

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**17 OCTOBER 2019**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**CABINET INFORMATION ITEM**

**Lead Cabinet Member - Children and Young People - Councillor Lisa Evans**

**CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT 2019**

**SUMMARY**

This report outlines how the Local Authority (LA) is meeting its duty to secure sufficient childcare and includes information about the supply of and demand for childcare, details on any gaps in provision and an action plan on how they will be addressed.

**REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT**

The Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 and the associated statutory guidance for local authorities on Early Education and Childcare – June 2018, requires Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Local Authority) to secure sufficient childcare, as far as is reasonably practicable and within available resources, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). Local authorities are also required to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting this duty.

**DETAIL**

1. The Childcare Act 2006 and 2016 and the associated statutory guidance for local authorities on Early Education and Childcare – June 2018, requires Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Local Authority) to secure sufficient childcare, as far as is reasonably practicable and within available resources, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children).
2. To secure sufficient childcare places, local authorities should take into account:
  - what is 'reasonably practicable' when assessing what sufficient childcare means for their area;
  - the state of the local childcare market, including the demand for specific types of providers, in a particular locality and the amount and type of supply that currently exists;
  - the state of the labour market including the sufficiency of the local childcare workforce;
  - the quality and capacity of childcare providers and childminders registered with a childminder agency, including their funding, staff, premises, experience and expertise;

- should encourage schools in their area to offer out-of-hours childcare from 8.00am until 6.00pm and in school holidays;
  - should encourage existing providers to expand their provision and new providers to enter the local childcare market; and
  - should encourage providers to take sustainable business approach to planning and signpost providers to resources to support them.
3. The Local Authority is required by legislation to maintain a service that provides information, to parents and prospective parents on the provision of childcare in their area, as listed in Schedule 1 of the Childcare Act 2006 and from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017 publish this information electronically on the local authority website and update it at a minimum termly on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1<sup>st</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> September, ensuring parents are aware of:
    - Early education places for two, three and four year olds;
    - The option to continue to take up their child's 15 hour early education place until their child reaches compulsory school age;
    - How to identify high quality provision in their area.
  4. The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment provides information on how the Local authority is meeting its legal duty as detailed earlier in this report.
  5. Take-up of universal 3 & 4 year places continues to be high with 100% take-up and 30 hour free childcare places for working parents of 3 & 4 year olds has increased by 27% since the last report was produced in 2018.
  6. Stockton continues to maintain a high percentage take-up of 2 year funded places; on average the termly take-up is around 90%. The table on page 19 of the assessment shows the take-up at a ward level basis. The number of children eligible is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, by the time this data is received it is already out of date, a number of families will have already moved address, and this is the main reason why take-up is lower in some wards. Families may also decide not to take-up a place as they prefer to look after their child at home.
  7. At the time of writing the report there were 1,401 recorded vacancies in registered provision. Vacancies are monitored on a termly basis to ensure there are sufficient places available for parents. If there was a significant reduction in places steps would be taken to ensure parents had access to alternative places in close proximity to either work or home. When new providers enter the market the assessment is used to inform them of any gaps in childcare at a ward level basis. Also, if there was a need, the authority would work with providers to offer additional places by either increasing number of places or opening new settings.
  8. As mentioned in point 7 above the percentage ward take-up of childcare is dependent on whether a parent requires childcare close to home; close to work; or at a provider of choice, therefore some wards will be reporting over 100% take-up.
  9. Childcare costs in Stockton are lower than regional and national charges, especially for childminders. Funded childcare is available for children aged 2, 3 & 4 years old and tax free childcare is available which covers 20% of the cost of childcare for working parents with children aged 0-12 years.
  10. In regards to quality of provision the majority (92%) of provision in Stockton is rated good or outstanding, although this percentage has decreased in comparison to 2018 and is lower than the regional percentage for 2019 (97%). However, with the continued support of the Early Years team this percentage has already increased and will increase again as settings are re-inspected.

11. Stockton-on-Tees has a good range of quality childcare across the borough, however specific priorities have been identified and will be addressed.
12. **Ensuring sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of disabled children**
  - Ensure that parents have an understanding of the availability of childcare for disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEN) via the Local Offer and the provision of specific information, advice and assistance through the Families Information Service including advice on funded childcare.
  - The Families Information Services to continue to promote the Disability Access Fund to parents and providers of childcare.
13. **Children aged two taking up early education places**

Continue to:

  - maintain at the least the current percentage of eligible 2 year olds accessing a place;
  - monitor take-up levels against increase demand for 30 hour free childcare places;
  - market and promote activities to maximise take up;
  - raise awareness with parents' on the advantages of taking up a place.
14. **Ensuring sufficiency for children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Universal Credit**
  - The Families Information Service will continue to ensure that information remains current and up to date in order to assist parents in making choices, particularly in relation to the Tax Free Childcare and the childcare element of Universal Credit.
  - Information will continue to be made available over the telephone by contacting the Families Information Service and on-line through the Stockton Information Directory.
15. **Children aged three and four taking up early education places**
  - Monitor the demand for 30 hour free places against vacancies on a termly basis to ensure there are sufficient places to meet demand.
  - Support the establishment of expanded or new provision to offer additional places.
  - Continue the marketing campaign to inform families of the entitlement and the benefits of formal childcare.
16. **Ensuring sufficiency for school age children**
  - Ensure there continues to be sufficient before and after school places for older children by monitoring places on a termly basis.
  - Ensure there continues to be sufficient holiday places to meet demand, in particular, for those parents wanting to use part of their 30 hour free childcare entitlement for a stretched offer.

**Name of Contact Officer: Cheryl Azam**  
**Post Title: Business and Project Manager**  
**Telephone No. 01642 527208**  
**Email Address: Cheryl.azam@stockton.gov.uk**