



**Family and
Childcare Trust**

Creating a family friendly UK

Recent research on Family Information Services

2014 FIS managers survey and Ipsos MORI

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Ipsos MORI and Family and Childcare Trust research on the quality of information about childcare

FIS Managers Survey 2014 – England

FIS Managers Survey 2014 – Wales

This research has been set in the context of:

- continued cuts in local authority budgets and restructuring
- early education and childcare being a political priority
- stronger realisation from DfE about the role of information and brokerage in childcare use – Ofsted Early Years report
- The challenges of delivering free early education for two year olds



Commissioned by the DfE in 2012

Research questions

- What does good quality information look like?
- What is the quality of existing data sources?
- How existing sources of information could be improved?
- What is the role of information in parental decisions about childcare?

Methodology

Literature review, assessment framework, analysis of information sources, key informant interviews and focus groups with parents.

Looked at all sources of information: word-of-mouth, professional face-to-face, telephone, online, with local and national organisations

Ipsos MORI Assessment framework



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- Ease of access to the information
 - Content and relevance
 - Accuracy of content
 - Effectiveness of the information
 - Outreach (where relevant)

Ipsos MORI Relevant findings and recommendations



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- Search engines don't always take user into FIS websites
 - Difficult to navigate some local authority websites to get to FISs
 - Huge variation in the content of FIS websites, 20% very comprehensive and 10% minimalist holding information
 - Gaps in content: childcare vouchers, nannies, emergency childcare and that outside normal office hours, de facto 'childcare' for older children, redress when things go wrong
 - Plain English needed!
 - Missed opportunities for publicising work of FIS, for example, sheet in parent-held child development records: the Red Book
 - Understanding of and methods of outreach differed.
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- Online survey to all FIS Managers in England and Wales at the end of 2013
 - 90 per cent survey response
 - Looked at staffing and qualifications, numbers and types of enquiries, how the service is organised within the local authority structure, partnership working with other professionals, outreach methods, nature of planned financial or operational changes.
 - Also wanted to identify good practice
 - Used many of the same questions as the 2012 survey, to enable comparisons to be made
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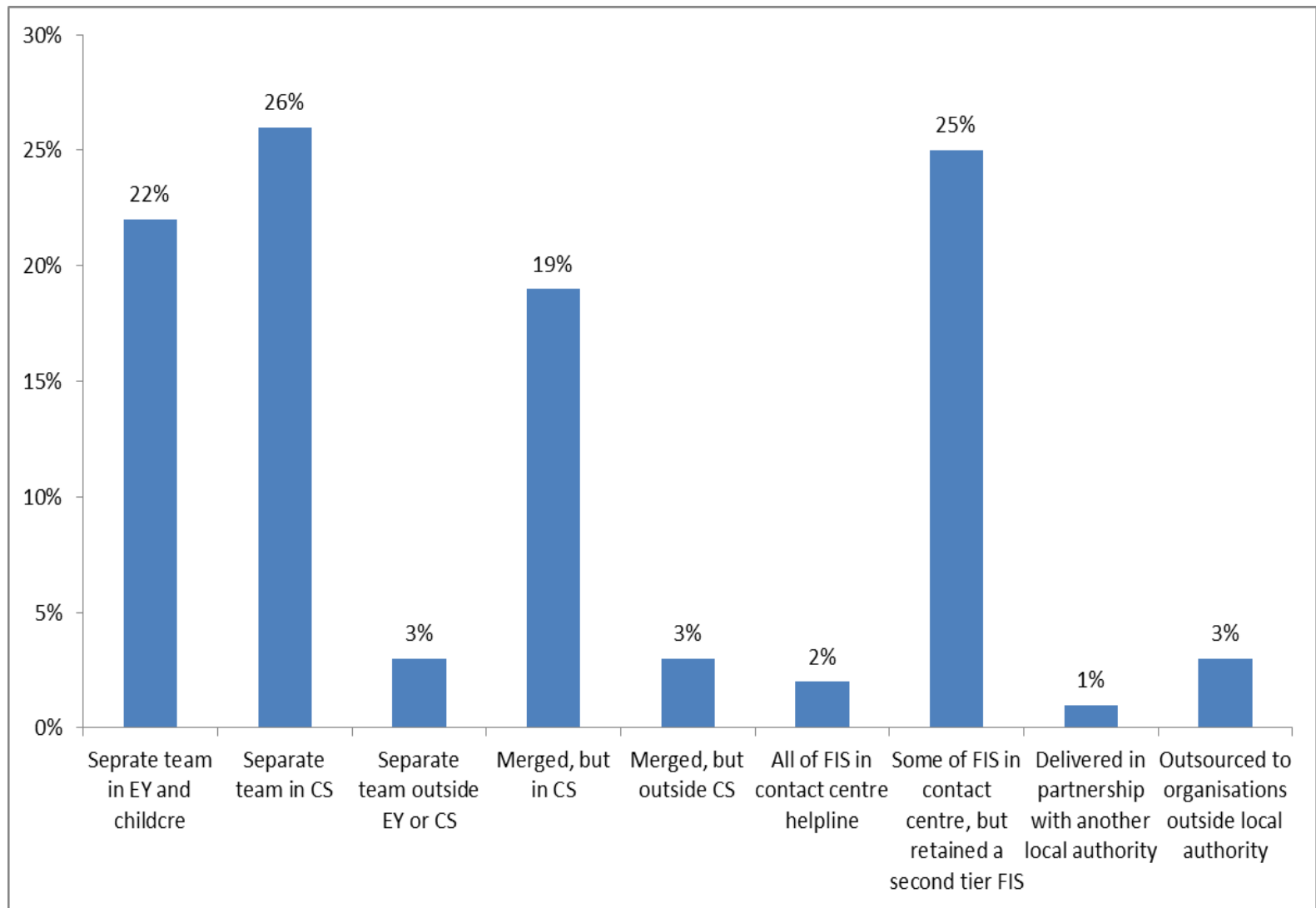
Staffing and enquiries - England



