



Still Home Alone?

Developing 'next generation' care for older children

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We are not the first generation to discover the potential conflict between the demands of the labour market and the needs and interests of children. The emergence of the ‘latchkey kid’ phenomenon created a wave of concern during the 1960s and ‘70s, as women entered the workplace in substantial numbers without childcare support. Forty years on, most parents now work, and there have been substantial improvements in childcare provision, especially for younger children. The current Government approach combines the expectation that family life will continue with parental employment, and the drive to tackle child poverty. On the one hand extending maternity leave and nursery provision; on the other, a greater emphasis on ‘welfare to work’, which will take another stride forward next year that will require lone parents to seek work when their youngest child is over 12.

But this sits against the backdrop of rising concern over the welfare of older children and teenagers; the alarming shortfall in provision for this age group could have serious implications for these policies. Evidence from abroad confirms that if good quality, reliable out of school activities are not available as part of welfare to work strategies, young people can be damaged by the experience. The positive case is also being made for these activities enhancing young people’s well-being, whilst also offering parents the chance to work.

What is ‘next generation’ care and why now?

“We don’t want to trade off more parents in work for more kids in trouble”

It may not be rocket science, but gaining access to positive and regular activities for older children at times that also support parents to work is something that is still a rarity for the majority of families.

Forthcoming changes to welfare policies will require lone parents whose children are 12 and over to return to work, affecting approximately 150,000 children aged 12–14.¹ To be able to work these parents need support for their children – a secure and positive place for them to go after and sometimes before school and during school holidays. Experience from the US indicates that Welfare to Work programmes can have a negative impact on academic achievement of adolescents if they do not have proper

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support and supervision.² The UK must learn from these lessons and put the support needed in place to ensure that these children are not disadvantaged as a result of their parents working.

But out of school provision is still not a reality for many children and families, with 80% of young people surveyed by the Make Space campaign saying they had nowhere to go and nothing to do.³ Even where such activities exist, they remain out of reach for many, financially for those on low incomes, for others because they are not aware of what is on offer or how to access these new opportunities. In some areas, schemes which cannot generate enough income to keep themselves going simply fold. That many of these problems occur in the most deprived communities is of real concern and out of school support for older children needs to be considered in the context of the government's anti-poverty strategy as well as 'welfare to work'.

But the challenge goes further – the ultimate judges of out of school provision are young people themselves and the new generation of clubs need to be appealing for young people. Children of secondary school age are likely to resist any provision which bears a 'childcare' label. They are taking their first steps towards independence and cannot be shoe-horned into a particular model of service. Yet parents need to know their children are safe, engaged in something which will meet their needs; and as all parents of older children know, this kind of arrangement can only work if children themselves want to be there. Childcare for older children is less about hand holding and more about creating a great place to be, that has plenty of activity going on and – arguably of most importance – is somewhere that children want to be.

“It's only natural you want to know where your child is, you sit at your computer thinking, is he home yet?... why hasn't he called?... you sit there watching the clock...”

At a time when the debate about keeping teenagers safe is raging amongst the public and the media, the often unsupervised time which older children spend after school does provoke important safety concerns.

Research shows that at any one point in time half of parents do not know exactly where their teenagers are, whom they are with or what they are doing when they are not in school.⁴ This means that should those young people get into trouble there is little support that parents can themselves immediately offer to their children. The rise

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in unsupervised time has also been linked to an increase in numbers of gangs which can move in to fill this vacuum for young people.⁵

The impact of the welfare changes in the Government Green Paper *In Work, Better Off* brings home the grim reality that only one place for every 200 children aged 11–14 currently exists.

In order to meet this challenge within the time frame available, there is a need to make the creation of new places an urgent priority. In order to meet demand, local authorities should be encouraged to develop childcare schemes, in partnership with local youth services and out of school providers and schools, with a start up fund of up to £20,000. With secondary schools across the country offering a ready made infrastructure and combined with a practical programme of national help and support from local authorities, this is a crucial opportunity to create a new layer of support for families which meet the needs and desires of children, parents and communities.

