



**Family and
Childcare Trust**

Creating a family friendly UK

The work of Family Information Services in England in 2015

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Context: Legal Requirements



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- If children and parents are to benefit from services, then families have to know what is available. Family Information Services are key in disseminating this information.
 - The Childcare Act 2006 (Section 12) places duties on local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance and sets the legal framework for Family Information Services. There is also statutory guidance for local authorities on how they should carry out their information duty (2008).
 - Section 5 of the Childcare Act 2016 amends the Childcare Act 2006 information duties. New regulations will require local authorities to publish information about local childcare services in an electronic format at a prescribed frequency, using open data standards (subject to consultation). Government intends that in future parents will be able to easily access up to date information about childcare online.
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Context: Changes in childcare support



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- There will be major changes to the way that parents are supported with their childcare costs between now and 2017. This will require an information drive and Family Information Services are crucial to getting information out to parents.
 - The changes include:
 - Increased support under Universal Credit , providing help for 85 per cent of costs, up from 70 per cent under Working Tax Credit. This change will be rolled out from 11 April 2016.
 - Introduction of Tax Free Childcare in 2017.
 - Expansion of free early education to cover 1,140 hours every year from September 2017, with pilots starting in September 2016.
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Purpose of survey

- The research aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of the work undertaken by Family Information Services across England.
- We hope the survey will inform the consultation of draft regulations attached to the Childcare Act 2016 (Published April 2016).
- We also hope the survey will enable you to make the case for Family Information Services, at a time when local authority services are in a state of change and there is pressure on budgets.

Methodology



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- In January 2016 a survey was sent out to 151 Family Information Services in England (Isles of Scilly not included).
 - There were 115 respondents to the survey.
 - Thirty-six Family Information Services did not respond. Many of those who did not are from local authorities which have fully merged their services into generic council helplines, for example Lewisham and Haringey.
 - Questions included:
 - Structure of FIS, including how they are arranged within their local authority
 - Services provided
 - Outreach and partnership work undertaken
 - Changes their FIS has undergone/will undergo

Methodology



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- Questions added from last years survey covered website hits, social media engagement and the family services directory.
 - Why where these questions added?
 - Over the past decade, technology has made significant advances. Organisations are able to reach their intended audiences through many forms of digital media. Therefore, in this survey it was relevant to ask questions about the current online presence of Family Information Services and the level of audience engagement they receive through these platforms.

