*.

## Evaluation Aims and Objectives

1.7 The aim of the **overall evaluation** was to:

- assess the effect the pilot has on the attitudes to take-up of childcare by lone parents on Income Support (IS), their move into work and the implementation of the pilot.

1.8 The main objectives of the research were fourfold, to assess:

- what evidence there is, as a result of the pilots, that the lack of accessible, affordable childcare is the main barrier to work for lone parents on IS
- the extent to which the pilot succeeded in removing this barrier, or otherwise
- the extent to which the removal of this barrier leads to higher rates of entry into work
- whether other factors take over and prevent lone parents entering work once affordable and accessible childcare is available.

1.9 To address these overarching aims and objectives, the evaluation comprised three distinct elements:

- an implementation study (Strand One)
- a ‘survey’ of lone parents on Income Support (Strand Two)
- monitoring of management information (MI) (Strand Three).

## Methodology

### *Strand One: Processes for Delivery*

1.10 The methodology for Strand One of the evaluation comprised in-depth qualitative interviews with relevant stakeholders in each of the two pilot areas, Aberdeenshire and Fife. Stakeholders consulted included:

- **Local Authority staff**, for example, pilot co-ordinators, Childcare Partnership Managers, Children’s Information Service representatives
- **Jobcentre Plus staff**, such as Childcare Partnership Managers, Advisor Managers and Advisors
- **childcare providers**, including head teachers, breakfast and After School Club managers, voluntary/community childcare providers, youth workers providing childcare as part of the pilot and providers of Sitter Services.

1.11 The fieldwork for Strand One was undertaken between October 2005 and January 2006.

1.12 At this time, no lone parents interviewed by Jobcentre Plus had taken up the offer of childcare through the pilot. In order to establish the potential reasons for low take-up, telephone interviews were also conducted with a **small sample of lone parents** (15) who had been made aware of the pilot but did not take-up the offer.

## ***Strand Two: Consultations with lone parents***

1.13 The methodology for Strand Two of the evaluation involved qualitative in-depth telephone interviews with a larger sample of lone parents on Income Support. In addition, a small number of telephone interviews were conducted with parents using the childcare set up through the pilot.

1.14 Consultations with lone parents and parents<sup>3</sup> using childcare took place at the end of the pilot period, between April and May 2006. The sample frame for lone parents came from two sources:

- **Jobcentre Plus** - using data captured via postcards that were completed by lone parents after they had been informed of the pilot by Jobcentre Plus staff (postcard data returns)
- **Local Authorities** - using data recorded on a data capture form completed by childcare providers.

1.15 The sample frame included 126 contacts for lone parents, of which:

- 33 were from Aberdeenshire<sup>4</sup>; and
- 93 were from Fife.

1.16 Many of the contact details provided were either incorrect or the individual contacted was unable to take part in an interview. In total 41 interviews (33%) were carried out with lone parents as part of Strand Two activities. This comprised:

- 9 lone parents from Aberdeenshire; and
- 32 lone parents from Fife.

1.17 Five parents (3 from Fife and 2 from Aberdeenshire) who were not targeted lone parents but who had used the childcare developed as part of the pilot were also interviewed to explore their views of the provision established.

---

<sup>3</sup> 'Parents' here is used to refer to parents that were not lone parents. Such parents were accessing the provision set up via the pilot and may or may not have been in receipt of benefits.

<sup>4</sup> 14 contacts for Aberdeenshire were provided via the data capture returns. Although more than 19 returns were provided via the data capture forms, only 19 parents consented to being contacted for the purposes of evaluation.

### ***Strand Three: Monitoring and Evaluation Phase***

1.18 Strand Three involved analysing management information routinely collected on the pilot by the Executive. The aim of this phase of the evaluation was to use the information to monitor:

- the number of *existing* childcare places (in schools or elsewhere) taken up by lone parents who have entered work as a result of having childcare (**Aim One**)
- the number of *new* childcare places created (in schools or elsewhere) through the pilot, and the number of these places that have been taken up by lone parents entering work (**Aim Two**)
- the number of schools providing childcare through the pilot (**Aim Three**).

1.19 Two sets of management information were provided by the Scottish Executive for analysis:

- Monthly Returns provided to the Sure Start Unit by Local Authorities (for Aberdeenshire and Fife) – the analysis in this report is based on the most recently updated MI from February 2006
- In-Month Childcare Reports (Aberdeenshire only<sup>5</sup>) supplied by Jobcentre Plus for the Department for Work and Pensions – the analysis in this report is based on the most recently updated MI from November 2005.

1.20 Therefore, the majority of the analysis of the MI relates to the information captured through the monthly Sure Start returns.

1.21 The MI, however, did not capture the full range of factors that would enable us to address each of the aims set out above. The limitations of the data were:

- Aims One and Two: The main difficulty in extracting the MI required to address these two aims is related to distinguishing between the take-up of new places by lone parents and the take-up of existing places by lone parents. The MI is collected through separate questions on new places and existing places relating to the creation and take-up. However, when the data was provided to us broken down by lone parent and partners, the information combines new and existing places.
- the other key missing information relates to the employment status of lone parents. Furthermore, the MI could not be used to indicate whether or not childcare has been the enabler of take-up of employment
- Aim Three: The MI provides details of the number of schools that have joined and the number that have left. We would require details of the number of schools at the baseline in order to understand the number of schools that have provided childcare through the pilot.

---

<sup>5</sup> Despite reminders by the Scottish Executive, Fife never featured in these reports.

1.22 The analysis of the MI to inform outcomes (Section Three) indicates that the recording of MI for the purposes of the pilot has been patchy. The quantity of data available (for example, on referral sources) suggests that the pilot areas have not been rigorous in ensuring that all data is collected and recorded on a regular basis for the purposes of the pilot. However, a key constraint of the MI is that it does not reflect the Scottish approach to delivering the pilot.

1.23 It is important to recognise that the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot aims to test whether lack of accessible, affordable childcare is the main barrier to work for lone parents by removing this barrier through the offer of a “virtual childcare guarantee”. The nature of any innovative pilot project and the reason for supporting innovative projects is that lessons are learnt. This learning will not only inform the development of initiatives to support lone parents into work, but also how childcare provision can be developed/enhanced to meet the needs of all parents.

## Report Structure

1.24 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- in Section Two we outline how the two areas have responded to the pilot by describing the models implemented in each. We then proceed to highlight some of the main issues facing the pilots in terms of progress made
- in Section Three, we use the evidence from qualitative feedback and available monitoring information to present the outcomes from the pilot
- in Section Four we summarise the supply-side constraints that have impacted on delivery
- we then proceed in Section Five to explore the demand-side factors that have impacted on delivery
- in Section Six we categorise lone parents into four broad types using the typology developed by Bell et al. (2005)<sup>6</sup> in order to explore lone parents’ orientations towards work and childcare. We then explore how the pilot’s aim to provide a virtual childcare guarantee could have assisted the lone parents in each of these four ‘types’
- in Section Seven we draw on the evidence from preceding sections to explore the extent to which the pilots have removed the barrier of childcare in terms of attempts to address issues of availability, affordability and quality through the approach to implementation;
- in Section Eight, we highlight good practice and lessons learnt throughout the pilots
- finally, in Section Nine, we set out our conclusions and recommendations.

1.25 Throughout this report, all names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

---

<sup>6</sup> Bell, A., Finch, N., La Valle, I., Sainsbury, R. and Skinner, C. (2005). *A Question of Balance: Lone parents, childcare and work*. NCSR and York University on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Research Report 230.



## CHAPTER TWO: SET-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION

**Table 2.1: Summary of Key Points**

- The two pilot areas have responded to the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot in different ways by implementing different models of provision according to local need and perceptions of the pilot.
- In addition to the existing childcare that was available:
  - Fife focused on developing registered provision to meet identified gaps in childcare for the under-fives and developing childcare for parents working unconventional hours by establishing evening and weekend provision.
  - Aberdeenshire initially focused on lone parents with children aged 12 plus, developing non-registered childcare for older age children and enhancing its pre-existing registered Sitter Service providing childcare at home. This was subsequently broadened out to all lone parents.
- In this way the pilots provided unique and innovative responses to addressing gaps in childcare.
- The aims of the pilot were well understood by those playing a key role in strategic planning and co-ordination. However, the rationale for the pilot was not understood by all those involved in its implementation and delivery, with some stakeholders placing differential emphasis on the childcare and work elements according to their organisational orientation.
- Both pilot areas have developed positive links with Jobcentre Plus to implement the pilots. However, there is some evidence of limited communication within and across the two agencies (the Local Authority and Jobcentre Plus) at ground level. This could be due to the high turnover of staff within Jobcentre Plus which has not aided collaboration between the two agencies. There is potential for greater joint working to transfer information, inform of action undertaken and to promote childcare uptake.
- There is scope to further encourage referrals via other partners e.g. family workers, schools, community groups. However, it must be acknowledged that the ability to do this was adversely affected by the pilot's timescales with resources inevitably being channelled into establishing new provision.
- Monitoring information was collected by both areas as required. However, constraints in the design of the centralised monitoring information available limited the extent to which take-up by lone parents and moves into work, or otherwise, could be assessed.
- A wide range of strategies to market the pilot have been employed, such as school bag drops, fliers and tasters. There emerges a tension between generic marketing (to ensure that childcare is available to all), and targeted marketing to encourage take-up by lone parents and other target groups.
- It must be acknowledged that developing new and innovative childcare, such as that developed in response to the pilot, is an extremely time-consuming and labour intensive process. The evidence suggests greater lead-in time was required to set up and implement the pilots.

## **Introduction**

2.1 In this section we describe the strategies employed to address the aims of the pilot and outline how each pilot area has approached set up and implementation in terms of:

- the model of delivery
- understanding the pilot aims
- co-operation with local stakeholders
- staffing and workload
- monitoring information
- marketing and referral
- progress to date.

## **Conceptualising the Pilots: Model Adopted in Each Area**

2.2 Aberdeenshire and Fife have responded to the pilot in different ways.

2.3 In developing the approach to respond to the pilot, both areas undertook preliminary work (although varying in scope) to assess:

- gaps in childcare
- local labour market opportunities
- prevalence of lone parents in receipt of benefits.

2.4 As a result of this, each area developed an approach that was tailored to local need.

## ***Fife***

2.5 The pilot in Fife was set up later than was the case in Aberdeenshire. In addition to its existing childcare, Fife focused on developing new childcare in areas where there is a high concentration of lone parents.

2.6 Breakfast and After School Clubs were already running. However, it was recognised there was an absence of evening and weekend childcare provision within Fife to suit shift work (retail and call centre) vacancies in the area. As such, Fife focused on developing;

- Extended Hours childcare - from six in the evening until nine at night
- full-day weekend provision.

2.7 In addition, it was recognised there were gaps in provision for the pre-fives and therefore, the development of additional provision was needed.

2.8 All the childcare developed in Fife to support the pilot was registered and, as such, all provision was regulated by the Care Commission.



2.9 Due to the fact that the childcare is registered, lone parents who enter work can access support to fund childcare using the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Fife Childcare Partnership also offers a subsidy for the school care provided by the Authority on top of the Childcare Tax Credit.

### *Aberdeenshire*

2.10 Aberdeenshire focused attention on lone parents with children aged over 12, of which there are 229<sup>7</sup> in Aberdeenshire. Childcare was then developed in five areas with the highest concentrations of lone parents in this target group. The remaining funding was used to develop childcare in two further geographical areas, selected because of their rural location, and to strengthen the availability of flexible provision throughout Aberdeenshire.

2.11 In addition to existing provision, the childcare developed, or enhanced, to support pilot activity included:

- breakfast and After School Clubs
- Sitter Services that provide care for children in their own homes
- after-school activities for older children
- holiday activity schemes for older children
- childcare tasters.

2.12 Expanding the range of its registered Sitter Services was a key focus in Aberdeenshire. The Sitter Service was developed to address transport issues associated with such a vast rural area and to provide flexible childcare provision that covers holiday periods and shift work.

2.13 Aberdeenshire also concentrated on developing provision that would be attractive to children aged 12 and over. In order to meet the timescale of the pilot and address issues of cost, the over twelve's provision in Aberdeenshire was not registered.

2.14 As the post 12 provision was not registered, parents were not eligible for the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Thus, the provision was subsidised using pilot monies.

2.15 At the time that the Strand One fieldwork was undertaken – January 2006 – some fourteen months into the pilot:

- all provision in Aberdeenshire was up and running
- newly established provision in Fife was still in the embryonic stages. Evening and weekend provision in Fife had just been launched and additional provision for pre-five children was still in the process of being secured.

---

<sup>7</sup> Taken from figures provided by the Scottish Executive.

## **Understanding of the Pilot Aim**

### ***Assisting Lone Parents into Work by Removing the Barrier of Childcare***

2.16 Lead staff from the Local Authority and Jobcentre Plus staff understood that the core aim of the pilot was to address barriers related to childcare and help lone parents into work.

2.17 The relative focus given to the childcare element and ‘back to work’ aspect for lone parents differed across stakeholders at ground level.

2.18 For some stakeholders, the main emphasis was on developing extended or flexible childcare:

*“The pilot attempts to provide childcare which is accessible and available out of school hours.” Local Authority*

*“It’s about providing childcare to cover gaps in provision for shift workers and to provide odd hours of childcare before school and in the evening.” Provider*

*“It is about encouraging lone parents to take-up the childcare that already exists.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor*

2.19 For others, the main focus was on encouraging lone parents to enter work:

*“The pilot is about testing the assumption that childcare is the main barrier [to employment for lone parents].” Jobcentre Plus*

*“The pilot’s aim is to see lone parents in a 13-week cycle where the youngest child is aged 12 or over, introduce them to childcare provision and suggest they contact the Children’s Information Service.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor*

2.20 It is important that all those involved in the pilot understand its aims, objectives and rationale. This helps to ensure a common sense of purpose regarding what is to be achieved and enables the appropriate ‘connections’ to be made between different services to facilitate the pilot’s operation.

## **Co-operation with Local Stakeholders**

### ***Links with Jobcentre Plus***

2.21 In line with the intention that the pilots work in close co-operation with local stakeholders, both areas have developed positive links with Jobcentre Plus, both in conceiving how the pilot should be implemented and throughout ongoing delivery.

2.22 There is some evidence of limited communication between and across the two agencies at the ground level:

- some Jobcentre Plus advisors were not clear whether and where new provision was up and running and thereby had concerns about how far they could discuss new provision developed as part of the pilot to lone parents
- Jobcentre Plus advisors were not consistently requesting that the lone parents they advise complete the postcards<sup>8</sup> used to transfer information from Jobcentre Plus to the Executive. This made contact with lone parents, for the purpose of the evaluation, difficult
- some Jobcentre Plus advisors had concerns that the information on childcare available through the Children's Information Service was not up to date
- Local Authority staff had some concerns that Jobcentre Plus staff were not selling the pilot effectively to the lone parents they advised. Jobcentre Plus advisors felt that LA stakeholders underestimated the time needed to build up a relationship with lone parents and breakdown/address their barriers to work
- forms were developed to exchange information across the two agencies but not all staff interviewed were aware of these processes. This could be due to the lack of take-up (childcare or work) or to limitations in (intra-agency) communication.

2.23 Joint working on the ground has not been aided by the fact that there has been a high turnover of staff acting as Childcare Partnership managers in both areas and that Jobcentre Plus has been through an unsettled period due to restructuring and job losses.

### ***Links with Other Sources of Referral***

2.24 There is evidence to suggest that pilot areas were developing some links with other agencies as potential wider sources of referral. For example, one area had developed links with Social Services and the other area was intending to use family workers in the future to promote the benefits of formal childcare and encourage take-up. This is by virtue of the fact that family workers have regular contact with families in the target group.

2.25 There is scope to enhance/improve the links with other partners, for example, through outreach work or by liaising with community groups, colleges, family workers, schools or childcare providers to promote wider referral. Local capacity to do this is dependent upon the resource and timescale available.