The next phase of the childcare revolution – 'next generation' clubs for older children

Despite significant improvements in childcare for younger children, the reality of support for parents once their children reach secondary school remains very patchy with low numbers of schemes, an information deficit and low parental expectation which has not succeeded in stimulating the market so far. Current estimates put the number of formal childcare places for the over 11s at around 20,000 places. On current population figures this means there is approximately 1 place for every 200 children.

Over the last decade, the Government vision has been for a revolution in childcare which would establish high quality and accessible childcare for all families of children up to the age of 14 who need it (16 for children with special educational needs or disabilities).⁶ The approach would offer parents greater choice and flexibility in how they balance their work commitments and family life; would be affordable and available for all parents with children aged up to 14 who need it; and would be high quality, offering opportunities for children and young people to develop and flourish and peace of mind for parents.

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However despite much success, there is significant evidence that this growth has not been uniform across age ranges and in particular that provision for older children (11–14) has not increased; meaning that parents and children in this age range have not yet realised the vision for childcare laid out in the ten year strategy. Forthcoming local sufficiency assessments will offer a more detailed picture but here again, low levels of awareness and lack of clarity about what constitutes childcare for this age group may combine to demonstrate low expectations.

For policy makers, these concerns are further fuelled by a recognition that these years are a crucial point of development for children during which long-lasting attitudes and capabilities begin to form. The gap between when the school bell rings at 3.30pm and parents return home from work is increasingly identified as a vulnerable period of time for young people, often spent on chaotic and unstructured interaction which contrasts poorly with the ‘socialising’ influence of parents and communities for young people and can lead to poor outcomes. Failing to deliver here could have consequences across communities in the cost of crime and unfulfilled potential.

What do we mean by ‘childcare’ for older children?

Childcare is defined by the Childcare Act 2006 as *“any form of care for a child which includes education and any other supervised activity not provided by a school during school hours”*.

What do older children and parents need?

- Fantastic things to do and positive opportunities
- To be involved in the design of these activities and have a say in what goes on
- Access to a safe and supervised environment
- To have inspirational adults around – workers who aren’t like parents or teachers
- Regular and reliable provision so that parents can depend on it – children are registered and stay there
- For provision to be open when parents are at work – term times and holidays

What is provided for older children?

Whilst around 77% of families with 11–15 year olds have both parents in employment and 65% of lone parents of this age range are also in work, the development of childcare for this age range has been disappointingly slow.

The Childcare Survey⁷ shows that whilst the use of formal childcare has increased from 17% to 30% across all age groups, it has only increased by 3% for those aged 8–11 and only 2% to a mere 8% for those in the 12–14 age group.

Use of childcare in the last week, by age of child and by year

Age in years	0-2	3-4	5-7	8-11	12-14
Used formal childcare 2001 (%)	31	58	23	18	6
Used formal childcare 2004 (%)	35	86	27	21	8
Change in %	+4	+28	+4	+3	+2

Caroline Bryson, Anne Kazimirski and Helen Southwood, *Childcare and Early Years Provision: A Study of Parents' Use, Views and Experience*, NatCen, 2007

Getting an accurate picture of what provision for this older age range currently exists can be difficult, partly because providers are not required to register with Ofsted. However 4Children estimated that around 1,000 providers were catering for secondary school age children in 2005⁸ and current estimates put the number of formal childcare places at around 20,000 places. On current population figures this means there is approximately one place for every 200 children over 11 in the population. Far from the vision of choice and flexible provision which was outlined in the ten year strategy, therefore, parents of older children would struggle to find a place for their child in the sparse provision which currently exists.

To further complicate the picture, there are definitional problems over what constitutes a 'place'. An activity may be listed but only take place once a week, for example, which is not much help for a working parent needing cover three days a week. Worse still, there can be a problem with reliability – activities can be cancelled at little

notice, leaving the child and parent with no time or opportunity to find an alternative.

What do parents want and need?

“I stitch together the arrangements for my children after school – we are always only one step away from chaos.”

Despite relatively little debate over care for this age group it is clear that most people do not believe that children of this age are old enough to be left alone for significant periods of time. Only 26% of parents believe that 11–13 year olds are old enough to look after themselves.⁹ Many parents simply live with the daily struggle to combine work and family life successfully – and with little on offer, parental expectation is low, often unaware of what they could or should expect. Some use informal arrangements with partners or grandparents or take children to work so that they do not have to stay home alone. Meanwhile, other children are left to fend for themselves – limiting their own opportunities with only the TV or MySpace as their companion.