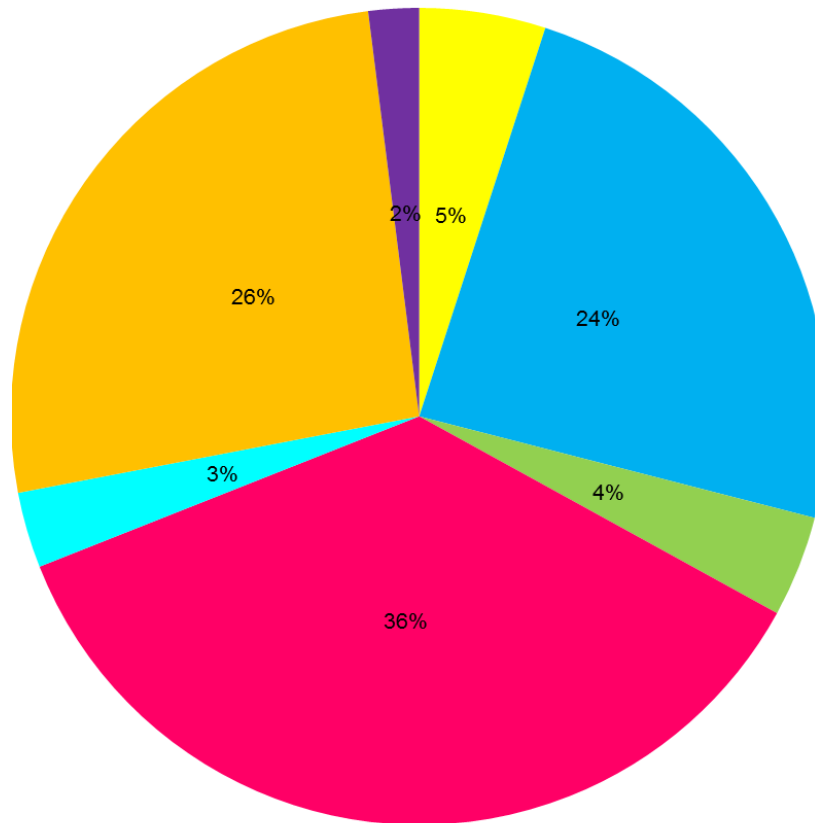
Our findings



Family Information Service structures



Structure of Family Information Service



- All of the FIS has been merged into the council's generic helpline/contact point
- It has been merged with another team and lies outside children's services or education.
- It is solely a separate team/unit within a local authority directorate other than children's services.
- It is solely a separate team/unit within children's services/education
- Other
- Some of the FIS has been merged into the council's generic helpline/contact point but we retain some 'second tier' FIS staff to deal with more complex enquiries, undertake brokerage and update information.
- The FIS has been outsourced to an organisation outside the local authority.

Family Information Service structures



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- As shown in the previous slide, the most common structure of a Family Information Service is as a separate unit within the Children's Service. This is closely followed by merging the Family Information Services in to another team outside Children's Services or merging with the councils generic helpline/ contact point.