### ***Links with Childcare Providers***

2.26 Each area has developed links with providers in line with their model of implementation.

---

<sup>8</sup> The postcard system was established by the Executive so that contact details could be collected on lone parents in order for them to be surveyed as part of the evaluation.

2.27 Fife developed links with After School Clubs (Local Authority and voluntary/community run provision) to extend after school childcare from the hours of 3pm – 6pm to the hours of 5pm – 9pm. Weekend provision has been established in a community school in one area.

2.28 Provision for pre-fives is also being developed. It was initially envisaged that day care provision for pre-fives would be established in local primary schools. However, as schools did not have the available space to accommodate day care, the Childcare Partnership sought to set up childcare in Local Authority buildings. This proved difficult due to issues of availability (the same room being available consecutively over five days) and health and safety (to meet the standards required by the Childcare Commission).

2.29 However, Fife managed to secure a small community hall to provide some day care for babies and pre-school children. As part of the wider work of the partnership, it is intended that additional provision for pre-school children be developed in the future. The long-term aim is to build new provision for pre-fives within a local primary school.

2.30 Aberdeenshire extended the scope of its Sitter Service and developed links with youth workers to provide after school and holiday activities for children aged 12 and over. The latter includes activities such as ‘sports testers’ (for example, fencing and abseiling) as well as longer running activities such as a video media project where young people script, write, film and edit a video project.

### **Staffing and Workload**

2.31 Both areas have employed additional staff to support the pilot:

- **Fife Childcare Partnership** has employed two additional members of staff to co-ordinate pilot activity and establish Extended Hours/weekend provision and provision for children under the age of three. At the time interviews were undertaken, Fife was also in the process of recruiting a ‘marketing consultant’ to promote childcare to parents
- **Aberdeenshire** did not appoint a designated co-ordinator for the pilot but shared the co-ordination role across existing members of staff. This was because of internal constraints that meant there was no space to house an additional member of staff. However, Aberdeenshire used pilot monies to create the post of ‘Vacancy Information Manager’ to implement a vacancy management system to update and monitor the childcare vacancies in the area.

2.32 Clearly, the ability of Local Authority staff to undertake additional work in support of the pilot (to market the pilot and develop innovative approaches to encourage take-up) is limited by the amount of resources available and extent/range of other duties.

2.33 However, contrary to the findings on initial implementation in England<sup>9</sup>, there is little evidence to suggest that the pilot has had negative implications in terms of additional burdens and workload for Jobcentre Plus staff.

### Monitoring Information

2.34 Both areas are collecting the monitoring information required as part of the pilot. However, three key issues emerged in this area:

- **accuracy of childcare information** – concern was raised regarding the difficulties of reporting childcare information according to the monitoring template. This is because take-up of childcare can differ on a week by week basis depending on the shifting requirements of parents. This makes it difficult to report and thereby assess the number of childcare places created and the extent to which these have been taken up by (target) parents
- **recording data on lone parents** – limitations in the way information is collected, collated and recorded on the monitoring template means that the data on lone parents taking up/accessing the childcare may not be accurate. Moreover, it is not possible to assess whether the lone parents have moved into employment as a result of taking up childcare provision. This has significant implications in impeding understanding of whether accessing childcare supports the move to employment
- **design of MI** – the centralised MI did not adequately reflect the delivery of the pilots in Scotland for example, in recording numbers relating to innovative forms of childcare developed.

### Marketing and Referral

2.35 Both areas employed a range of strategies to market the pilot and promote referral. This has included:

- **school bag drops** – by distributing letters/fliers in children’s school bags
- **fliers/posters** – displayed in the jobcentre, schools, supermarkets, doctor’s surgeries, shops and call centres
- **local press advertising** – the Extended Hours and weekend provision in Fife has been advertised in the local press
- **media campaign** – advertising on local radio and television
- **open day/evening** – as part of the above, parents in Fife were invited to attend an open day/evening to visit the Extended Hours and weekend provision created
- **Childcare Tasters** – staff (Local Authority and/or Jobcentre Plus) talk to parents about childcare and encourage them to visit a provider to see what the provision is like
- **introduction through Jobcentre Plus advisor** – advisors are talking to lone parents about childcare and introducing them to the Children’s Information Service as a source of information and advice

---

<sup>9</sup> *Evaluation of the Childcare Taster Pilot and Extended Schools Childcare Pilot Programmes: Qualitative Research into Initial Implementation. BMRB and PSI*

- **promotion through Children’s Information Service** – CIS staff are raising awareness of the new childcare places created through the pilot when parents contact the service for information
- **promotion through other agencies** – such as schools, social work and community services
- **word of mouth** – from one parent to another
- **internal communications** – in order to raise awareness of the pilot to those acting as a point of referral i.e. Jobcentre Plus, staff held workshops and presentations for Jobcentre Plus advisors to cascade information on the pilot and raise awareness of where new provision was being developed.

2.36 Several issues emerged with regards to marketing. These include the timing of marketing activity and the extent to which it is targeted at lone parents and partners in receipt of benefits.

### *Timeliness*

2.37 There is evidence that the timing of marketing activity has implications for the extent of its effectiveness. For example:

- in some cases marketing was felt to have been undertaken too early before childcare provision was up and running. For instance, some Jobcentre Plus advisors had been made aware of the pilot in the early stages and as a result, understood that new provision was being developed to meet identified gaps in provision. However, as the pilot progressed they were not aware when new provision was up and running and thereby, whether and when they could ‘sell it’ to parents
- there was some concern that continuing to market the pilot as it reached its end point (in March 2006) sent the wrong messages to parents. This is because Local Authority staff were unclear whether they would be able to sustain the newly created provision once pilot funding came to an end. It was therefore felt that there was a risk that parents would take-up provision that could not be relied upon to be available once the pilot ended.

### *Targeting*

2.38 In line with the intended remit of the pilot, childcare created is available to all parents and not just lone parents and partners in receipt of benefits. As such, marketing activity was generically focused rather than targeted. However, both areas focused generic distribution of publicity material in areas where there is an identified high concentration of lone parents. As well as potentially over-stimulating demand, the pilot could have attracted parents with children from non-target groups who might ordinarily have secured different types of childcare – a potential deadweight problem.

2.39 Nevertheless, there emerged a tension between developing provision that is available and marketed to all, and targeting the key client groups that the pilots have been designed for. It is not clear whether, and to what extent, the pilot has been marketed to other target groups such as partners of benefit claimants and parents in receipt of Working Tax Credit.

2.40 There is scope to undertake additional/wider marketing activity to promote the availability and affordability of childcare to lone parents and other target groups. One opportunity to do this is via the local Children's Information Service. However, CIS staff interviewed stated that they were not permitted to directly question parents on issues such as employment/parental status. This limited the extent to which the CIS could be used as a route to direct parents to the pilot. If replicated in other areas, this could also have implications in terms of the extent to which the CIS can be used to refer parents to linked initiatives and programmes – such as back to work programmes.

## **Summary**

2.41 Both areas worked hard to identify and address gaps in childcare and have responded to these in different ways in line with local circumstances. Both areas developed innovative responses to provide childcare that was not available before the pilot and that was therefore additional to the childcare offer in place pre-pilot. In this way the pilots were pioneering new approaches to childcare needs.

2.42 It took considerable time and effort to establish new provision and get this up and running. This highlights the need for adequate lead-in time and realistic timescales for set up and implementation.

2.43 It is important that respective organisations involved in the pilot understand its aims and not just the element that relates to their organisational role (i.e. childcare or work).





## CHAPTER THREE: PILOT OUTCOMES

**Table 3.1: Summary of Key Points**

- Limitations in the available MI constrain the extent to which pilot outcomes can be accurately assessed in quantitative terms. Quantitative figures presented therefore need to be interpreted with caution.
- Quantitative evidence from the MI shows that both areas have created new childcare places over the course of the pilot.
- A key positive outcome was the development of childcare during unconventional hours and tailored provision for older children.
- The MI shows that many more places have been taken up in Aberdeenshire than in Fife. The take-up of new places created during the pilot has been relatively low.
- The lack of data and adequate tracking of lone parents means that the outcomes for lone parents in terms of moving off benefits and into work cannot be fully assessed.
- 125 lone parents consented (via Jobcentre Plus) to be contacted for the purposes of evaluation. Qualitative evidence suggests three lone parents entered work due to the availability of formal childcare. Only one outcome (entry to work) can be directly attributed to the pilot with one lone parent directly moving into full-time work as a result of the availability of weekend childcare.
- Additional outcomes were evidenced in terms of the availability of additional childcare for non-lone parents and improved links between Jobcentre Plus and the Local Authority.

### Introduction

3.1 The aim of the pilot was to offer a virtual childcare guarantee in order that the childcare barrier for lone parents be removed. The intended outcomes of the pilot could therefore be summarised as follows:

- the availability of childcare provision
- take-up of childcare by lone parents and other parents
- increased rates of entry to work by lone parents (because of the childcare made available).

3.2 In this section, we explore the outcomes achieved. This is based on evidence collected during qualitative interviews and analysis of the available quantitative evidence from monitoring information. There were some gaps in the MI provided which means quantitative figures presented should be treated with caution.

### Availability of Childcare: Developing the Childcare Infrastructure

3.3 In order to provide a virtual childcare guarantee, pilot areas needed to ensure that formal childcare was available. This was to be achieved through the provision of existing childcare and by developing new childcare to address identified gaps in provision.

3.4 As highlighted in the preceding section, both Aberdeenshire and Fife developed new provision as part of the pilot. This included the development of unique forms of new childcare to support and enhance the existing childcare infrastructure.

3.5 A key positive outcome from the pilot was the development of:

- **more flexible provision** – such as Sitter Services, Extended Hours provision running until 9pm in the evening and weekend provision
- **activity based provision for the over 12s** – such as After School Clubs running abseiling and other recreational activities
- **holiday schemes.**

3.6 Quantitative evidence from the available management information shows that both areas created new childcare places over the course of the pilot. **Table 3.2** shows the Sure Start MI on the creation of new childcare places over the course of the pilot period.

**Table 3.2: Development of Childcare Infrastructure**

	New Places Created	
	In schools	In other settings
Fife	48	0
Aberdeenshire	24	406

*Source: Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Fife and Aberdeenshire)*

*Note: These places were created during May 2005. No additional places have been created since May 2005.*

3.7 Fife created twice as many new places in schools than Aberdeenshire (48 cf. 24), however, Aberdeenshire created a significant number of places in other childcare settings (406). Caution should be exercised in interpreting the figures presented however, since qualitative feedback from both areas suggests that there are constraints in reporting childcare information. The reliability of the resulting data can therefore be questioned.

3.8 **Table 3.3** below details the number of schools that have joined or left during the pilot period. Sufficient data was not provided to detail the total number of schools, or the number of places in these schools, providing childcare over the course of the pilot period.

**Table 3.3: Schools Joining or Leaving During the Pilot (no. of people referred to pilot)**

		Schools that have joined	Schools that have left
<b>Fife</b>	Primary	1	0
	Secondary	1	0
<b>Aberdeenshire</b>	Primary	1	0
	Secondary	0	0

Source: *Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Fife and Aberdeenshire)*

Note: No schools have joined or left since May 2005.

### Take-up of Childcare by Lone Parents and Partners

3.9 Take-up of childcare by lone parents and partners has been mixed, with many more places taken up in Aberdeenshire than in Fife, according to the MI. Specifically, the take-up of new places created during the pilot has been relatively low.

#### *Take-up of new and existing places*

3.10 **Table 3.4** below details the number of new and existing childcare places taken up by lone parents or partners over the pilot period in the two Local Authorities, distinguishing between childcare places in schools and places in other childcare settings.

3.11 The take-up of new and existing places has been much higher in Aberdeenshire than in Fife, with the majority of the take-up in Aberdeenshire being of childcare places in settings other than schools.

**Table 3.4: Places taken up (by either lone parents or partners)**

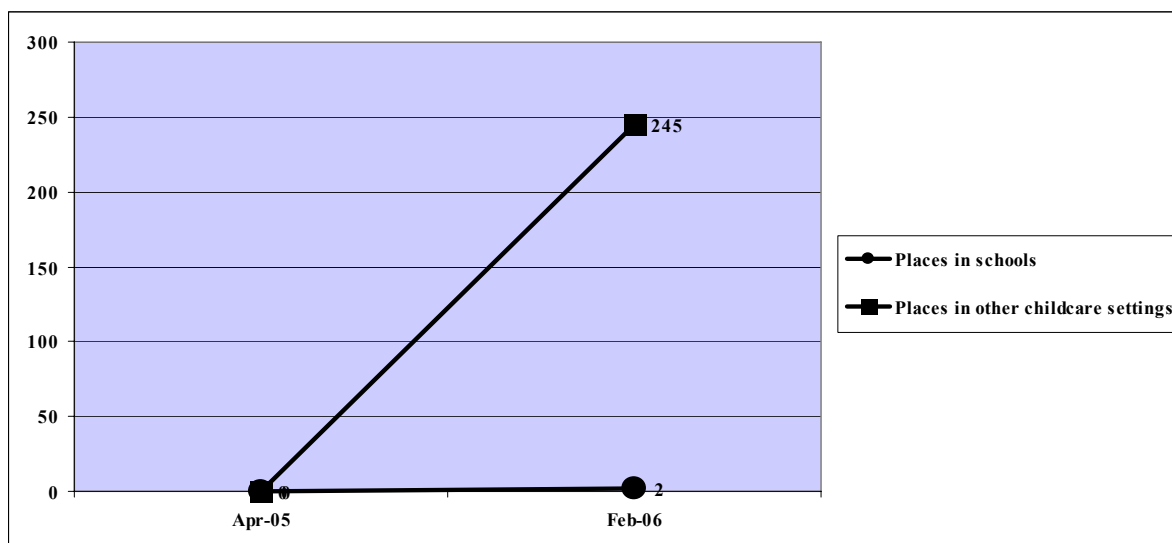
		New Places	Existing Places	Total Places Taken Up
<b>Fife</b>	Places in schools	12	0	12
	Other childcare settings	0	0	0
<b>Aberdeenshire</b>	Places in schools	2	93	95
	Other childcare settings	245	311	556

Source: *Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Fife and Aberdeenshire)*

Note: the data for Fife shows that there has been no change in take-up of places since May 2005.

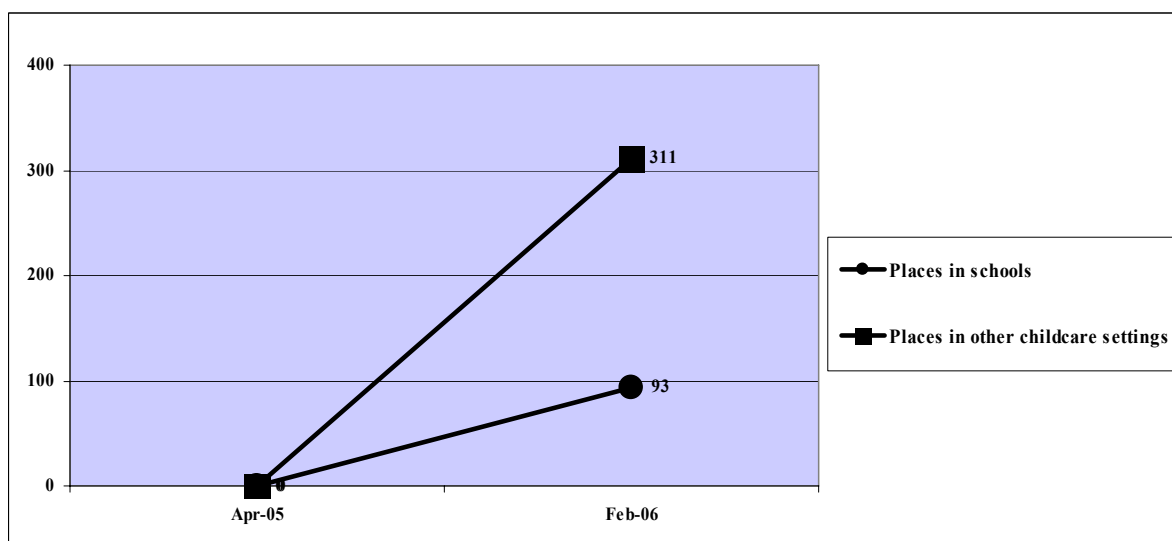
3.12 While there has been no change in the take-up of places in Fife since May 2005, places have been taken-up in Aberdeenshire between May 2005 and the last reporting period in February 2006. **Figures 3.1** and **3.2** present the cumulative take-up of new and existing places over the pilot period. This shows that the majority of *new* places were taken up during July 2005, while the take-up of *existing* places has been much steadier over the entire pilot period.

