

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 17 March 2011
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Young People
SUBJECT: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform Executive Board of the statutory duty in the Childcare Act 2006 to carry out a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment in order to demonstrate that the local authority has secured sufficient childcare for all parents who need it.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- a) the report is noted;
- b) the LA completes an annual review of its childcare provision in addition to the 3 yearly Childcare Sufficiency Assessment thereby ensuring supply of places and demand for places is monitored and findings are actioned appropriately;
- c) The LA, through its CYPD Officers, provides targeted support to childcare providers to ensure delivery of high quality provision and improved outcomes; and
- d) The Strategic Director – Children & Young People, be authorised to action issues arising from the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment through an agreed action plan.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 From April 2008, the Childcare Act 2006 placed duties on English Local Authorities to improve outcomes for young children and reduce inequalities between them. Local Authorities are also required to secure sufficient childcare to enable parents to work; and to provide information to parents about childcare and a wide range of other services that may be of benefit to them. In preparation for this duty, a detailed assessment of the supply of, and demand for, childcare in the local authority area is required. There is a particular emphasis to ensure childcare settings are in a position to support children with disabilities and also support parents in receipt of

working tax credits.

- 3.2 The Childcare Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act') expands and clarifies in legislation the vital role local authorities should play as strategic leaders in facilitating the childcare market, first laid out in the Children Act 2004. The 2006 Act reinforces the framework within which we already work – in partnership with the private, voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector – to shape children's services. It focuses in particular on sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare that is responsive to parent's needs.
- 3.3 Section 11 of the 2006 Act places a duty on local authorities to have undertaken a childcare sufficiency assessment, in accordance with regulations and have regard to government guidance, within one year of the duty coming into force and subsequently carry out a new assessment within 3 years. This assessment is a necessary first step towards securing sufficient provision, enabling local authorities to identify gaps and establish plans to meet the needs of parents so that they can fulfil their Section 6 childcare sufficiency duty.
- 3.4 The Children Act 2004 Act introduced the requirement for a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), which is a single, strategic and overarching plan for children and young people in a local authority area. The CYPP provides a clear link to the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. The statutory requirement to produce a CYPP was removed as of October 31st 2010, together with the requirement to have a Children's Trust. In Halton however, it has been agreed that the Trust will remain in place as the vehicle through which multi agency partnership working can continue, with a new CYPP to be published in April 2011 to provide strategic direction for the Trust.
- 3.5 The childcare sufficiency assessment is a measure of the nature and extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area. It will help the authority to identify where there are gaps in the market and - in consultation with relevant stakeholders – plan how to support the market to address them.
- 3.6 The childcare sufficiency assessment process has required the local authority to be proactive in seeking the views of stakeholders in the local childcare market. The local authority has undertaken a detailed investigation of the local childcare market, using existing demographic information and the outcomes of extensive consultation.
- 3.7 Childcare markets are highly localized. The assessment covers the whole local authority area, but also takes into account the pattern of demand and supply below local authority level i.e. town level, ward level, and Children's Centre reach area. It identifies specific gaps for particular groups and in particular types (market segments) of

childcare in these smaller geographical areas ('sub-local authority area').

3.8 The following table details the timeframe for the 2011 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

Activity	Target Date (for completion)
Project Action Plan	February 2010
Stakeholder Launch	March 2010
Collect Supply Data	May 2010
Carry-out research with local employers	June 2010
Carry-out research with parents / carers	July 2010
Carry-out research with childcare providers	July 2010
Collect demand information / model demand by market segment	August 2010
Carry-out research with children & Young People	September 2010
Produce market analysis using primary and secondary information sources	September 2010
Produce gap analysis / action plan	November 2010
Produce draft report	December 2010
Consult on draft report / action plan	January 2011
Publish Final Report	April 2011

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Completion of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment by April 2011 is a statutory duty in the Childcare Act 2006.

4.2 The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment undertaken in Halton will ensure that demand meets supply, and that outcomes in childcare settings continue to improve. The assessment will also help to inform future school- place planning and school organisation as comprehensive data sets of children within these settings will be available to the LA, which in turn will assist the local authority to map-out primary and secondary school place provision, and will help to shape the Authority's School Admissions Policy.

4.3 The Place Planning & Provision Team within the re-structured Children & Young People's Directorate, now incorporates the previous early years team and school admissions team, which will allow for a more strategic 0-19 place planning approach within the local authority.

5.0 **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 If it is established through the assessment that there are any gaps in any segments of the childcare market, then there will be a requirement for the LA to produce an Action Plan to address those gaps. This could involve the reconfiguration of existing places and also to attract additional provision to the Borough, ideally through Private, Voluntary, or Independent providers. Whilst the opportunity

does remain for the LA to put in place such provision, it has previously proven expensive and burdensome in terms of finance and resources, and PVI settings are preferred, the Childcare Act is also clear that the LA should only deliver childcare as a last resort, when it is “reasonably practical” to do so.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment in Halton will help to ensure that children have sufficient, high quality childcare provision, giving them the best start in life.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

In ensuring that supply meets demand for childcare provision in Halton, the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment provides parents/carers with the opportunity to work and/or undertake further education/training whilst ensuring that their children are in high quality and locally available childcare provision.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Joint projects between the Local Authority and the PCT ensure that childcare providers in Halton are promoting healthy lifestyles to parents and children. As a result of training and qualifications gained by settings they are better able to support parents and children with health issues.

6.4 A Safer Halton

It is the responsibility of all adults to be committed to building a culture of safety and Halton’s childcare providers have a legal duty under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to provide an environment where children feel safe and valued.

6.5 Halton’s Urban Renewal

The Halton Childcare market is a multi-million pound enterprise with an annual turnover estimated in the region of £11m. In addition to providing childcare for children, allowing parents/carers to undertake further education and/or training, it also provides in excess of 700 direct employment opportunities within the childcare sector in Halton.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 If the LA did not undertake a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment it would be failing in its statutory duty. In addition the LA would not be in a position to match supply with demand impacting upon

parents/carers ability to find quality childcare, and subsequently their ability to work and/or undertake further education/training.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is undertaken to ensure that all parents/carers have access to high quality childcare provision throughout the borough, regardless of location. The Assessment also ensures that all children, regardless of need, can access quality provision, and that staff are trained and equipped appropriately.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Children Act 2004	Grosvenor House	Mark Conway
Childcare ACT 2006	Grosvenor House	Mark Conway