

Vale Family Information Service

Annual Report 2023

Providing families in the Vale of Glamorgan with accurate information and guidance on what matters to them.

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Social Care Information Team Manager



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1. Meet the team



2. The Role of the Family Information Service

2.1 The Vale Family Information Service (FIS) is a one-stop information service for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-20 years in the Vale of Glamorgan, as well as for professionals working with families and childcare providers.

2.2 Providing an integral part of the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service for the Council, as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014).

2.3 Enabling the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Child Care Act 2006, Section 27, regarding the provision of prescribed information to parents and prospective parents, on childcare and other services or facilities.

2.4 The FIS provides free information and guidance on childcare, help with childcare costs, groups for new parents, activities for children and young people, family support services and generally, all things that matter to families.

2.5 We also provide information to prospective childcare providers and existing childcare providers, to support the sector.

2.6 Maintaining an online database of childcare and services for children, young people and families in the Vale via the [Dewis Cymru website](#) which feeds through to the [Childcare Information Wales website](#).

2.7 Working closely with partners including the Childcare and Early Years Team, Flying Start, Families First Advice Line, Children & Young People Services, Learning and Skills, and more, to ensure a seamless, valuable service is offered to families and providers in the Vale.

2.8 Our animation explains our service in a more accessible format:



<https://sway.office.com/xj81aD3o35b8SNQT#content=dQMn6CdILOQ4wl>

2.9 Administering [The Index for families of children and young people with disabilities or additional needs](#), to ensure families in the Vale are connected to services and support. There are now 1013 children registered on The Index.

2.10 Promoting the [Welsh Government 30 Hour Childcare Offer](#) funding for 3 and 4 year olds in the Vale. Supporting parents to apply for the Offer and childcare providers to register for The Offer.





3. Key Achievements

Here are some examples of our key achievements over the last year:

3.1 Responded to 1,619 enquiries

3.2 Curated the Summer of Fun Holiday Activity Programme by working with the Healthy Living Team Manager. 147 free activities provided over 3 months and the online programme received over 28,000 views. This was a huge success.



3.3 Increased outreach in the community attending schools, events, parent & toddler groups, play schemes and generating 189 enquiries (3 times as many as the previous year). One particularly successful event organised by FIS, was a Parent Information Event at Barry Library, where we worked with Adult Learning and partners and 80 parents attended and could find out about help with childcare costs, childcare, employment and training opportunities etc.



3.4 The new Childcare Offer for Wales national digital system was implemented across Wales and went live in January 2023. The team ensured this was rolled out effectively and to timescale in the Vale. 380 children are now receiving the Childcare Offer via the new digital system and 132 providers have registered. The team now manage an additional telephony service. For the whole academic year (Sept 22-April 23) there are 1048 children accessing the Childcare Offer, which is 56% of all 3-4 yr olds (data provided by Health Service and Education on number of births).



3.5 There are now 1,013 children and young people registered on The Index. In the last year, 164 children have been registered, which is a 46% increase from the previous year. We have worked closely with the Families First Advice Line to ensure parents who wish to be registered, are referred via the Social Services database, which has worked extremely well.

3.6 The Index newsletter was reviewed and produced in hard copy and digital format as a 'flipbook'. Hard copies are also distributed in the community and to schools to ensure information is reaching parents.

3.7 The Index Officer promoted the latest newsletter on the Staffnet and took the opportunity to ask staff to complete a short survey giving feedback about the newsletter. Responses were very positive and included:

'It's clear and colourful which is attractive', 'Very informative and current in it's information', 'I feel it is impossible to target everything, It has achieved a great range of articles and if it was any longer it may be off putting to find time to read it'.



The plan is to do the same with the public following the summer newsletter.

3.8 A new simplified and more accessible online registration form was launched in March 2022. This will make it easier for parents to register on The Index.

3.9 Maintained and enhanced information about services and support on the Dewis Cymru website - 586 resources reviewed and published.

