

Local councils breaking childcare laws as working parents forced to rely on charity of friends and family ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Millions of children across Britain are being denied local childcare by councils, with working parents forced to rely on the charity of friends and family, according to a report to be released on Tuesday.

More than half of local authorities in England and Wales are breaking the law by not meeting their legal obligations to ensure sufficient childcare for working parents, according to the report by the Family and Childcare Trust.

The Childcare Act 2006, which came into force in 2008, places a legal responsibility on all local authorities in England and Wales to provide sufficient childcare for working parents and those in training or education to return to work.

For children aged between five and 11, only a third have sufficient places. Young teenagers and children living in the countryside have even less provision, with fewer than a fifth of councils providing enough childcare for them. The picture is also poor for parents with disabled children.

Jill Rutter, author of the report, said: "Millions of families are really struggling. The duty to provide childcare didn't come in until 2008 ... and local authorities have not been held to account."

A third of families across Britain use "informal childcare, which is usually grandparents", she added.

A "failure of political will" has allowed councils to go unpunished, she claimed. "We would like the Government to enforce the duty on local authorities to provide sufficient childcare. What's the point of having this law if it's not enforced?"

Responding to the news yesterday, Labour's shadow minister for childcare, Lucy Powell, said: "Ministers should act to tackle this crisis in childcare places. Instead, under David Cameron, we've seen a childcare crunch hitting family budgets and acting as a drag on the economy." Labour has pledged to extend free childcare for three and four-year-olds with parents in work from 15 to 25 hours.

"Nursery costs have risen five times faster than wages since 2010, early years places are plummeting and ministers have cut financial support to help pay for childcare. Getting enough good quality childcare in a local area is vital to get parents into work and to help the economy grow," she added.

-reprinted from the Independent

Region: Europe ^[2]

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