

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 23rd January 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education & Social Care

SUBJECT: Sufficiency Duty Report 2022-2023 (previously known as the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Review (CSA))

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The report aims to provide a summary of the revised Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Report, now known as the Sufficiency Duty Report (SDR). It details any achievements since the last review and outlines Halton's current position. It also highlights any gaps in provision and how these are being addressed. The report shares the longer term effects of how Covid-19 are impacting the childcare sector. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the childcare market in Halton continues to be secure and sustainable. However, Early Year's providers have expressed fears around what the future may hold, due to the uncertain nature of the pandemic and the increasing costs of living, such as fuel bills.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) **Members approve the revised Sufficiency Duty Report (previously known as the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment).**

3.0 **BACKGROUND**

3.1 Sections 6 and 7 of 'The Childcare Act' (2006) and the associated statutory guidance: 'Early Education and Childcare – Statutory guidance for local authorities' (March 2018), requires all Local Authorities in England to undertake and provide an annual childcare sufficiency report to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make it available to the public.

3.2 In accordance with the above, Halton's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) has been reviewed and updated (now known as the Sufficiency Duty Report (SDR)). The purpose of the document is to:

- Assist parents to find suitable childcare across the borough;
- Help inform the Local Authority regarding supply and estimated demand for childcare places in all age ranges, in particularly for the Free Early Years Entitlement places;
- Provide information for anyone who is considering setting up new childcare provision in the borough or becoming a childminder.

4.0 **ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE LAST CSA REVIEW**

4.1 Since producing the last CSA Review, the following have been achieved:

- The percentage of Day Nurseries with a good or better Ofsted outcome has remained at 100% (excluding one nursery, who has not been inspected yet);
- We have retained the number of childminders who are able to deliver the Free Early Years Entitlement;
- We continue to fund an average of 523 funded 2 year old children per term;
- From September 2017, 30 hours childcare was introduced for working parents. Currently 100% of day nurseries, 83% of pre-schools, 100% of nursery schools, 20% of nursery classes, 50% of nursery academies are offering the extended hours. This is in addition to the 46 childminders registered to deliver the FEYE for 15 or 30 hours;
- We continue to secure childcare for all vulnerable children and children with SEND.

5.0 **SUMMARY OF SDR REVIEW**

5.1 The SDR provides the following information:

- A brief introduction to the review, outlining it's purpose and rationale;
- A description of the Halton context;
- A statement about Safeguarding;
- An update re the revised Early Years Foundation Stage Framework;
- Details of Halton's market segments and their characteristics;
- Details of Halton's Early Years market, including;
 - the percentage of Free Early Years Entitlement places by sector;
 - the numbers of 3 & 4 year old places by setting type;
 - the number of early years settings;
 - Ofsted grades for all sectors;
- The supply and estimated demand of childcare places;
- A brief outline of Halton's SEND provision, Disability Access Fund (DAF) and Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP);
- Details of the affordability and flexibility of Halton's childcare,

- sustainability and staffing;
- Rates of pay and flexibility
- An overview of the changes in childcare places since the last CSA and projected new places;
- Guidance around financial help with childcare costs;
- Details of any apparent gaps in provision and an action plan to show how these gaps will be met;
- Early indications of how the effects of Covid-19 are impacting childcare and sustainability in Halton.

6.0 **CURRENT POSITION**

6.1 Overall, the Halton Sufficiency Duty Report 2022-2023 continues to reflect a vibrant, sufficient and high quality Early Years and Childcare market that delivers choice, high quality and affordable service to parents and carers. Halton as a borough has sufficient childcare places to meet demand.

However, this review has been undertaken at a time when the Early Years Sector is under increasing pressure due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and other factors, such as the increase in fuel costs. Although, early indications show that the sector remains sustainable at present, this will need to be carefully monitored over the coming months.

