

South Gloucestershire Council

REPORT TO: CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT
OCTOBER 2022
CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT 2022/23 (ALL WARDS)

Purpose of Report

1. To receive and approve the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022/23.

Recommendations

2. To approve the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022/23.
3. To approve the actions for the next 12 months as set out in paragraph 25 of the report.

Policy

4. Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents or parents that are studying or training in their area. Under that Act, local authorities were originally required to undertake a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment every three years. South Gloucestershire carried out the required assessments in 2008 and 2011.
5. Since 2013, the requirement has been to make an annual report available and accessible to parents, with the manner of reporting no longer prescribed by government and therefore local authorities able to decide the level of detail to be included in their report. Guidance published in 2018: Early Education and Childcare Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, dated June 2018, sets out the areas the report should cover.
6. The local authority's duty to assess sufficiency of childcare provision was repealed under Section 86 of the Children and Families Act 2014. However, the local authority still has a duty to secure sufficient childcare and to provide information and advice about that childcare to parents/carers, childcare providers, and elected members. This report enables the local authority to demonstrate how it is meeting these duties.
7. The guidance sets out what local authorities should consider when assessing whether there is sufficient childcare in their area. This includes:
 - what is reasonably practicable in 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, including their funding, staff, premises, experience and expertise;
 - information about the supply and demand of childcare for particular age ranges of children, the affordability, accessibility and quality of provision; and
 - details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed
 - encouraging schools in their area to offer childcare from 8.00am until 6.00pm and in school holidays
 - encouraging existing providers to expand their provision and new providers to enter the local childcare market if needed
 - Encouraging providers to take a sustainable business approach to planning and signpost providers to resources to support them, for example, the [business sustainability tool kit](#) published by the Department, and the National Day Nurseries Association Early Years [Business Zone tool](#)

8. Local authorities are required to ensure that parents are provided with information about their child's entitlement to an early education and childcare options in this area so that they may take up provision, including:
 - entitlement to 15 hours of free provision for 3 and 4 year olds and some 2 year olds;
 - an increased entitlement to 30 hours of free provision per week for 3 and 4 year olds of working parents;
 - Tax Free Childcare;
 - information on local provision and options;
 - eligibility checking procedures for 2 year olds;
 - eligibility checking procedures for early years pupil premium for 3 and 4 year olds;
 - information on the quality of providers based on Ofsted inspection.

Background

9. Free early education for children aged 3 and 4 year was increased to 15 hours per week in September 2010. From September 2013, this was extended to: 2-year-old children from low-income households (based on entitlement to a range of income-based benefits); children who are looked after by the local authority; children who have been through the care process; or children with high level Special Educational Needs (SEND).
10. With effect from September 2014, eligibility was extended to around 40% of 2 year olds (approximately 260,000 children nationally). With effect from September 2017, the entitlement to free early education was extended to 30 hours per week for 3- and 4-year-old children of eligible working families. Tax Free childcare was also fully rolled out to parents of 3 and 4 year olds children in September 2017.
11. Pre-school provision in South Gloucestershire is almost entirely in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector. The local authority therefore has a key role in commissioning provision and working with PVI providers to secure sufficient provision. In September 2022 there were 131 group settings and 144 individual childminders in South Gloucestershire. There is one setting which has temporarily closed due to staffing issues, which is aiming to re-open.

Current Position

12. Each year the Local Authority determines the supply and demand for early year's education provision. An annual early years census is taken, which measures the number of hours of free education attended by individual children at each setting. The summer term is when there is greatest demand for places. This summer term, all settings have been asked to submit data on take up of both free and funded places. In July, information is also gathered from OFSTED registrations and inspections; and parents are consulted on their requirements. The following sections describe the current position on places and issues identified in the last year.
13. **Sufficiency of Places:** The Government Department for Education (DfE) sets a benchmark for sufficiency of places of each ward having a minimum of 17 places per 100 children and therefore we measure how well we are performing against that benchmark. Details of the number of places per 100 children by ward and age are provided in **Appendix 1**.
14. From **Appendix 1**, there are three wards (Dodington, Woodstock and North Yate) where the level of provision is below 17 places per 100 children. In respect of these, there are sufficient early years places within walking distance of each of these wards and therefore the community does have access to sufficient places as follows:
 - **Dodington** (9 places per 100 children): there is capacity in the adjoining wards Yate Central (76 places per 100 children) and Chipping Sodbury and Cotswold (57 places per 100 children);
 - **Woodstock** (8 places per 100 children): there is capacity in the adjoining Parkwall & Warmley ward (72 places per 100 children).