However parental demand is not static and levers such as information, assistance with payment and understanding of the benefits of childcare for this older age group are not being used either locally or centrally to stimulate demand in the way that these have done for children in younger age ranges. Information in particular is often identified as a key shortfall, with surveys showing that parents of 11–15 year olds are more likely than parents of younger children to say that there was too little information available regarding childcare.

The word ‘childcare’ can also be confusing in relation to this older age range – whilst many older children will not want to associate themselves with ‘childcare’, parents too may think of this as too hand holding for their teen and pre-teen children. This means that surveys of parents may well be under-representing demand for what policy makers understand childcare to be.

Concerns about quality of provision may also play a role in discouraging use of the more formal facilities, with parents of this older age group being significantly less likely to rate the quality of childcare highly than parents of younger children.¹⁰ The new Ofsted

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Childcare Register offers a voluntary registration facility (from April 2007) where providers of childcare for children over 8 and under 17 may register. Whilst this may offer some comfort and peace of mind for parents in the longer run, at present it is too early to judge its impact, and it will need to ensure that parents understand how and what it means for them.

How can we make it happen?

The current situation is clearly not working for parents or children, but how can the system tackle what is undoubtedly a complex issue?

The starting point has to be current government strategies and initiatives. The fundamental vision of the ten year strategy for childcare remains valid and sound and aspirational for older children. So too does the recently launched *Aiming High for Young People* strategy to provide positive places to go and things to do for young people.¹¹ In order to make these a reality, a renewed impetus for change is needed, combined with a programme of strategic and operational activity designed to tackle the local and national barriers to change.

Increasing good quality provision for older children

There is little doubt that new provision for this age range is needed. The question is: how it can be delivered?

Much can be achieved through building on and bringing together existing provision and initiatives. Encouraging youth provision to operate earlier in the day and in school holidays and linking with extended schools is a clear way forward. Encouraging existing childcare providers of primary school age children to extend to secondary schools and providing wraparound care arrangements alongside existing activities – from school based activities to leisure activities – are just some of the very practical ways that this can be achieved.

To achieve this, start up or transition funding will be needed. Evaluation of funding initiatives like the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) have shown that start up funding remains vital to the stimulation of the market and therefore to the creation of new

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places. However, we know that schools in deprived areas in the Regent's Park and Kensington North constituency receive only around £10 per pupil per year to provide after school activities – and after local authority top slicing of funds, only around £6,000 for the whole year to provide extended school services.¹² More funding must be made available for this age group if adequate levels of provision are to be developed. Furthermore, the evaluation is clear that the NOF funding resulted in fewer closures than previous schemes although it also identified the need for ongoing subsidies in order for services in very deprived areas to stay viable. If we are to ensure that parents in deprived areas are able to go back to work and stay in work, policy must recognise that childcare subsidies may need to be longer term.

Maximising the potential of current initiatives

Extended schools are a major focus of expansion of school age support and have the potential to offer 11–14 year olds a great place to be at times that are needed. And despite some concerns, young people themselves say that more activities in school would be welcomed. Of the young people who took part in the Make Space Youth Review, 68% said they would be likely to use youth activities offered through school buildings as long as they were not simply an extension of the school day.

The vision of childcare from 8am to 6pm being one of the five elements of the core offer is delivering well for primary school age children but has not yet delivered for parents of secondary school age children, with most secondary schools not yet offering a full 8am–6pm day that working parents can rely on and no formal requirement for childcare for secondary schools as part of the core offer.

Even without the requirement for formal childcare, creative use of the 'varied menu of activities' element could be made to work to offer young people and parents the support they need. However parents are often unaware of what is available at their local school, the extent to which these activities would meet their needs across the week and whether these are eligible for Working Tax Credit support. These factors combine to mean that the whole area of support for older children can become too difficult to deliver. With schools receiving no ringfenced funding for this element of provision it is too easy for the momentum to dissipate and for nothing to happen.

However, the new ten year strategy for positive activities, *Aiming High for Young People*, does offer an opportunity to build and develop new youth services with a clear focus on maximizing the potential of extended schools beyond the traditional youth model.

