

<b>16 January 2024</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2023</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Andrea Winstone, Head of Service, School Effectiveness and SEND		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Executive Director of Children Services		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## **Executive Summary**

This report presents Thurrock’s Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023.

The Council has as statutory duty to report annually to the elected council members on how we are meeting our statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare in our borough, as set out in the Childcare Act 2006. This report is available and accessible to the public.

The report recognises the regeneration opportunities locally and will look to support some of the national drivers around early year’s education. The report recognises the challenges around forecasting sufficiency and is working hard with planning to ensure we have an overview of potential developments coming forward and the need to provide enough childcare places.

### **The Childcare Sufficiency Report**

- sets out the principles and planning guidelines on early years both nationally and locally.
- provides demographic and contextual picture of the early year's provision in Thurrock.
- provides information on the demand of childcare in Thurrock including data in relation to children with special educational needs and or disability (SEND), school-age children and the take up of funded early education places.
- provides an indication of the supply, quality, and affordability of childcare across the borough.

- provides childcare sufficiency data, population of 2-, 3- and 4 -year-olds and number of childcare providers by ward.
- provides details of the take-up of the 30 hours free childcare entitlement
- provides details of future planning and developments and population increases/decreases.
- details how the Council plans to support childcare sufficiency in the borough.
- details the Council's implementation plan for the new childcare entitlements.

## **1. RECOMMENDATION**

### **1.1 That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023 and offer any additional comment or feedback.**

## **2. Introduction and Background:**

### **2.1 Local Policy Context**

The Annual Assessment links with the following Council vision and priorities: -

Vision - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

Priorities:

1. People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.
2. Place – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future.
3. Prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

### **2.2 National Policy**

2.2.1 As reported in last year's assessment, we have seen Recruitment and retention of staff in early years remaining a key risk. School Effectiveness Officers are working with other Local Authority's both locally and nationally to develop a recruitment and retention strategy to support the early years sector. This year we have organised a recruitment fair to encourage people to consider a career in this sector. The Fair was very successful with a number of attendees being offered interviews with Thurrock early years settings. Our intention is to run this event annually.

2.2.2 Thurrock Council continues to support providers in offering 30 hours of childcare for three- and four-year-olds of working parents, ensuring that we have the appropriate early education and childcare pathways including wrap

around care for both early years children, and as they progress to school. This will be critical to the success of encouraging residents to take advantage of the local job opportunities.

2.2.3 The government announced in the Spring budget: large scale childcare reforms to increase the availability; reduce costs to parents who wish to access early education and childcare, and increase the number of parents using childcare. Flexible early education and childcare expands the opportunity for parents to return to or enter the job market. High quality early education and childcare significantly improves the outcomes of children reducing disparities in later life. Nationally the government is expecting 60,000 more parents will enter the workforce.

#### 2.2.4 **The existing childcare offer:**

- All parents are entitled to 15 hours per week childcare support for 3- and 4-year olds.
- Parents who earn the equivalent of at least 16 hours a week at national minimum/living wage and earn less than £100,000 adjusted net income per year, are entitled to 30 hours childcare support a week for children aged 3 and 4.
- Parents of 2-year-olds who receive some specific forms of support are also entitled to 15 hours per week childcare support.

#### 2.2.5 **Childcare Reforms**

##### **September 2023**

- Childminder grants to become available - £1200 for those who register with a childminder agency and £600 for those who register with Ofsted.
- Staff 2-year-olds ratio change from 1:4 to 1:5 for two-year-olds in England.

##### **April 2024**

- 15 hours for eligible working 2-year-olds introduced.

##### **September 2024**

- National wraparound support begins.
- 15 hours eligible working parents of children 9 months plus

##### **September 2025**

- 30 hours for eligible working parents of children from 9 months to primary aged introduced.

##### **September 2026**

- All schools able to offer 8am to 6pm wraparound on their own or in partnership.