 - The average number of full-time equivalent staff employed at Family Information Services is 3.2, down from 4.6 in 2014 and 4.8 in 2011.
 - This ranges from no dedicated Family Information Service staff in Hertfordshire, Manchester, Staffordshire to 10 staff in Birmingham.
 - Family Information Services with no dedicated staff rely other teams within the local authority to take on family information related work that is necessary.
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Target groups and childcare brokerage



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- Nearly a third (31 per cent) of Family Information Services do not target specific groups for its work. Those who do target specific groups (69 per cent) mention:
 - Parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities
 - Vulnerable families
 - Low income families
 - Young parents
 - Families eligible for the 2 year old free early education offer
 - 86 per cent of Family Information Services offer childcare brokerage services. Within that number, 12 per cent only offer these services to specific groups. 14 per cent offer no brokerage services.

Volume of enquiries per month



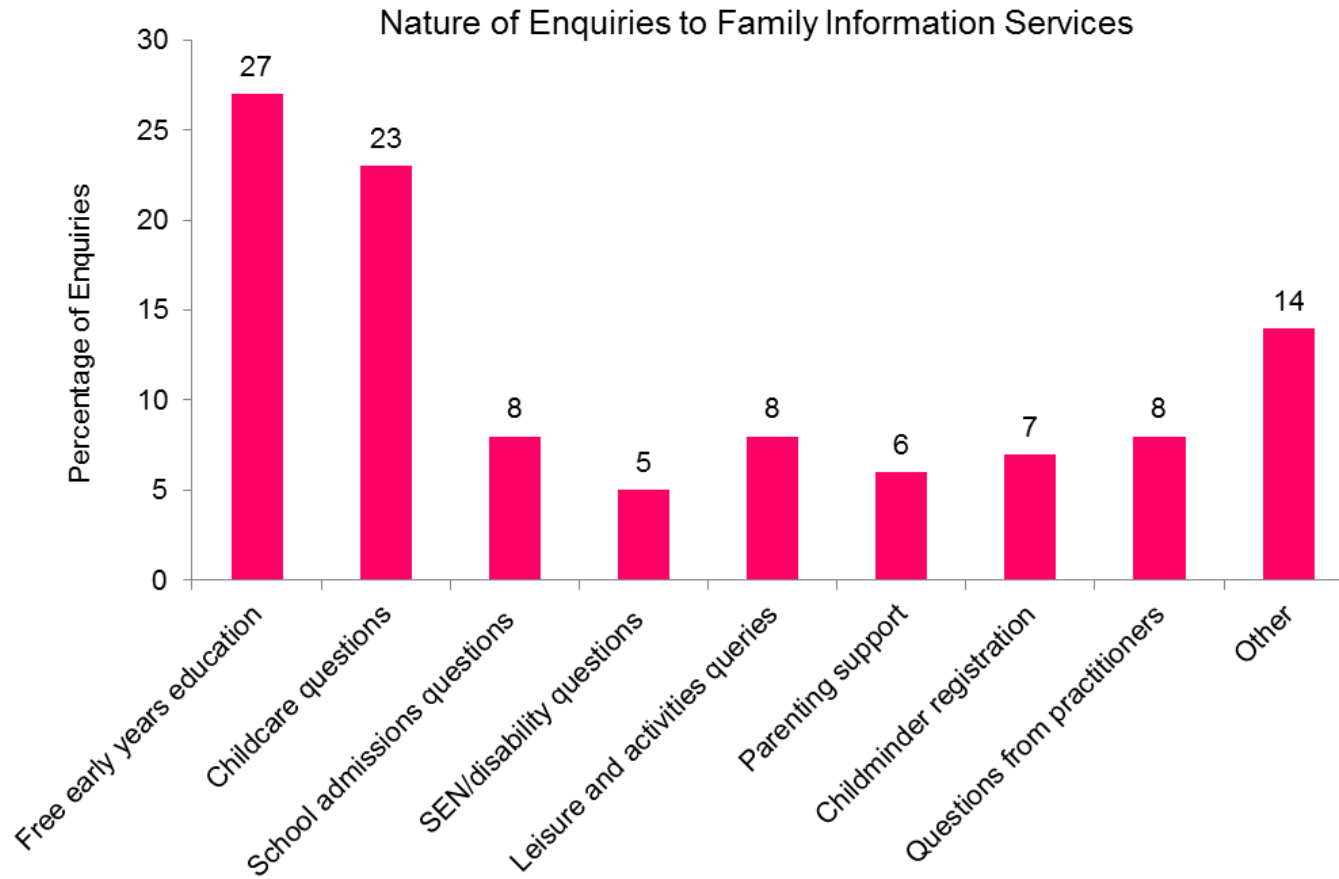
	Average	Range
Telephone	329	0-1993
Email	145	0-500
Social Media	8	0-100
Face-to-face	92	0-3000
Total	574	