Drawing together new infrastructure and funding streams, coupled with a strategic vision to maximize the potential of current initiatives, offers a real opportunity to push this agenda forwards.

Providing financial subsidies and support for families

“Why is it cheaper for me to take an adult education course, than for my child to go to after-school club?”

“I want him to experience these things, but I just can’t stretch the money that little bit further.”

One of the challenges of making provision for this age range work is around the issue of who pays. Parents of older children often just aren’t used to paying for childcare¹³ and juggle a different set of responsibilities to those with younger children. Whilst for very young children the need for childcare when a parent is at work is a given, parents of older children face a

more complex set of decisions. They will need to balance the cost of supervision against the peace of mind this will give them, or parental desire to know where their child is versus a struggle to get them to attend if they do not want to go or cannot afford the cost.

In order to help parents, there needs to be more done to raise awareness of the Working Tax Credit (WTC). Campaigns to raise parental awareness and understanding have tended to focus on parents of younger children. With low awareness amongst parents and little formal childcare in existence, much more work needs to be done to raise expectations that this kind of support can be provided and to ensure that parents of older children understand how they can use support for childcare through the WTC to pay for an out of school place for children up to the age of 14. More could also be done to make parents aware of their role in asking for childcare; with local authorities and schools increasingly undertaking consultations on need in order to shape and influence what is provided, parents have a key role to play in voicing their needs.

Improving take up of the WTC, however, will not be enough for everyone. The New Opportunities Fund Evaluation¹⁴ highlighted that even with the WTC, after school care was still out of reach for some parents. There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that WTC is not well suited to high cost, high deprivation areas such as inner London. Anti-poverty strategies should recognise that these groups of children should still be able to access the benefits of after school activity and build on the current commitments to increase access for low income families to this agenda.

The importance of strategic leadership

With so many barriers to services for this age range developing, it is crucial that someone takes a lead to make things happen.

The strategic role for local authorities outlined in the Children Act offers another important opportunity for promoting and developing the kind of support that older children and their parents need. However the operational complexity of delivering this is clear, with officers from childcare, learning support, youth services, extended school services, social inclusion and play often being involved – all with their views and priorities for planning, commissioning and funding. Ensuring that support for older children and their parents is in place needs to be a clear priority for all local authorities, linking to important policy agendas of employment, regeneration, academic achievement and enjoyment, health, and crime and anti-social behaviour.

A renewed impetus for change

“After school clubs should help them develop a good way of life, help keep them on the straight and narrow and let them do things they wouldn’t be able to at home.”

Fundamentally, childcare for older children is about more than just meeting parents’ demand for support. Ensuring a more positive use for out of school hours is a key part of building the case for a better deal for children and their parents. Concerns about effectively tackling boredom, lack of opportunities and anti-social behaviour, and the impact that this

sort of provision could have on academic attainment, all provide us with important reasons for investing in this sort of provision and working with children and families to make sure it meets their needs.

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Research has identified that young people themselves recognise the importance of after school provision and often complain about the lack of options and alternatives. The 'time lag' after school, when parents are still at work, during which they can either return home to an empty house or wander the streets with friends for amusement in particular is identified as "boring", with a real feeling that once the school day ends they are unchallenged and unmotivated. Many also recognise that it is such boredom that can lead young people into trouble or fuel the interest in searching for excitement and activity through risky and more rebellious behaviour.

Kingsdown High School in Wigan has become a hub for childcare for children from 2½ to 16 years old. Serving an urban area of Wigan, the school was awarded specialist business and enterprise college status two years ago. It has long hosted a young person's centre on its premises that started out as a playgroup and has grown to become a hub for childcare in the area. The centre recently extended its offering to secondary age children up to 14 years old, and up to 16 years old for children from special schools. Many of the older children are pupils at Kingsdown.

The centre now has some 247 children on its register, and a daily capacity of 150. The new secondary age group is small – 16 at present – but growing fast. The centre organises a wide range of activities from sports to group trips. Children register on arrival and are then escorted to different activities on the school grounds. Many families are claiming support with fees from Working Tax Credits.