**Figure 3.1: New childcare places taken up (Aberdeenshire)**



Source: Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Aberdeenshire)

**Figure 3.2: Existing places taken up (Aberdeenshire)**



Source: Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Aberdeenshire)

### *Take-up of new places*

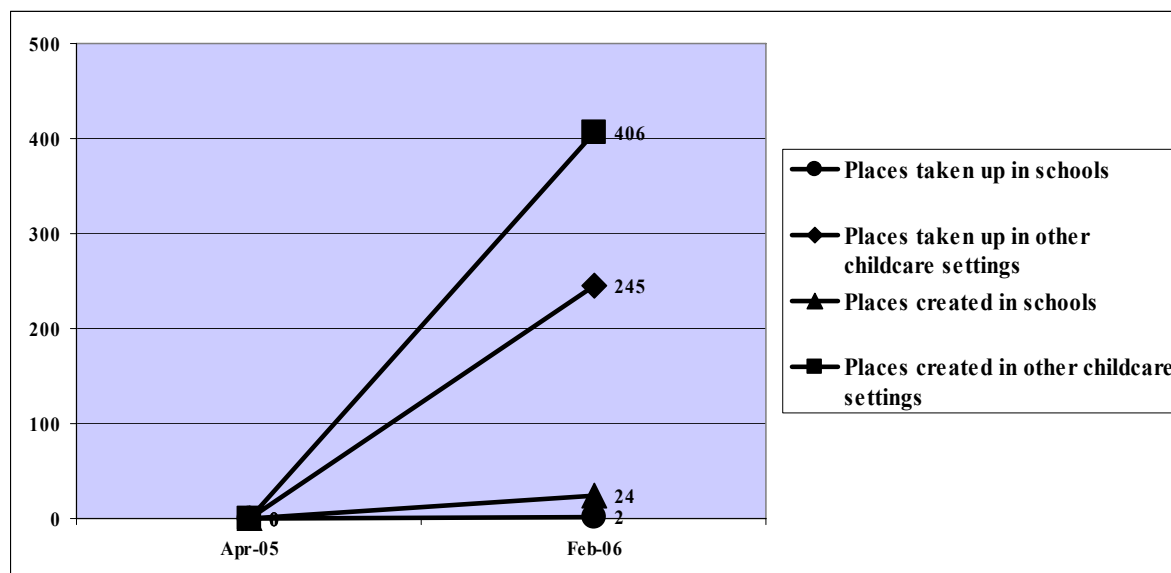
3.13 The MI data on the take-up of the **new** places by lone parents and partners (see **Table 3.5**) suggests that take-up of the new places has been low in Fife (at 25%). In Aberdeenshire, the take-up the new places created in schools has been very low (at 8%) whilst the take-up of places in other settings is much higher at 60%.

**Table 3.5: Take-up of new places**

	New Places Created		New Places Taken Up (by Lone Parents or Partners)		% of New Places Taken Up	
	In schools	In other settings	In schools	In other settings	In schools	In other settings
Fife	48	0	12	0	25%	-
Aberdeenshire	24	406	2	245	8%	60%

3.14 **Figure 3.3** presents the creation and take-up of new places over the course of the pilot period, highlighting the gap between the number of places created and the number taken up.

**Figure 3.3: Childcare places created and taken up (Aberdeenshire)**



Source: Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Aberdeenshire)

### *Take-up by lone parents and partners*

3.15 In the following tables (**Table 3.6** and **3.7**) the take-up of childcare is shown, distinguishing between take-up by lone parents and take-up by partners.

**Table 3.6: Take-up by number of families**

		Children of Lone Parents	Children of Partners
<b>Fife</b>	Places in schools	7	5
<b>Aberdeenshire</b>	Places in schools	32	37

Source: Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Fife and Aberdeenshire)

Note: The data for Fife shows that there has been no change in take-up since May 2005.

**Table 3.7: Take-up by number of children**

		<b>Children of Lone Parents</b>	<b>Children of Partners</b>
<b>Fife</b>	Places in schools	7	5
<b>Aberdeenshire</b>	Places in schools	41	55

*Source: Sure Start MI, February 2006 (Fife and Aberdeenshire)*

*Note: The data for Fife shows that there has been no change in take-up since May 2005.*

3.16 The data suggests that, in Fife, of the twelve families (see **Table 3.5**) who have taken up the childcare, the take-up is by just one child per family. In Aberdeenshire, however, take-up has been by more than one child per family in some cases.

#### ***Take-up by lone parents and referral source***

3.17 There is no quantitative data available detailing the precise number of lone parents who were informed of the pilot by Jobcentre Plus. However, qualitative feedback suggests take-up has been poor. Anecdotal feedback (via steering group meetings and from the Scottish Executive) suggests that Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed “a high number” of lone parents and “almost none were interested in employment or childcare.” Of the lone parents interviewed by Jobcentre Plus advisers, 125 consented to their details being used for the purposes of evaluation. This included 98 lone parents from Fife and 27 from Aberdeenshire. These contact details provided the sample from which lone parents were selected for the purposes of evaluation.

3.18 The MI provides some information on the number of referrals from other (non-Jobcentre Plus) sources in Aberdeenshire. According to the MI, 41 parents have been referred from other sources. The MI for Fife shows that there have been no referrals, however it is more likely to be the case that Fife has not collected any information on referral sources.

#### **Entry to Work by Lone Parents**

3.19 It is not possible to make a robust assessment of the extent to which the availability of formal childcare results into entry to work for lone parents. The available MI **does not provide information on the employment status of the lone parents or partners**, and therefore, it is **not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the impact** of the availability of childcare places on employment status from the monitoring information collected.

3.20 Provision in Fife had only been running for a short period before the pilot ended and initial uptake was slow. There was therefore insufficient time to assess the effects of Extended Hours and weekend childcare on lone parent movements into work.

3.21 Qualitative evidence suggests moves into employment as a result of the pilot are very low. Of the 41 lone parents interviewed as part of the Strand Two fieldwork, just seven lone parents were in employment (see **Table 3.8**). Of these seven:

- five lone parents were working part-time for between 4 and 21 hours per week
- two lone parents were in full-time employment.

**Table 3.8: Employment Status and Childcare Use**

	<b>Part-time</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>No. of LPs in work</b>	5	2	7
<b>No of LPs using formal CC</b>	2	1	3
<b>No of LPs using informal CC</b>	2	1	3
<b>No of LPs using mix formal and informal</b>	1	0	1

3.22 Of the five lone parents working part-time, there was an even split between parents using formal and informal childcare:

- two lone parents were using ‘formal’ childcare (nursery and school)
- two relied on informal childcare and were using family members to care for their child
- one lone parent used a patchwork of formal and informal childcare (nursery provision and the child’s father) to enable her to work 21 hours per week in a call centre.

3.23 Of the two lone parents working full-time, one was using informal childcare whilst the other relied on formal childcare to enable her to work as a social worker.

3.24 Three of the seven lone parents in employment relied on informal childcare. As such, their moves into work cannot be attributed to the Extended School Childcare Pilot.

3.25 Four lone parents were using formal childcare. For three of these, the availability of formal childcare was clearly linked to their ability to take up employment. For one lone parent the availability of formal weekend childcare has been fundamental to her ability to work. Entry to work for this lone parent can therefore be directly attributed to the pilot.

**Table 3.9: Case Study Example**

Julie is a lone parent of three children. She works in the social work field in the arena of mental health. She has been working full-time for about 4 months and her children attend the weekend provision in Fife on a Saturday. Julie is clear that her transition from part-time to full-time employment is due to the availability of childcare over the weekend. Her job requires weekend working and she had encountered problems finding a childminder that would be prepared to take all three of her children and on a weekend.

*“I couldn’t have taken this job without the weekend provision. My worst fear was not finding childcare. I really rely on it. It’s fantastic.”*

Julie worries the provision may shut down. She also has some concerns about the cost. Fees have increased recently which means she is paying £75 for all three of her children to attend on a Saturday.

## Additional Outcomes

3.26 A number of additional outcomes from the pilot can be evidenced. These relate to:

- **improved relationships within respective organisations.** Through delivery of the pilot, stakeholders within the Local Authority felt they had improved their relationship with staff from Jobcentre Plus and vice versa. The development of this relationship provides a strong signal of an improved understanding in ‘connecting’ the childcare and movement into work issue in the future;
- **increased/improved availability of childcare for non-lone parents.** Clearly, it would not have been cost effective to develop childcare specifically for lone parents. Hence, any childcare available or newly created through the pilot was available for all parents regardless of status. Feedback from a small number of non-lone parents who used the new provision created through the pilot showed that they valued the provision and perceived it to be high quality. However, the issue of deadweight emerges here. Non-target parents are benefiting from the provision that is subsidised from pilot monies and that was developed to try and address the issue of affordability for lone parents in receipt of Income Support (see Example One below). This may suggest that different charging mechanisms should be in place for non-target group parents when pilot monies are used to subsidise provision.

**Table 3.10: Case study examples from non-lone parents**

<b>Example One: Non-Lone Parent using activity-based post 12 provision</b>
<p>Marion is 42. She is married with two children, one aged 12 and the other 14. Marion has recently completed a degree in fine art and works part-time 20 hours per week as an artist. Her husband works off-shore and on a shift basis. He helps her out with childcare when he comes home but the rest of the time Marion balances her work commitments with her parental responsibilities by working during school hours and using the activity-based After School Club outside of school hours.</p> <p>Marion had heard about the club via word of mouth as one of her friends was running it. Views of the club were largely positive:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Childcare wasn’t something I was prepared to compromise on. The kids really enjoyed it. They were interested in the activities. It’s affordable, very cheap. It only costs £1 per session [subsidised activity-based provision].”</i></p> <p>The only issue raised was that of location, with Marion having to make a ten-mile round trip to drop off and collect her children.</p>
<b>Example Two: Non-Lone Parents using weekend provision</b>
<p>Alice and Louisa both used the weekend provision. Alice has two jobs, one during the week and one on Saturdays. Louisa works in a shop on a Saturday. Both parents use the provision because there is nothing else available at the weekend. Louisa is clear that the availability of weekend childcare is paramount when working in retail.</p> <p>Both parents had positive views of the provision:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“My son loves it and really wants to go.”</i>  <i>“It provides a lot of things for children to do.”</i></p> <p>Cost was a concern in relation to the weekend provision:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I find it [registered weekend provision] quite expensive.”</i></p>



## Summary

3.27 A key outcome from the pilot has been the development of childcare through sustaining existing places and the creation of new and innovative forms of additional provision. Positive outcomes have also been achieved in terms of improved links between Jobcentre Plus and the Local Authority. Nevertheless, key outcomes in terms of take-up of formal childcare by lone parents and subsequent entry into work have been poor. The reasons for such modest outcomes are explored further in the following four sections where we assess the supply and demand-side factors impacting on delivery and take-up, categorise lone parents into types and explore the extent to which the barrier of childcare has been removed.



## CHAPTER FOUR: SUPPLY–SIDE FACTORS

**Table 4.1: Summary of Key Points**

- The research identified a wide range of supply-side factors confronting pilot areas when developing childcare to meet the aims of the pilot. These included challenges such as:
  - sourcing venues to accommodate provision;
  - ensuring premises complied with Care Commission requirements;
  - the ability to staff provision because of problems recruiting staff to work atypical hours and shifting parental demands for childcare;
  - the insufficient timescale to develop forms of childcare that were sustainable once the funding received from the pilot came to an end;
  - ensuring that the provision developed was affordable. This meant subsidising non-registered childcare in the case of Aberdeenshire and/or addressing limitations in the tax credit system as the funding route to registered childcare in both areas;
  - encouraging parents to try out provision in order to alleviate anxieties that their child would be safe and happy when parents returned to/ entered work;
  - developing flexible approaches to childcare fee rates so that parents were charged differing rates depending on their level of use (hourly, daily, half-daily rates);
  - the location of childcare to ensure that provision was both accessible for lone parents and relevant to the labour market opportunities available;
  - transport constraints, to enable sitters to get to rural locations where parents reside (Aberdeenshire) or to transport children to different provider locations offering childcare at differing times of the day (Fife);
  - managing the number and range of hours of childcare required, leading to difficulties in terms of filling vacancies and co-ordinating catering;
  - developing innovative and activity-based provision to suit the needs of older age children.

### Introduction

4.1 In this section we highlight a range of supply-side factors that have emerged through developing childcare in response to the pilot. However, it is important to point out that provision was still in its infancy in some areas at the time fieldwork was conducted. Several of the issues presented may well be *perceived* rather than *actual* constraints experienced, or they may indicate short-term ‘teething problems’ which would be rectified in the medium-term.

#### 4.2 Supply-side factors that emerged through case study consultations included:

- availability of venues
- ability to staff provision
- sustainability
- funding and the child tax credit
- location
- transport
- hours required
- youth and childcare.

#### Availability of Venues

#### 4.3 Sourcing venues to house new provision caused a range of difficulties for pilot areas. This relates to:

- head teacher reluctance to house provision – it was highlighted that head teachers can be reluctant to accommodate childcare provision because of concerns that this will impose additional burdens and management responsibilities on the school:

*“Head teachers are fearful because they think it’s added responsibility for them, which isn’t the case, that’s our (Local Authority) role”*

- **lack of space in schools** – both areas initially intended that some of the provision developed in response to the pilot would be based within local schools. However, this proved difficult as schools did not have the space available to accommodate childcare provision (consistently in the same place over a five day period):

*“We’ve always had difficulty in trying to secure venues in schools, not all schools, but we have had a fight on our hands these past six years. Sometimes it’s because there is simply no space.”*

*“Schools weren’t able to accommodate us.”*

*“We wanted it [provision] in the primary school but the school is full... And it means a whole day, so a school has to give up a classroom for a full day, every day.”*

- **lack of space in community venues** – similar issues emerged when sourcing alternative premises to house provision such as community halls and adult learning facilities. Rooms were not available on a regular basis during the time periods required:

*“Community centres don’t have the rooms free either.”*

*“We tried to use community venues, the problem being we can’t get five days a week. We can get them for three days in one place and two in another but that’s not ideal.”*

- **compliance with Care Commission requirements** – even where community premises were available, these often did not comply with Care Commission requirements. This meant that some of what was available could not be used for childcare, or that substantial investment (time and money) was needed to ensure the venue was of the required standard. This explains the time taken to establish childcare in Fife in particular;

*“We needed to bring venues up to standard. We are duty bound to use our own Works Department. The Works Department are being very helpful in what can be a very slow process.”*

4.4 Taken together, these issues highlight the need to ensure that the lead-in time to develop childcare is sufficient and realistic and that venues can be sourced which will offer consistent provision of the necessary quality.

### **Ability to Staff Provision**

4.5 Both areas highlighted a range of issues in terms of staffing provision such as:

- **attracting staff to work atypical hours** – several stakeholders highlighted that it can be difficult to attract staff to work atypical hours (early mornings, evenings and weekends)
- **geographical issues** – finding staff willing to work in diverse rural locations can be difficult, as knowledge of the area and local transport networks may be poor. This can make it difficult for staff to get to the area where they are required to work and provide Sitter Services, for example
- **attracting suitably qualified staff** – recruiting staff with an appropriate level of qualifications and training emerged as a key issue for some stakeholders. Although both Local Authorities had programmes in place to train staff, some providers felt that the requirement for staff training could deter potential recruits from entering the profession:

*“The requirement to have half of all staff qualified can be a barrier, especially for older women who typically approach us. Our main concern in recruiting is that applicants have experience of looking after children and the right attitude. If they then wish to train, they are encouraged to do so.”*

- **balancing the need to recruit quality staff with the need to get provision up and running** in time for parents who need to access it can cause tensions. Interviewing, selecting and subjecting staff to disclosure procedures all takes time. This can mean provision is not ready (because staff are not in place) when parents need to access it;

- **shifting parental demands for atypical provision making staffing difficult** – parental demands for childcare can change, especially when parents work irregular shift patterns. This can make staffing difficult for providers. This issue becomes exacerbated when a core number of childcare places need to be filled for the business/provision to be viable;
- **job insecurity** – stakeholders endeavoured to resolve some of these issues by employing staff on casual contracts or through relief work. However, there is concern that this imposes additional problems in terms of staff retention, as casual contracts offer little in the way of job security.

*“We haven’t been short of applicants. It’s just the time and the process. You’ve got to get the timing right. It’s crucial and not an easy one to resolve. We sent out fliers to existing staff asking if anyone would be able to do relief work until we had recruited more staff... We need to advertise for more staff, then you need to interview staff and wait for disclosures and that takes quite a bit of time.”*

## **Sustainability**

4.6 Developing childcare that could be sustained following the pilot was highlighted as a key difficulty. This was because it was felt that the pilot duration was simply not long enough for the issue of sustainability to be adequately addressed. Concerns were raised in both areas that provision may cease once the funding from the pilot came to an end:

*“[When the pilot ends], we would have no choice but to close the provision. Obviously, we are not about closing provision and if we could source the funding elsewhere we would. But we do need money to keep it open.”*

4.7 Moreover, some stakeholders had concerns about continuing to strategically and systematically market provision in the latter months of the pilot. This was due to concern that this would ‘send the wrong message to parents’ who may well be let down should childcare be forced to close:

*“The sustainability issue is a big, big problem because if lone parents go and take up a job, they want to know that the childcare is sustainable so they can stay in that job. They don’t want to start the job and a few weeks later find that the childcare isn’t there.”*

## **Funding and the Child Tax Credit**

4.8 Both areas were conscious of the need to ensure that the childcare developed was affordable. As highlighted in **Section Two**, the issue of affordability was addressed in different ways depending on whether or not the childcare was registered or non-registered.

4.9 Where it is registered, working parents can access the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. On top of that, other subsidies are offered. For example, Fife has a local scheme to further subsidise out of school care.

4.10 Where childcare is not registered (as was the case with the post-12 activity provision in Aberdeenshire) parents are not eligible to claim child tax credits. Therefore, pilot monies were used to subsidise provision to ensure that it was affordable for parents.

4.11 In addressing issues of affordability, several key issues emerged that are explored below.

### ***Subsidising Non-Registered Childcare***

4.12 The fact that Aberdeenshire had to subsidise the costs of new childcare because the provision was not registered has implications for future sustainability. This is because monies to sustain provision will need to be sourced from alternative sources once the pilot comes to an end.

### ***Assisting Parents until Child Tax Credit are Received***

4.13 The fact that registered childcare is made more affordable through the Government's system of tax credits raised some issues. These centred on the need to develop short-term strategies to assist parents with childcare costs in the intervening period until child tax credits are received. This is important since some childcare providers require that fees are paid in advance.

4.14 Strategies developed to address this included the Local Authority developing flexible strategies to help parents with the costs and the Jobcentre providing short-term assistance via the Advisor Discretionary Fund:

*“parents get Working Tax Credit for childcare but there is a gap when people start work and private nurseries, childminders want a month up front and they're [parents] not going to get the money from the Inland Revenue for some time. So that can be a barrier.”*

*“It can take a month to six weeks to even get their award. In that time, the job has started, they've had to buy new clothes.”*

### ***Raising Awareness of Tax Credits***

4.15 There is a need to reassure parents about issues of affordability. Some Local Authority stakeholders felt that parents are not always aware of tax credits and the fact that interim assistance can be provided. There is concern that parents do not trust the tax credit system because of perceptions that they may have to repay monies incorrectly allocated (this is explained further in the following section).

4.16 Some stakeholders felt that alleviating parents' concerns around tax credits should be the role of Jobcentre Plus:

*“Parents will ring up and say - ‘I don’t get my money for another month. They want a huge deposit and I can’t do it so I can’t take the job.’ - Only Jobcentre Plus can feed out that information. We can advertise all we like to encourage lone parents to come in the door but the people who have actually got lone parents in their hands are Jobcentre Plus.”*

### ***Opportunities to Try Out Provision***

4.17 Several stakeholders highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for parents to try out provision. This enables them to be confident that their child is safe and happy when they go out to work.

4.18 The pilot areas provided opportunities for parents to experience childcare provision through childcare tasters, open evenings and encouraging them to visit provider premises.

4.19 However, parents, particularly those who have been out of work for some time, can have a deep-rooted mistrust of formal childcare provision that can take time to overcome. This is a difficult issue to tackle when monies to support the costs of registered childcare are only available for working parents and has implications for the extent to which childcare can act as the ‘push’ rather than ‘pull’ into work<sup>10</sup>.

4.20 The current situation presents a potential vicious circle. Parents may be reluctant to enter work because of concerns that their child will not settle with a childcare provider. However, parents may not be able to afford to pay for their child to become accustomed to the childcare before they enter work because they can only claim financial assistance through child tax credit if they are working.

---

<sup>10</sup> Free half-time nursery places have existed in Scotland since 2002 for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents want one. However, parents have to fund childcare for children outside of this age range.



4.21 In this way, whilst childcare developed through the pilot may help parents who have already made the decision to enter work and are looking for childcare to enable them to do that (work is the catalyst to childcare = pull), it perhaps does not help the reverse (childcare as catalyst to work = push).

### ***Charging for Childcare Received***

4.22 Local Authorities also tackled issues of affordability through offering differing charge out rates, a daily rate, half-day rate and hourly rate. Whilst beneficial for parents, this can cause difficulties for providers balancing the need to provide flexible childcare to meet parents' requirements and developing a viable and sustainable business.

### ***Supply-side versus Demand-side Funding***

4.23 Some providers highlighted that they had suffered from the Government's shift to demand-led funding (child tax credits). This is because, in endeavouring to be flexible, they permitted parents to use the childcare until the tax credits came through, only to be let down, in some cases, when parents did not pay for the childcare received or dropped out of work. This has implications for the extent to which suppliers of childcare are willing to focus on low income parents.

### **Location**

4.24 Ensuring that provision is suitably located to meet the needs of parents is a key issue to be addressed in developing the supply of childcare.

4.25 The location of childcare presented a key challenge in Aberdeenshire due to the size and rurality of the county. Aberdeenshire addressed this through enhancing its Sitter Services. This approach afforded a means of providing flexible childcare to meet the needs of parents, including those working atypical hours, in a cost effective way.

4.26 In Fife, a number of implications emerged regarding the location of newly created childcare but not existing childcare.

4.27 Concerns were raised by some stakeholders (Jobcentre Plus advisors and providers) that the location of newly developed childcare was not in the right place. This related to its accessibility for lone parents and the employment opportunities available.

4.28 This is perhaps not surprising given that the Local Authority had to balance competing demands and tackle a range of obstacles in developing new provision, including:

- finding suitable and available premises
- developing registered childcare which is time-consuming and costly
- addressing issues of supply to ensure that places created could be filled
- balancing the demand for childcare for all parents with the specific demands of one parent families
- balancing the need to get Extended Hours childcare up and running with the need to place this in areas where there was a high concentration of lone parents and labour market vacancies.

## **Transport**

4.29 A further factor affecting the supply of childcare was that of transporting children to and from differing types of provision.

4.30 Differing types of childcare, such as After School clubs and evening provision, may well not be located at the same venue. Therefore, consideration needs to be given as to how children can be transported from one childcare venue to another.

4.31 In the pilot, this issue was resolved by staff from the 3-6pm provision meeting the children at school and walking, or bussing them, to the venue, or by taxiing children from a number of schools to an After School Club.

4.32 However, at the time of fieldwork there was some concern that this issue had not been fully resolved in relation to out of hours provision running from 6pm-9pm in Fife.

4.33 The 6-9pm provision was based in the same venue as provision running between the hours of 3-6pm. Therefore parents could potentially leave their child with that provider between the hours of 3pm and 9pm. However, at the time interviews were undertaken, the 3-6pm session was running at full capacity whilst the 6-9pm session was not. This meant that potentially any new parents wishing to use provision between the hours of 3pm to 9pm would have to find an alternative provider between the hours of 3-6pm and then find a means of getting the child across to the 6-9pm provision.

4.34 Whilst the need to transport children from other After School Clubs to the Extended Hours venue had not occurred at the time the interviews were undertaken, there was some concern that this issue may transpire in the future or could already be adversely affecting take-up of the 6-9pm service. The LA were aware of this issue and had plans to extend the number of 3-6pm provision to overcome this.

## Hours Required

4.35 Two key issues emerged with regards to the hours of childcare required.

### *Flexibility of Hours Required*

4.36 The first relates to the issue of flexibility and the difficulties this causes for childcare suppliers. In developing childcare, Local Authorities have endeavoured to ensure that the childcare offered can be flexible to meet the diverse and shifting needs of parents.

4.37 However, shifting parental demands for childcare, (the number of hours and sessions required) not only causes problems for providers in relation to staffing as outlined above, but also in terms of:

- **managing vacant places.** Some parents may only require additional hours childcare from say, 6pm until 7pm on odd days because, for example, they are required to work late. Parents using additional hours childcare as a ‘buffer’ or safeguard on odd occasions causes tensions for providers in terms of managing/juggling the number of places they have available for other parents.
- **determining the number of hot meals required** – the changing needs of parents can also pose additional practical difficulties. An example was cited from one provider where meals had to be ordered a day in advance from the school. This causes difficulties when parents use the childcare at short notice.

### *Number of Hours Required*

4.38 The second issue relates to the length of time children are placed in the care of others. Potentially, if lone parents of school-age children work evening or late night shift patterns, then their child could be in childcare from nine in the morning (whilst at school) until late in the evening (with an Extended Hours provider or Sitter). Local Authority staff were highly sensitive to this issue and in Fife they had employed a range of strategies to address it:

- by ensuring that childcare provision running at different periods of the day comprises differing programmes of activity
- by employing a system of checks and balances to ensure that a child did not continually remain in childcare for long periods.

*“We change the care after 6pm; it’s a completely different programme. You wouldn’t want a child in school from early in the morning until nine/ten o’clock at night. We are monitoring that very closely. The Care Commission are hooked on that issue as well. We have to see how the new provision is going to work and take it from there.”*

## **Youth and Childcare**

4.39 Developing childcare for older age children requires a different response and type/supply of provision than that required for younger children.

4.40 In both pilot areas the difficulties of providing childcare that was attractive to older children (i.e. those age 12 or above) emerged as a key tension. It can be difficult to encourage children to attend After School Clubs for example, as they consider themselves ‘too old’ or because they ‘don’t like school’ and therefore don’t want to attend beyond the required school day.

4.41 Focusing on lone parents with children aged 12 and over, Aberdeenshire recognised this was a key area that needed to be addressed when developing new provision in response to the pilot. They therefore went down the route of developing activity-based ‘care’ such as recreational and sporting activities.

## **Summary**

4.42 A range of issues emerged in relation to the supply of childcare. These related to the availability of venues, the ability to staff provision, sustainability, funding and tax credits, location, transport, range of hours required and the age of the child.

4.43 Such issues demonstrate the complexity of considerations that need to be taken into account in developing childcare as part of the pilot. Both areas have worked hard to develop childcare in the light of the obstacles and challenging timescales they faced.

4.44 It must be acknowledged that the LAs participating were championing the concept of extended hours and activity-based childcare. In pioneering such unique provision it is inevitable that teething problems will be encountered along the way. The issues raised in this report should therefore be considered in context. This was a pilot and both providers were testing out unique ways of responding to acknowledged gaps in childcare.

4.45 In addition to the supply-side factors discussed, there are a range of demand-side factors that have affected take-up of the provision developed. These are explored in the following section.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DEMAND–SIDE FACTORS

**Table 5.1: Summary of Key Points**

- The research revealed a wide range of demand-side factors affecting lone parents' decisions around work and childcare. These included:
  - **Economic factors** such as employment levels and job opportunities in the area; the extent of employer flexibility where parents were required to undertake shift work; the extent to which work was considered a financially viable option; and concerns regarding the tax credit system;
  - **Childcare factors** such as a preference for informal as opposed to formal childcare provision; mistrust of formal childcare; preference to act as the main care giver for their own children; concern that shift work would require their child to be in childcare during unsociable hours or for long periods; and changing preferences for childcare depending on the age of their child;
  - **Parent factors** for instance, low self-esteem/ lack of confidence; low level skills/qualifications; anticipated difficulties that may occur should the parent enter work; and health issues;
  - **Child factors** for example, lack of desire to enter work until the child was of school-age or able to get between home and school independently; and the child having additional support needs which resulted in the parent being more reluctant to take up work or unable to find childcare provision that could accommodate the child's needs;
  - **Logistical factors** such as transport constraints, limited awareness of the childcare available, level of trust and extent of contact between a lone parent and Jobcentre Plus advisor through which parental obstacles to entering and sustaining work can be addressed; and the fact that parents can choose whether or not they wish to enter employment.
- Given the wide range of factors affecting lone parents' attitudes towards work and childcare, it must be acknowledged that managing the transition into work can be difficult and stressful. It takes time and support to aid lone parents back into the labour market.
- The evidence suggests that there are a number of complex and diverse challenges affecting lone parents' decisions to enter work and take up childcare that are often interlinked.

### Introduction

5.1 In this section we highlight the range of **demand-side factors** that have a bearing on the pilots by exploring the factors that may influence lone parents' decisions about whether or not to enter work and/or take up the childcare developed via the pilot.

5.2 The research shows that there are a wide range of demand-side issues that influence lone parents' views about work and childcare. Factors emerging during consultations with lone parents and other stakeholders have been grouped under the following categories:

- economic factors
- childcare factors
- parent factors
- child factors
- logistical/process factors.

### **Economic Factors**

5.3 The research identified four key economic factors that influence lone parents' decisions to (re)enter the labour market:

- employment levels/opportunities
- employer flexibility
- making work pay
- perceptions of tax credits.

### ***Employment Levels/Opportunities***

5.4 The first factor relates to employment levels and the labour market opportunities available.

5.5 Several of the lone parents interviewed felt that there was a lack of suitable job vacancies in their local area. The research suggests that, in both areas, much of the work available is unskilled and /or shift work:

*“There is a lot of retail and call centre work in the area.” Jobcentre Plus Advisors*

*“A lot of the jobs these people are going for are not highly paid jobs, many of them are retail, many of them are unskilled, entry level jobs. They don't come with high wages.” Jobcentre Plus Advisors*

5.6 The research evidence suggests that lone parents can be reluctant to undertake shift work because the hours required do not easily enable them to balance work and family commitments. Preferences to work part-time and during school hours were common amongst the lone parents interviewed. In addition, some parents were disinclined to be away from their children if that meant taking up low skilled jobs:

*“I would want day work and wouldn't be prepared to work evenings or weekends.” Lone Parent*

*“I wouldn’t want to work full-time.” Lone Parent*

*“I’d need a job with hours that suit the family.” Lone Parent*

*“I worked in a sewing factory previously. I hated it, just stuck in a factory all day y’know.”*

*“I need work that fits in with the childcare available. There’s retail work but it’s anti-social hours so that restricts me from getting work.”*

5.7 Parental preferences for employment during school hours were corroborated by feedback from Jobcentre Plus Advisors:

*“Lone parents want to work between the hours of 10 and 3. These jobs don’t come up very often and when they do they go quickly.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor*

5.8 Thus, the emerging evidence suggests that although the pilot areas endeavoured to develop out of hours childcare to match the labour market opportunities available, many lone parents are not willing to work unconventional hours or hours which do not ‘fit’ with the typical school day.

