

# FAMILY HUBS AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE ANNUAL SURVEY REPORT

August 2024

## Bedford Borough Council

138 Cauldwell Street  
Bedford, MK42 9AP



# Family Hubs and Children's Centres

## Introduction

### WHAT FAMILY HUBS DO

Family Hubs act as one-stop shops where families can access a wide variety of services designed to meet their everyday needs. These hubs offer support with health care, education and more, all under one roof.

### THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES

Children's Centres focus primarily on helping young children thrive. They offer programs and resources tailored to promote early childhood development, including activities that support learning, health, and emotional well-being.

### HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER

By working together, Family Hubs and Children's Centres create a nurturing environment where children can flourish, and families can thrive. Their combined efforts ensure that every family has access to the resources, support, and guidance they need to build a strong foundation for the future.

## Annual Survey 2024

The Bedford Borough Family Hubs and Children's Centres annual survey ran from 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024 until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The survey aimed to gather feedback on services currently offered through our centres, families' understanding of the offer and their views on gaps in the service which can help shape our future offer and help us to ensure we are meeting the needs of every child, young person and family in Bedford.

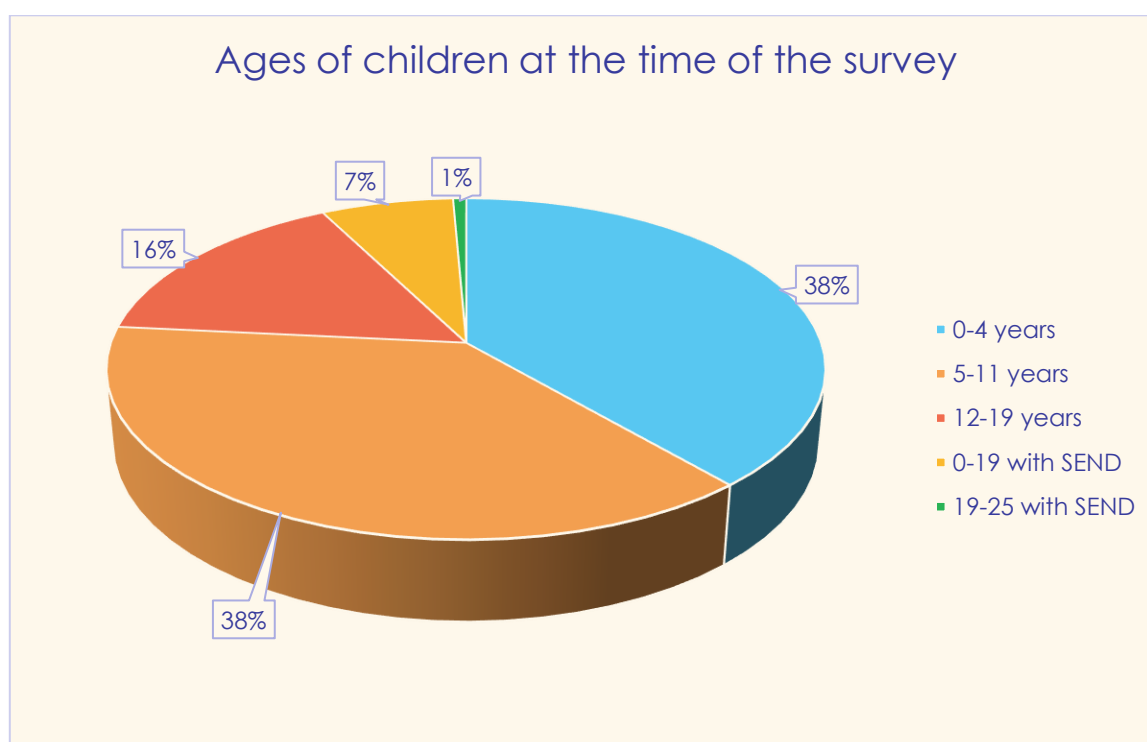
The survey was aimed at parents and carers of children aged 0-19 years or up to 25 if they have Special Education Needs as well as parents who were expecting a baby. Overall, 283 respondents completed the questionnaire. This report summarises their responses and details our intended actions and outcomes.