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- 4.6 staff in 2014, from 4.8 staff in 2012
 - 10 local authorities with a FIS of just one member of staff
 - 16% of FIS have all staff who are qualified with NVQ in advice and guidance
 - 108 local authorities have FF award or were working for it at time of survey
 - Fewer enquiries than in 2012 – average of 235 per month, but greater use of social media and more calls being routed through call centres
 - At least 16 local authorities not providing childcare brokerges
 - 27% of enquiries from other professionals, 73% families
 - Largest category of enquiries about childcare (33%) but 20% of inquiries about two year old offer in England
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- In England a big change in the way that FIS are organised in last two years – with a quarter of local authorities now having some of their family information work as part of main local authority call centre.
 - Concerns that we had in 2012 have not materialised as the majority of local authorities have kept a second tier FIS function.

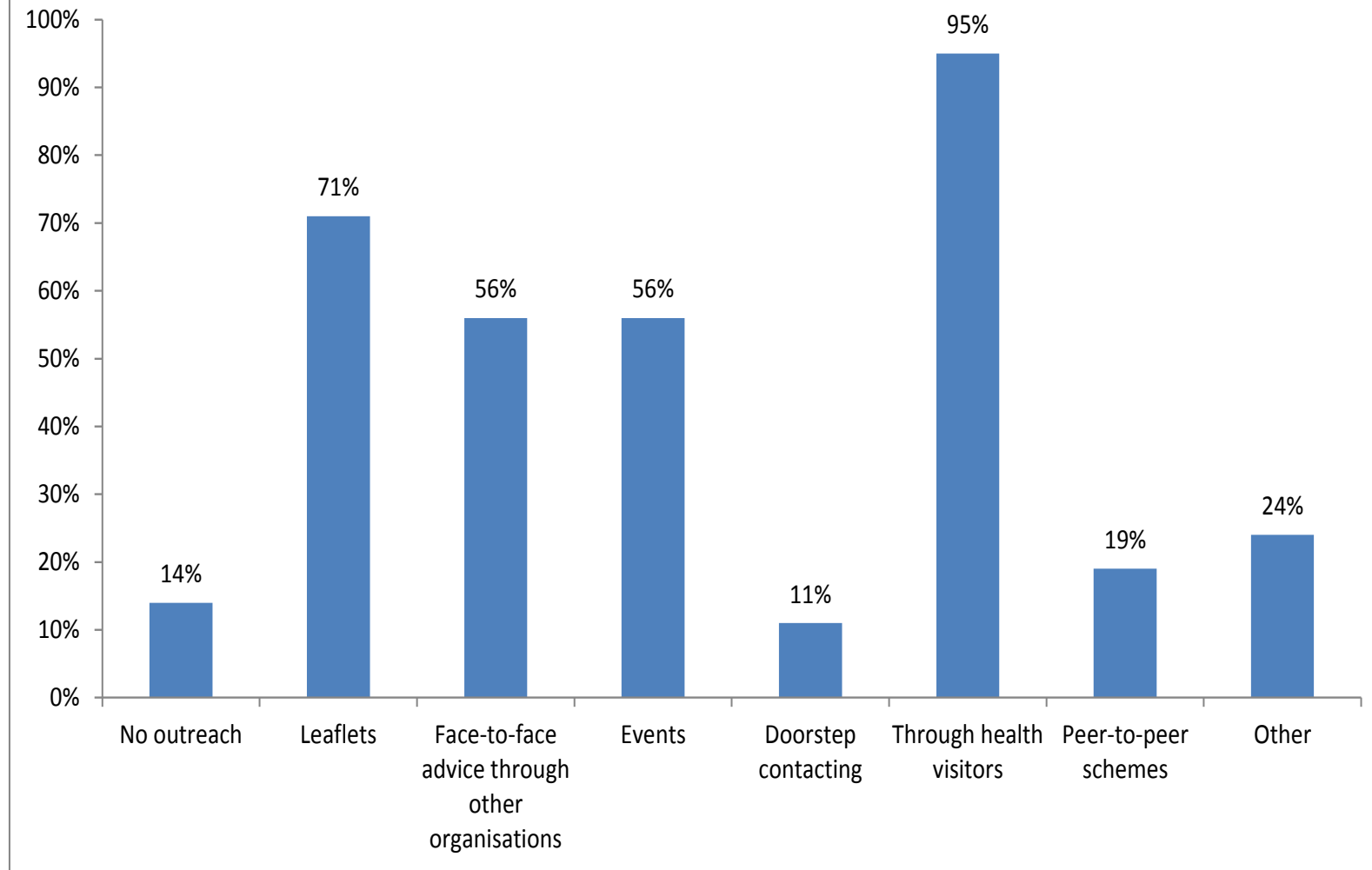




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- Outreach cut back as a result of budget cuts – 53% FIS have cut back on this aspect of work
 - 14% of FIS not undertaking any outreach at all
 - Much good practice –Red Book, work with birth registration team, work with employers
 - But some FIS don't have a good picture of their local population and of groups who might not take up services
 - Over-reliance on ad hoc relationships with health visitors, which is not formalised
 - Problems about sharing personal data
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How Family Information Services contact those who under-utilise services



Budget cuts



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- 58% of FIS have seen budget cuts since 2012 in England
 - Impact of spending cuts has been to staffing (62% FIS have cut staffing) and to outreach
 - Spending cuts have also forced restructuring
 - Many FIS will not be able to withstand further cuts without damage to their services



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- FISs are smaller, but serving smaller populations
 - Funding mechanism different and differ between local authorities
 - Funding cuts less harsh
 - No mergers into call centres
 - Even greater reliance on ad hoc relationships with health visitors

Conclusions



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- Spending cuts and significant restructuring
 - Much good practice, but too much variation in quality of outreach and the content of online material
 - Potential for wider duplication of good practice
 - Failure by a small number of local authorities to follow information duty and statutory guidance
 - DfE and Ofsted not putting in place measures to ensure local authorities are compliant with Childcare Act 2006 and statutory guidance



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- No more large spending cuts
 - Retention of second tier FIS if considering merger of some function into call centre
 - Improvements needed in some local authorities to online material and to outreach
 - DfE and Ofsted to put in place carrot and stick measures to ensure all local authorities fulfil obligations of Childcare Act 2006 and statutory guidance, and to encourage wider dissemination of good practice
 - More detailed Ofsted inspection of FIS
 - FIS support contract
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