Volume of enquiries



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- The average number of enquires was 235 per month in the 2014 survey. The increase to 574 this year may be down to greater use of Family Information Services due to 2 year old offer and better monitoring of use.
 - Scaled up, Family Information Services are now dealing with 1,041,000 enquiries across England, every year.
 - Family Information Services vary in their structure and communication methods, this is reflected in the above ranges.
 - 71 per cent of enquiries come from parents and 23 per cent are from professionals.

Nature of enquiries

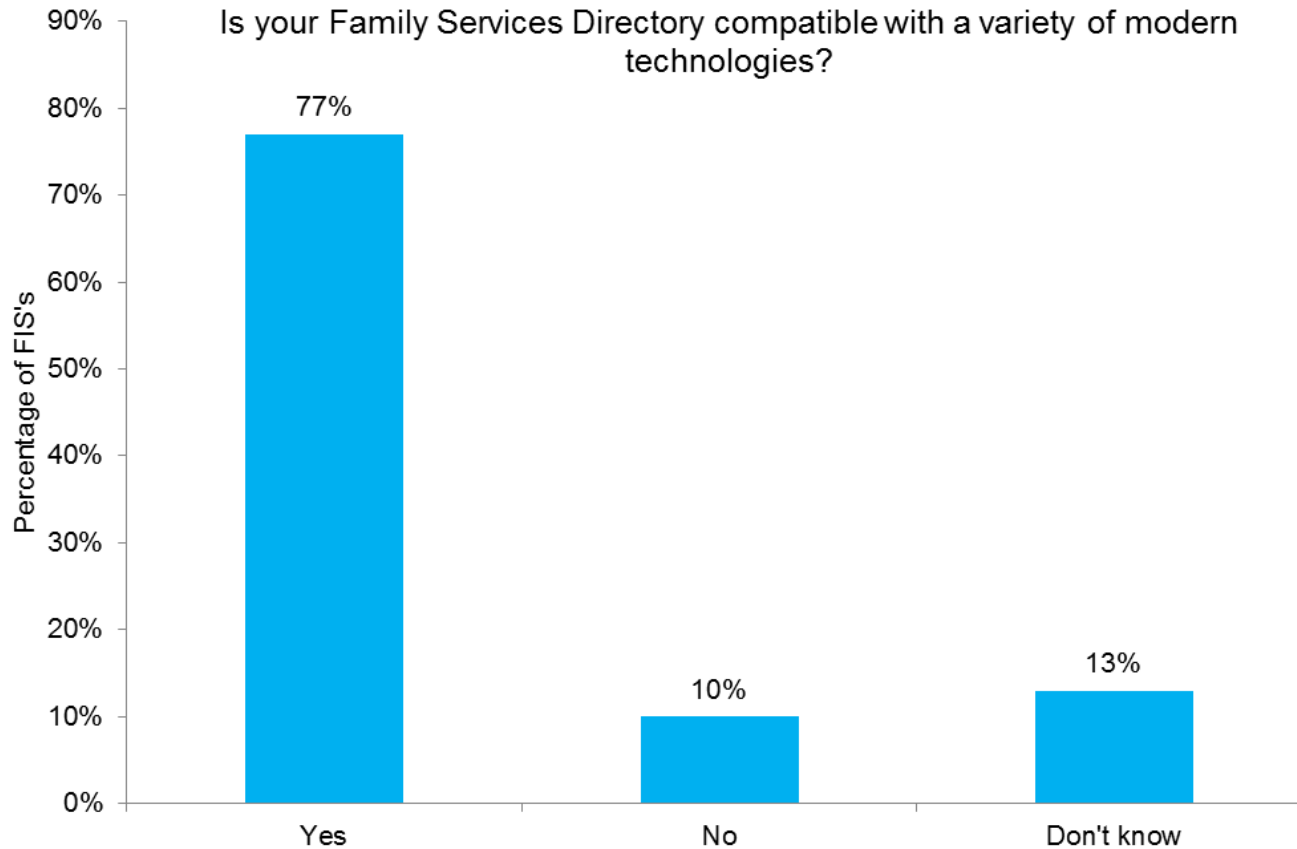


Family Services Directory



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- The Family Services Directory aims to provide families with comprehensive information and support, activities and services to help them get the most for their children from an early age. This can include the following:
 - Parenting and caring
 - Special educational needs and disability
 - Education and childcare
 - Careers advice and training opportunities
 - Money and benefits
 - Local activities for families
 - Health
 - 104 out of 110 FIS who answered this question have a Family Services Directory that is fully searchable online.
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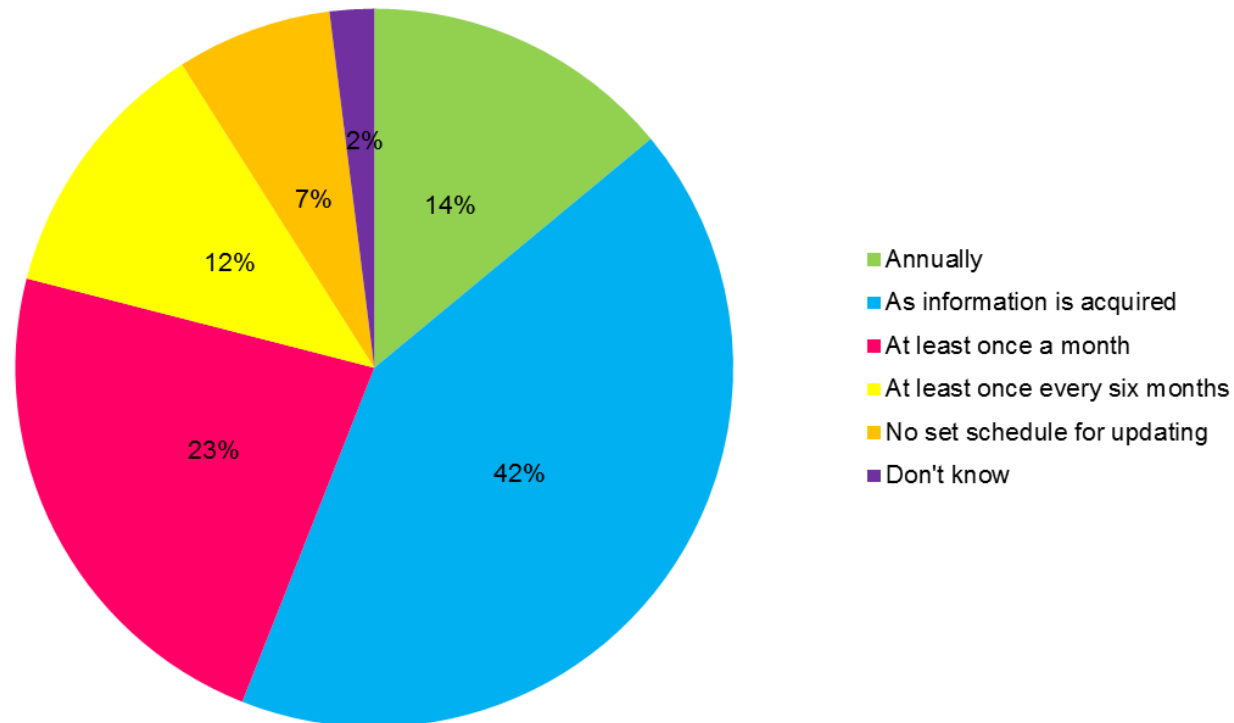
Family Services Directory



Family Services Directory



How often do you update your Family Services Directory?

