

Report to Cabinet

20 October 2021

Subject:	Childcare Sufficiency Report 2021/2022
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Children and Education, Councillor Karen Simms
Director:	Katharine Willmette - Interim Strategic Director Children and Education Melanie Barnett – Acting Operational Director Children and Education
Key Decision:	Yes
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1 Recommendations

1.1 That Cabinet:

- (i) Consider the eight recommendations of the Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency report 2021-2022, now submitted as appendix 1 and endorse the report and recommendations.
- (ii) Recommend that subject to the above, the Director Children and Education will develop and implement a Childcare Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2022 to be monitored based on the 8 recommendations of the Childcare Sufficiency Report to meet the Council's obligations under the Childcare Act, 2006.



- (iii) Note that the Childcare Strategic Action Plan will be monitored by the Early Years Strategic Group and progress will be reported termly to The Director Children and Education Extended Divisional Management Team meeting.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 states that local authorities should report annually to Elected Council Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.
- 2.2 The 2021-2022 Childcare Sufficiency Report has been developed based on the June 2018 Early Years and Childcare Statutory Guidance.
- 2.3 The supply of childcare places has been assessed against the potential demand for places and the findings have been formulated into the eight recommendations.
- 2.4 Cabinet is requested to consider the eight recommendations of the Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency report 2021-2022 (appendix 1 attached) and recommend that a Childcare Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2022 be implemented and monitored as outlined in decision recommendations above.
- 2.5 The Childcare Act 2006 gives local authorities a key role in shaping the childcare market in their area. Working with providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors, the local authority will look to create a strong, sustainable and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of parents. It focuses on sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare that is responsive to parents' needs.
- 2.6 Section 6 of the 2006 Act gives local authorities a duty of securing, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the provision of childcare (whether or not by them) is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area to enable them to:

a) take up, or remain in, work, or



- b) undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

2.7 Local authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, geographical division and date of publication.


The Department for Education publishes annual Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for local authorities. The June 2018, document which is available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf

states that the 2021-2022 Childcare Sufficiency Report should include:

- A specific reference to how they are ensuring there is sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of: disabled children, children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit, children with parents who work irregular hours; children aged two, three and four taking up early education places; school age children and children needing holiday care.
- Information about the current and projected supply and demand of childcare for age ranges of children, and the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision; and
- Details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>The Sandwell Childcare Sufficiency Report 2021-2022 supports the Council's Ambition 4. Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families. The report assesses the gaps in early education and childcare across the borough.</p>
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	<p>The findings of the Childcare Sufficiency Report provide an opportunity to deliver Early Help to our most disadvantaged families who are most at risk of poor outcomes in Sandwell, through the recommendations children will be able to access good quality early education and childcare.</p> <p>Support for families to achieve better outcomes for their children and themselves by ensuring childcare and early education is available to allow parents to remain in or return to employment/training.</p> <p>Support access to positive activities including holiday play schemes and after school activities.</p> <p>Ensure that children and young people are safeguarded and have improved outcomes by supporting early education and childcare providers to access training, advice and support regarding health and safety and child protection issues.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Childcare Sufficiency report 2021/22 will be circulated to the Members of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board and any comments or observations will be submitted to Cabinet at the meeting.
- 4.2 The Childcare Sufficiency Report (appendix 1) was undertaken between June and August by the Family Information Service Data Management Officer.
- 4.3 Supply of childcare places was extracted from the Local Authority Open Objects database.
- 4.4 Quality data was extracted from the Local Authority Open Objects database and feedback from the Quality Early Years Team.
- 4.5 Gaps were identified against demographic data and supply of childcare.
- 4.6 The report is based on findings for Sandwell overall and for the 24 wards.



4.7 The findings have been used to develop the below eight recommendations.

4.8 The 8 recommendations will be used to formulate a Childcare Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2022 which will be monitored termly to assess the progress being made against the actions.

4.9 **The current position**

4.10 Sandwell's Childcare Sufficiency Report 2021-2022 is attached as Appendix 1. The 2020-21 Action Plan had 7 actions, all of which have been met. No actions are carried forward. The 7 actions achieved in 2020-21 were:

- (i) Support visits to childcare providers carried out between September 2020 and July 2021.
- (ii) 39 support visits to inadequate and requires improvement settings.
- (iii) Early Years monitored and supported childcare providers throughout the pandemic.
- (iv) Unmet demand monitored by FIS and Early Years and supported by brokerage service.
- (v) HAF 21 Summer activities took place in Wednesbury South and Oldbury wards but not Tividale ward.
- (vi) 52% of eligible families took up a 2 year old place. 48 schools offered 30 hours to working families.
- (vii) A Marketing and Communication Apprentice employed to develop social media promotion and engagement.