## Respondents Demographic Information

There were 283 responses to the survey. Of those responses, 97.2% were already parents of one or more children, 0.7% were expecting their first child, 0.4% were planning their first child and 1.8% did not have children.

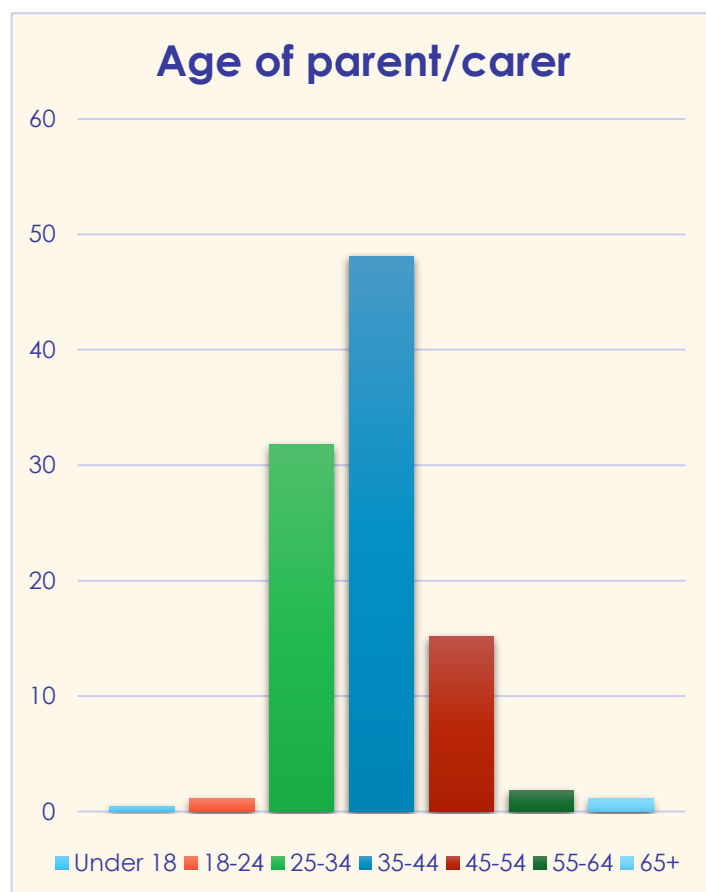
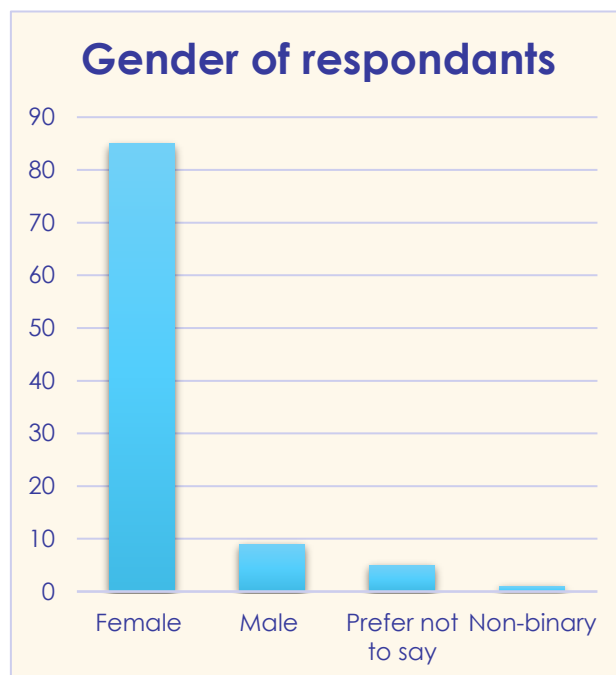
### CHILDREN'S AGES

As can be seen in the chart below, families' responses were broadly representative of the whole age range, including those with children with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND). Whilst responses were predominantly from families of children in the early years and of primary school age, just under a quarter also had children aged 12-19. This demonstrates a positive move in engaging families within the whole Family Hubs remit.



## GENDER

Respondents were predominantly female (85%), with 9% who were male, 1% who were non-binary and 5% who chose not to share their gender. This is somewhat to be expected, as it is often mum's or female carers who engage with our services at centres. As well as sharing the survey in centres the main way of sharing our survey was via social media where most of our engagement is also with mum's and female carers. Whilst not unexpected, we do need to consider for future engagement, how we can further engage dads and male carers and ensure that those from the LGBTQIA+ community are also represented.

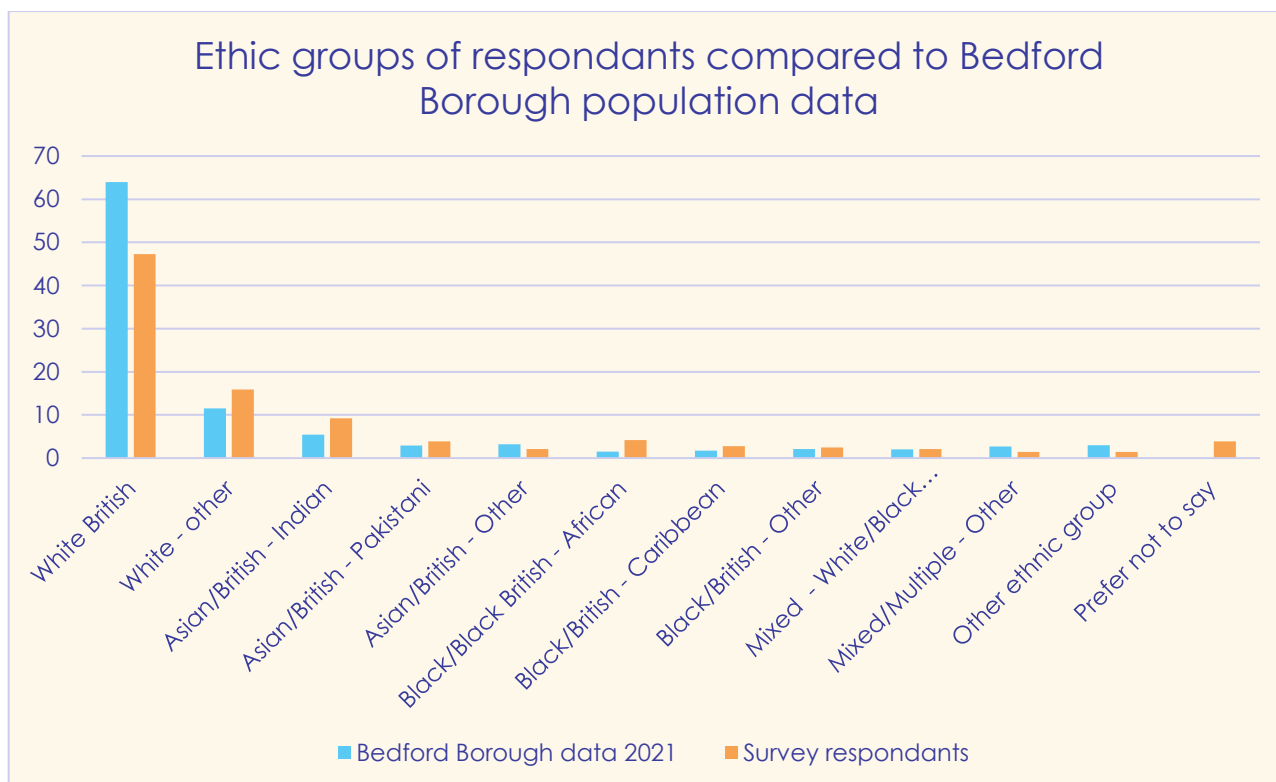


## PARENTS/CARERS AGE

There was a broad spread of age groups of the parent/carers who responded. The majority aged 35-44 (48%) and 25-34 (32%). 15% from the 45-54 year old age group. Whilst it is good to see that some older parent/carers responded, it would be good to obtain the viewpoints of more grandparents. Age UK report that almost half grandparents in the UK regularly care for their grandchildren and in 2022 27% of pre-school children received informal care from grandparents, relatives or close friends. Therefore, it is important they are also aware of and able to access our services and have input on how these develop.