2.2.6 The Council has a statutory duty to secure sufficient early education and childcare for parents who live in Thurrock and to deliver the reforms. The School Effectiveness Team is working with colleagues from across the Council and with existing and potential new providers to implement these reforms. The reforms will be challenging due to the lack of suitable premises, recruitment and retention of quality staff, capital and revenue costs and future financial sustainability.

The School Effectiveness Team will support providers to implement the changes:

- Supporting pathways for new early years providers.
- Regular visit to providers to ensure quality of care and education.
- Continued support for settings with recruitment and retention of staff.
- Liaising with the planning department and assets team to support new providers to open provision in Thurrock and existing providers to expand provision to meet the new early education and childcare entitlements.
- To work with the planning department to produce information on planning regulations for early years settings and early education and childcare on domestic premises.
- Monitoring new planning applications to ensure early years provision is included in new development as and when required.
- Work with local schools to ensure wraparound care is offered to parents either on school site provided by school, on site provided by independent providers or off site by local providers including childminders. School Effectiveness Team will work with all parties to broker relationships.

We also appreciate councillor support in including early year's education and childcare in any new strategic developments.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 The key risk is associated with the recruitment and retention of staff and lack of suitable premises. We have outlined some of the measures we have taken to support this earlier in the report.
- 3.2 Lack of suitable early education and childcare for children with complex needs remains an issue in Thurrock. We work with providers to promote inclusive practice and share information on how to access the Disability Access Funding and Early Years Inclusion Funding. Providing wraparound care for school aged children who attend special provision may be difficult as many of these children access school transport. We will work with our special education providers and our colleagues in School's transport to find a solution to this challenge.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Children's O&S are asked to review and offer comment on this report. The Department of Education recognises the importance of local governance arrangements and, as a result, Local Authorities must present the childcare sufficiency assessment to a range of governance structures. The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to make sure that there are enough early education and childcare places within its locality for working parents or for parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). The Childcare Sufficiency Report is a statutory report that must be published on our website and updated annually.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 We work closely with all our early years settings to gather data and feedback and continue to work with them to identify potential opportunities. The School Effectiveness Team capture parents' views via an on-line parental survey, the Local Offer website and the Family Information Service to ensure we are capturing the voice of parents/carers.

#### **6. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance and Community Impact**

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:
1. People - a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live, and stay.
  2. Prosperity - a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Head of Finance, Children Services**

This report is part of the statutory duty as set out in the Childcare Act 2006 which states Local Authorities need to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of early years entitlement with due regard to planning and growth across the Local Authority.

Funding to fulfil this duty is provided by Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) through the Dedicated Schools Grant. The funding to the Local Authority in 2023/24 is to be based on the January 2023 and 2024 census.

Funding to providers is based on a termly head count and distributed through the local early years funding formula.

## 7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)**

The Council has a statutory duty under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 to secure sufficient early education and childcare for working parents. In determining whether the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet those requirements, the Council must have regard to the needs of parents in the area for childcare where working tax credit or universal credit is payable as well as the provision of childcare which is suitable for disabled children. Disability has the same definition as in the Equality Act 2010.

The Council is obliged to have regard to the statutory guidance of the Secretary of State. The guidance requires that the Council produce an annual report that is considered by elected members. The format of the report is not prescribed but the guidance suggests it covers provision for specific groups of children, supply and demand, affordability, and any gaps in provision.

## 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer | Adults, Housing & Health**

The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010, and equality of opportunity is a key principle of all early years' providers; they ensure they meet statutory duties around offering places to all early year's children. Part of the Ofsted requirement is to evidence how they have ensured quality of opportunity. Further information on the demand of childcare in Thurrock including data in relation to children with Special Educational Needs and or Disability (SEND), the school age children and the take up funded early education places, is contained within the body of the assessment.

## 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

None

**8. Appendices to this report:**

- **Appendix 1: Thurrock Childcare Sufficiency Annual Assessment 2023**



Childcare  
Sufficiency Assessment

**Report Author:**

Andrea Winstone

Head of Service, School Effectiveness and SEND