- **Yate North** (15 places per 100 children): there is capacity in the adjoining wards Yate Central (76 places per 100 children) and Chipping Sodbury and Cotswold (57 places per 100 children).
15. It is also worth noting that **Bitton & Oldland Common** (18 places per 100 children and a decrease from 38 places per 100 children) is just above the DfE benchmark. This is due to recent closures, however there is capacity in adjoining wards: Boyd Valley (81 places per 100 children) and Parkwall & Warmley ward (72 places per 100 children).
16. **Take-up of Places:** A key priority for this academic year was to try to raise take up of places by eligible 2-year-olds to the levels which existed before the Covid-19 pandemic. This reflects that participation rates reduced from 90% in Autumn/Spring terms 2019/20 to 78% in Summer 2021 owing to Covid-19 resulting in the number of children taking up a place reducing to 522 compared to 574 previously.
17. In Summer 2022, take up has remained static with 77% taking up the entitlement, equating to 486 of those eligible taking up a place. The number of children eligible has decreased, which could be due to more parents returning to work and the minimum wage being increased, but the income threshold criteria remaining the same. The take up continues to compare favourably to the national average participation rate. Contributing to this are the council outreach activities, including mail shots, home visits, and publicity campaigns via social media and community-based outlets, including supermarkets.
18. **Quality:** Under DfE regulations published in August 2014, 2-year-olds should be offered placement in a setting which is “good” or better, and 3- and 4-year-olds should not be offered placement at a setting which is less than “requires improvement”.

The latest available Ofsted grading's as at 07/10/2022 are:

<u>Grading</u>	<u>Groups</u>	<u>Childminders</u>
Outstanding	18	11
Good	92	98
Requires Improvement	4	0
Inadequate	0	0
Sub Total	114	109
% Graded Good +	96%	92%

The following settings have not had full Ofsted inspection

Met Requirements	0	8
Not Met Requirements	0	2
<u>Awaiting Grade</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>25</u>
Sub Total	14	35
Total	131	144

19. **Children with Special Educational Needs:** Disability Access Fund (DAF) continues to be available for Early Years Settings to request for all children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), promoted by officers in contact with Early Years Settings. Early Intervention Officers and Portage home visitors collaborate with colleagues in health and Children's Centres to enable children to secure early years placements and access to funded places.
20. This multi-agency collaborative approach supports early identification of children with SEND resulting in applications each year for an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) needs assessment for children in their early years. A review of funding available to support children with SEND in early years has recently taken place. There is now an Early Years Inclusion Support Fund (EYISF) which provides more timely financial assistance to early years settings to meet the needs of children with SEND from the age of 2 without the need for an EHCP and enabling children to access places and support sooner than an EHCP would provide. Transition Support Funding (TSF) is another new funding stream, introduced this year to support children with SEND transitioning from pre-school to reception class in school.