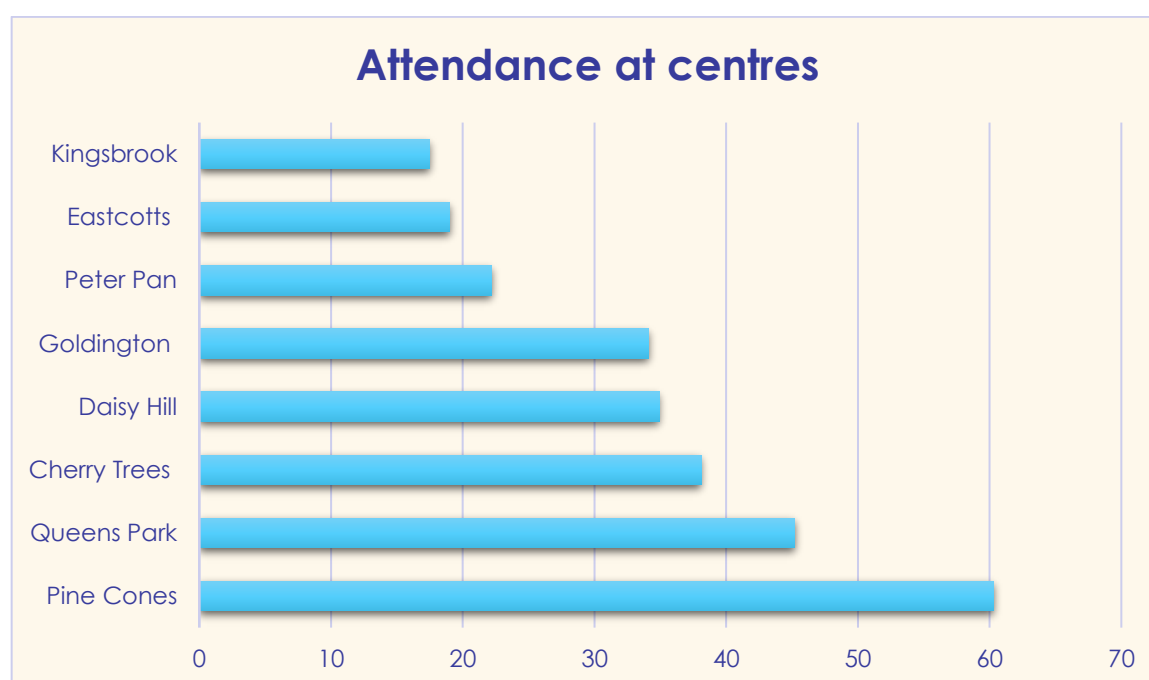
## ETHNIC GROUPS

Whilst respondents were predominantly from a White British background there was a good balance of responses from across Bedford Borough's ethnic groups which broadly represent the mix of communities. We are aware, however, that communities where there is a language barrier and those who may not yet use our centres or use social media may not have had the opportunity to share their views and we need to consider how this can be tackled moving forward.



## Public Awareness

The survey showed that 59% of the families who responded were aware of Family Hubs and Children's Centres, of these 77% have visited a site. When looking at the sites which have been visited, the two Family Hubs, Pinecones (60.3%) and Queens Park (45.2%), are the most popular followed by Cherry Trees, Daisy Hill and Goldington. We recognise that this data may have been somewhat skewed by parents completing the survey at centres, but it broadly matches attendance data collected at individual centres.



### AWARENESS OF ACTIVITIES

The survey showed that Play and Learn sessions (53.2%) are the most recognised, this is the busiest group in the centres followed by Self-weighing (47.1%) which is combined with the play and learn cruiser session and Breastfeeding Brasserie (41.7%). The three top groups all work alongside each other.

