

**TO: SCHOOLS FORUM
7 MARCH 2024**

**2023 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT
Executive Director of People**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Schools Forum on the 2023 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA), attached as Annex A, to be submitted to the Executive Member and subsequently published on the Bracknell Forest Council Website, as required by the authority's statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 **That Schools Forum NOTES the attached CSA**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 Statutory Guidance sets out the Local Authority's statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare. To meet this duty Bracknell Forest Council is required to submit a report to elected council members on how it is meeting its duty and to make this report available to parents.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 No alternative options were considered

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 Section 6 and 7 (as substituted by section 1 of the Education Act 2011) of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on English local authorities to secure sufficient childcare for working parents and to secure early years provision free of charge.
- 5.2 Part B of the Statutory guidance for local authorities sets out how Local Authorities should meet this duty, including the requirement to report to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, and make this report available and accessible to parents.
- 5.3 In assessing the sufficiency of the local childcare market, the CSA draws on data from the Office for National Statistics, labour market statistics from the National Online Manpower Information System (NOMIS) and census data, Health data, local statistical data, information provided by local childcare providers, and a survey of parents in Bracknell Forest.
- 5.4 Currently evidence indicates that in the summer term 2023 there was sufficient childcare capacity for children aged 0 to 4 (not in school), however there continues to be insufficient provision for school age children (ages 4 to 16), with parents reporting continued difficulties accessing childcare before and after school and during school holidays.
- 5.5 The early years free entitlements will expand to encompass 15 hours of free entitlement for working parents with 2-year-olds from April 2024, with a further expansion in September 2024 for working parents of children aged 9 months and older. There is currently insufficient data on both the available supply and demand

Unrestricted

for the expanded entitlements to project the adequacy of early years childcare provision in Bracknell Forest beyond March 2024.

- 5.6 Responses to the Parental Survey highlight growing difficulties accessing specialised services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, there is insufficient evidence available to make a comprehensive assessment of the adequacy of SEND provision.
- 5.6 Based on challenges identified in the CSA, the priorities for childcare in 2024-25 are:
1. Collaborating closely with childcare providers to successfully execute the extension of early years free entitlements, which will be introduced in a phased manner as follows:
 - Starting in April 2024, we will implement 15 hours per week for working parents of 2-year-olds
 - In September 2024, we will roll out 15 hours per week for working parents of children aged 9 to 23 months
 2. To comprehensively grasp the influence of shifts in family circumstances, the cost-of-living crisis, and the extension of early years free entitlements on the childcare sector in Bracknell Forest, we will persist in our ongoing efforts to:
 - Assess alterations in the childcare supply landscape
 - Analyse shifts in childcare demand patterns
 - Pinpoint instances where the supply-demand equilibrium is not met and collaborate with providers to bridge these gaps
 - Assist providers in recognising and comprehending opportunities within the childcare market and effectively promoting the childcare services they provide
 3. Our ongoing efforts involve collaborating with childcare providers to sustain their operations while adapting to the evolving childcare market. This includes actively engaging with childminders to explore the feasibility of introducing monthly payments. Additionally, we are committed to extending business support to providers who require assistance in navigating these changes.
 4. We will inform prospective providers contemplating the establishment of new childcare services within Bracknell Forest about the current population forecast and the existing sufficiency status.
 5. Actively promoting the Bracknell Forest Local Directory, which holds information on all childcare in Bracknell Forest.
 6. Early Years Forum:
 - We will maintain our collaborative efforts with the forum to enhance sufficiency and sustainability initiatives.
 - Actively promote and encourage broader participation in the forum to ensure a more diverse representation of providers.
 7. School Age Childcare:
 - Collaborate with both schools and childcare providers to establish sustainable wrap-around childcare solutions.
 - Sustain engagement with providers for the effective delivery of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme.
 8. Mapping supply and demand for early years and childcare:

Unrestricted

- Recruit a fixed term post, Early years and childcare sufficiency manager.
- Develop a comprehensive mechanism for assessing both supply and demand for:
 - Early years and childcare funded places for the working family entitlement (9 months to school age)
 - Wraparound childcare for primary age children (working families)
 - Children with SEND both early years and primary.

5.7 The CSA will be submitted to the Executive Member and subsequently published on the Council website where it will be available and accessible to parents and childcare providers.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

6.1 Part B.2 of the Statutory Guidance: “Early education and childcare (applies from 1 April 2024)” requires local authorities to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare pursuant to S.6 and S.7 of the Childcare Act 2006 (as amended). This report should be made available and accessible to parents.

The guidance states local authorities are responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in their report, geographical division and date of publication. It is advised that the level of data required to map supply and demand is proportionate. It should aim to minimise the burden on childcare providers. The report should include:

- a specific reference to how local authorities are ensuring there is sufficient childcare available to meet the needs of: children with special educational needs and disabilities, children from families in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit, children with parents who work irregular hours, children taking up free early education and childcare places, school age children, and children needing holiday care
- information about the current and projected supply and demand of childcare for particular age ranges of children, and the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision
- details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed

The attached Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) addresses the issues as set out in the Statutory Guidance.

Director of Resources

6.2 The revenue related cost of delivering the CSA will need to be financed from within the Dedicated Schools Grant income which is allocated by the government through reference to actual hours delivered for the free entitlement. A detailed assessment of affordability is considered each year as part of the Early Years budget setting process. The expansion of free entitlements will present additional challenges in terms of service delivery and financial planning.

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 Not Required

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 BFC will be at risk of not meeting its statutory duty if it does not submit the CSA to the executive member and publish the report where it is accessible to parents.
- 6.5 If BFC does not complete a sufficiency assessment; development of childcare may not be placed in the correct area, may not meet the needs of working parents and may destabilise the local childcare market.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 In preparing for the CSA, data on current capacity and costs were gathered from providers of childcare in Bracknell Forest. Parents of children resident in or accessing childcare in Bracknell Forest were consulted on their need for childcare in July 2023.

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Data was collected from providers via the Provider Self Update portal, provider surveys, email and telephone and provider websites. Parents were consulted via an online survey using Objective, this was advertised via childcare providers, the Council website, the Family Information Service website and social media.

Representations Received

- 7.3 105 parents responded to the consultation, a decrease of 207 responses compared to the previous survey in June 2022.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf

Early education and childcare statutory guidance for local authorities - June 2018

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents>

Childcare Act 2006

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/contents/enacted>

Childcare Act 2016

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Cherry Hall, Head of Early Years & Childcare

01344 352811

cherry.hall@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

David Allais, Early Years Business & Family Information Manager

01344 354027

EHBS@bracknell-forest.gov.uk