21. **Affordability:** The entitlements to 15 or 30 hours per week free childcare for children aged 3 and 4 and eligible 2-years old children is free at the point of delivery. Outside that entitlement, charges are set by the individual PVI provider. The Council has no direct control over the level of charges but the general position in South Gloucestershire is in line with other areas. The number and distribution of providers means that there is, overall, a basis for reasonable charges. However, settings are increasing charges for optional extras that are allowable under government guidance. Settings are encouraged not to charge for families that cannot afford to pay for these extras, this includes low-income families in receipt of two-year-old funding and children in receipt of pupil premium.
22. **Impact of the Pandemic:** There are no permanent closures of settings as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Between February 2020 and end of September 2022, a total of 7 new settings have opened and 12 have closed with a net increase of 120 places. There has also been a decrease of 74 childminders, although there have been 32 new registrations resulting in a net decrease of 42 childminders and 95 places. Overall, there has been an increase of places of 25.
23. The Local authority continued to engage with the Early Years Provider Working Group throughout the pandemic particularly when considering DfE guidance on temporary amendments to funding arrangements during the pandemic. The Local Authority continues to offer settings business advice and support specifically targeted to settings whose free entitlement funding levels do not appear to have recovered. The Early Years Sector are continuing to face challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff to posts of all grades and these issues are raised regularly with DfE.
24. **Summary of parents'/providers' views of childcare provision:** In June 2022, the Council issued a sufficiency questionnaire to parents and carers via childcare settings, Council outlets and other public offices. A total of 135 responded of which 112 (83%) use formal childcare (19, 11% use informal childcare). The responses highlighted the following:
- 62% of responses (84 responses) say that childcare arrangements fully meet their needs. 27% (37 responses) say their childcare arrangements partially meet their needs and 10% report their needs not being met (14 responses)
 - 70% of responses say it was easy to find the childcare they wanted (95 responses). 27% (37 responses) say it was difficult to find the childcare they wanted and 2% (3 responses) said it was not possible.
 - When asked how childcare can be improved, parents/carers refer to issues of flexibility, affordability and childcare being offered at different times of the day. A full range of responses is provided at **Appendix 2**.
 - Most parents responding, 87%, (117), required childcare to enable them to work in full or part time employment, and 4%, (9) to enable them to study and 1%, 2 to train. 38%, 83 of the 135 who responded also require childcare to allow their child to develop social and learning skills.
25. The areas of work identified below will help improve the flexibility and ease with which parents/carers are able to find childcare. These make up the key priorities to support the sufficient, flexible, affordable provision of childcare in South Gloucestershire.
- Partnership working with local schools to help establish Early Years Provision on school sites, to support sustainability of childcare and education, increase the type of childcare offer available to the community and to support improvement of education in the primary phase. Several schools have expressed an interest in developing early years provision on their site and this will be explored further.
 - Develop and publish a guide for school partners to increase awareness and understanding of the various options and models of childcare provision and implications for governance, finance and accountability.
 - Aligned to the priorities contained in the Early Years Strategy, work with the sector to support the recruitment, retention and development of staff by promoting the recently advertised Hemsall's workshops on recruitment and retention and to encourage the sector to register for the DfE funded National Early Years Leadership qualification for practitioners

- Continue to work with the Childminder Recruitment Working Group that has been developed to enhance ideas to increase childminders in the Local Authority to increase the number of places.
- Encourage providers to be as flexible as possible with the session times that they offer to suit local demand across a wide range of opening hours throughout the year, including weekends and school holidays where appropriate.
- Continue work to maintain the high take up of places, particularly for eligible 2-year olds and those working families that are eligible for 30 hours per week.
- Monitor, and where possible increase the capacity available in areas where the sufficiency is marginal (this is likely to apply particularly to the Bristol fringe areas and to the impact of cross border take up places).
- Monitor the increasing need in areas of housing development and enable provision where necessary.
- Prioritise provision and placement for children with special and additional needs and those who are otherwise vulnerable.
- Work with providers to encourage eligible parents to register for early years pupil premium funding.
- Monitor the free childcare webpage on the public website to ensure the data is accurate to enable families to be able to find the free childcare options available to them, as well as local provision.

Consultation

26. Early years census forms were completed by 214 childcare providers with details of the number of places available at their settings and a headcount of the number of children claiming funding for their free early education entitlement in week beginning 17 January 2022.
27. In June 2022, all providers were contacted and asked to inform parents of the online childcare sufficiency questionnaire. 135 responses were received.

Childcare providers were also asked to complete a questionnaire on take up of places in June 2022. 123 settings completed the questionnaire which is 90% of the sector. The questionnaire was not issued to childminders, as the purpose was to gauge an idea of sufficiency of places which was affected by recruitment and retention of staff in the sector. 41 settings responded to say they were currently offering a reduced capacity of places due to staffing issues which equates to 33% of the respondents. A large majority of these settings are in areas where there is a higher than the DfE target number of places available per 100 children. 6 settings reported they are offering a reduced capacity of places due to lower demand of children. These settings are all in areas where there is higher than the DfE target number of places available of places available per 100 children, meaning there is still sufficient places available.

Equalities Considerations

28. This report sets out the legal framework/statutory requirement established by Government to require local authorities to secure sufficient childcare in their area for 3 and 4 year olds and less advantaged 2 year olds. As the statutory guidance points out, “Evidence shows that higher quality provision has greater developmental benefits for children, particularly the most disadvantaged children, leading to better outcomes”. The intention is to mitigate disadvantages, break the ‘cycle of deprivation’, narrow gaps in children’s attainment and provide a stronger basis for entering the primary phase of education.
29. This report confirms that sufficient places have been secured, including the places required for 2 year olds from low income households. The equality duty also requires that the Council, in securing childcare places, ensures that the equalities practices of PVI providers are appropriate. This is achieved in two ways: first, through the Provider Agreement between the Council and the providers of early year’s places and, secondly, through the Ofsted inspection framework.