82 people responded to the question around awareness of The Dad's group (29.5%). However, out of this number only 25 were male (8.8%). This suggests that Dads are being referred to the group by female relations or friends rather than finding out about it first-hand.

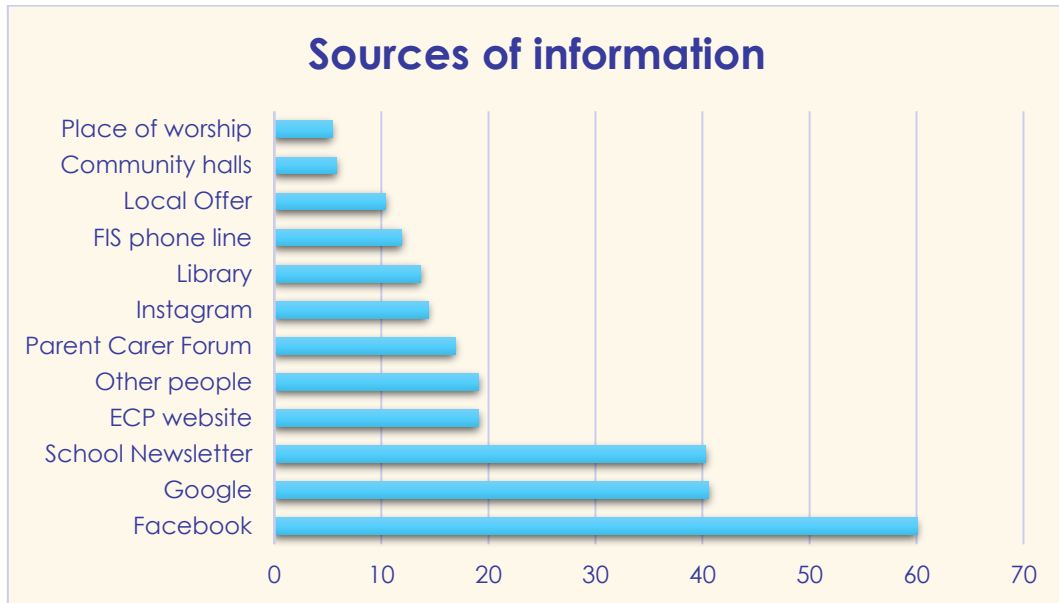
## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Facebook (60.1%) continues to be the highest recognised source of information for families. This reflects the trend in posts seen in local groups from families asking 'what's on' to do with their children as well as the consistent growth we have seen in followers on the Family Hubs Facebook page since its creation in September 2023. As of September 2024, the Family Hubs and Children's Centre Facebook pages will merge to make it easier for families to find the information they need in one place.

Google search (40.6%) is the next most popular place to find information, and this again reflects the growing number of interactions we have seen on our Family Hub and Children's Centre profiles. We hope that the launch of our new website in October 2024 will also support families using this method to find information.

At 40.3%, School Newsletters are also a popular source of trusted information. This emphasises a continuing need to build and maintain relationships with schools and share relevant information with them. This is especially important with the wider remit of Family Hubs to support all children and young people aged 0-19.

The Early Childhood Partnership (ECP) Website (19%) is not being used as much as it could be, and we are aware that it does not necessarily offer the information that families seek. The new Family Hubs – Best Start Bedford website, to be launched in October 2024, aims to combine all of the information families might need across the whole age range, including incorporating a live timetable and searchable database of our offer and wider services and activities in the local area.





# Quality of Service

In response to questions regarding the quality of service and how families felt when using the services at the centres there was overwhelmingly positive feedback. Overall, over 95% of respondents were pleased with the service and resources available, they felt the staff were approachable and professional.

98% of people who completed the survey said they would recommend the Family Hubs and Children's Centres.



# Suggestions and Actions

## SUGGESTIONS

Parents feedback on potential barriers to using the centres highlighted that whilst many families are increasingly aware of the existence of Family Hubs and Children's Centres, they need further clarity on what they offer and where they are. 56% stated that clearer information about what activities were taking place, where and when would encourage them to make better use of the service offered.