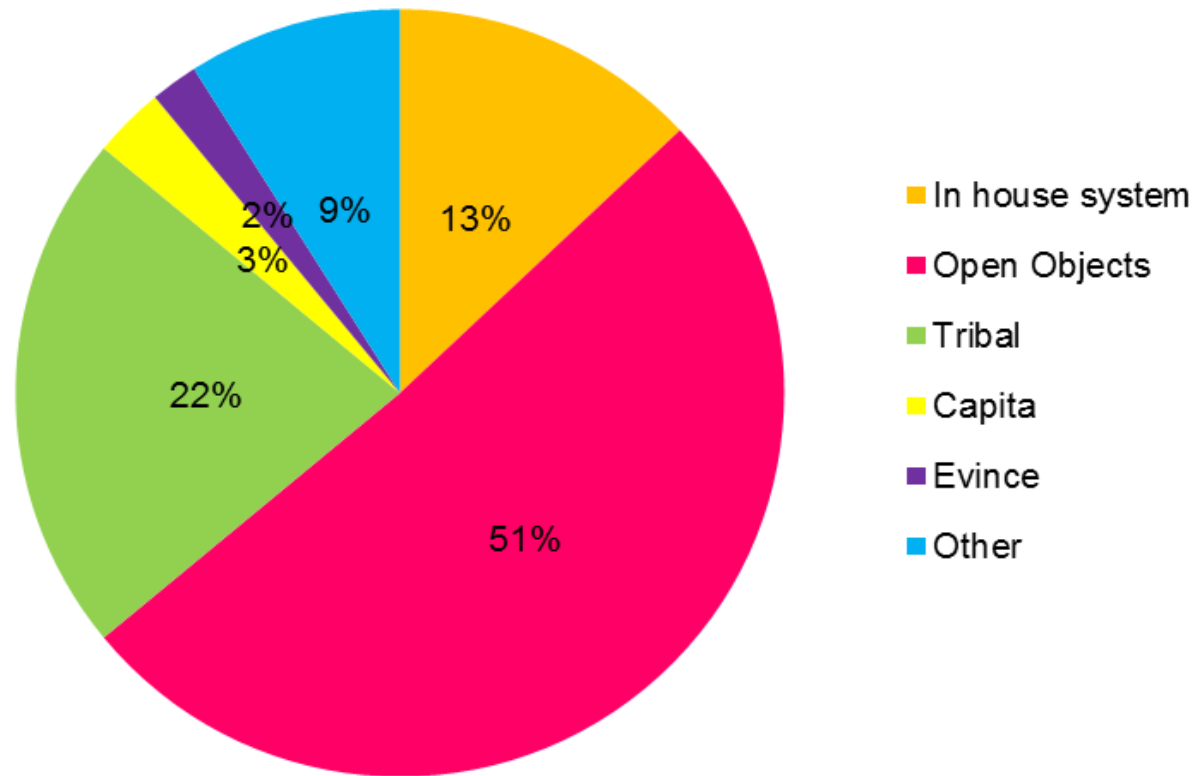


- The draft consultation on local authority duties will require that Family Information Services update their information annually.

Family Services Directory



In what format is your Family Services Directory data published?