5.9 Moreover, there is also evidence to suggest that where lone parents have considered weekend work, they still *perceive* that there is no childcare available to enable them to take up the opportunity:

*“I was recently offered a job that involved working every Saturday. The local childminder does not want to work every Saturday and I had no other childcare options available. So I couldn’t take the job and had to look for another one. It is difficult for me as I am looking for hairdressing work and you often have to work on a Saturday.”*

5.10 This could indicate an information deficit (i.e. that lone parents are not being given sufficient information about the childcare available) or it could be that lone parents are not proactively seeking out information. It could be that lone parents cite lack of childcare as the barrier to work because this is considered more ‘socially acceptable’ when, in fact, other factors are also influencing their decision (such as a preference to be at home with their child). This issue is explored further in **Chapter Six**.

### ***Employer Flexibility***

5.11 The extent of employer flexibility was also a factor affecting lone parents’ ability to enter work.

5.12 Feedback from Jobcentre Plus advisors indicated that a lack of employer flexibility regarding shift patterns caused difficulties for lone parents. This hindered them in balancing the challenges of unconventional shift patterns with the challenges of finding similarly flexible childcare arrangements. In addition, it was also highlighted that employers, particularly those offering seasonal work, often do not inform workers of shift patterns sufficiently in advance for them to be able to arrange childcare to meet the differing hours allocated on a week by week basis.

*“Give us more flexitime so we can choose the hours so we can work for an employer without feeling like a burden.” Lone Parent*

*“I want to work 9-3. Some employers will not give you the school holidays off and obviously you don’t get paid for that. You need someone [employer] who can be flexible around your childcare.” Lone Parent*

### ***Making Work Pay***

5.13 A key concern for lone parents, as indicated in the interviews with them and with the Jobcentre Plus advisors, was the extent to which ‘work pays’ and is therefore considered a financially viable option (i.e. to make work financially more attractive than receiving benefits).

5.14 Several stakeholders commented that ‘better-off’ calculations can reveal little difference in terms of income levels compared to benefit payments. This can reduce the incentive for lone parents to work and limit their willingness to tackle the range of other obstacles experienced in re-entering the labour market (such as ensuring their child is happy in childcare, starting a new job):

*“I would need a job of at least 16 hours a week – preferably 20-24 hours a week. If the hours are less, it wouldn’t be financially worthwhile to put the children into childcare.” Lone Parent*

*“The work available is seasonal work. I’m not sure how this would affect all my benefits when it’s only for a short period.” Lone Parent*

*“I’d lose my housing benefit if I took up work.” Lone Parent*

*“If I work then I have to pay full rent and council tax, lose the free school meals and the bus fares. I’ll be about £30 a week worse off when I work.” Lone Parent*

*“Working 16 hours a week means I am no better off. You then have to add in costs to get to work because there are no jobs locally.” Lone Parent*



5.15 Jobcentre Plus advisors also highlighted that the removal of other entitlements available to benefit recipients, further reduces the extent to which work pays. For example, when lone parents enter work and stop claiming benefits, free school meals stop too, which means parents have to find a job that covers the costs of school meals on top of other outgoings<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Perceptions of Tax Credits***

5.16 A further factor influencing lone parents' decisions to enter work was concern over the tax credit system. Some lone parents were sceptical of the system because of media, or word of mouth, reports that they may be given money they were not entitled to and that they would have to repay at a later date:

*"I don't trust the credit system. My mum and brother were overpaid and then had to pay some back. I don't want to get into that situation."* Lone Parent

### **Childcare Factors**

5.17 The research indicates that there are a range of factors that influence lone parents' decisions around childcare and which, in turn, influence their decisions to enter the labour market. These include:

- **preferences for informal childcare** – Many of the lone parents interviewed indicated a preference for informal childcare networks (relative or friend) because of the perception that this was better for their child. This highlights the need to raise awareness amongst parents of the benefits of good quality formal provision. Some lone parents preferring informal childcare had concerns about the extent to which this could be relied upon when used regularly to enable them to take up work. In particular, concerns were raised about the stability of informal childcare arrangements because they could not afford to pay or reimburse the 'provider' (usually a relative or friend):

*"I've never thought of using any other form of childcare [other than a relative/friend], it's nicer with the family. But obviously, I can't use them all the time and during the holidays."* Lone Parent

*"I think it's much better to leave the children with family members but if you use them all the time you would have to pay them."* Lone Parent

*"What would really make a difference is if there was money available to pay relatives (like grandparents) rather than just registered childminders."* Lone Parent

---

<sup>11</sup> Individuals are still eligible for free school meals if they receive Child Tax Credit, but not Working Tax Credit, and their income is less than £13,910, as assessed by the Inland Revenue, see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/School-Education/18922/16018>

- **trust of formal childcare provision** – limited trust of formal childcare providers, and of childminders and Sitter Services, was evidenced amongst some lone parents. Stakeholders highlighted that parents need time to develop their trust of childcare. This is because concerns over childcare can exacerbate parents’ reservations when starting a new job. This can adversely affect the extent to which they sustain work, particularly in the early days, since they may well have multiple fears to conquer:

*“I wouldn’t use a Sitter Service. I don’t like the idea of leaving my child with a stranger.” Lone Parent*

*“There are two childminders in this area. One, I simply would not use because I don’t trust them, and the other is fully booked. All other childcare is in the town which is not practical for me.” Lone Parent*

*“I wouldn’t feel comfortable leaving my child in a nursery. You hear all these horror stories. I am not keen on leaving them with strangers.” Lone Parent*

*“I only trust family. I wouldn’t leave him with anyone else.” Lone Parent*

*“Parents have to find childcare, then worry about how their child will get to that childcare. They then have to be confident that their child is happy and well cared for in that childcare facility. You need to alleviate their fears because a lot of it is about trust. And they are worrying about all of these things when they start a job as well as how they will cope/adjust to work.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor Manager*

- **preference to be main care giver** – for many of the lone parents interviewed, a preference to be the main care giver was an important factor in shaping parental attitudes towards work and childcare. Such parents considered it their duty and privilege to provide childcare themselves:

*“I want to look after my child myself.” Lone Parent*

*“I want to spend time with my child. He’s only four.” Lone Parent*

*“I would prefer to work at home and then I can be with my kids.” Lone Parent*

*“T’be honest, I didn’t have kids for someone else to bring them up.” Lone Parent*

*“I want to be with my kids. When you are a lone parent you are on your own. You are the only one who is there for them.” Lone Parent*

*“I believe that I should be there for them.” Lone Parent*

- **hours spent in childcare** – the previous section highlighted concerns raised that children could potentially be in childcare for long hours if their parents were employed in shift work. Concerns regarding the effects on their child of working unconventional hours were also raised by lone parents:

*“I would like to go back to working in a nursing home but the shifts aren’t good. I’d have to get my child to the carer by 7.30 am which when you add on travel time would mean getting him up early every day. That worries me.” Lone Parent*

- **availability and cost of childcare during school holidays** – a number of lone parents highlighted the difficulty of sourcing childcare during school holidays. This was also linked to issues of cost, with lone parents expressing concerns about the additional costs incurred for childcare during the school holidays and the interrelationship of this and making work pay;
- **ability to source childcare that matches parental needs and preferences** – for several parents interviewed, the issue was about sourcing childcare that matched their preferences and needs. For example, one lone parent needed childcare for all three of her children aged between 3 and 15 years of age. Her preference was for a childminder but she had been unable to source one who could accommodate all her children across the part-time hours required. In the case of another lone parent, her preference was for an After School Club, but competition for places was high. There were no vacancies in the After School Club attached to the child’s school, and the child had been placed on a waiting list at a neighbouring club;
- **parental preferences towards different forms of childcare depending on the age range of their child** – parents of older age children highlighted the need to ensure that ‘childcare’ was appropriate to the child’s age. However, views concerning what could be deemed ‘appropriate’ were mixed. Some lone parents felt that their children would be reluctant to attend After School Clubs. Alternatively, another lone parent felt that activity-based After School Clubs were appealing to young people and more appropriate than a childminder. This lone parent stated that her child had been refused from an After School Club, because at age 12 he was considered ‘too old’. While some lone parents’ views in this area were often perceptual rather than experiential, they are important to acknowledge as barriers to uptake. In addition, some lone parents highlighted that they had found it hard to source childcare for the pre-5 age-range.

*“I know that my daughter (aged 15) would never go to anything like that (childcare established for over 12s). There is no point in me looking into anything like that because if I signed her up for it, she just wouldn’t go.” Lone Parent*

*“I’d be happy for my daughter (aged 13) to go to an After School Club but I don’t think she would. She’d think she was being babysat and she’s far too old for that.” Lone Parent*

*“My child was not accepted onto the After School Club because he was over 12.” Lone Parent*

*“The kids wouldn’t like it.” Lone Parent*

## Parent Factors

5.18 The research highlights that lone parents' views towards paid employment are also affected by personal factors such as:

- **low self-esteem/confidence** – there was a sense that a lack of self-esteem or low confidence negatively affected lone parents' decisions to enter work:

*“I’ve very little confidence after 14 years in the house.” Lone Parent*

- Jobcentre Plus advisors also highlighted that lone parents, particularly those who have been out of the labour market for some time, have a fear of going out to work. Advisors highlighted the importance of time in building a trusting relationship with parents in order to ‘expose’ these barriers. However, in many cases, it must be acknowledged that such fears would not be disclosed by parents;
- **anticipated constraints** – some lone parents expected problems to occur that would affect their confidence/willingness to enter the labour market. This included transport problems and concerns that they might have to leave work early if their child was ill:

*“I haven’t got a driving licence, so I can’t get to work.” Lone Parent*

*“I’m frightened I’d get the sack because the kids are always getting ill and I might have to stay at home off work.” Lone Parent*

- **health issues** – a small number of lone parents indicated that they could not (re)enter work due to long standing health problems (physical or mental):

*“I have a disability so it’s finding a job which I can actually do.” Lone Parent*

*“I have had a neck injury for four years which prevents me from working.” Lone Parent*

- **low level skills and qualifications** – some lone parents indicated their employment options were limited by a lack of skills or qualifications:

*“It’s hard for single mothers to get back into work, especially with youngsters who have better qualifications. The only thing available seems to be skivvy work.” Lone Parent*

## Child Factors

5.19 Two key child-related factors emerged to influence lone parents' considerations around work.

5.20 The first relates to the child's age or life stage with several lone parents highlighting that they would not wish to return to work until their child has started primary or secondary school.

5.21 The second factor relates to the presence of additional support needs with some children of lone parents requiring specialist forms of childcare. Several of the lone parents and Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed highlighted that a number of children had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or other additional support needs such as Autism. There were concerns:

- that the presence of additional support needs made it difficult for lone parents to enter work because of concerns that they may be called to the school to collect the child at short notice
- that there was little specialised childcare available that could cater for the needs of children with additional support needs.

*“One of the big issues is special needs childcare as well which is very expensive to run so it’s hard to get special needs childcare.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor Manager*

*“A lot of people are coming in and their child’s got this ADHD – that’s going through the roof. I know because I have checked it on the system and the number of records that have come back and said that they can’t take up work and it is a childcare issue because the school phones them everyday to go and collect the child because they’ve been misbehaving.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor Manager*

*“My son has autism and there is no childcare available which will take him on. At times he can be very challenging. I get 6 hours a week respite care from the Autistic Society. You can’t just run out and get a childminder. You need someone who knows what they’re doing. I’ve got to be able to trust the carer.” Lone Parent*

## **Logistical Factors**

5.22 A number of logistical factors also affected the demand for childcare amongst lone parents and their attitudes towards work. These included:

- **transport issues** – this included transport difficulties in terms of the practicalities of transporting children to differing childcare locations and in terms of lone parents travelling to work themselves:

*“I intend to start a college course next year and my mum will look after my son. I have concerns about using other forms of childcare because then I would have to drop one of my children off at one place and then the other at a another location, all before I set off for my course in the morning.” Lone Parent*

*“The After School Club [attached to child’s school] is full and so I have been put on a waiting list at another school. The problem is getting my child from school to the other club.” Lone Parent*

*“Transport to work is the main problem. I don’t drive and the place I work at part-time has been relocated.” Lone Parent*

*“There are no jobs or childcare available locally. My main problem is getting to work in other areas because there is no transport.” Lone Parent*

- **lack of awareness of the childcare available** – during the course of consultations, many lone parents cited childcare barriers that the pilot had specifically sought to overcome. For example, several parents mentioned a lack of childcare during anti-social hours or on a weekend as a barrier to employment. In both the pilot areas, childcare provision has been set up to try and address this issue. Thus in some cases, lone parents’ views of the childcare available were based on *perception* rather than fact
- **availability of ad hoc childcare to attend interviews** – one lone parent highlighted that it could be difficult to source short-term childcare at short notice to enable her to attend job interviews
- **level of trust and extent of contact between the lone parent and Jobcentre Plus advisor** – the fact that Jobcentre Plus advisors see lone parents at different intervals, depending on the type of benefits they claim, affects the extent to which advisors can build up a relationship of trust with the lone parent. As noted above, this affects the extent to which advisors can work with lone parents to break down the barriers they face and thereby encourage take-up of the pilot:

*“You tackle whatever that customer comes in with and the issues they refer to. You may not hit on an issue until you’ve cleared one, so you clear the obstacles as you go along. If childcare is one issue, it’s all the other issues that lead into that, so you’re working through things all the time. That is why it takes so long to get lone parents into work. And that has to be recognised because the lone parent advisors may be working with these people over a long period of time. Childcare might be one barrier but there might be others as well.” Jobcentre Plus Advisor*

- **voluntary nature of the New Deal for Lone Parent (NDLP) programme** – the government’s welfare to work programme for lone parents is voluntary<sup>12</sup>. This means even where levels of trust are established, lone parents still have a choice to decide whether or not they wish to enter work. This inevitably means that some single parents will make an informed choice not to enter work.

---

<sup>12</sup> Lone parents on Income Support may opt to enter into the NDLP programme. Some other New Deal programmes are voluntary.

## Managing the Transition into Work

5.23 Given the range of factors affecting decisions to work described above, the period of transition into work for lone parents can be difficult and stressful. This is because parents are often overcoming diverse and multiple obstacles simultaneously – finding childcare at the same time as finding work, overcoming fears about leaving their child in childcare at the same time as conquering fears about entering the labour market. As Jobcentre Plus stakeholders highlighted, all this takes time and requires that ongoing support is given to lone parents to build up their trust and confidence.

5.24 This might help to explain, in part, the low take-up of childcare provision newly created through the pilot, particularly as:

- **lone parent interviews range in frequency** – which could affect the pace at which advisors are able to build up a relationship with the lone parent to breakdown/dissect the barriers to work and inform them once new childcare provision becomes established
- **awareness of the range of childcare provision available was low** amongst the lone parents consulted.

## Summary

5.25 The evidence presented in this section suggests that there are a number of complex and diverse challenges affecting lone parents' decisions about whether to work and thereby whether or not to use childcare. Often such challenges are interlinked, suggesting that childcare is not a barrier that can be addressed in isolation. Multiple strategies for resolution are required.

5.26 The inter-relationship between childcare and other barriers facing lone parents is explored in further detail in the following section in order to identify and establish whether there are different barriers for different 'types' of lone parents.