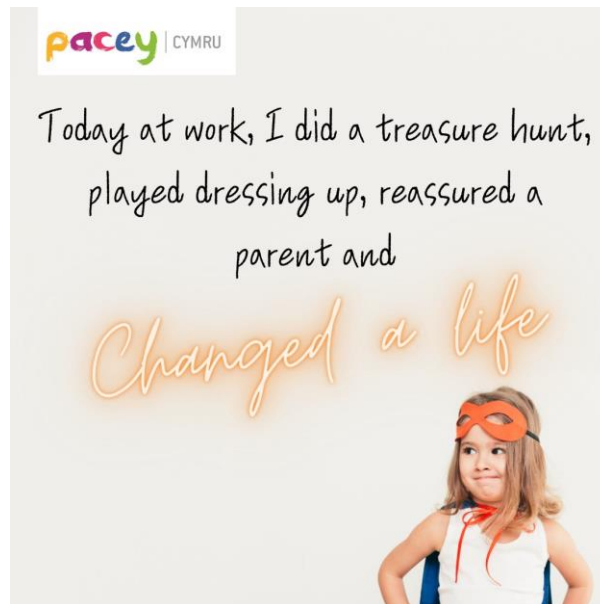
3.10 Social media has continued to be an effective marketing and communication tool and we have 3,957 followers on Facebook, which is an increase of 500 followers since last year. The most successful post was the Parent Information Event, which reached 18,500 people and was shared 87 times.

4. Key Challenges in 2022-23 and Going Forward

4.1 The implementation of the new Childcare Offer national digital system and the transition from the old legacy system took a huge amount of staff resources. We receive funding for 1.6 members of staff but the whole FIS Team was involved with answering enquiries, learning a new system and ensuring that all childcare providers registered on the system before it was launched. We also faced

challenges with the new cloud based telephony system, where we were unable to connect via the Vale's VPN. However, we overcame these issues ensuring a seamless transition.

4.2 We have seen a decline in the number of childminders in the Vale and many childcare providers have reported difficulties in recruiting childcare staff. We have certain areas and schools where we have been unable to find childcare for parents. We are working with colleagues in the Childcare and Early Years Team and Flying Start, to look at developing new childcare, increase existing childcare and also raise awareness with the public about choosing childminding and childcare as a career. Here is one of the 'pacey' social media posts that we have used to help promote childminding as a career option.



4.3 We have experienced several changes with staffing; we received additional funding for a part time Childcare Offer Support Assistant, to help with the national digital system, who started in July 2022. Our Outreach Officer left in August 2022 and we recruited a new officer in January 2023. Due to vacancies and several staff reducing their hours, we were able to recruit a temporary member of staff through an agency to support with the work of the team. The Resource Management and Safeguarding division has gone through a restructure, resulting in a change of Team Manager and Operational Manager and the Regional Dewis Team has now joined the FIS to form the new Social Care Information Team.

4.4 We receive funding through Families first to administer The Index, which is temporary funding for 2 years and there has been no uplift to match a rise in cost of services, supplies and salaries. There is a risk that the hard copy newsletters will need to be reduced or cease printing.

4.5 We have worked with colleagues to look at improving our Index database and we have moved to Microsoft Forms. The software 'Power Automate' would be an ideal software solution to improve work flows, reduce human error and staff resources. However, there are security issues with using a cloud based system and ICT need to resolve these before it can be used.



5. FIS Enquiries for 2022-23

FIS receives enquiries from parents, carers, professionals working with families, childcare providers and partners. Over the last two years, enquiries have returned more to business as usual and reflect our enquiries prior to the pandemic. Outreach activities have increased, which has generated more enquiries and this section will look at our enquiries in more detail.

Here are some examples of the enquiries we received last year:

I am a single working parent and I am really struggling to handle my 3 year old's behaviour.

Do you have any parenting courses on dealing with this sort of thing that I could do?

I was also looking for support groups or youth clubs to help my older anxious daughter gain more confidence.

Hi, how do I enrol my son for nursery please? He is 3 the end of January and I'm not sure when he is going to start. I also need childcare to drop off / pick up from the nursery. I've no idea how I'm going to afford this?

Hi, I wondered if you have an updated list of parent and toddler groups and things to do in or around Penarth. I have recently been housed in Penarth after travelling from Ukraine and I do not know where to start with groups and other help that might be available to me?

Case Study

Enquiry

A Ukrainian mum and 3yr old child were placed with a host family and the host contacted FIS. She wanted to find out if the ESOL course (English for Speakers of Other Languages) mum was starting, would be eligible for mum to access the 30 Hour Childcare Offer funding. Mum also needed childcare and was looking for a nursery school for her child to attend. She was also looking at local support and transport for when the family moved out of the host's home.

Action

FIS Officer provided information and support about nursery admissions, when to apply and local nursery schools. They also found wraparound childcare for the nursery school.

They enquired with Welsh Government about whether ESOL courses are eligible for the funding and they are. Therefore, the FIS Officer supported the host and mum to apply.

