

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

TITLE: ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHILDCARE PLACES IN THE BOROUGH

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	6 March 2024
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Children's Services
Key Decision	Yes
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

1.To inform Cabinet of the findings of the 2023-24 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for the Barnsley Local Authority area.

Council Plan priority

The annual review primarily supports the Council Plan Priority of a **Learning Barnsley** particularly through enabling young children to obtain a good start and to develop a good level of development during their early years as a platform for achieving good education outcomes later.

Recommendation

That Cabinet notes the outcomes of the annual review of the sufficiency of early years provision in the Borough and endorses the actions to be taken to maintain resilience within the sector which supports the sustainability of provision as indicated in Section 4 of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Local authorities are required by legislation to 'secure sufficient childcare' under the Childcare Act (2006) and should report annually on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare. Local authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, the geographical division and date of publication.

- 1.2 The Barnsley Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) was produced from information gathered from providers in the Summer Term 2023 (see Appendix 1). The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was produced by the Childcare Quality and Sufficiency Team.
- 1.3 The geographical division within the assessment is based on the six Area Council localities although a full background assessment has been undertaken at Ward level. The full report will be shared with existing and potential childcare providers and will be published on the Council's website.

2. PROPOSAL

2.1 Key Findings

- 2.2 The number of children aged 0-4 years in the borough has reduced slightly from 13,926 in 2022 to 13,460, a difference of 466 children. This trend is due to continue with the ONS projections for the population aged 0-4 years in the borough reducing to 13,205 by 2026.
- 2.3 The number of early years children who have Special Educational Needs (SEN) and have either an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or require SEN support is 420 increasing from 335 in 2022.
- 2.4 Housing development and business development plans are now all progressing with significant amounts of housing and large business parks expected to be complete before 2030.
- 2.5 The number of early years registered providers in Barnsley is 189 which has fallen by 10 providers from last year. Early years school provision still stands at 55 which is equal to last year. There are a total of 232 providers of early years places in the borough, the remaining 12 registered providers do not offer early years education and instead are offering school age places only.
- 2.6 The reduction in the actual places being offered and the number of registered places has widened significantly again this year with recruitment issues having a huge impact in the reduction of availability of places. Providers also state that increases due to the cost of living, such as energy prices and increases in national minimum wage are impacting on the sustainability of their settings.
- 2.7 Encouragingly, the number of primary schools now delivering 30 hours of child-care has increased to 60%.
- 2.8 The take up rate of funding for eligible 2-year-old children is 73.8% which is 0.1% below the national average and the take up of funding for children aged 3 and 4 is 96.9% which is 3.2 % above the national average.

2.9 The cost of childcare is still rising with Barnsley settings charging above the regional rate for places.

3. Summary

3.1 There is the need to create a significant number of places in the borough in order to meet anticipated demand in line with the expansion of new entitlements, particularly for children aged 0-2 years, as well as the wraparound childcare offer. There is still a good mixture of childcare across Barnsley but some parents may not be able to access their preferred choice and may have to travel to access a place.

3.2 Priority should be firmly placed on the providers who are currently registered within the borough to assist them with the staffing and financial issues they are facing so they can provide the places which they are registered for and to stabilise the market.

3.3 Some of the sessional care currently being provided by early years settings and by schools is not currently meeting the needs of working parents so work should be completed with these providers to support the sufficiency needs of the borough.

3.4 Due to the increase in children with special educational needs and disabilities, the increasing complexities of some of those needs and the potential lack of access due to the lower than average figures in the Census, consideration should be given to if there are barriers to access and how increasing needs can be met.

3.3 There is the need to create further places particularly places that meet the needs of the new businesses that are setting up in the borough and who require employees to work shifts and evenings and weekends.

3.3 Further work is required to promote the existing childcare provision available in localities as well as to promote funded childcare entitlements to support people to access these.

4 Next Steps

4.1 A Steering Group of multi-agency partners and services is in place with a number of task and finish work strands to drive forward the delivery plan of ensuring the sufficiency of childcare places across the borough, taking into account the increased demand as a result of the expansion of new childcare entitlements and wraparound provision.

A focus of the delivery plan actions is to work with all existing early years settings to enable them to provide the places they are registered to deliver and consider expansion where appropriate. Where premises are available to accommodate childcare provision, including recently closed sites, work will be undertaken to seek to bring these back into use. We will work closely with partner services such as Enterprising Barnsley to promote the setting up and expansion of childcare businesses; encouraging the setup of new providers, including childminders, across the borough with emphasis on those Wards that do not currently have full day care provision including Dodworth, Stairfoot and Darfield as well as areas with a low childcare ratio including the Dearne, North and North-East Wards.

Additionally work should continue to encourage further schools to deliver 30 hours of care flexibly to meet the needs of working parents.