## CHAPTER SIX: DIFFERENT BARRIERS FOR DIFFERENT LONE PARENTS

**Table 6.1: Summary of Key Points**

- The lone parents interviewed are categorised according to the typology developed by Bell et al in 2005:
  - Type 1: high orientations to work and high parental childcare orientations
  - Type 2: high orientations to work and low parental childcare orientations
  - Type 3: low orientations to work and high parental childcare orientations
  - Type 4: low orientations to work and low parental childcare orientations
- Categorising lone parents according to this typology shows that around a quarter (11) of the lone parents interviewed fell into the Type 1 category. They wanted to work but also felt strongly compelled to parent their children.
- Two-fifths (16) of the lone parents interviewed fell into the Type 2 category. They were keen to work and keen/willing to use formal (and informal) childcare to enable them to do that.
- Around a third of lone parents (13) fell into the Type 3 category. They were not strongly motivated to work and felt strongly that they should parent their children themselves.
- Only a small number of lone parents (1) fell into the Type 4 category. These lone parents had low motivations to work and were positive about using formal (and informal) childcare.
- Overall, around two-fifths of the lone parents (17) interviewed had a high orientation towards the use of formal childcare and could have benefited from the availability of a childcare ‘guarantee’ and, therefore, the pilot. Lack of awareness and misperception of what childcare was available in their area partly affected lone parents’ decisions about work. There is also evidence that lone parents in these groups had additional barriers that affected their decisions.
- Three-fifths (24) of the lone parents interviewed had strong views that parents should be there to parent their child. Such parents had a preference for parental or informal childcare and a deep-seated mistrust of formal provision. Through its focus on formal childcare, the pilot could not have assisted these lone parents without attempting to change firmly held attitudes on the importance of parental childcare. Attitudes towards childcare were often combined with a range of other barriers that affected decisions around work.

### Introduction

6.1 In the preceding section a number of factors affecting lone parents’ take-up of the pilot were identified. In this section, we explore in further detail the barriers lone parents face and their attitudes towards work and childcare.

6.2 We categorise lone parents into different ‘types’ according to their orientations towards work and childcare in order to assess the extent to which the lack of accessible, affordable childcare constitutes the main barrier to work for lone parents on Income Support.

6.3 In classifying different types of lone parents we have used the typology developed by Bell et al. (2005)<sup>13</sup>. The work of Bell et al. suggested that lone parents’ work and parental childcare orientations could be broadly grouped into four key ‘types’<sup>14</sup> (see **Figure 6.1**). Classifying lone parents into these four types helps to elucidate the extent to which lack of formal childcare is the main barrier to work. As Bell et al. highlight, in reality, lone parents often fall somewhere in the middle of the work/childcare continuum rather than into a discrete category. Parental views towards work and childcare may shift over time.

**Figure 6.1: Typology of Lone Parents**

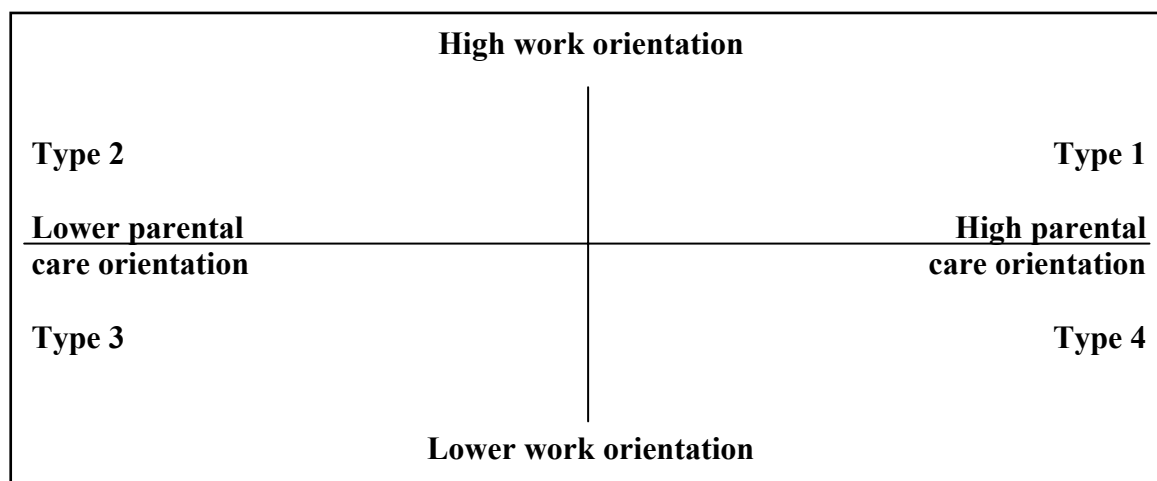


Figure taken from Bell et al. (2005) A Question of Balance, pp28.

6.4 Whilst the descriptions of each type are based on the work of Bell at al. the examples cited by illustration are based on the feedback obtained during the course of our consultations with lone parents:

- **Type 1 (H-H): high work orientation, high parental childcare orientation.** Type 1 lone parents had high orientations to work and a strong inclination to provide childcare for their children themselves i.e. to provide parental childcare. Such parents had aspirations to work but also felt a deep-seated inclination that it was their responsibility to look after their children themselves:

<sup>13</sup> Bell, A., Finch, N., La Valle, I., Sainsbury, R. and Skinner, C. (2005). A Question of Balance: Lone Parents, Childcare and Work. NCSR and York University on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. Research Report 230.

<sup>14</sup> According to Bell et al. (ibid) although lone parents’ orientations towards work and childcare can be broadly grouped into four categories, often lone parents are “situated at some point along a continuum”.

Type 1	
High Work Orientation	High Parental Childcare Orientation
<b>Lone Parent 1</b>	
“I work part-time as a dinner lady at the school my children go to.”	“I didn’t have kids for someone else to bring them up. To be honest I don’t quite believe in childcare.”
<b>Lone Parent 2</b>	
“My mum is retiring this year and I want to go back to work. “	“When you are a lone parent you are on your own, you are the only one there to look after them. When my mum retires she can look after the children. I don’t trust childcare. You hear all sorts of horror stories. I’m not keen on leaving them with strangers.”

- **Type 2 (H-L): high work orientation, low parental childcare orientation.** Type 2 lone parents had high orientations to work and a lower inclination to provide parental childcare. Such parents had aspirations to work and did not necessarily feel compelled to provide full-time childcare themselves; in other words, they were amenable to using formal childcare;

Type 2	
High Work Orientation	Low Parental Childcare Orientation
<b>Lone Parent 3</b>	
“I work part-time at a call centre, 21 hours a week. My daughter goes to school in September and I’m going up to full-time then.”	“My daughter goes to nursery in the mornings. I’ve found she has learned a lot there. Her dad has her some weekends and one evening a week.”
<b>Lone Parent 4</b>	
“I’ve been unemployed about 5 months. I’m looking for work as a carer and have applied for a job 17 hours a week. It’s the shifts that are the problem. I can’t see myself not working. I like care work and it gives me personal satisfaction.”	“My daughter goes to playgroup and nursery. It’s good for her general well-being, education and her social life. I like her to have contact with other children.”

- **Type 3 (L-H): low work orientation, high parental childcare orientation.** Type 3 lone parents had low orientations to work and a strong inclination to provide childcare for their children themselves i.e. to provide parental childcare. Such parents had low aspirations to work and a firmly held belief that it was their responsibility to look after their children;

Type 3	
Low Work Orientation	High Parental Childcare Orientation
<b>Lone Parent 5</b>	
“You may say I’m old fashioned but I don’t think both parents should work. I have a neck injury anyway so I can’t work.”	“I think parents should be there for their kids. When parents are working the kids tend to get involved in vandalism and things.”
<b>Lone Parent 6</b>	
“My son is autistic. He has behavioural problems and needs someone trained in these problems. That is the reason I don’t work”	“He’s my son and my responsibility and I don’t see why someone else should look after him.”

- **Type 4 (L-L): low work orientation, low parental childcare orientation.** Type 4 lone parents had low orientations towards work and a lower inclination to provide parental childcare. Such parents had low aspirations to work but were amenable to using formal childcare.

Type 4	
Low Work Orientation	Low Parental Childcare Orientation
Lone Parent 7	
“My child has problems. I need to be there for him.”	“I don’t think there is anything out there for my child. My advisor says I should try and get work in school hours because there is nothing out there for him.”

## Interview Findings

### *Type 1: High Work and High Parental Childcare*

6.5 Analysis of our consultations with lone parents shows that around a quarter (11) of the lone parents interviewed fell into the Type 1 category.

*“I wouldn’t really use anyone else. I value my time with my kids.”*

6.6 Mistrust of formal childcare was common amongst this group. Parents interviewed had a firmly held belief that only close relatives or friends should look after their children when they were unable to provide parental childcare.

*“I only trust family.”*

6.7 The key issue for this group of lone parents then was finding work that would enable them to balance their parental childcare commitments (to look after the children themselves) and their desire to work. Key concerns or barriers for this group were:

- finding a part-time job or one that fits round school hours
- employer flexibility so that parents could be at home with their children after school and during school holidays
- securing stable informal childcare arrangements such as paying a relative to look after the children
- waiting until the child starts school to look for work then seeking employment round school hours.

6.8 Many of the lone parents interviewed highlighted that they were finding it hard to find a job within school hours only, or that they were waiting until their child had started school.

6.9 However, there were examples where lone parents had found work in schools that enabled them to balance the need to parent their child with the desire to work. Where lone parents were working, typically their jobs were part-time and informal childcare was used.

### ***Does the pilot meet the needs of Type 1 Lone Parents?***

6.10 The Extended Schools Childcare Pilot aims to offer a virtual childcare guarantee for parents that are not in work by ensuring that, as far as possible, if they want to work then there is formal childcare available to help them to do so. However, for Type 1 lone parents the barrier is not the availability of formal childcare but the availability of the types of jobs that will enable them to balance their aspiration to look after the child themselves or address their preference to use informal childcare. In this way, the pilot's aim to provide formal childcare does not resolve the issue for this group. Instead, the pilot would need to have concentrated on *changing* preferences towards parental and informal childcare or addressing the alternative barriers around flexible employment opportunities and financial recompense for informal childcare providers.

### ***Type 2: High Work and Low Parental Childcare***

6.11 Around two-fifths (16) of the lone parents interviewed fell into the Type 2 category. These lone parents were keen to work and had a lesser desire to look after their child themselves. They were content to use formal childcare options and felt that time away from their child could be of mutual benefit to the child and themselves as parents:

*"It makes you a happier parent if you have a life outside of the children and the house. A happy parent is a good parent. It's vanity too, it gives you independence, get out and meet people, earn my own money."* Lone Parent

*"It's important to work to be a positive role model for children."* Lone Parent

*"It's [work] about showing an example to your kids."* Lone Parent

*"I like working. It gives me personal satisfaction. And it's good for my daughter's education and well-being."* Lone Parent

6.12 The key issue for this group of lone parents was finding work and formal childcare. The availability, accessibility and affordability of formal childcare opportunities was therefore of central concern. This can be evidenced through their comments regarding the availability of childcare.

*"You're still snookered for evenings and weekends."* Lone Parent

*"There is childcare [available] but it is expensive. I've heard of tax credits but I'm not sure that they really help."* Lone Parent

*"I'd definitely go back to work if I could find childcare. I've found out about childminders but they are fully booked. My child used to be at a different school and there was an After School Club there. But the one at the school he goes to now is fully booked and we are on the waiting list. I can't risk finding a job and then not finding childcare. You should be able to provisionally book a place at an After School Club so it's there when you get a job."* Lone Parent

*“My advisor has told me about that (tax credits) and I’ve worked out I’d need to work 16 hours or more. I used to be home carer and want to do that again. The problem is the hours. It’s early morning and weekends and you can’t get childcare. There’s nothing at 7 in the morning.” Lone Parent*

*“I’ve been looking for a job since Christmas. I’m after something round school hours. My main concern is childcare in the holidays that is reasonably priced.”*

*“I’m working as a domestic, part-time. I’d like to go back full-time but it is out of the question. In this job you have to be flexible and work outside of normal hours. I can’t find childcare. I just find it so difficult. I’ve contacted childminders but they are either busy, or won’t take all 3 kids, or won’t take them part-time.” Lone Parent*

*“I’ll be about £30 a week worse off working but I still want to do it. I’m desperate to get off benefits. The jobcentre have tried to help me get into retail work. They sent me on a course. I’d never have had the confidence to apply for retail work before. The course helped me. It was brilliant and the jobcentre were really helpful. The problem with retail is that a lot of it is anti-social hours and childcare doesn’t cover evenings and weekends.” Lone Parent*

*“There is no childcare for kids with special needs.” Lone Parent*

6.13 By providing a virtual childcare guarantee, the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot clearly has the potential to assist Type 2 lone parents. Both pilot areas developed new childcare (to complement that already in existence) to address the childcare gaps at evenings and weekends. The feedback obtained from lone parents therefore suggests that there was a lack of awareness of the availability of that provision. Many lone parents had not heard of the Children’s Information Service and were not aware of the provision available in their area. Greater awareness of the existence of childcare was needed to attract this group. The evidence suggests that where lone parents had been advised on childcare in their area, feedback was very positive.

<b>Case Study Example: The experience of a working lone parent</b>
Jessica is 22 and has a 2 year old child. She works part-time, 20 hours per week as a cleaner where she worked full-time before having her child. Jessica talked to her Jobcentre Plus advisor about finding childcare when she wanted to return to work part-time. She found her advisor “brilliant, very helpful” in assisting her to find childcare. Her advisor gave her a phone number for her local CIS and they gave her a list of nurseries, told her what to look for and what to pay. Jessica is clear that she only managed to return to work because of the availability of childcare in her area and because of tax credits.

6.14 However, the evidence also demonstrates that formal childcare was not the only concern or barrier for this group. Feedback from lone parents suggests that a multitude of other barriers needed to be addressed, including:

- parent factors such as the presence of a disability, confidence issues
- child factors such as the presence of additional support needs (e.g. ADHD or Autism) for which the parents interviewed felt there was no formal childcare available

- availability of local jobs or more specifically, suitable jobs, that parents wanted to do or that fit around school hours. Many lone parents expressed a preference for part-time work
- economic factors and the need to make work pay.

*“I need a job I can actually do – it’s not so much confidence or my qualifications. It’s the hours and my illness. I want to work 9-3 and preferably, well it’s whether employers will give you the school holidays off. Obviously, you don’t get paid for that but otherwise you really need someone who’s incredibly flexible for your childcare.” Lone Parent*

*“I’ve been working 21 hours a week and my daughter goes to nursery. She starts school in September and then I’m hoping to work 9-5. I’ll need someone then to pick my daughter up from school and sit with her for a couple of hours.... The cost of childcare isn’t a problem cos the tax credits help. My main problem at the moment is transport. The company I work for has just relocated. So it’s about getting to work and finding childcare for the extra hours.” Lone Parent*

*“I’d love to go back to work. I’d like to work around 16 hours. That way I can work and be with my child. The problem is there are no jobs in this area and working 16 hours a week makes me not better off when you add on travel costs.” Lone Parent*

### ***Does the pilot meet the needs of Type 2 Lone Parents?***

6.15 The key issues for Type 2 lone parents were the availability of suitable jobs (part-time, flexible around school hours and school holidays, location and type of work) and the availability of formal childcare. Given that the availability of childcare is a key issue, the pilot clearly has the potential to assist this group. However, the feedback suggests that several lone parents perceived there to be gaps in childcare or had experienced difficulty in securing provision to meet their circumstances. Potentially, some of the Type 2 lone parents could have benefited from the pilot had they been aware of the provision available. However, the evidence also suggests that it is not just a case of removing the childcare barrier but also addressing other barriers such as confidence and the lack of local labour market opportunities that match parents’ working preferences.