30. The arrangements for free early education impact positively upon the equality's agenda within South Gloucestershire. Free early education for 2-year-olds at risk of disadvantage and those with SEND (including those in receipt of disability living allowance), alongside Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) for 3- and 4-year-olds at risk of disadvantage works to narrow the gap in educational achievement. Additional funding is available through a range of sources for vulnerable families to enable them to access early education; Disability Access Fund (DAF), Early Years Inclusion Support Fund (EYISF), Transition Support Fund (TSF) and Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) alongside their universal 15 hours per week entitlement.

Risk Assessment

31. The following sections include the outcome of a risk assessment and advice arising from this.

Financial Implications (includes tax implications such as VAT)

32. Funding for free early education places for 2, 3- and 4-year-old children is included in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Early Years Block, provided to local authorities each year by the government. The current 2022-23 financial budget to support pre-school providers for the delivery of free early education is allocated as follows:

Funding stream	Amount (£000)
Free places for 2 years	1,565
Free places for 3&4 years	15,630
Deprivation	142
Inclusion	315
Early years pupil premium	112
Early years disability access	78

33. The current budget is allocated based on the latest DSG Funding announcement using January 2022 census data and will be updated during 2022/23 using January 2023 census data.

34. Based on current projections, the budget is sufficient to meet the expected demand for places in 2022/23.

Caroline Warren – Finance Business Partner, People (Children) – 01454 863153

Legal Implications

35. Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare for working parents or parents that are studying or training so far as is reasonably practicable, in their area. Section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient early years provision, free of charge at the point of use, for eligible children resident in their area. Local authorities must have regard to the early education and childcare statutory guidance for local authorities dated June 2018. This requires the local authority to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare.

The statutory guidance requires the report to set out how the local authority is meeting the duty to secure sufficient childcare and should include specific reference to how it is 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 aged two, three and four taking up free places; school age children; and children needing holiday care. The report should also contain 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; and details of how any gaps in childcare provision will be addressed.
Maria Sweetman – Solicitor – 01454 864229

Human Resources Implications

36. There are no Human Resources implications that arise directly from this report. **Nicola Plant – Strategic HR Business Lead – 01454 863093.**

Climate Emergency and Environmental Implications

37. As far as possible, childcare provision should be enabled so that it is available on a local and accessible basis without the need for extended travel. This is in order to reduce the emissions generated from associated journeys, walking and cycling to childcare provision should be promoted. This in turn helps to reduce the air quality impact of journeys made for this purpose and to support and encourage active travel to and from facilities. It is crucial that the activities identified around generally increasing capacity, increasing capacity in marginal areas and the continued monitoring of increased need are carried out. Work should focus on ensuring that childcare places across the area match the distribution of demand. **Lucy Rees – Senior Environmental Policy & Climate Change Officer – 01454 862224**

Economic Implications

38. There are no direct economic implications identified through the recommendations outlined within this report. Given that the majority of provision is in the PVI sector, there is a requirement for an effective and sustainable commissioning role for the Council including stimulating and supporting that sector. In relation to employment, a vigorous and expanding PVI sector provides jobs and opportunities for training and development. **Ian Steele – Business Investment & Digital Connectivity Manager – 01454 868202**

Reasons for Decision

39. The authority is currently meeting its statutory duty to secure sufficient places for early education and childcare. Work continues to ensure that there will be sufficient capacity available. This has depended, and will continue to depend, on the good provision made in the PVI sector and the partnership with the local authority in commissioning provision.