Outcome

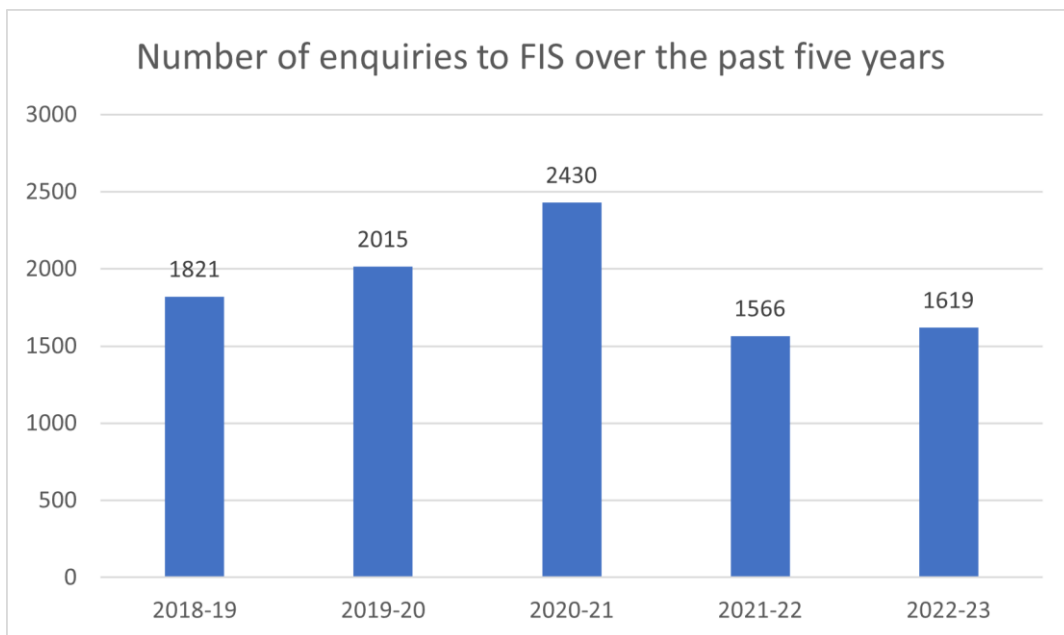
The child started in a nursery school in January 2023. They also started in a childcare setting in Cowbridge that offered a drop off and pick up service to the school. Mum secured Childcare Offer funding. They also received information about local transport and general information and support for Ukrainian families in Cowbridge.

Feedback from Host:

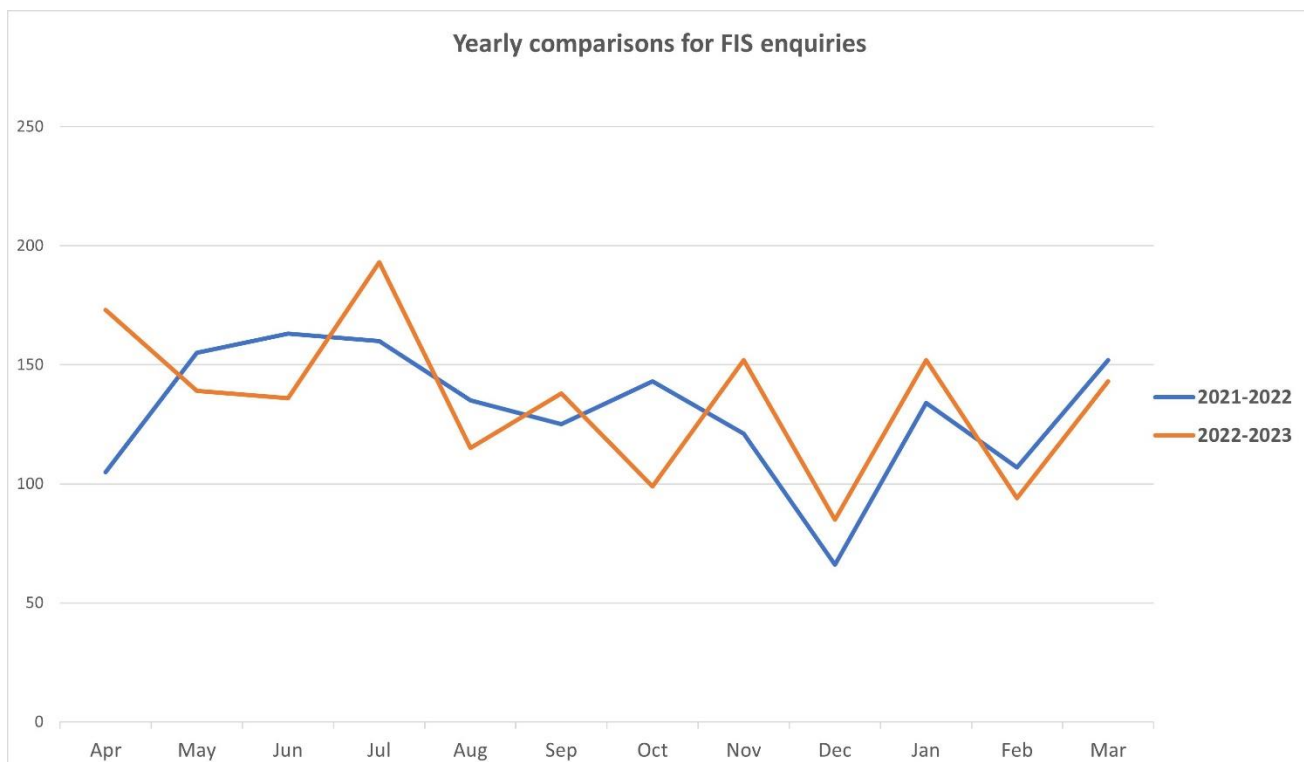
Huge thanks for your help with (child). He has now started nursery at x nursery and x childcare. (Mum) is also receiving the full childcare offer. Thank you once again for your support.