- 4.2 Work is to continue to facilitate the forum of providers and relevant agencies to drive forward strategies that will support the sector with the recruitment issues they are facing. This will include targeted work to encourage and support people to join the sector, including promoting opportunities to learn, apprenticeships and support to return to the profession.
- 4.3 Work should be undertaken to investigate ways to further support providers to manage the financial pressures impacting the sector to enable them to sustain their provision during this cost of living crisis. Additionally we should continue to work with large employers to assess their employees needs to inform local childcare providers and encourage them to provide financial support to local providers who can meet their needs.
- 4.4 Promotion of the childcare offer in the locality and funded entitlements should continue maximising the new Virtual Family Hub and designated family hubs sites to improve and widen local information available to residents. This will include further promotion of all childcare initiatives to support parents with the cost of living.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

5.1 Financial and Risk

- 5.1.1 The Council's Director of Finance or his representatives have been consulted in the drafting of this report. There are no direct financial implications emanating from the outcome or findings of the 2023-24 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment carried out by the Council.
- 5.1.2 Early Years providers and settings are currently funded from the Council's Early Years Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding allocation. The EY

funding is allocated through a local funding formula, based on actual participation hours for the year.

- 5.1.3 It should be noted that early years providers (mainly those in the private, voluntary and independent sector) continue to express sustainability concerns due to increasing cost pressures such as pay, cost of living, rising inflation and energy costs. This is due to the fact that the increase in Government funding has not kept pace with rising pay and inflation costs.
- 5.1.4 To address sustainability issues in the early years sector, additional funding was announced by the Government as part of the 2023 Spring Budget, namely £204 million from September 2023 rising to £288 million in 2024/25 to increase the funding paid to nurseries for the existing free hours offered.
- 5.1.5 On 29 November 2023 the DfE announced and released guidance on the expansion of Early Years entitlements of 15 hours childcare provision for 2 year olds for working parents from April 2024 and under 2s from September 2024. Details of the 2024/25 early years funding rates were confirmed on 19 December 2023 along with Barnsley's provisional settlement for the early years block of £25.9m.
- 5.1.6 In October 2023 the DfE announced a 3 year allocation in relation to a Wraparound Childcare Programme, which aims to ensure parents are able to access wraparound childcare during term time outside of the school day from 8am to 6pm. The table below detail the allocated funding:

Wraparound Childcare Programme Grant allocation	
	£
FY 2023/24	16,760
FY 2024/25	1,069,394
FY 25/26 (Provisional)	499,310
Total	1,585,465

- 5.1.7 This funding is expected to be used to either expand existing wraparound childcare provision or introduce provision where it does not exist. This can be in the form of contributing to start-up costs, expansion costs or running costs of a provision whilst demand for the provision builds. DfE expect provision to become self-sustainable through parental payments alone by the end of the funding term.

5.2 Legal

- 5.3 Please see Paragraph 1.1 of the report. There are no unanticipated legal implications emerging for the Council through this report.

5.4 Equality

- 5.5 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the annual review and is attached as Appendix 2 of the report.

5.6 Sustainability

- 5.5 There are no implications for sustainability in the Borough arising through consideration of this report.

5.7 Employee

- 5.8 There are no direct implications for the Council's employees emerging through this report. However, the report details the broader child-care workforce and the support which the Local Authority intends to offer as part of improving the sustainability of provision within the Borough.

5.9 Communications

- 5.10 The outcomes of the Annual Review will be published on the Council's Web site and widely shared with partners and the public as part of improving the long-term sustainability of the sector and promoting provision so that child-care and early years needs are fully met in the Borough.

5.11 CONSULTATION

- 5.12 The outcomes of the Annual Review have been reported to our early years' partners and the Council's Senior Management Team which has endorsed the proposed action outlined in Section 4 of this report.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The purpose of this report is to set out for Cabinet the findings of the statutory childcare sufficiency assessment and the responsibility for ensuring there are sufficient child-care places to meet the needs of the Borough

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The outcome of the annual review affords Cabinet an insight into the current position of early years provision and its sustainability in the Borough in the context of the expansion of early years entitlements to young children and the development of 'wraparound' support provision.
- 7.2 As Cabinet is aware, the sustainability of the sector is not only crucial in enabling young children to obtain a good start in life and show a good level of development at an early stage as part of improving life chances and social mobility, sufficient child-care places are also imperative in ensuring parents remain economically active.

8. GLOSSARY

8.1 None, applicable

9. LIST OF APPENDICES

9.1 Appendix 1: Annual Review of the Sufficiency of Childcare Places in Barnsley (2023-24)

Appendix 2: Annual Review of the Sufficiency of Childcare Places in Barnsley Equality Impact Assessment (2023-24).

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

11. REPORT SIGN OFF

Financial consultation & sign off	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date <i>Joshua Amahwe (16/01/2024)</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date Marianne Farrell, Team Leader – Social Care Legal Team. 22 nd January 2024

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