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| 17 November 2022 | | ITEM: 6 |
| Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee | | |
| Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2022 | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Non-key | |
| Report of: Andrea Winstone, Strategic Lead School Effectiveness and SEND | | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills | | |
| Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

This report gives an overview of Thurrock's Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022.

This report forms part of our statutory duty as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 which states Local Authorities need to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of early years entitlement with due regard to planning and growth across the Local Authority.

The report recognises the regeneration opportunities locally and will look to support some of the national drivers around early year's education.

Thurrock Council will continue to: -

- a. To support further early years & childcare development across the borough where re-generation and new housing is taking place**
- b. To consider early education future needs before decisions are taken in relation to capital assets across the Local Authority**
- c. To support sessional providers to offer, or access wrap around care in partnership, for working parents**
- d. To encourage providers, including schools, to participate in the 30 hours entitlement offer to enable more working parents to access their full entitlement.**

1. Recommendation

1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022 and offer any additional comment or feedback.

2. Introduction and Background:

Local Policy Context

The Annual Assessment links with the following Council vision and priorities: -

Vision - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

Priorities:

1. People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live, and stay
2. Place – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
3. Prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

National Policy

The Covid Pandemic has had a major impact of the uptake for the Two-Year-Old Entitlement places this is due in two parts one being the concern from parents and secondly the availability of places. Our early years team have continued to support parents and at the time of writing this report we have seen an increase in the take up for the 2-year-old funded places this supports our most vulnerable children.

Recruitment and retention of staff is a major issue for early years providers, this is a national as well as a local issue. School Effectiveness Officers are working with other local authority's both locally and nationally to develop a strategy to overcome the challenges the sector is facing.

Thurrock continues to support providers in offering 30 hours of childcare for three- and four-year-olds of working parents, ensuring that we have the appropriate childcare pathways including wrap around care for both early years children, and as they progress to school. This will be critical to the success of encouraging residents to take advantage of the local job opportunities.

The pandemic has meant a few providers are no longer operating in Thurrock. This has the potential to impact on the places that will be available to 2-year-olds and 3- and 4-year-olds across the borough. Officers from the School Effectiveness team are working closely with potential new providers to ensure that we can meet local demand to create places for 2, 3 and 4 year old provision.

Current Support to Early Years Providers from School Effectiveness Team: -

- Support pathways for new early years providers
- Regular visit to providers to ensure quality of care and education
- Support settings with recruitment and retention of staff
- Liaison with planning department and assets team
- Monitoring new planning applications to ensure early years provision is included in new development as and when required. We also appreciate councillor support in including early year's education and childcare in any new strategic developments.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

These are highlighted within the introduction to this report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

We have asked Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review and offer comment on this report. The Department of Education recognises the importance of local governance arrangements and as a result Local Authorities must present the childcare sufficiency assessment to a range of governance structures. The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to make sure that there are enough childcare places within its locality for working parents or for parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). The Childcare Sufficiency Report is a statutory report that must be published on our website and updated annually.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

We work closely with a range of our early years settings to gather feedback and look at potential opportunities, our local offer also looks to gather feedback to ensure we are capturing the voice of parents/cares.

6. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact

6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:

1. People - a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live, and stay
2. Prosperity - a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**

Strategic Lead Finance

This report is part of the statutory duty as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 which states Local Authorities need to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of early years entitlement with due regard to planning and growth across the Local Authority.

Funding to fulfil this duty is provided by Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the Dedicated Schools Grant. The funding to the Local Authority in 2022/23 is to be based on termly census. Funding to providers is based on a termly head count and distributed through the local early years funding formula.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. The duty applies in relation to children up to the age of 14 and for disabled children up to the age of 18. The Council is obliged to have regard to the statutory guidance of the Secretary of State. The guidance requires that the Council produce an annual report that is considered by elected members. The format of the report is not prescribed but the guidance suggests it covers provision for specific groups of children, supply and demand, affordability, and any gaps in provision.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Officer, Adults, Housing and Health

The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 and equality of opportunity is a key principle of all early years' providers; they ensure they meet statutory duties around offering places to all early year's children – part of the Ofsted requirement is to evidence how they have ensured equality of opportunity. Further information on the demand of childcare in Thurrock including data in relation to children with Special Educational Needs and or disability (SEND), school age children and the take up funded early education places is contained within the body of the assessment

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

None

- 8. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

- 9. Appendices to this report:**

- **Appendix 1: Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2022**

Report Author:

Andrea Winstone

Strategic Lead School Effectiveness and SEND