5.1 Total number of enquiries

1,619 enquiries were received direct to the service, which is a slight increase from the previous year (3.5%). The high volume of enquiries in 2020-21 was mainly due to parents applying for the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (CCAS) for key workers from April - August 2020.

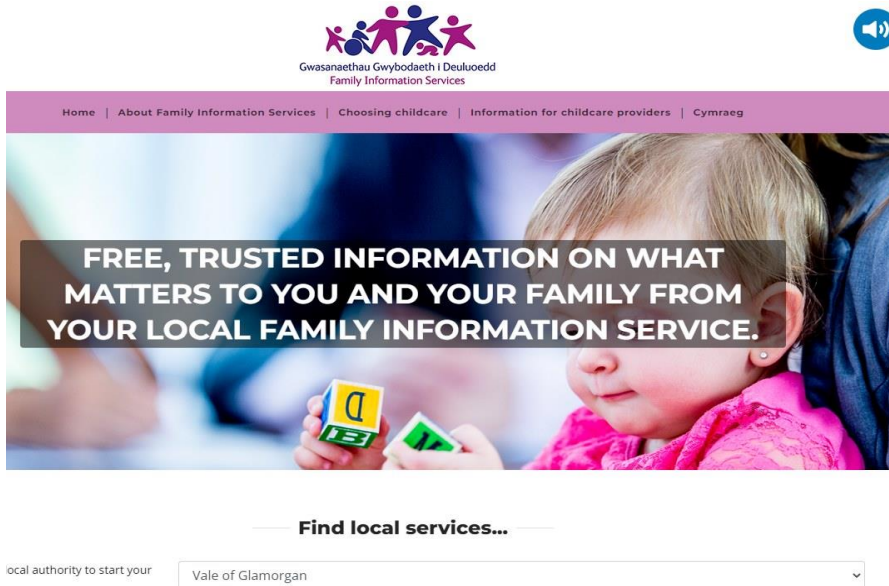


It's important to look at the volume of enquiries throughout the year and whether they follow a similar pattern year on year. We received a peak in enquiries in July and April and this was due to us producing the Easter Holiday Activities Programme and the Summer of Fun Holiday Activities Programme. The second half of the year follows a similar pattern where we have spikes in enquiries in November, January and March, which is mainly due to us promoting the opening of the Childcare Offer funding applications.