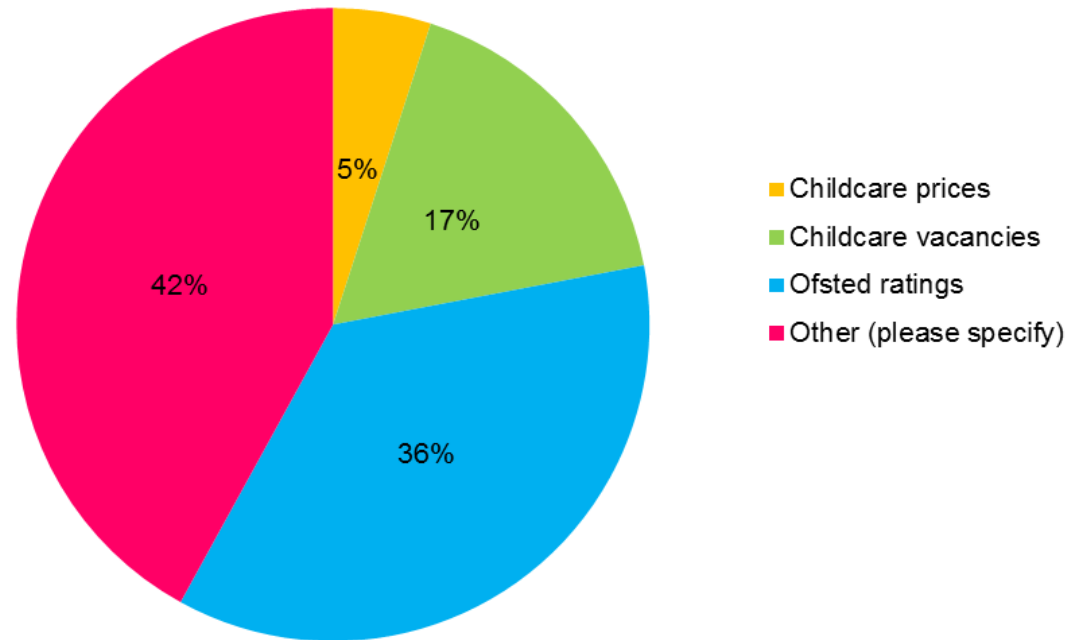
Family Services Directory



What type of information do you update most frequently?

Other information that is updated frequently includes:

- Contact details
- Opening hours
- Local offer information
- Events and activities



Online Material

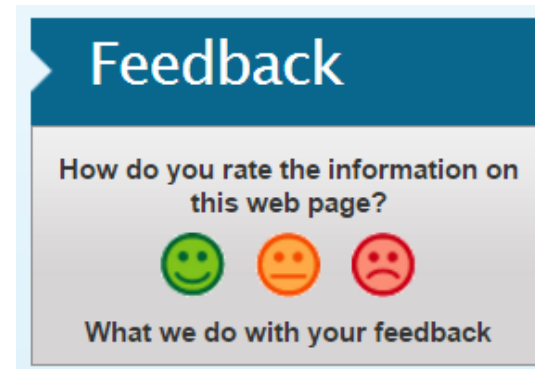


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- In a typical month, Family Information Service websites have an average of 34136 website hits. Of these, an average of 17313 are unique (new viewers).
 - On social media, Family Information Services have an average of 1199 followers on Facebook and 910 followers on Twitter.
 - Not all Family Information Services have a social media presence.
 - There is no consistent way of displaying online material between Family Information Service. The information that is published also varies between service.

