



Covid and Childcare: The Role of Local Authorities

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Today's presentation: findings from the Covid and Childcare LA Survey



- Reminder of the study objectives and different elements.
- LA survey objectives and how it was undertaken.
- Findings:
 - Impacts of Covid on provision.
 - LA support for parents and providers.
 - Factors facilitating and hindering LA support.
 - Post-pandemic expectations.
- Implications for further discussion.

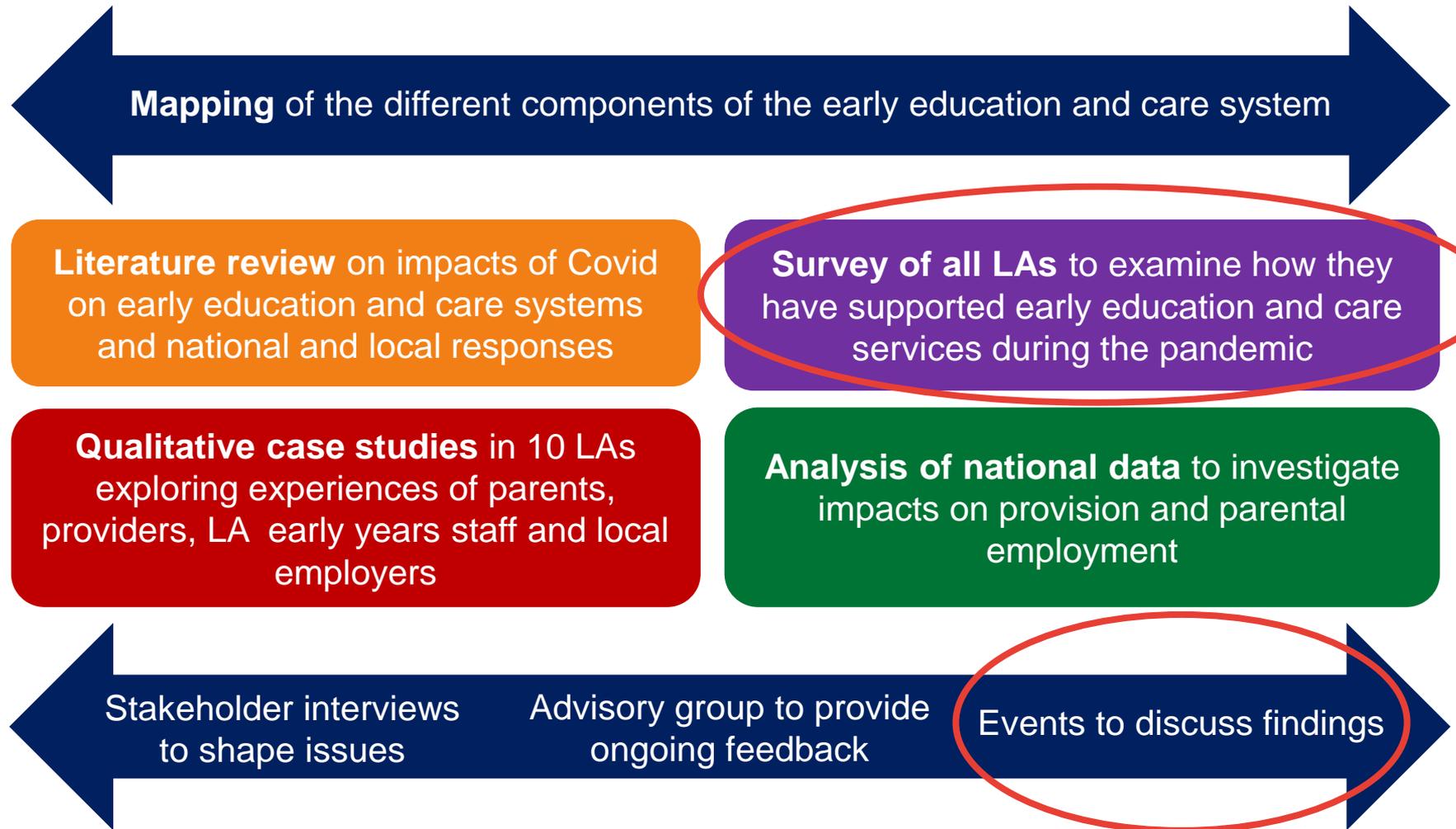
Covid and childcare: study questions



Reminder of the five questions:

- How is the pandemic affecting **children's and parents'** needs, access and experiences of early education and care services in different local contexts?
- How are **services** responding to Covid and how is the nature and viability of provision changing in different local contexts?
- Has **local support** for services mitigated the effects of the pandemic, and how is this mediated by local labour market conditions?
- What **opportunities and weaknesses** in the early education and care system are highlighted by Covid, and what can we learn about building resilience in the system?
- What should the role of **local authorities** be, and what tools do they need to support the early education and care system in future?

Covid and childcare: multiple strands of evidence collection and analysis



The survey of Local Authority Early Years Leads



Survey had **two** objectives

Description of how LAs supported parents and childcare providers during the pandemic

Development of “groupings” of LAs to consider how their support influenced changes in childcare provision and parental employment.