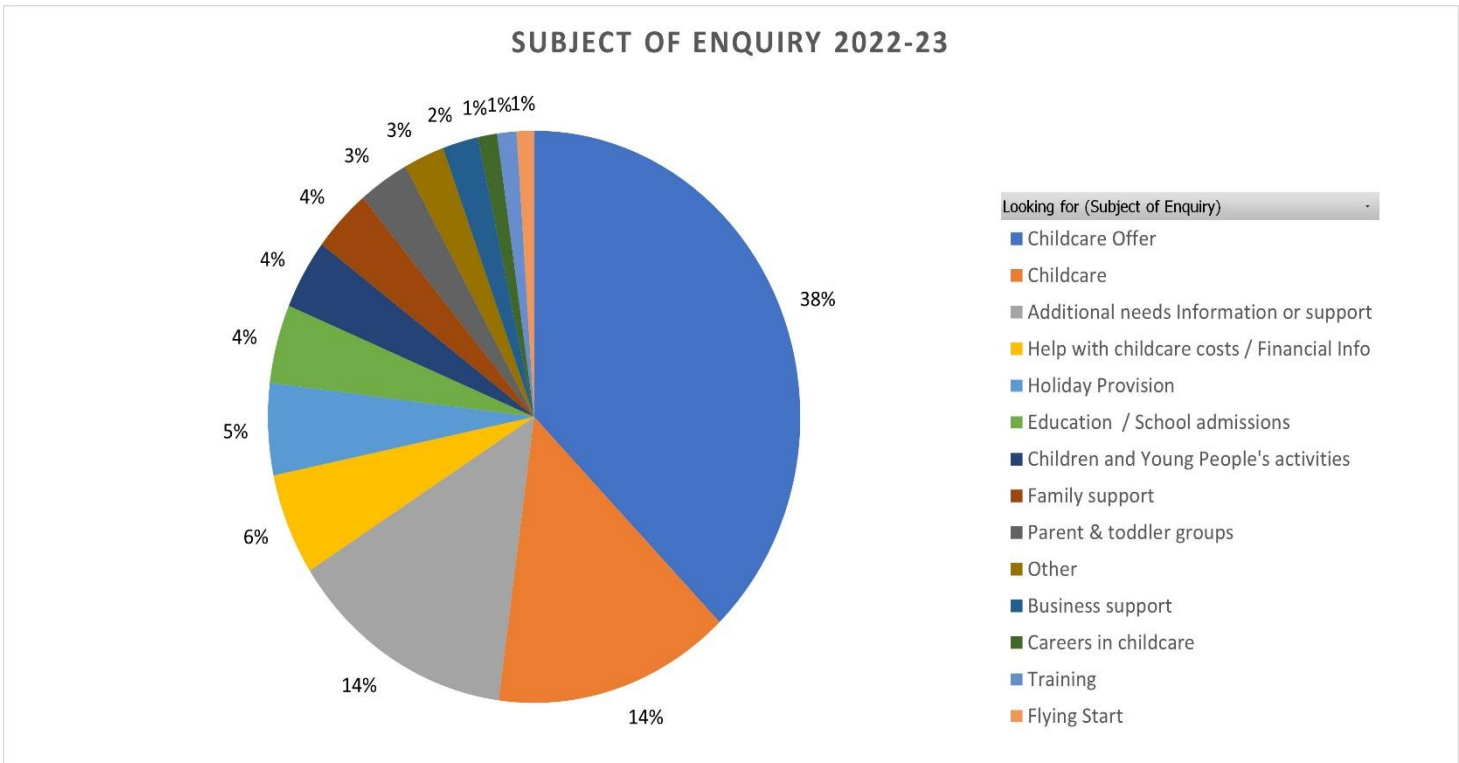
Parents can also visit the The [Childcare Information Wales](#) website to search for childcare, activities and support themselves. The website surfaces information from the Dewis Cymru resource directory and has been designed as a more user friendly platform for parents. FISs in Wales manage the information, ensure it's kept up to date and raise awareness about the website with parents, providers and professionals. We also contribute to the development and improvement of the website.

Over the last year, the Vale pages have received 10,800 views and almost 4,000 users.



5.2 Subject of Enquiry

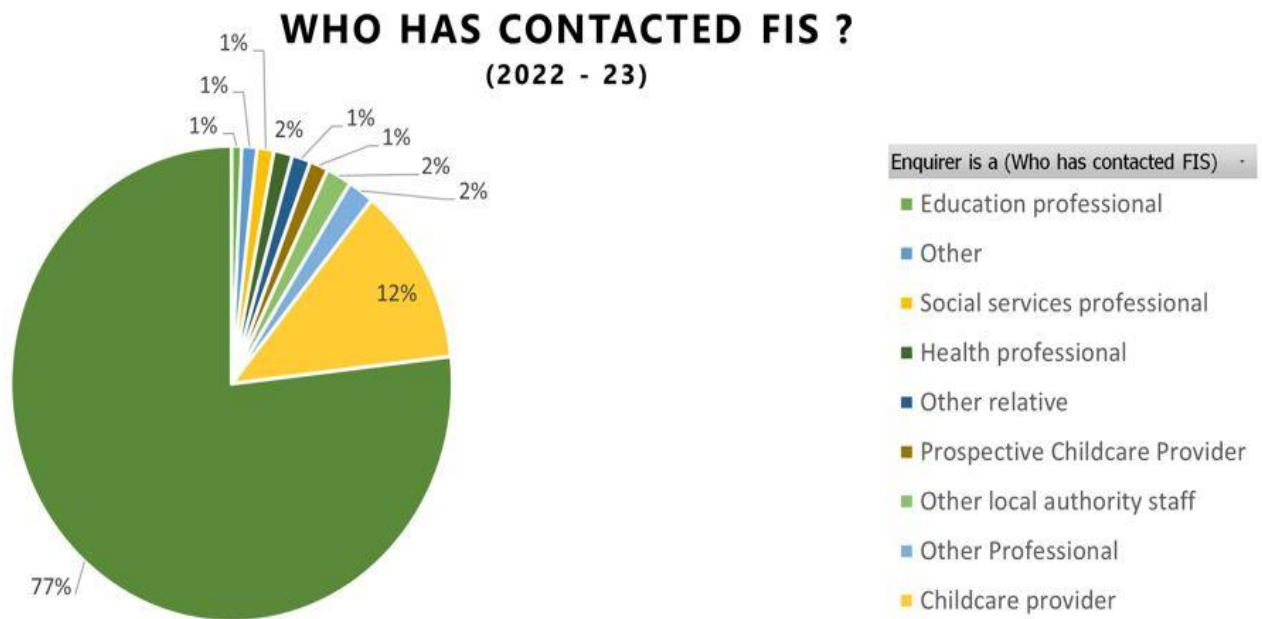
The nature of the enquiries over the past two years since the pandemic, have remained fairly consistent, with the majority of enquiries looking for childcare and Childcare Offer funding (51% in the last year and 54% of enquiries in 21-22). However, there are a few exceptions - the number of