The 2021-22 report is presented within the context of the continuing Covid-19 global pandemic. There are no further budgetary implications for the 8 recommendations



4.11 The following 8 recommendations arising from the findings of the report, are:

- (i) To continue to support childcare providers to deliver high quality, sustainable provision.
- (ii) To improve the quality of the providers which are judged by Ofsted as Requires Improvement or Inadequate by working intensively with them and those that deliver early education funded places.
- (iii) To undertake a parent survey, increase social media engagement and strengthen links with Jobcentre Plus to understand local demand for childcare.
- (iv) To continue to monitor take-up of 2, 3 and 4 year old funding and 30 hours codes. To increase promotion of free entitlement ELT and 30 hours and create a more nuanced, targeted approach to marketing.
- (v) To undertake parent consultation to understand demand for wraparound childcare and how flexible it needs to be. To monitor wraparound childcare to ensure sufficient places are available for families.
- (vi) To continue to work with childcare providers to ensure business viability and monitor for any “red flags” where providers are at greater risk of closure. To monitor capacity and childcare places to ensure sufficiency through the borough. To promote childminding as a business opportunity.
- (vii) To increase parental engagement to determine how SEND provision should be delivered post-pandemic. To consult with childcare providers to assess any potential short and medium term gaps for SEND provision, particularly wraparound childcare.
- (viii) To continue to promote the Family Information Service to parents and professionals. To raise awareness of brokerage and online chat facility and engage with families through social media channels.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Childcare Sufficiency Report assesses the supply of childcare places against the demand for childcare places and identify any gaps. Findings are developed into recommendations. There are no other alternative options.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>This area of work to establish sufficiency is a statutory duty funded through Target Funding.</p> <p>Capacity to achieve the recommendations of the Childcare Sufficiency Report 2021-2022 falls within the remit of staff within the Quality Early Years Team and Family Information Service and the recommendations have been taken into consideration.</p> <p>The financial impact of changes to the number of childcare places is funded from the Early Years Block grants based on take up on Early Years Census dates for which annual adjustments to funding are made.</p> <p>There is also Target funded budget to support providers with sustainability.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>The Childcare Act 2006 –The Local Authority has strategic responsibility to plan, support and commission childcare and should only provide childcare directly if no other person is willing to do so or it is appropriate for the local authority to do so.</p> <p>The Childcare Act 2006 - Local Authorities must secure the free minimum amount of early year's provision for all three and four year olds whose parents want it and to assess the sufficiency of childcare and to secure sufficient childcare.</p> <p>The Education Act 2011 gives parents of disadvantaged two year olds a new right to free early year's education and care.</p>



	<p>The Children and Families Act 2014, states that local authority should report annually to Elected Council Members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.</p> <p>The Department for Education published in June 2018, the Early Education and Childcare Statutory guidance for local authorities. This document also addressed changes with regards to securing sufficient childcare.</p>
Risk:	<p>There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from the content of this report.</p> <p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with - to identify and assess any significant risks associated with this decision/project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks. Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that no significant risk has been identified.</p> <p>Risk is continuously monitored through the Early Years Strategic Group, to ensure we meet the needs of children and their families.</p> <p>If the Cabinet Report is not approved and the action plan not developed, then the local authority would fail to meet its statutory duty under the Childcare Act 2006 to publish a Childcare Sufficiency Report. It would also fail to develop an action plan to deliver the 8 recommendations from the findings of the Childcare Sufficiency Report. The 7 actions from the 2020-21 report were achieved (see 4.10 above) and none are carried forward. No other significant risks are identified from the 8 recommendations.</p>
Equality:	An Equality Impact Assessment screening has been carried out. However, a full assessment is not required for the purposes of this proposal.
Health and Wellbeing:	A sufficient supply of high quality early years and childcare places:



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enables young children to access safe early learning and play opportunities • enables school aged children to access positive activities including holiday play schemes, before and after school activities • supports parents to return to or remain in employment/training • ensures that children and young people are safeguarded and have improved outcomes by supporting early education and childcare providers to access training, advice and support regarding health and safety and child protection issues.
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7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Childcare Sufficiency Report 2021/22

8. Background Papers

2.8 DfE June 2018 Early education and childcare. Statutory guidance for local authorities

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf

