

New children's centres at a standstill

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The opening of new children's centres has almost ground to a halt, 18 months ahead of the deadline to have 3,500 in place.

There are currently 2,925 centres across the country. But although a preliminary target of 2,500 centres was exceeded in March 2008, government figures released in Hansard last week show only 12 new centres were opened during the rest of the year. This means 30 centres a month will need to be opened over the next year and a half if the government is to meet its target.

Shadow minister for families Maria Miller MP told CYP Now she is concerned that the government will not hit the 2010 deadline. "The situation has almost come to a standstill since February. If you do the maths, on the current rate the target will not be achievable," she said.

Together for Children, the agency delivering the children's centre programme, claims a drop in the number of centres being opened was expected. Annamarie Hassall, director of the organisation's delivery support team, said: "This final phase has needed just as much planning as the first and in some cases careful reshaping of services and areas to be reached."

A spokeswoman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said: "It is nonsense to suggest that Sure Start children's centres are being delayed. With over 2,900 already designated, we are very much on track to achieve our ambitious target of at least 3,500 by September 2010."