enquiries for information about 'Additional Needs Support and The Index' have increased by 45%. This is mainly due to an increase in referrals to The Index. We have also seen an increase in enquiries for 'Holiday Provision' and 'Help with Childcare Costs and Financial Help'. Enquiries about Flying Start provision have remained consistent but we anticipate these increasing over the next year as the 2yr old expansion rolls out across the Vale.

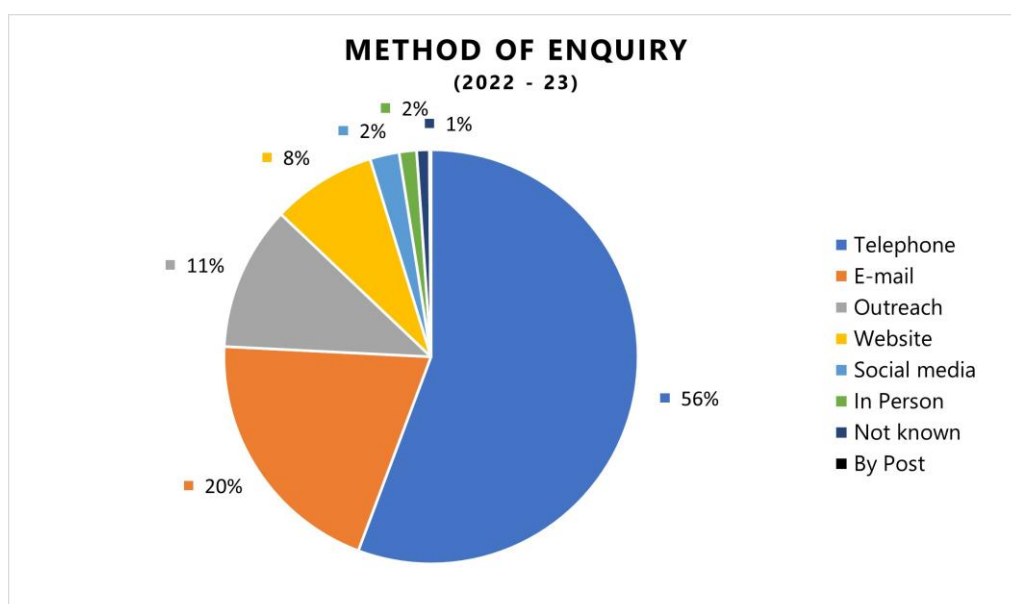
5.3 Who has contacted FIS?

Three quarters of all enquiries were from parents or carers, which has slightly increased from the previous year. This is also the case for enquiries from childcare providers, which has also slightly increased. Enquiries from other professionals has slightly decreased.



5.4 Method of Enquiry

Over half of all enquiries were made via phone, which is consistent with previous years. There has been an increase in enquiries from the website, due to our online enquiry form and there has been a significant increase in enquiries via outreach (258% increase). However, there has been a decrease in enquiries via social media.



