

14 March 2023		ITEM: 8
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2022 Report		
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 is a follow up report relating to the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment which was presented to Committee in the Autumn term 2022. At the meeting committee members requested further information around the work of the Early Years Team in supporting families to access childcare opportunities across Thurrock.

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:-

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

1. Recommendations

1.1 That Children's Services O&S review the requested additional report relating to the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022 and offer any additional comment or feedback.

2. Introduction and Background:

Local Policy Context

The Annual Assessment and appendix 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

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

The challenges over the past couple of years has meant a reduction in the number of early years providers. 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 Early Years 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 to identify future opportunities around vacant buildings.
- 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 of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

The O&S Committee requested additional information regarding recruitment and retention, support for childminders and geographical statistical information on available childcare across the borough. We have asked Children's O&S to review and offer comment on the appendix to this report.

The Department of Education recognises the importance of local governance arrangements and, as a result, Local Authorities have to 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/carers. A parental survey is undertaken yearly to assess the availability to parents of quality and affordable childcare to meet their children's need.

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 - Schools & DSG

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 annual 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 to meet the requirements of working parents in so far as reasonably practicable. In determining for the purposes whether the provision is sufficient to meet those requirements the Council must have regard to:

- a) The needs of parents for the provision of childcare for which childcare element is included in working tax credit or universal credit
- b) The needs of parents for childcare which is suitable for disabled children.

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 Monitoring Officer, Adults, Housing & 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 years 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, and Impact on Looked After Children

None.

8. **Appendix to this report:**

- **Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2023**



Appendix - Thurrock
Childcare Sufficiency ,

Report Author:

Andrea Winstone

Strategic Lead School Effectiveness and SEND