In addition, 24% stated that activities were not at a convenient time of day and highlighted parking as an issue. Nearly 50% of families agreed that they would use centres more if they were open at weekends and requested more holiday activities, with 27% asking for extended opening hours and after school clubs for older children. 5% asked for greater provision for children with additional needs.

Below 10% of respondents said they would feel more comfortable using centres if they knew who staff were beforehand and if they had a named person to greet them when they arrived. Between 5 and 7% said having better cultural recognition and knowing there was someone who spoke their language was important.

## ACTIONS

Below are the outcomes we hope to achieve based on the feedback received from families.

Outcome	Actions	By when?
Increase the reach of Family Hubs and Children's Centres so that more diverse groups and communities are aware of the offer and have service to suit their needs, including rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reach out to dads and male carers to find out what else we can do to support them and how best to communicate with them</li> <li>Reach out to the LGBTQIA+ community to find out what else we can do to support them</li> <li>Reach out to wider family including grandparents who may do some of the caring for working parents</li> <li>Ensure places of worship and faith groups being reached so aware of all the services available</li> <li>Community link worker to visit rural communities to raise awareness of our services and find out how we can support them. Visit local play groups, schools and travel on the library bus</li> </ul>	<p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p> <p>March 2025</p> <p>Partially complete</p>
Increase the reach of future surveys to obtain feedback from a greater range of different communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual site surveys at each centre to reach different communities, complete over the course of a year, monthly. Short questions and face to face</li> </ul>	December 2024
Remove barriers to those with EAL or those who may not access social media or online media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore the best ways to communicate with different communities, e.g. face to face, in their community, through community leaders using translated printed materials etc.</li> <li>Make clear the offer of staff who speak different languages and how they can be contacted</li> </ul>	<p>March 2025</p> <p>December 2024</p>
Help families understand where centres are and what is on offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add maps and addresses to new website and to timetables</li> <li>Redesign timetable so it is clearer and more accessible</li> <li>Create an interactive and searchable timetable on the new website</li> <li>Merge Children's Centre and Family Hub social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Eventbrite) so there is consistent information in one place</li> </ul>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>October 2024</p> <p>Complete</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share, google map links, photos and walk-through videos for each centre so families can be familiar with where they are going prior to visiting</li> </ul>	October 2024
Help families to feel more comfortable attending centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an online page with photos and introductions to staff members</li> <li>Make clear the offer of staff who speak different languages and how they can be contacted</li> <li>Make clear the offer of staff to call and meet and greet families</li> <li>Continue to market centres and activities in a family friendly way</li> <li>Create videos of feedback from real families who have used our services</li> </ul>	December 2025 December 2025  December 2025 Ongoing March 2025
Expand the offer to families after school and at weekends so working families can access services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer regular weekend play and learn sessions (Monthly Dad's and Family groups)</li> <li>Offer further session at weekends (Good Life Garden offered fortnightly on Saturdays)</li> <li>Offer after school sessions (Good Life Garden and Toby's Tall Tales offered after school)</li> <li>Consider out of hours contracts for newly employed staff</li> </ul>	Complete  Partially complete  Partially complete  December 2025
Expand the offer of activities and support to families with children over 5, up to 19 years of age or 25 with SEND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate the offer of support from Early help and Family Hubs across the age range</li> <li>Offer online support across the whole age range</li> <li>Offer activities for older children and young people at centres (Toby's Tall tales and Good Life garden on offer to Primary aged children, HAF sessions offered in holidays for the full age range)</li> <li>Work with families of older children and young people and the young people themselves to find out what they want</li> <li>Continue to work with organisations and families of children with SEND to expand the offer to meet their needs. (We work alongside the CDC to offer quiet stay and plays twice a week during term-time, Monday sessions are for those under the CDC and Fridays are for any family who child has additional needs regardless of whether they have a diagnosis or not. We have recently introduced a new session at Kingsbrook which is a quieter session for those who are unable to attend the mains play and learns)</li> </ul>	Complete  October 2024 Partially complete  December 2025  Partially complete