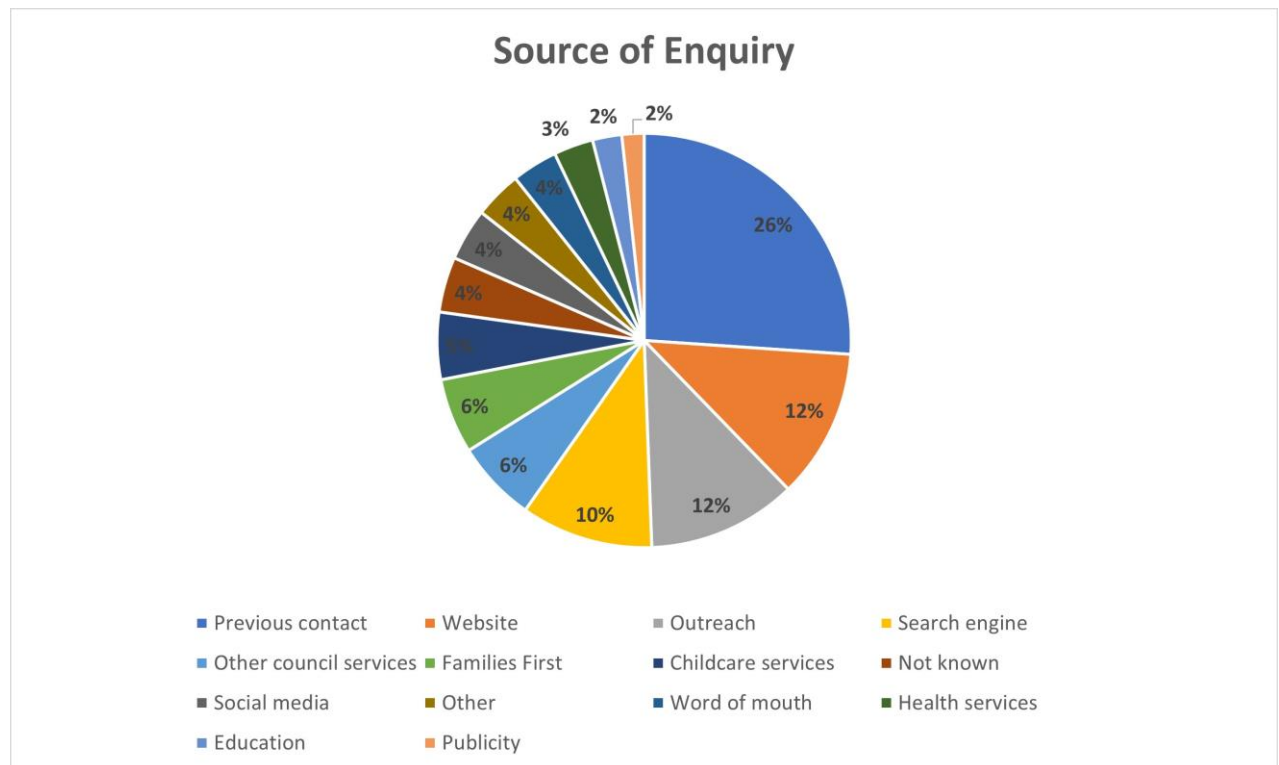
5.5 Source of Enquiry

One quarter of all enquiries were from people who have previously contacted the service (26%). Therefore, 74% were new contacts.

12% of people found out about the service via the Vale website and 12% via a search engine.

We've seen the biggest increase in enquiries via outreach, which are 3 times higher than the previous year, publicity and Families First, which are 4 times higher than the previous year. We have worked closely with the Families First Advice Line this last year to ensure there is a seamless referral to The Index if parents contact them and have a child with a disability or additional need.

On the other hand, we've seen a decrease in referrals from 'Health services' and 'Education', so we can target more awareness raising with these professionals next year.