### ***Type 3: Low Work and High Parental Childcare***

6.16 Around a third (13) of the lone parents interviewed fell into the Type 3 category. These lone parents were not strongly motivated to work and considered it their main duty and ‘job’ to look after their child.

**Table 6.2: Case study example – Type 3 lone parent**

Jackie is 41 and has two teenage children. She has been out of work due to a neck injury for four years. Being at home with her children has made her feel it is important to provide parental care. She feels that parents should be at home to listen and support their children. In her view, encouraging lone parents into work could have a negative effect on communities in terms of anti-social behaviour. This is because children do not have a parent at home to discipline them.
--

6.17 Lone parents in this group had a deep mistrust of formal childcare:

*“I want to look after them. They’re my kids so I should look after them.” Lone Parent*

*“I feel very wary of even leaving them with friends.” Lone Parent*

6.18 Lone parents in this group also presented a range of other barriers to work. These were often parent-focused barriers such as the presence of a disability, low self-esteem, confidence and qualifications. Other barriers included:

- **economic factors** such as the financial viability of work – one lone parent, for example, was on the housing list and securing stable housing for her and her children was her main priority:

*“I live in a private let and the rent is steep. Housing benefit pays a lot of the rent. If I was working I’d just be working to pay the bills.” Lone Parent*

*“I would go to work but it’s not worthwhile in terms of money.” Lone Parent*

*“I’ve been on the council housing list for 2 ½ years. I don’t feel like I can get a job until this is organised.” Lone Parent*

- **child factors** such as the presence of additional support needs:

*“My son’s got ADHD. It’s very hard for me to go to interviews and work because I always expect a phone call from his school to say he’s been excluded.” Lone Parent*



***Does the pilot meet the needs of Type 3 Lone Parents?***

6.19 For Type 3 lone parents, the availability, accessibility and affordability of formal childcare did not emerge as the main barrier to work. Therefore, by providing a virtual childcare guarantee the pilot could not address their needs. To assist them, the pilot would need to have concentrated on *changing* firmly held preferences for parental and informal childcare. The key issues to be addressed for this group of lone parents included:

- change attitudes towards childcare for example, by convincing lone parents of the benefits of employment for themselves and their child
- tackle the additional obstacles lone parents face when considering work, such as confidence, housing and the availability of specialised childcare.

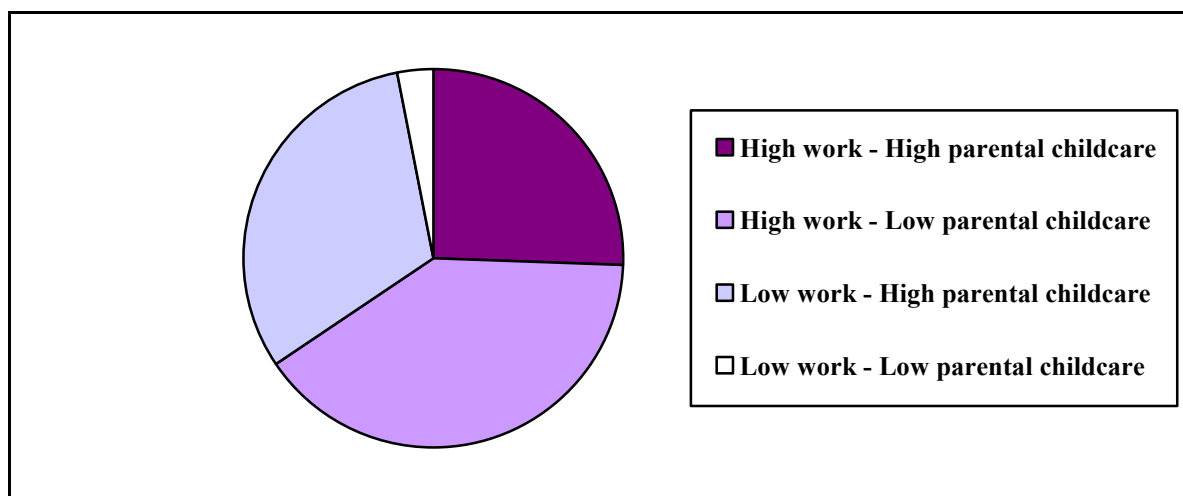
***Type 4: Low Work and Low Parental Childcare***

6.20 Only one of the lone parents interviewed as part of this study fell into the Type 4 category. This lone parent was not motivated to work but did not necessarily feel compelled to provide full-time parental childcare. This lone parent was prepared to use formal childcare. The central issue was that this lone parent was not job-ready.

***Does the pilot meet the needs of Type 4 Lone Parents?***

6.21 Given that lone parents in this group are willing to use formal childcare, the pilot could potentially benefit these lone parents through the removal of the childcare barrier. However, the pilot would also need to have tackled the issue of work readiness and to have changed their attitudes towards work.

**Figure 6.2: Proportion of Lone Parents in each type**



### Removing barriers for Lone Parents disposed to formal childcare

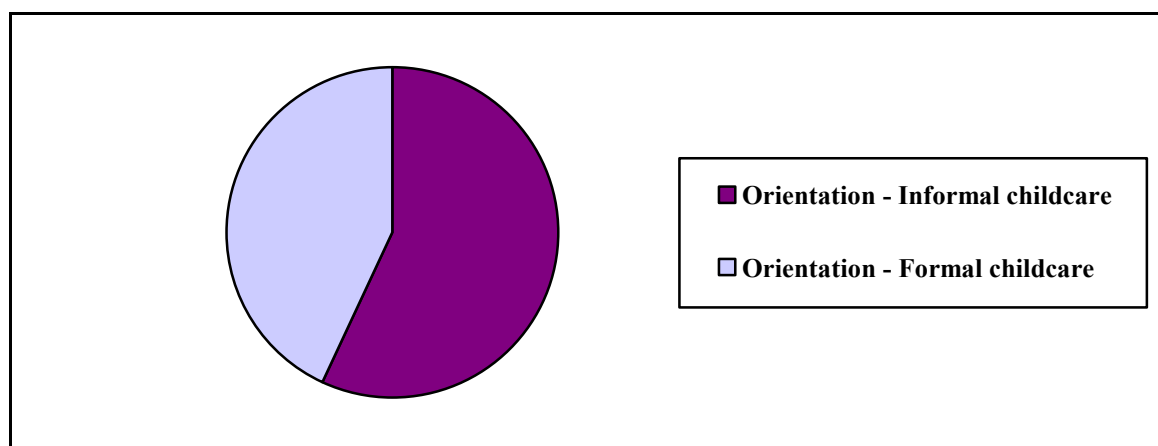
6.22 The evidence suggests that around two-fifths (17) of the lone parents interviewed were willing to use formal childcare and therefore could potentially have benefited from the formal provision available in their area. Feedback from some lone parents suggests they may have entered work if they had been aware that childcare provision existed to meet their needs, particularly the availability of flexible childcare in the evenings, weekends and school holidays.

6.23 However, there is also evidence that the availability of formal childcare was not the only barrier for lone parents and often there was a dearth of what were deemed suitable jobs (part-time, type, economically viable). Removing the childcare barrier was therefore not the only issue to be addressed.

### Removing barriers for Lone Parents disposed to parental childcare

6.24 Around three-fifths (24) of the lone parents interviewed had a deep-seated mistrust of formal childcare and strongly entrenched orientations towards parental childcare. The Extended Schools Childcare Pilot, through its focus on formal childcare, could not have benefited this group without having more targeted support to address and change parents' attitudes towards formal childcare. Even if parental attitudes towards childcare could be changed, the evidence also shows that lone parents faced multiple barriers to work which would also need to be tackled.

**Figure 6.3: Proportion of Lone Parents amenable to formal and informal childcare.**



### Summary

6.25 For some lone parents, the availability of formal childcare emerges as a key barrier to work, whereas for others it does not. Given that the availability of formal childcare was a concern for some of the lone parents interviewed, in the following section we explore the extent to which the pilot was successful in removing that barrier.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: REMOVING THE CHILDCARE BARRIER: ACCESSIBILITY, AFFORDABILITY, QUALITY

**Table 7.1: Summary of Key Points**

- Pilot areas are tackling the issues of providing accessible, affordable and quality childcare provision in different ways.
- In terms of **accessibility**, both areas are offering a wide range of provision to meet differing parental needs that includes innovative approaches to provide childcare that runs outside of conventional working hours and/or to promote activities that are stimulating and attractive to older age children.
- The extent to which the issue of accessibility has been removed varies with concerns being raised in some areas regarding, for example, the accessibility of the childcare location, the type of provision available, and the number of places available for preferred forms of childcare.
- Regarding **affordability**, both areas have addressed the need to ensure childcare is affordable for low income families. This has been achieved, for example, by providing registered childcare for which parents are eligible to funding via the Working Tax Credit, by supplementing this via localised subsidies, or by using pilot monies to pay for provision that is not registered.
- However, a number of issues emerge with regards to affordability. Use of subsidies for non-registered childcare has implications for the extent to which provision can be sustained over the longer-term. There are some limitations concerning the Working Tax Credit (speed of payment and negative perceptions of the system) that may act as barriers to take-up.
- There was a lack of awareness concerning the availability of formal childcare amongst several lone parents.
- In terms of **quality**, much of the provision developed is registered childcare.
- However, provision for the over 12s in Aberdeenshire was not registered. This limits the extent to which the pilot can meet the additional aim to promote the use of formal childcare amongst parents in receipt of the Working Tax Credit that are currently not using registered childcare.
- It must be acknowledged that providing childcare that is accessible, affordable and registered (proxy for quality) is not a straightforward task, particularly as parental preferences for the type of childcare required vary. In addressing such issues, the pilots are inevitably constrained by issues outside of their control, such as the timescale available for the pilot, limitations of the Tax Credit system and parental attitudes towards childcare.

## Introduction

7.1 In this section, the evidence from preceding sections is drawn together to assess the extent to which the pilot areas are removing the barrier of childcare and thereby meeting the pilot's aim to provide 'a virtual childcare guarantee'. This is explored in relation to the extent to which the pilots are addressing issues of:

- accessibility;
- affordability;
- quality.

7.2 The evidence shows clearly that both pilot areas are addressing each of these elements but to varying degrees. This is demonstrated through an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of accessibility, affordability and quality given in **Tables 7.2 to 7.4** below.

## Accessibility

7.3 Through existing and newly established provision, both areas are clearly offering a range of childcare provision for all parents, including single parent families (see **Table 7.2**).

7.4 This includes innovative approaches to provide out of hours, weekend and post-12 provision that is additional to what was available before the pilot and that should provide parents with greater opportunities to undertake shift work or weekend work.

7.5 However, the extent to which the childcare available is considered accessible for lone parents varies. This is for a range of reasons:

- there is some concern that the location of Extended Hours and weekend provision in Fife does not meet the needs of lone parents residing in differing locations of the county or the labour market opportunities available
- there is a perception that transport may be an issue in Fife should lone parents using 3-6pm provision in other clubs wish to access extended hours' childcare available in the 6-9pm provision
- there is some concern that the provision in Fife may not be wholly appropriate to meet the needs of older age children who may be reluctant to take-up traditional forms of *childcare* provision
- there is evidence that the type of provision developed in Aberdeenshire through Sitter Services may not match the childcare preferences of parents
- feedback from lone parents and Jobcentre Plus staff implies a lack of awareness of the differing childcare options available in both areas

- there is a perception that there is a shortage of available childcare in both areas with some (albeit limited) evidence that lone parents have been refused or placed on waiting lists for childcare. Given that Fife and Aberdeenshire’s understanding of the position is that there is not a lack of available childcare, this supports the finding presented in previous sections, that there is a deficit in the information provided on the childcare available. In addition, it could be that the childcare does not fully equate with parents’ needs or preferred choice of childcare.

**Table 7.2: Accessibility: Strengths and Weaknesses**

<b>ABERDEENSHIRE</b>	<b>ABERDEENSHIRE</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide range of pre-existing childcare available</li> <li>• Vacancy post established to provide better, more up-to-date information on childcare places available</li> <li>• Sitter Services enhanced to provide flexible childcare that is available for parents in a location (at home) and at times that match/can be tailored to individual circumstances</li> <li>• Innovative, activity based provision developed to be accessible for older age childcare</li> <li>• Holiday provision enhanced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness amongst lone parents about the varying childcare options available</li> <li>• Concern that the type of childcare available (Sitter Service) does not match the childcare preferences of parents.</li> </ul>
<b>FIFE</b>	<b>FIFE</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide range of pre-existing childcare available</li> <li>• Hours of provision extended to cover the hours of 6pm to 9pm</li> <li>• Weekend provision established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern that the location of newly developed provision may not fully meet the needs of parents in differing locations or reflect the job opportunities available</li> <li>• Perception that transport may be an issue to transfer children from other 3-6 pm clubs onto the 6-9 pm provision</li> <li>• Concern that there may be a gap in provision for older age children</li> </ul>

### **Affordability**

7.6 Both areas have clearly addressed the issue of affordability to ensure that the childcare on offer is affordable for low income families (see **Table 7.3**).

7.7 This has been achieved through:

- the provision of **registered childcare** (all newly established provision in Fife and increased Sitter Services in Aberdeenshire) which means that lone parents are able to access funds to cover the costs of childcare through the childcare element of Working Tax Credit

- **subsidising provision** through other Local Authority initiatives, or using pilot monies to cover the costs of non-registered provision to further ensure affordability for parents on low income.

7.8 However, a number of issues regarding affordability emerge:

- **offering subsidies** – the fact that pilot monies have been used to subsidise non-registered provision in Aberdeenshire raises questions concerning the sustainability of the provision developed once the pilot comes to an end
- **tax credit system** – as has been demonstrated in previous sections, there are some weaknesses in the Working Tax Credit System that may have negative implications for the extent of uptake.

**Table 7.3: Affordability: Strengths and Weaknesses**

ABERDEENSHIRE	ABERDEENSHIRE
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70% of costs of registered childcare covered through childcare element of Working Tax Credit</li> <li>• Childcare provision subsidised so that the costs for lone parents, and indeed others, are very low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much of the newly developed provision is not registered so costs cannot be recovered through the tax credit system. This has implications for the extent of long term sustainability</li> </ul>
FIFE	FIFE
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70% of costs of childcare covered through childcare element of Working Tax Credit</li> <li>• Shortfall in amount of tax credits can be covered through additional Local Authority subsidies available for certain forms of childcare</li> <li>• Rates broken down into hourly, half-day and daily-rate charges so parents only pay for the childcare they receive</li> <li>• Channelling costs through system of tax credits helps to address issue of sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider concerns/weaknesses regarding tax credit system</li> <li>• Extent to which private or non-school care is affordable may be questioned since additional subsidies are not available</li> </ul>

## Quality

7.9 Both areas have ensured that the childcare offered is considered to be of good quality (see **Table 7.4**) through:

- **developing registered childcare provision** (all newly developed provision in Fife, Sitter Services in Aberdeenshire)
- **devising differing programmes of care** that reflect the age-range and length of time children are in childcare provision
- **encouraging/promoting training** for staff.

7.10 However, the fact that newly established provision for children aged 12 plus in Aberdeenshire was not registered, raises questions regarding:

- the extent to which parents can be confident of the quality of that provision
- the extent to which the Local Authorities can provide assurances of quality, in the absence of non-registered status.

7.11 The option to provide non-registered childcare means that parents are not eligible to claim the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. This not only raises issues regarding sustainability as outlined above, but also limits the extent to which the pilot can promote the use of good quality registered childcare amongst its other priority groups, namely, parents in receipt of Working Tax Credit who are not using registered childcare.

7.12 Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that Aberdeenshire was testing the issue of ‘childcare’ for older age children as this was identified as a gap in provision. The delivery model devised was a way of testing the notion of activity-based childcare within the confines of the pilot timescale. In this way Aberdeenshire was endeavouring to deliver childcare that was unique and innovative.