The report shows what the majority of areas in Halton do have sufficient supply of childcare places in all age ranges, except for the following:

- Widnes overall has a deficit of approximately 13 places for 0-2 year olds which has reduced from last year.
- Halton Brook CCRA has a deficit of approximately 31 places for funded 2 year olds, which has remained the same as last year.
- Windmill Hill CCRA has a deficit of approximately 42 extended entitlement places, which has halved since last year and 37 places for out of school care for 5-10 year olds, which has increased.
- Kingsway CCRA has a deficit of approximately 20 places for funded 2 year olds, which has reduced from last year.
- Upton has a deficit of 12 places for funded 2 year olds, 56 universal places for 3 and 4 year olds, 49 extended hour places and 11 places for out of school care for 5-10 year olds.

However, it is important to remember that parents do not always access childcare in the ward where they live and children do not always attend a school in the ward where they live.

With regards to the shortage of funded 2 year old places in Halton Brook CCRA, the Two Year Old Funding Officer reports that she

continues to be able to find alternative places in the area. Furthermore, if parents have requested a particular setting where there are no available spaces, they are happy to wait for availability.

With regards to the shortage of extended places in the Windmill Hill CCRA, this category applies to working families. These families may travel to other wards to access their FEYE. This may mean accessing a setting, which is outside the Windmill Hill CCRA or even out of the borough, if it is closer to their workplace.

Concerning the shortage of out of School places in this area, local knowledge would support the fact that, in reality, no such shortage exists. In addition, the majority of primary schools offer after school activities, which parents may use as childcare.

With regards to the shortage of funded 2 years old places in the Kingsway CCRA, the nursery which opened in Farnworth Ward last year has now opened Phase Two of the building, which has increased overall capacity for this age range in the general Farnworth/Kingsway areas.

The shortage of 2, 3 & 4 year old FEYE places (both Universal and Extended) in the Upton CCRA would appear to continue to be due to the expansion of new housing estates in that area. The Day Nursery, as mentioned above, which opened in Farnworth ward will also help to alleviate the shortage of 3 and 4 year old places in the Upton RA (and Farnworth/Kingsway areas).

An Action Plan is included in the SDR showing how the Local Authority will work with a range of partners to address the above gaps to ensure sufficiency.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The outbreak of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in 2020 has radically changed the way we live our lives. The impact of this global pandemic has yet to be fully determined, but repercussions are beginning to be felt within the Early Years sector.

The main challenges faced by Early Years providers are around staffing & recruitment, learning and development, supporting children with SEND, and a reduction in occupancy. This has led to increased concern around future sustainability, especially within the Pre-School sector. There are also increasing concerns around the increase in fuel prices and national living wage.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Currently none identified, but some providers are facing challenges of sufficiency due to reduction in occupancy; less staffing flexibility; increasing costs of fuel and overheads, making some financially vulnerable.

9.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

Close working with the sector will continue to monitor demand and supply with uptake and changing demographics and falling birth rates.

9.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Research has proven that the earliest years of a child's life are crucial to their development for laying the foundations of success at school and in later life. In Halton, we want to ensure we have high quality childcare available for all parents or carers that need it, in all age ranges. The Family and Childcare Trust Childcare Survey (2018) states: *'Childcare supports parents to work, keeps valuable skills in the workforce, helps children do better at school and can narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers'*.

9.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

High quality childcare which results in children experiencing success within education will increase training and employment opportunities for pupils and students.

9.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Raising children's achievements through access to affordable and sustainable early years childcare provision will have a positive impact on the emotional health and wellbeing of challenging pupils and students. Access to quality provision also plays a key role in the early development of language and communication skills which are essential to future learning, vocabulary development and access to the wider curriculum and developing and maintaining relationships

9.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified

9.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified

10.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

10.1 Raising children's achievements through access to affordable and sustainable early years childcare should reduce incidents of challenging behaviour.

11.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

11.1 Raising children’s achievements through access to affordable and sustainable early years childcare provision should ensure that all children are able to receive timely support and intervention, thereby reducing inequalities in life chances.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
The Childcare Act 2006	www.legislation.gov.uk	Operational Director – Education Inclusion and Provision & Operational Director Resources
Early Education and Childcare – Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (March 2018)	www.gov.uk	Operational Director – Education Inclusion and Provision & Operational Director Resources