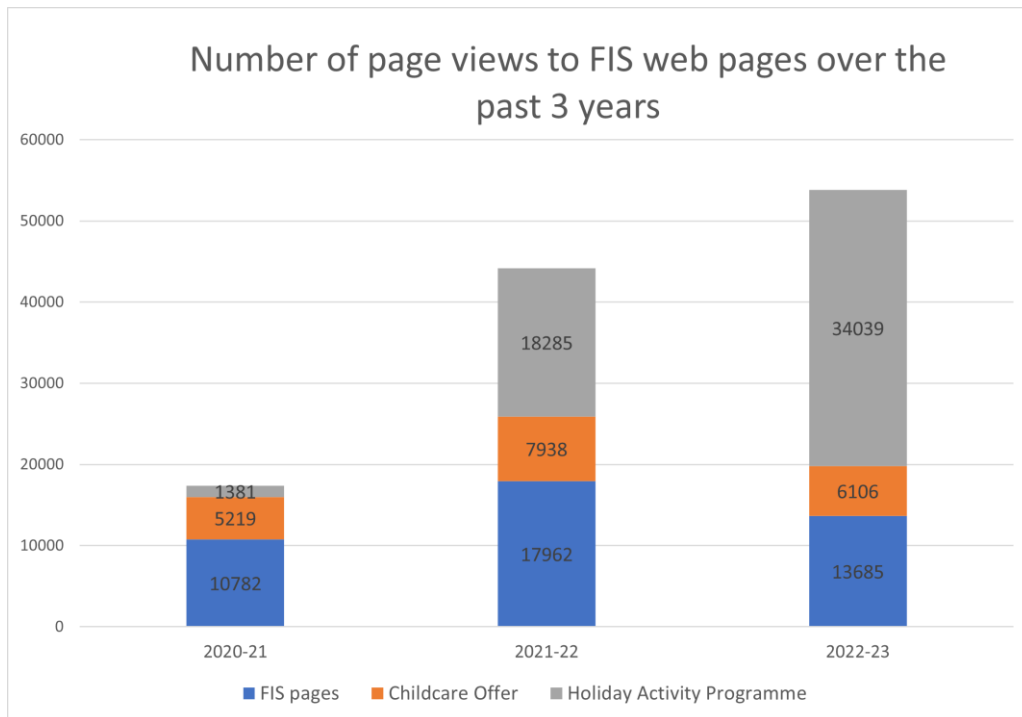


5.6 Website Performance

FIS ensure information for families is available and up to date on the [FIS web pages](#). This includes information on choosing childcare, health and wellbeing in the family, parenting programmes, starting nursery, raising a child bilingually and many more. We also have a comprehensive section for childcare providers, including starting a career in childcare, training and grants for providers.

The graph below shows the number of page views over the past three years and we have split them into the most visited pages which were the 'Holiday Activity Programme', the 'Childcare Offer' and the rest of the FIS web pages. We received 53,830 page views over the last year which is a 22% increase from the previous year. This is due to the 'Summer of Fun Holiday Activity Programme', published in June 2022. FIS worked closely with colleagues from the Healthy Living Team to collate the information on activities and produced an online programme.

Hits to the Childcare Offer page have decreased which could be due to the new national digital service, where parents apply for the Childcare Offer funding centrally on the gov.wales website. We anticipate this continuing as the national communications campaign is rolled out.



6. Feedback

6.1 We aim to contact everyone who enquires to the service to gain feedback, to help develop the service and ensure that people received the information they need. We also collate comments received from people after they've used the service.

We were only able to obtain feedback from 16 people and a further 20 people provided comments. Although the majority of feedback was very positive, there were a few people who rated us poorly, but the comments were about the lack of services available, rather than the service received from FIS.

81% had the right information when they needed it

87% said they would recommend our service to other people

81% rated their experience as excellent or very good.

63% said the information provided made a difference to them and their family

I really appreciate your time and thoroughness! You have been so helpful. Thank you so much for the list, it makes it much less daunting!

Just that 'staff member' did as much for me as they could on the call and was very supportive when I became upset. They made a positive impact on my mindset/day. Thank you.

Quick turnaround lovely response extremely helpful and informative!

Accurate and timely! A pleasure to deal with after months of wading through admin for the home for Ukraine scheme

The lady I spoke to was so helpful really informative and left me feeling that I had all the information and more . I am really grateful to 'staff member' who gave me so much help she was fantastic and put my mind at ease

Also can I just say that all of you working there are so fabulous. So helpful, kind and responsive. I feel so grateful to you all and I hope you know how excellent you all are.

7. Key Actions for 2023-24

7.1 Continue to work with partners including Communities For Work, Job Centre Plus, Flying Start, Adult Community Learning, to provide information and guidance to parents and carers returning to work / remaining in employment and those seeking training, on financial help, childcare options and schemes.

7.2 Promote the expansion of the Childcare Offer to parents in training and education by working with partners and raising awareness.

7.3 Research digital flipbooks to ensure The Index newsletter and digital leaflets are accessible to people with visual impairments and disabilities.

7.4 Work with early years childcare settings to provide information packs to new families, promoting the FIS, Childcare Offer, financial help and The Index.

7.5 Achieve the Families First Quality Award.

7.6 Improve the FIS web pages to ensure information is easily accessible and work with the Childcare and Early Years Team to re-brand the web pages for childcare providers.

7.7 Promote the Childcare Information Wales website as the place to go for information for parents and increase the number of resources on Dewis Cymru.

7.8 Work with the Childcare and Early Years Team to encourage people into childminding and working in the childcare sector.

8. Contact Details

Family Information Service

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