

Local families 'spending more on childcare than food and heat' ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

For two-thirds of families in Northern Ireland, the childcare bill is their largest or second largest monthly outgoing.

The startling figure was revealed as Employers For Childcare launches the 9th Annual Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey results which show that, after housing, the childcare bill continues to exceed groceries, heating, transport and other household costs.

While this year's Survey found the average cost of a full-time childcare place has dropped slightly to £166 per week, the ability to afford and access childcare is still a significant issue for thousands of families.

Each family's experience depends on a range of factors including the type of provider they use, with the change overall largely driven by a decrease in the average cost of a childminder place, while the average cost of a day nursery place has actually increased.

The average cost for a full-time childcare place in Co Down has decreased from £171 in 2017 to £166 per week in 2018, which is now in line with the average cost across Northern Ireland.

While this may offer some respite, families are still struggling with affordability as the childcare bill remains equivalent to a significant proportion of household income.

Strikingly, almost six in ten parents in County Down feel that there is insufficient provision of one or more types of childcare in their area.

One mum from Co Down highlighted how she has had to reduce her working hours to balance the cost of childcare for her two children, "I had to give up full-time work at the end of my maternity leave as it would no longer pay for one child in childcare, never mind two children."

Aoife Hamilton, Policy & Information Manager at Employers For Childcare stated, "Over half of the parents who responded to the Survey stated they have had to cut back or go without to meet their childcare costs.

"Some have had to resort to borrowing from payday loans to meet their bill. At the same time, many childcare providers told us they have sought not to increase their fees over the past year, in some cases absorbing increasing overheads, rather than passing them on to parents. This situation is simply not sustainable for parents or childcare providers in the longer term," she added.

The research has also revealed a strong call from parents to bring childcare support in Northern Ireland in line with England where eligible families can receive 30 hours of free childcare for three to four-year-olds.

Aoife explained, "Families recognise that it is costly to deliver quality childcare, which is why they are expressing their frustration that the sector here is receiving less investment than in other parts of the UK. Introducing policies such as the '30-hours free childcare' would go a long way to alleviating some of the hardship or difficulties experienced by local working families."

Looking towards the future Aoife added, "Over three-quarters of parents stated they believe the quality of childcare they receive is excellent, with many calling for childcare workers to be better remunerated and recognised for the valuable role they play in shaping the next generation.

"The message coming from parents is therefore very clear – they want proper investment from Government in a childcare infrastructure that is affordable, flexible, and meets the needs of families.

"Alongside this, they are calling for an early years system on a level with other parts of the UK, and access to the financial support needed to ensure going out to work will always, always pay. As we enter 2019, Employers For Childcare will continue to make it our mission to lobby Government for a better deal for working parents and childcare providers."

Related link:

Region: Europe ^[3]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/01/local-families-%E2%80%98spending-more-childcare-food-and-heat%E2%80%99> [2] <http://newrytimes.com/2019/01/22/local-families-spending-more-on-childcare-than-food-and-heat/> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe>