

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

15 SEPTEMBER 2022

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

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

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT 2022

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.

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.

Recommended that the report be noted.

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 1st September 2017 publish this information electronically on the local authority website and update it at a minimum termly on 1st January, 1st April, and 1st 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 at 95% take-up, which is 3% lower than 2021 (98%) but still higher than the national average of 92%. 4yr old take-up is 99% and 3 year old take-up is 91% as per figures from the January 2022 census collection.
 6. Take-up of 30 hour free childcare places for working parents of 3 & 4 year olds has increased to 1495 which is an increase of 9.76% on the previous year and there are now 80% of primary schools offering places.
 7. Stockton continues to maintain a high percentage take-up of 2 year funded places (92%), which is an increase of 5% on the previous year. The table on page 20 of the assessment shows the take-up at a ward level basis. To be noted the number of children eligible is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions which doesn't include any on-line eligibility applications received by Stockton.
 8. In some cases, the percentage take-up up of 2 year places by ward can be over 100%, this is due to parents accessing childcare outside of the ward area where they reside, as parents may travel to access a childcare provider of choice if in a different ward area.
 9. Reports on national 2 year old take-up are issued by the DfE on a termly basis, based on data submitted to DfE by LAs at the end of term. As per the summer term report Stockton-on-Tees is ranked 1st against its statistical neighbours, 5th regionally and 11th nationally for take-up of places.
 10. Stockton, in keeping with the North East region maintained a higher percentage of funded children than England as a whole.
 11. At the time of writing the report there were 1,554 recorded vacancies in registered provision a reduction of 11.2% against 2021. 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. If there was a need, the authority would work with providers to offer additional places by either increasing number of places or opening new provision.

12. Childcare costs in Stockton are lower than regional and national charges. A full-time place in a nursery averages £233.74 per week in Stockton, regional £238.03 and national 273.57. A full-time place with a childminder is £157.06, regional £211.76 and national £237.58.
13. Funded childcare places are available for children aged 2, 3 & 4 years old and Tax Free Childcare is available to offset the cost of childcare for children aged 0-11, this is a government subsidy of up to 20% off the full cost of childcare.
14. Stockton has a good range of quality childcare across the borough with the majority (98.6%) of provision rated good or outstanding as at July 2022, which is higher than the national percentage (96%) and regional percentage (97%) as at March 2022.
15. The number of nurseries, Pre-school, and out of school settings remains relatively unchanged although there has been a reduction in childminders of 16 with a loss of 140 childcare places, but this has not impacted on the sufficiency of places available to meet the needs of parents/carers.
16. Demand for early years and childcare remains low for some settings and providers will need to continue to review their business models to meet a changing market where parents may require a more flexible offer due to changes in employment and employers offering flexible homeworking arrangements.

Consultation and Engagement

17. Consultation has been undertaken with parents/carers and childcare providers to inform the sufficiency assessment.

Next Steps

18. The sufficiency assessment will be placed on the Stockton Information Directory once it has been through the Cabinet process, so it is available for parents/carers, childcare providers, and employers to read.

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