Out of school provision can also provide support for children at a crucial time in their development – during the transition years. Research continues to identify that too many children still regress academically when they switch from primary to secondary school despite repeated efforts to deal with this long identified concern. Whilst there have been improvements in the priority given to this issue, in fact there is still a dip at Key Stage 3. Many 11 year olds fall significantly behind when they start secondary school despite induction and summer school programmes. This transfer is also identified as a stage during which some children can become susceptible to anti-social behaviour and social exclusion.

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Out of school childcare for 11–14 year olds can help provide a safe and nurturing environment, supporting children who exhibit signs of vulnerability and improving school attainment at a crucial time in their development.

Hengrove Community Arts College in Bristol serves a community with significant levels of social and economic deprivation and has a proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities that is well above the national average. The school came out of special measures in April 2006, with the Ofsted inspection report recognising that the development of extended services had played a significant role and “brought many benefits”.

Hengrove offers a wide range of holiday activities for over 100 young people per day during the summer holidays. As part of this, it provides joint targeted work with ‘at risk’ children, with the main aim being to support them through transition. A survey revealed a lack of summer holiday provision and facilities in the area as well as anecdotal links between this and nuisance behaviour involving young people. A wide consultation then helped to define and guide the provision that has now been put in place. The programme staff also track and monitor particular children, looking at attendance levels before and after their participation in the scheme. “For instance, there was one young person who had an attendance rate of 51% who then went back to school in September and the rate was 84%.”

Conclusion

The message from the evidence is clear – that despite gains for many families, older children and their parents have not yet been able to realise the vision of affordable, accessible and high quality childcare which was promised in 2004 and still experience a real lack of opportunities and support out of school in their local area. This frustration is often rooted in genuine and complex issues around the delivery of the service and low parental expectation but cannot be allowed to continue.

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In order to move forwards and overcome these challenges we need a renewed and explicit political commitment to delivering for these families. This commitment should reaffirm the belief that older children can and should benefit from the opportunities, care and support provided by childcare facilities. Changes in Government policy which will bring a new tranche of need from lone parents who are returning to work have also made this an urgent priority for change.

The positive case is also clear, there are benefits for us all in supporting children through the vulnerabilities of the 11–14 transition years, and out of school activities should be recruited as a key tool in our armoury to help achieve this.

In order to make this commitment a reality, it is clear that there needs to be a programme of more practical and focused support. The recommendations below set out how this can be delivered by working with all stakeholders – local authorities, providers, parents and of course children and young people themselves – to move this issue forwards.

The well identified need to stimulate activity in this sector of the market, to overcome years of inactivity in the timescale required, is a challenge – and one which will need assistance via pump priming funding. In the longer term, a better understanding of the levers of the market must be developed nationally and cascaded down locally to ensure stability and sustainability of provision to ensure that all areas are able to deliver for their local communities.

Whilst the challenges for making childcare for older children a reality may be daunting, the rewards of overcoming these are high – a society where parents are able to juggle work and family demands more easily, where young people do not have to fend for themselves until their parents come home, and ultimately a society where we all reap the benefits of well supported children and families.

Recommendations

1. That a new target is set for the creation of childcare places for this older age range based on the potential demand identified by the Labour Force Survey numbers of working parents and numbers of working parents identified in *In Work, Better Off*.
2. Creation of a new pump priming fund aimed specifically at the 11–14 age group to enable existing and new providers to move into the market, including youth providers and schools. This would consist of £20,000 each for a scheme in every secondary school to create out of school hours support, with ongoing funds available to help sustain and subsidise childcare in deprived areas.
3. That the DCSF commissions a detailed survey of the sector which seeks to find out the number of providers of activities of children in this age range and understand who they are and what they provide in order to benchmark progress in this area – then undertake a benchmark survey on an annual basis.
4. That local authorities are supported to better understand demand and to draw together current agendas on youth, extended schools and childcare to provide strong strategic leadership and operational clarity. Good practice on providing childcare for older children needs to be shared between local authorities and the DCSF, LGA and others to enable the case for providing childcare for older children to be made with local authority partners.
5. That learning from the provider sector is used to help develop best practice to support providers for this older age range, including the development of a quality framework and a development fund to establish new places.
6. That a more comprehensive analysis is done on the needs and concerns of parents of this age group, including work to identify the type of arrangements currently used, reasons why these choices are made and better understanding of the range of barriers to the use of out of school activities including formal childcare.