7.13 There is evidence to suggest that some lone parents are not aware of the benefits of good quality formal childcare. Moreover, there is a lack of clarity regarding responsibilities to increase awareness of the benefits of formal childcare amongst the pilot target groups. Jobcentre Plus staff, for example, have concerns that discussing with lone parents the strengths and weaknesses of differing forms of childcare is outside of their remit.

**Table 7.4: Quality: Strengths and Weaknesses**

<b>ABERDEENSHIRE</b>	<b>ABERDEENSHIRE</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sitter Services provide quality registered childcare</li> <li>• Training programme for staff available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newly developed childcare for older children is not registered</li> <li>• Development of non-registered childcare limits extent to which pilot can address aim to promote use of registered childcare amongst parents in receipt of Working Tax Credit</li> </ul>
<b>FIFE</b>	<b>FIFE</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All provision registered and subject to requirements of Care Commission</li> <li>• Training programme for staff available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some concern about the number of hours children could potentially be in childcare (highlighted in previous sections)</li> </ul>

## Summary

7.14 The evidence suggests that the pilots have worked hard to provide and develop childcare provision that is accessible and affordable for parents.

7.15 Despite this, there are inevitably some weaknesses in the type and range of provision on offer which suggests that the pilots have only partially met the aim to ‘ensure that wherever possible, if a job is available then so is registered childcare’<sup>15</sup>.

7.16 This is because, despite the wide range of childcare services on offer across both pilot areas, a number of limitations emerge. These include:

- the location of provision and whether this is in an area that is accessible
- the extent to which provision matches parental preferences
- the extent to which the provision available is registered
- limited awareness of what is available
- lack of action undertaken to raise awareness of the benefits of formal childcare that may have altered attitudes towards formal and informal options.

7.17 Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that providing childcare that is accessible, affordable and of good quality is by no means a straightforward task and is complicated by the fact that parental preferences for the type of childcare accessed can differ. Thus there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to providing childcare for lone parents and what suits one lone parent may not be deemed appropriate by another. This is corroborated by the evidence presented in preceding sections that many lone parents have a preference for parental or informal childcare. Therefore, cost-effective solutions are difficult to address.

7.18 In developing accessible, affordable, quality childcare, Local Authorities are clearly constrained by issues that are outside of their control. These include restricted timescales, available levels of resources, limitations of linked policy interventions (i.e. the Tax Credit system) and differing parental preferences for childcare.

---

<sup>15</sup> As stated in the research specification as part of the invitation to tender for the evaluation.



## CHAPTER EIGHT: GOOD PRACTICE AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Table 8.1: Summary of Key Points**

- The timescale available for the pilot was not sufficient for childcare gaps to be addressed through the development of additional provision. Correspondingly, the relationship between the availability of childcare and the effect of this on lone parents moving into work, remains to be tested.
- It is important that prior research (e.g. mapping and gapping exercises) is undertaken in order that delivery of the pilot reflects local need and so that pilot baselines can be established from which to monitor progress.
- Staffing and the adequacy of resources emerge as important as does the need for multi-agency partnership and collaboration.
- Given (mis)perceptions of limited childcare availability, it is critical that ongoing and diverse attempts are made to reach lone parents and raise their awareness. For attitudes towards formal childcare to be changed, more needs to be done to raise awareness of the benefits of high quality early years education and childcare. This cannot be achieved in the short-term.
- Not all lone parents are the same and different types of intervention may therefore be required.
- There are many issues relating to developing sufficient childcare in order to provide a virtual childcare guarantee. To do this is likely to require a trade off between supply-side issues and issues of demand.
- Given that preferences for part-time working and employment around school hours are common amongst lone parents, it may be prudent to negotiate local agreements and more family friendly policies with local employers.
- Sustainability of childcare is a key issue. Attempts to develop an exit strategy to sustain provision once pilot monies come to an end need to be addressed early.
- Outcomes in terms of entry to employment cannot be adequately assessed in the absence of detailed monitoring information (at the start and end point). Data protection issues need to be considered up front so that parents can be tracked and interventions followed up accordingly.

### Introduction

8.1 In this section, we pull together the evidence from preceding sections to highlight good practice and lessons learned. This is in order that the lessons learned from delivering the pilots can be used to inform the future development of similar programmes and initiatives designed to address issues of work and childcare. Themes emerging from the research are explored under the following headings:

- Time
- Pre-delivery planning and set up
- Partnership and collaboration
- Awareness-raising marketing and referral

- Identification and solutions
- Issues in developing childcare
- Employment issues
- Sustainability
- Monitoring and tracking.

## **Time**

8.2 A key lesson from the pilot is the time needed for set up and delivery. Greater time is required for scoping, planning, staff recruitment, partnership development and delivery. In particular, the experience of the pilot shows that the duration of the pilot needs to better reflect the time investment required up front for initial planning and set up. The timescale was not sufficient for childcare to be developed and for lone parents to take up the programme in order for the hypothesis to be tested (that childcare is the main barrier to work). Newly established childcare in Fife was not in place long enough for an assessment of the effects to be made. This issue has been recognised and further funding has been provided by the Scottish Executive to continue the extended hours provision in Fife.

## **Pre-delivery planning and set up**

### *Understanding Needs*

8.3 Both areas undertook background research to identify the lone parent population in their area and to identify key childcare needs/gaps. It is important that research is undertaken to ‘map and gap’ childcare provision, identify labour market opportunities and establish the target population in order to tailor the pilot’s delivery and approach to local circumstances. This should then be used to inform and develop the project plan. Identified needs could also be quantified in order to establish a baseline from which progress and outcomes (e.g. childcare places, lone parents in employment/unemployment) can be assessed.

### *Staffing*

8.4 It is important that there is sufficient resource/staffing for co-ordination both within the Local Authority and Jobcentre Plus. Progress of the pilots was not helped by the high turnover of Jobcentre Plus Childcare Partnership managers. A clear overall pilot lead should be identified who can dedicate sufficient time to the pilot in order to maintain momentum and ensure key players are involved and active.

## **Partnership and collaboration**

8.5 Given the finding that lone parents are not a homogeneous group and often have diverse and multiple barriers to work, it is important that a partnership approach to delivery is undertaken. This should involve close collaboration with a range of organisations that have access to the target group e.g. Jobcentre Plus, Children's Information Service, schools, health visitors, early years practitioners, youth workers, voluntary organisations, colleges and the Inland Revenue (who can provide advice on tax credits).

8.6 It is important that all partners have a clear sense of purpose and clarity regarding their role in delivery. Partners benefit from meetings at key milestones to discuss progress and priorities for action that can then be cascaded within their organisation. Feedback from the evaluation suggests that Jobcentre Plus advisors benefit from continual information/updates on the progress of new childcare being implemented so that they can inform parents once childcare becomes established. Ongoing information is important given the degree of staff turnover within Jobcentre Plus.

## **Awareness-raising, marketing and referral**

8.7 Given the finding that a (mis)perception exists amongst lone parents that there is limited childcare in their area, it is important to raise awareness of what is available on a continual basis.

8.8 Multiple strategies to raise awareness, market the pilot and promote referral should be employed. As was the experience in the pilot, this could include distributing leaflets, school bag drops, holding events (such as open days), taster sessions and referral via other agencies such as Social Work and voluntary groups. Referrals should be promoted from a range of sources through a partnership with Jobcentre Plus and other agencies, for example, outreach work. Potentially, lone parents could be informed as to what is available to them via the CIS. However, currently this is not considered possible because the CIS is not permitted to question parents on their status. A potential solution would be for the CIS to draw attention to a range of initiatives available for different target groups when individuals contact them with queries.

8.9 Nevertheless, evidence from the evaluation of Sure Start Local Programmes<sup>16</sup> in England suggests that hard to reach groups, such as lone parents, often do not take up services/programmes (designed to assist them) until they start to see the benefits emerging for those who have accessed them. Word of mouth is therefore an important marketing strategy for lone parents. This may imply a greater time duration for some lone parents to be attracted. Lone parents using childcare in the area, or who are successfully balancing parenting, childcare and work, could be used as champions for other lone parents.

---

<sup>16</sup> See: <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/research/evaluations/ness/nesspublications/>

## **Childcare as both a push and pull factor**

8.10 It should be recognised that childcare can act as a ‘push’ or ‘pull’ into work. Therefore, strategies should be employed not only to promote available childcare once lone parents have found work (pull) but also to try out childcare before employment in order that the experience may act as the ‘push’ into work.

## **Identification and Solutions**

8.11 Not all lone parents are the same. The evidence from the evaluation suggests that different types of lone parents may require different types of intervention or support to address the barriers they face. It may therefore be beneficial to market and/or deliver the pilot in different ways for different types of lone parents. In particular, the learning from the pilot suggests that some lone parents have a deep-seated preference for parental or informal childcare. This suggests that additional strategies may be required to change such parents’ attitudes towards formal childcare or that an alternative approach may be required.

8.12 It is important that parents are provided with information and evidence on the benefits of good quality formal childcare if lone parents’ attitudes towards childcare are to be affected.

## **Issues in developing Childcare**

8.13 Issues in developing the supply of childcare to meet demands were detailed in **Section Four**. A key lesson learned is that what is commercially viable may well not match parental preferences. In developing childcare to meet the needs of (lone) parents there may well be a trade off required.

## **Employment issues**

8.14 The findings from the pilot suggest that many lone parents have a preference to work part-time and during school hours. For some, there is also concern regarding the flexibility of employers and the suitability of local labour market opportunities. Therefore, in scoping the pilot and assessing need, it may be prudent to develop local agreements with employers and to promote more parent-friendly working practices.

## **Sustainability**

8.15 The issue of ongoing sustainability should be addressed from the outset. It is important to develop an exit strategy so that the innovative provision set up in response to the pilot does not simply stop because pilot monies have come to an end. This is important since the provision developed is not only of potential benefit to lone parents but parents overall.

## **Monitoring and Tracking**

8.16 It has proved difficult to assess rates of entry into work because of limitations in the monitoring information collected. It is important that monitoring information:

- can track lone parents and assess moves into work
- that baselines (in terms of childcare places, proportion of lone parents on Income Support etc.) be identified at the outset
- outlines the interventions accessed by lone parents in order that any moves into work, or otherwise, can be attributed to the pilot as opposed to other interventions that may be in place.

8.17 Issues of data protection should be considered early. This is in order to track lone parents and for the purposes of evaluation. This could be achieved through the collation of parental contact details with a statement to 'opt out' of their contact details being passed to a third party.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

9.1 Prior research suggests that a lack of affordable, accessible childcare is the single most important barrier to work for lone parents on Income Support. The Extended Schools Childcare pilot aimed to address that barrier through providing ‘a virtual childcare guarantee’ to lone parents not in work. In doing so, the pilot aimed to help lone parents and partners of benefit recipients into work. The pilot operated in two areas of Scotland: Aberdeenshire and Fife.

9.2 It is clear that it has taken considerable time and investment to set up and implement the pilots in both areas. Substantial progress has been made in terms of developing additional, flexible and innovative forms of childcare to meet the diversity of parental need to supplement what was already in place. This includes:

- **unique responses to childcare** in the form of Extended Hours provision, activity-based provision and Sitter Services. Such provision affords parents the opportunity to take up employment outside of conventional working hours or to place their older age children in more inventive forms of childcare
- **the creation of a vacancy manager post** to provide better, more up-to-date information on available childcare
- **the use of ‘top-up’ subsidies for low income families** to supplement tax credits
- **employing the use of variable charge-out rates** to ensure that parents only pay for the childcare they use
- **developing different programmes of care** that are tailored to the child’s age/life stage and that offer a range of diverse and stimulating activities throughout the day.

9.3 Take-up of childcare by lone parents and partners has been mixed. None of the lone parents referred to the pilot via Jobcentre Plus have taken up the offer of childcare and moved into work as a result. Notwithstanding the limitations of the MI available, the evidence suggests that the outcomes of the pilot in relation to entry to employment by lone parents as a result of the availability of childcare are low. This is likely to have been affected – at least partially – by timescales.

9.4 Developing new provision has not been without major challenges and the pilot areas have worked hard to address the wide range of supply- and demand-side factors they face. Inevitably, there are still some limitations in terms of the extent to which the childcare available is accessible, affordable and of quality (by virtue of whether or not it is registered) overall, and the extent to which this matches parental preferences regarding the type of childcare required.

9.5 Given that progress in setting up and implementing the pilots has been slower than anticipated and that there is a lack of awareness of what is available, the assertion that lack of affordable, accessible childcare is a significant barrier to work for lone parents has not yet been adequately tested in the case of Extended Hours and weekend provision.

9.6 The evidence suggests that for some lone parents the availability of formal childcare presents a significant barrier to employment. Some of these lone parents perceived there to be a lack of childcare in areas the pilot had specifically sought to address. This implies a need to raise awareness of the availability of childcare.

9.7 However, for a significant proportion of lone parents, the belief that parents should be there to parent their own children appears to be the prevailing barrier. For these lone parents decisions to enter work are not simply about providing accessible, affordable childcare. Removing the childcare barrier also means alleviating parental fears/mistrust of childcare and changing their preferences for informal childcare.

9.8 Regardless of parents' views towards formal and informal childcare, the evidence suggests that the issue of childcare is often interlinked with a multitude of other issues that affect their orientations to work. The barrier of childcare then is perhaps not best tackled in isolation but as part of a wider/diverse package of support. This is because childcare might be one of several barriers. Furthermore, the extent to, and ways in, which childcare constitutes a barrier can change over time. This depends on the interrelationship of the childcare barrier with the other obstacles lone parents may face. As the work of Bell et al. is testament, different types of intervention may well need to be provided for different types of lone parent.

### **Summary: Meeting the Research Aims**

9.9 To summarise, the research had four key aims:

- Aim One: to assess the assumption that ‘a lack of affordable, accessible childcare is the single most important barrier to work for lone parents on Income Support’<sup>17</sup>. Whilst the evidence suggests that a lack of affordable, accessible childcare is a significant barrier for some lone parents, it does not emerge as the central barrier for others. The degree to which ‘childcare’ presents a barrier depends on how ‘childcare’ is defined (as formal or informal childcare). For some lone parents the availability of affordable formal childcare is a key (childcare) barrier. However, for others, it is preferences for parental and informal childcare that influence decisions (i.e. parental beliefs of childcare as the ‘*barrier*’ to work, although parents themselves may not label this a barrier as such). However defined, the evidence suggests that childcare is often interlinked with a range of other barriers rather than being a single issue to be addressed
- Aim Two: to assess the extent to which the pilot succeeded in removing this (childcare) barrier or otherwise. The research evidence suggests that the pilot has only partially met its aim to remove the childcare barrier. This is for a range of reasons that relate to:
  - the restricted timescale which meant registered out of hours childcare was not available or accessible until the pilot had almost reached completion

---

<sup>17</sup> Verwaayen, B. (2003). What Works. Final report of the National Employment Panel’s Steering Group on Lone Parents.

- the tensions between supply-side and demand-side factors that meant inevitably there was a trade-off between developing childcare that was cost effective (supply) and meeting parental preferences for the type of childcare preferred (demand)
- limited awareness of what was available.
- Aim Three: to assess the extent to which the removal of the childcare barrier leads to higher rates of entry into work. It is not possible to quantifiably assess rates of entry into work. This is because of limitations relating to:
  - the extent to which the childcare barrier was effectively removed
  - the availability and accuracy of the MI provided
  - timescales.

Qualitative feedback revealed only one instance of a lone parent entering employment that could be directly attributed to the pilot and the availability of formal childcare.

- Aim Four: to assess whether other factors take over and prevent lone parents entering work once affordable and accessible childcare is available. The evidence suggests that barriers to work for lone parents are perhaps not best tackled consecutively, but rather simultaneously. This is because the childcare barrier does not appear to operate in isolation but moreover, it operates in different ways for different lone parents.



ISSN 0950 2254  
ISBN 0 7559 6328 8  
web only publication

[www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch)

Astron B49262 11/06

