

Schools Forum

3rd May 2016

Childcare 30 hour free entitlement

Introduction

1. The Government is delivering on its commitment to double the amount of free childcare for working parents of three- and four-year-olds to 30 hours per week term-time. The Government will be launching this offer nationwide from September 2017 and have enshrined the new entitlement in legislation in the Childcare Act. They have also carried out the first major review of childcare costs and have committed to a significant increase in the hourly rate of funding.
2. The Government intends to increase the national average hourly rate for three- and four-year-olds from £4.56 to £4.88. The national average two-year-old rate will increase from £5.09 to £5.39 and proposals for achieving this will form part of the consultation on early years funding reform later this year.
3. It is essential that the right infrastructure is in place and that the market is able to respond to demand, so that all eligible children can access a place when they need it. The new extended entitlement provides government with an opportunity to work with local authorities to reform the delivery model so that the entitlement can be provided more efficiently and in a way that meets parents' needs.
4. The delivery model for the existing 15 hours of free childcare for all three- and four-year-olds sees local authorities working with their local market to ensure that there are sufficient free childcare places in their area. Doubling the entitlement to 30 hours for working parents provides an opportunity to introduce reforms to the system.
5. The market will need to grow and expand further to ensure there are sufficient places to meet local demand for the offer of 30 hours free childcare, taking the opportunity to drive further improvements on issues such as the flexibility of childcare provision to match non-standard working patterns. To that end the Ministerial Childcare Implementation Taskforce has agreed the following principles for reform:
 - Simple for parents and providers to use, securing improvement to existing model.
 - The initiative needs to interact successfully and work with existing entitlement and government childcare schemes.

- It needs to create capacity cost-effectively and without driving up the cost of childcare.
- Be efficient for providers to administer and not add to their costs.
- Be at least as cost effective to administer as current delivery model and better value for money for government.
- Not undermine the successful delivery of the first 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds.
- Ensure that as many existing formal childcare providers as possible are able to take part in delivery of the 30 hours.

Progress to date

6. The Council's Planning and Partnership Team have already established a Project Team, have briefed Primary Head Teachers at Education Matters and have also had initial discussions with local childcare providers.
7. The following actions are taking place:
 - a. Information gathering through providers in relation to current practice for working parents.
 - b. A short questionnaire is due to be sent to every school in order to gather similar information.
 - c. Demographic information is being collected with a view to identifying potential gaps.
 - d. An Expression of Interest is being submitted to the DfE in relation to capital funding to support the expansion.
 - e. Sample models of delivery are being summarised for discussion.
 - f. Two Working Groups have been established, one for schools and one for childcare settings, to examine models of delivery for the 30 hour offer and how it can be in place by September 2017.
 - g. A public consultation for parents of 0 – 3 year olds during the summer term.

Childcare Free Entitlement: Delivery Model Government Consultation.

8. The Government Consultation covers some of the aspects of implementation of the 30 hour free entitlement offer, particularly how this will be delivered by local authorities and how the offer will meet the needs of working parents.
9. Alongside this document, the Government will also publish draft, indicative regulations setting out details on eligibility, the role of local authorities, reviews of, and appeals against, unfavourable eligibility decisions by HMRC, information sharing and associated offences, financial penalties and publication of information for parents. They have also published draft statutory guidance, which sets out the requirements on local authorities in relation to the two-, three- and four-year-old entitlements.
10. The main key areas of the Consultation are as follows:
 - Making sure there are enough childcare places available.

- Increasing flexibility to meet parents' needs.
 - Ensuring that disabled children and those with additional needs are able to access the entitlement.
 - Reforming the local authority role.
 - The duty to secure early years provision free of charge.
 - The duty to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents.
 - The duty to provide information, advice and training to childcare providers.
 - Making sure that parents have access to information.
 - The commitment to two-year-olds.
11. The Consultation is open from the 3rd April to the 6th June 2016 and the Council will be submitting a response.
12. Local childcare providers have also been advised of the opportunity to comment and will be submitting any responses individually.
13. Primary Schools have also been advised of the opportunity to comment and asked to submit any responses individually.
14. Access to the consultation and associated guidance documents can be found via the following link: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/early-years-funding/childcare-free-entitlement>

Recommendation

15. The Schools Forum is asked to note and comment on the above.

Jane Wright
Planning & Partnership Manager