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7. That this information is used to help develop a programme of information which will help parents to better use their local services and participate in the development of new services. And that a major promotional campaign is undertaken to raise awareness of provision and what is available, and all children's Information Services and schools set out annual information for all parents on what is available and who parents should contact.
8. HM Revenue & Customs to target a campaign aimed at raising awareness of the WTC particularly at parents of older children, and that better information is provided on which activities parents are able to claim the WTC for.
9. That strategy and services are developed in consultation with young people and their parents.

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1. Figures provided to One Parent Families from the Labour Force Survey, April-June 2006. Estimates are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a margin of uncertainty. They should therefore be treated with caution.
2. For older children and adolescents, however, there is evidence of reduced academic performance measured by self-reported dropout, expulsion and suspension rates, and maternal assessment of overall achievement (Gennetian et al. 2004).
3. *Make Space Youth Review: Transforming the offer for young people in the UK*, 4Children, 2007
4. *Ibid.*
5. Dixon M, Margo J, Reed H and Pearce N, *Freedom's Orphans: Raising Youth in a Changing World*, IPPR, 2006
6. The Government's ten year strategy for childcare, *Choice for parents, the best start for children*, was published alongside the Pre-Budget Report (PBR) on 2 December 2004
7. Presentation on the *Findings from the Childcare Survey 1999–2004*, NatCen, 24 April 2007
8. This number relates to formal childcare schemes for children of this age range, often during school holidays and run by providers across the sectors. This includes holiday playschemes for over 11s in community buildings, provision in school, sports schemes in leisure centres but all with clear childcare arrangements including booking and registration.
9. *Families and Children Survey 2004*, NatCen
10. NatCen's *Families and Children Survey 2004* showed that 44% of parents of older children rated provision as 'good or very good' compared to 65% of those with children under 4
11. *Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities*, DCSF, July 2007
12. *Hansard* 24 May 2007, Column 1419; and 10 July 2007, Column 1329
13. *Evaluation of the Round Three Out of School Hours Childcare Programme: A Final Report to The Big Lottery Fund*, Big Lottery Fund, 2004
14. *Ibid.*

4Children has been shaping and influencing national policy for the past 25 years. The national children's charity strives to place every child's and parent's needs at the heart of the community through the development of innovative, integrated support for children from birth to teens – providing a comprehensive and joined up approach from 0–19.

Our work helps stimulate debate and brings fresh thinking to old problems. In addition, 4Children plays a vital role in delivering the new Children's Agenda from running our own children's centres, to our contribution as partners in supporting the delivery of the children's centres and extended school targets.

4Children believes that:

- Support needs to be joined up and universal, with targeted support where required
- Prevention is better than cure
- Support is needed throughout childhood: from 0–19.

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NAPO is the trade union, professional association and campaign organisation for those working in the National Probation Service and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). As well as protecting and promoting its members' interests, NAPO's campaigning priorities/goals include:

- Campaigns for positive change in the Family and Criminal Justice Systems.
- In coalition with others, seeking positive change in social policy legislation and welfare provision.
- Formulating and developing progressive policies on probation and family justice issues.

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Developing 'next generation' care for older children

The last thirty years have seen unprecedented changes for children and families in the UK. Dramatic transformations in work patterns, family structures and mobility have changed the patterns of caring within the family, possibly forever. In the outside world, increased choices and new pressures have led to a complex environment, with children and families needing to navigate their own way through a world of work, schools, transport and support when they need it. Such radical changes in the way that children are brought up demand radical solutions.

This pamphlet draws together the particular challenges facing families with children aged 11–14 who still often fall between youth initiatives and those aimed at younger children. Proposing to complement existing strategies with new funding to pump prime developments, *Still Home Alone?* sets out how a new generation of support for 11–14 year olds can be created. These 'next generation' services should appeal to this older age range, would provide enjoyable activities and great places to be, and enable parents to know their children are well looked after until they return home from work. The time for a new wave of provision is with us – the next crucial element of the childcare revolution.

Karen Buck is MP for Regent's Park and Kensington North and has a longstanding interest in child poverty, education and welfare.