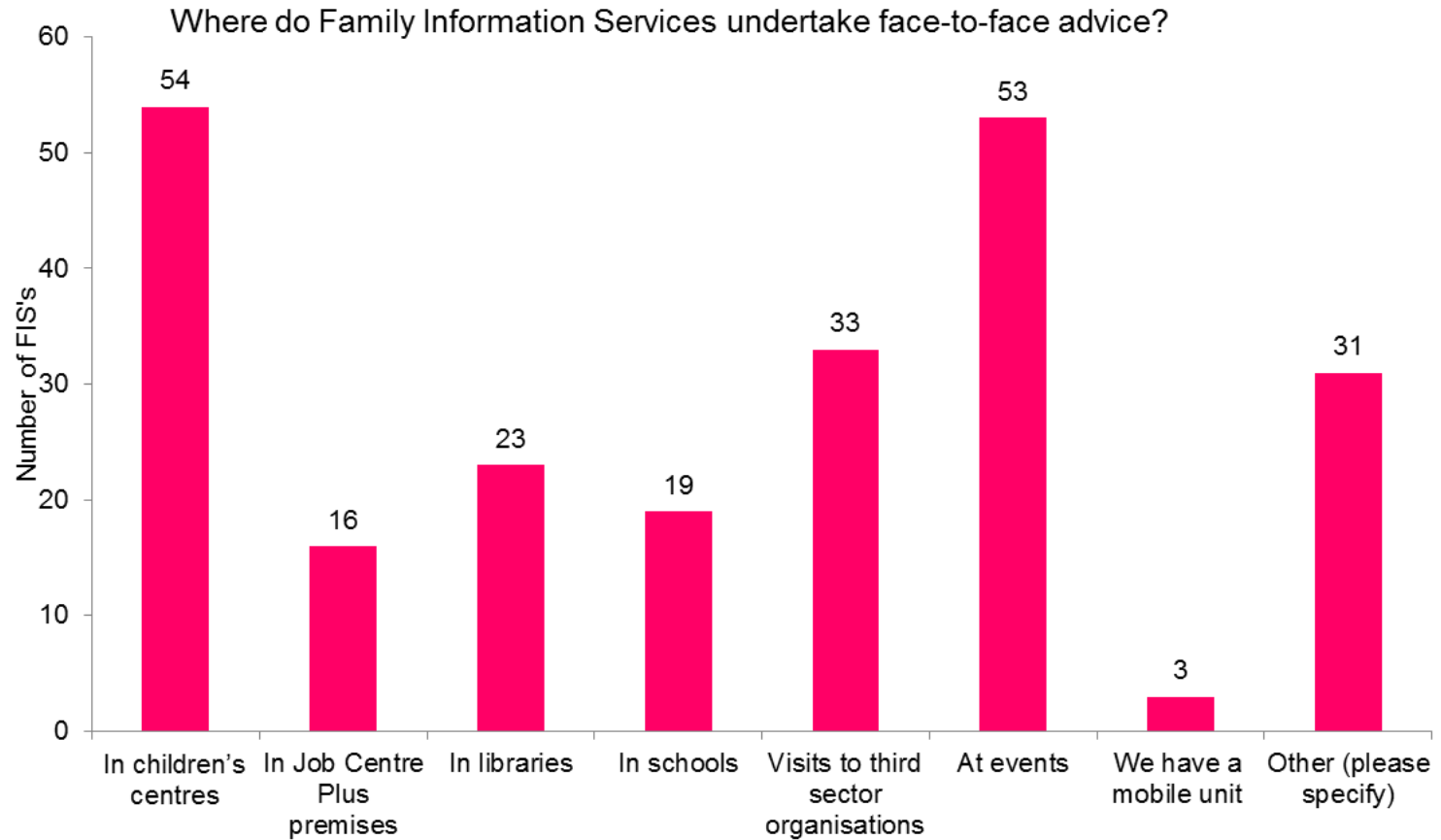
Evaluation of online material



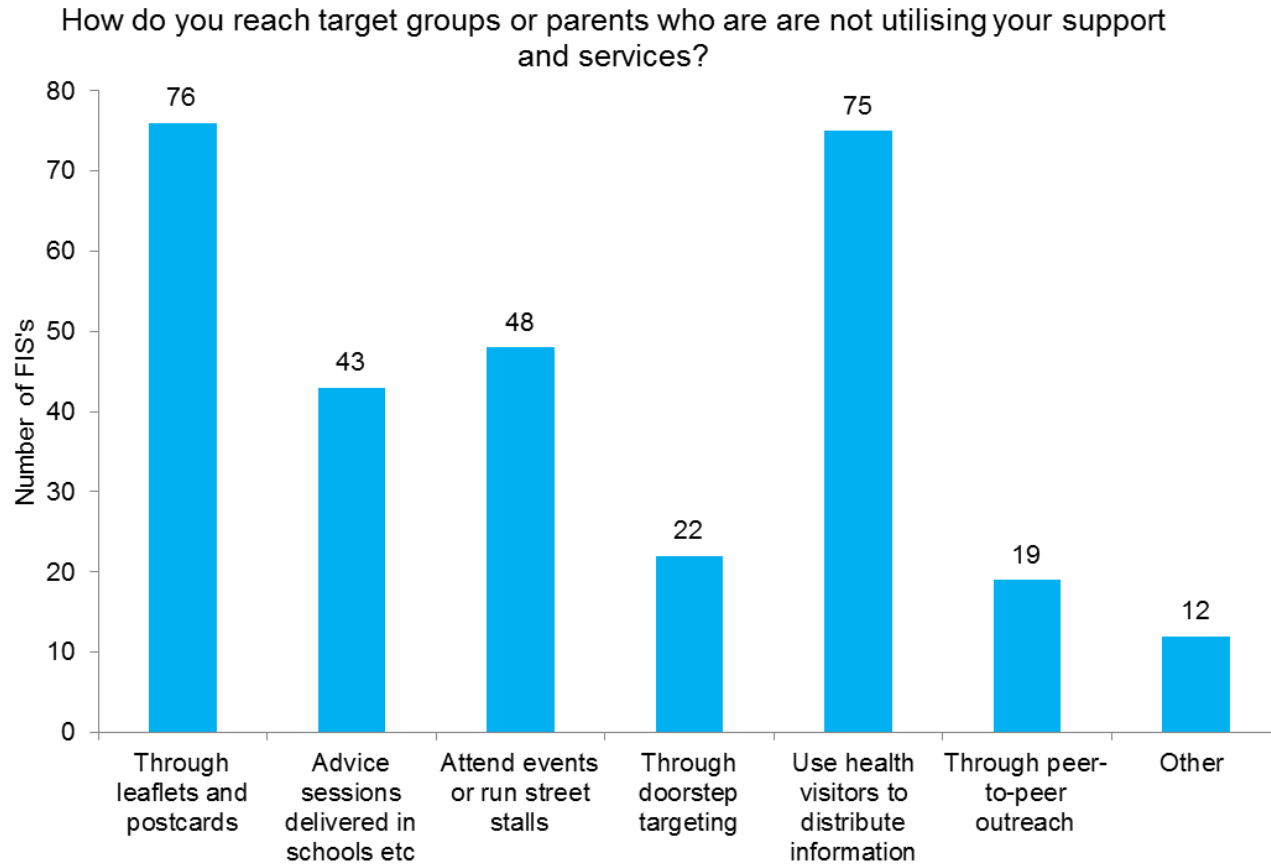
- Fifty-three per cent of Family Information Services seek feedback from parents on the friendliness and content of their websites.
- Of the remaining 47 per cent, 19 per cent of services gain feedback passively through methods such as 'rate this page'.
- 44 per cent of services test their impact from the user perspective by particular methods such as mystery shoppers, customer surveys or peer reviews.



Outreach work (1)



Outreach work (2)



Outreach work (3)



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- Responses to questions about outreach work once again reflect the varying structures and capacities of Family Information Services.
 - Family Information Services with smaller staff sizes are less able to carry out advice sessions or doorstep targeting.
 - As you can see, from the graph on the previous slide using third parties such as health visitors, or distributing leaflets/postcards are the most popular forms of outreach. Arguably these methods do not require as many staff to be effective.

An uncertain future?



	Changes to staff numbers	Changes to budget	Changes to opening hours	Changes to the delivery of face-to-face sessions	Changes to the delivery of outreach services	Changes to the delivery of childcare brokerage
Increased	6%	1%	0%	2%	3%	6%
Reduced	51%	66%	12%	57%	59%	21%
Stayed the same	43%	33%	88%	41%	38%	73%

An uncertain future?



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- The chart above shows that in the past year the main of reduction in Family Information Services have been in the areas of budget, staff and delivery of face-to-face and outreach services. Over half of the respondents to the survey reported reductions in these areas.