Author

Chris Sivers, Director for Children, Adults and Health

Departmental Contacts

Hilary Smith, Head of Education, Learning and Skills, 01454 863268

Samantha Gardner, Business and Finance Development Officer, 01454 862368

Appendix 1

		Number of Early Year childcare places per 100 children					
		Total	Age in years				
			0	1	2	3	4
Total	South Gloucestershire	44	9	9	48	75	73
Area	The Chase	43	10	10	48	70	69
Area	Frome Vale	36	7	7	38	60	60
Area	Kings Forest	45	8	8	51	77	72
Area	Severn Vale	41	7	6	45	72	69
Area	Southern Brooks	52	11	12	54	88	88
Area	The Chase	43	10	10	48	70	69
Ward	Frenchay & Downend	65	25	20	71	100	95
Ward	Kingswood	63	12	14	74	107	97
Ward	New Cheltenham	41	7	10	35	83	74
Ward	Staple Hill & Mangotsfield	35	7	6	45	57	59
Ward	Woodstock	8	1	1	14	11	12
Area	Frome Vale	36	7	7	38	60	60
Ward	Chipping Sodbury & Cotswold Edge	57	10	12	51	100	97
Ward	Dodington	9	1	1	10	15	14
Ward	Frampton Cotterell	54	11	11	64	81	92
Ward	Yate Central	76	16	12	86	120	129
Ward	Yate North	15	4	4	19	24	22
Area	Kings Forest	45	8	8	51	77	72
Ward	Bitton & Oldland Common	18	3	2	23	30	27
Ward	Boyd Valley	81	12	12	96	124	141
Ward	Emersons Green	35	10	9	36	57	53
Ward	Hanham	61	8	9	64	104	99
Ward	Longwell Green	22	4	5	26	37	33
Ward	Parkwall & Warmley	72	12	12	85	140	126
Area	Severn Vale	41	7	6	45	72	69
Ward	Charfield	54	9	8	63	103	93
Ward	Pilning & Severn Beach	19	0	0	23	32	43
Ward	Severn Vale	57	8	7	63	108	83
Ward	Thornbury	36	9	8	39	62	60
Area	Southern Brooks	52	11	12	54	88	88
Ward	Bradley Stoke North	68	16	18	61	130	110
Ward	Bradley Stoke South	38	4	5	48	60	62
Ward	Charlton & Cribbs	39	10	11	37	68	67
Ward	Filton	60	10	11	60	99	118
Ward	Patchway Coniston	67	8	7	76	128	118
Ward	Stoke Gifford	46	13	16	50	68	68
Ward	Stoke Park & Cheswick	86	18	23	87	165	150
Ward	Winterbourne	26	2	3	33	46	48
Data Sources: September 22 and AHA 2021		Includes Full daycare and sessional places					

Responses from questionnaire with parents/carers

Do your current childcare arrangements meet your needs?

	Number of responses	
Fully	84	62%
Partially	37	27%
No	14	10%
Total	135	100%

How easy was it for you to find the childcare you wanted?

	Number of responses	
Easy	95	70%
Difficult	37	27%
Not Possible	3	2%
Total	135	100%

How could the formal childcare provision you use for this child be improved?

Different type of childcare provider	(1)
At a different time of day	(13)
More flexible sessions	(19)
More affordable	(29)
Closer to home	(6)
Closer to work	(2)
Closer to school attended by sibling	(3)
Better suited to my child's additional needs or disability	(1)
Better quality	(4)
Other	(10)

Further summarised comments made by respondents included the following:

- Lack of provision in the area (33)
- Provision meets needs (25)
- The cost of childcare is too high (23)
- Concerns about long waiting lists at some providers (13)
(this refers to provision beyond the free entitlements)
- More flexible sessions and extended opening hours are needed (9)
(including options for shift workers on 7 day work patterns requiring greater flexibility)
- Need more after school//holiday/breakfast clubs or more early years providers to be open during school holidays (6)
- Successfully accessed a place by applying early (6)
- Free childcare should be available to more families (6)
- Insufficient provision close to home (4)
- Went to provision where sibling attended (3)
- Nurseries closing due to recruitment and retention issues (3)
- Accessed provision close to sibling's school (2)

- Too many new housing developments in the area (2)
- Difficulty finding childcare in more rural areas (1)
- Difficulty finding list of providers on council website (1)
- More support for disabled parents (1)

The table below identify changes in requirements when choosing a childcare as a result of Covid 19.

When you were choosing your childcare provider was your preferred setting criteria either:

Criteria	Pre Covid		Post Covid		% Change
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Close to Home	91	67%	94	70%	2%
Close to Place of Work/Study	10	7%	8	6%	-1%
Close to School Attended by Sibling	8	6%	9	7%	1%
Close to Home & Close to Place of Work/Study	7	5%	4	3%	-2%
Close to Home & Close to School Attended by Sibling	7	5%	6	4%	-1%
Close to Place of Work/Study & Close to School Attended by Sibling	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Close to Home, Close to Place of Work/Study & Close to School Attended by Sibling	8	6%	4	3%	-3%
No Response	4	3%	10	7%	4%
	135	100%	135	100%	

These figures show that compared to before COVID, more families need childcare closer to home than their work place or place of study, which shows that the pandemic is still having an impact of whether families are attending workplaces like they used to be.