Report to be published next week (jointly by Frontier Economics and Coram Family and Childcare)

Today's presentation provides a summary of key findings



Later analysis

As national data on childcare provision and parental employment becomes available

How the survey was undertaken



Semi-structured telephone interviews:

- With LA Early Years Leads (or closest equivalent).
- During February to April this year (still in lockdown).
- 122 interviews completed = response rate of 82%.

Discussions covered three areas:

- The impacts of the pandemic on provision.
- How LAs responded to support childcare provision.
- Views on the longer lasting effects of the pandemic on provision and the LA role.

Impacts of the pandemic on provision



Not always possible to untangle influences of Government guidance, settings' opening decisions and parent demand for childcare.

Demand for parent-paid hours fell substantially during first lockdown:

- Remained below normal after restrictions lifted in June.
- Due to shifts to home-working and reductions in work for parents.

Throughout, demand for free entitlement hours did not fall to the same extent:

- Declines in demand for two-year old children most commonly reported.

Childcare usage returned unevenly across the country:

- Some areas seen usage steadily rising.
- Other areas saw demand remain low or drop again at end of 2020.

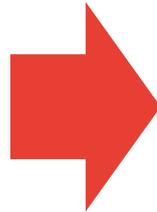
Greatest falls for out-of-school sector:

- Due to reduced demand from working parents and delivery challenges
- Widespread concern for the future of this part of the sector.

LA support for parents



Covid rules on attendance

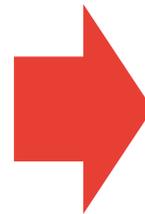


Almost all LAs provided guidance:

- Either encouraged attendance.
- Or took a neutral stance on whether children should attend.

Most LAs reported that parents had generally been able to find places:

- Some noted issues for children of key workers during the first lockdown.
- Some noted issues for under-twos, out-of-school care and in rural areas.



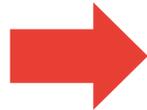
Almost all LAs gave assistance to parents to find places:

- Often through existing FIS and brokerage systems.
- But many LAs enhanced these systems in some way.

Issues for providers and LA support



Health and safety issues presented widespread and multiple challenges.



Almost all LAs offered support:

- Advice / assistance with risk assessments.
- Provision of free / cheaper PPE.

Staffing issues were not so widespread.



Around half of LAs offered support:

- Several reported help was not needed or contingency plans not used

Financial impacts moderate in terms of immediate closures:



Almost all LAs gave financial management advice:

- Some using external organizations.

- Warnings of future impacts.



High proportion of LAs allocated local funds to support provider sustainability.

LAs struggled to say conclusively how quality had been affected:

- Mainly adverse impacts but some benefits.



A high proportion of LAs gave additional quality support:

- Many reported they always supported quality anyway.

Overall levels of LA support



Some variation in support across the 7 key areas:

- All LAs had support in at least 3 areas.
- Two thirds of LAs offered support in 6 or 7 areas

LAs used a mix of local and national messaging:

- Some predominantly used bespoke local messages.
- Some relied more on signposting to national sources.

Total local additional spending challenging to report:

- Considerable in many areas.
- But substantial variation and no additional spending in some.

Challenging to measure effectiveness:

- No measure of depth of support in each area / financial information too patchy.
- Quite low proportions of LAs reported support had made a clear difference.
- Typically reported positive feedback / no complaints or noted that settings had not closed.

Factors facilitating and hindering LA support



Long list of factors reported by LAs

Areas with largest number of comments:

- Strength of senior and political support for Early Years within the LA (allowing for quick and strong decisions).
- The status, recognition and understanding of the Early Years sector with (local and national) Government.
- Speed and effectiveness of the development of new technological approaches and online communications.
- The usability and timing of national Government Guidance.

National guidance most commonly mentioned as a hindrance

Status of Early Years sector had most strongly-worded views.

Other areas:

- Strength of LA Early Years team.
- External support including LA regional co-operation and national organizations (such as Hempsalls)

LAs which felt least supported (more hindrances relative to facilitators):

- Active in fewer policy areas.

Post-pandemic expectations



Over half of Early Years Leads thought there will be permanent changes in parent demand; in childcare provision; and in the LA role in the sector:

- Only a quarter thought there will permanent changes in all three elements.
- Majority thought there will be some permanent changes, but not across all elements.

Change in demand / provision:

- Lower due to home-working and more flexible working.
- Lower for hours outside 9am-3pm, particularly for out-of-school care.

Change in LA role (mix of expectations and hopes):

- Move towards greater virtual working.
- Greater recognition and understanding of Early Years sector in Government (local and national).

Balance of responsibilities between local and national Government:

- Very few comments on whether would or should change.

Implications from findings for further discussion



No widespread view that the sector is on the brink of financial disaster:

- But too early to make conclusive judgements.

Permanently lower demand in itself not a problem if the market adjusts:

- But reductions in parent-paid hours could have negative impacts for free entitlement hours or for groups already poorly served.
- Particular concerns about out-of-school provision where there were shortages pre-pandemic (and this care is needed by a large number of working parents).

LAs played an active role in supporting providers and families with a wide range of approaches:

- Indicate responsive approach to address local need as and when it emerged.

But there was variation in the level of LA activity:

- Not a problem if this reflects differences in need.
- But the range of facilitators and hindrances across different areas suggests this may be driven by differences in local priorities and resources.

Finally, thank you again...



To all those who gave their
valuable time to take part in
the survey.



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