 - The opening hours of Family Information Services have largely stayed the same.
 - In the upcoming financial year 48 per cent of Family Information Services expect changes within their local authorities that will affect them.

Summary



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- Many Family Information Service teams now have other roles within local authorities – for example, school admissions.
 - Despite reductions in staffing, Family Information Services are still reaching parents. The survey results indicate they are dealing with over one million enquiries every year. This has more than doubled since 2014 when the average was 430,000.
 - Online enquires and website hits are now an important way of disseminating information. But use of IT and the content and quality of online material is varied.
 - Some local authorities have disbanded their Family Information Service teams, retaining an online presence and through generic council helpline. Whether this reduced service will meet the requirements of new legislation is up for question.
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Want to find out more?



The Family and Childcare Trust is the leading national charity in the field of policy, research and advocacy on childcare and family issues, working closely with government, local authorities, businesses and charities to achieve positive and long lasting change for families across the UK. Our vision is a society where all families are well-supported and have genuine choices about their lives.

The Family and Childcare Trust's annual childcare costs survey is the definitive report on childcare costs and sufficiency in the UK and its data are used by the Department for Education and OECD. For further information, go to www.familyandchildcaretrust.org

- Email our NAFIS officer on william@familyandchildcaretrust.org
- Follow us on Twitter @FamChildTrust