

SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 20 July 2023
Report Subject	Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
Portfolio Holder	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide a progress report on the local authority statutory duty under the Childcare Act (2006) and Guidance to strategically lead on the provision of childcare locally, in partnership with the private, voluntary, independent, community and maintained sector, to provide information on childcare and to undertake a local childcare sufficiency assessment to identify gaps and establish plans to meet childcare needs as best as possible.

The current Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-26 makes an assessment on:

- i) the supply of childcare in Flintshire including type, quantity of provisions, location, costs, places available, choice.
- ii) the gaps in childcare including location choice, barriers to take up provision, places unavailable.

And enables partners to plan and work together on key areas including:

- the planning for future quality childcare provision across the county, and to address gaps and potential issues.
- transition from the Flintshire bespoke system to the new 3–4-year-old Childcare Offer national digital system.
- the phased implementation of the Flying Start 2–3-year-old universal childcare;

recruitment, retention, and training needs of the Sector including the introduction of the new Framework and key messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	For Members to scrutinise the effectiveness of the Council's strategic response to securing sufficient, sustainable, and high quality, childcare within the county that is responsive to the needs of children and their families.
2	To support the on-going work and commitment to the delivery of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment every five years and the annual Progress Report.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND
1.01	<p>The Childcare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) provides a legislative basis for the vital role local authorities' play as strategic leaders in the local provision of childcare. The 2006 Act reinforces the framework within which local authorities already work – in partnership with the private, voluntary, independent, community and maintained sector – to shape and secure children's services and focuses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing sufficient, sustainable, and flexible childcare that is responsive to parents' needs • Providing information, advice and assistance relating to childcare to parents, prospective parents and those with parental responsibility or care of a child.
1.02	The local authority has the responsibility and lead role in co-ordinating effort across services; enabling different organisations such as childcare providers from all sectors, Jobcentre Plus, community focused schools, integrated family centres and local health services to work together to secure sufficient high quality, sustainable provision that is responsive to the needs of children and their families. This is developed with partners via the Flintshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) group in accordance with its Terms of Reference.
1.03	<i>Section 22</i> of the 2006 Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, provision of childcare that is

	<p>sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area to enable them to take up, or remain, in work; or access education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work. This requires the team to network and work in partnership with various organisations in-house and externally including the Department for Work and Pensions and their work 'coaches' who gain important perspectives and information from parents in relation to childcare and barriers.</p>
	<p>Flintshire's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)</p>
1.04	<p>The Childcare Act 2006 requires all Local Authorities in Wales to carry out a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) every 5 years. This CSA report (2022-2026) looks at the supply of childcare in Flintshire (including type, quantity of provisions, location, costs, places available, choice) and the gaps in childcare (including location, choice, barriers to take up provision, places unavailable and Welsh language provision).</p>
1.05	<p>The CSA Report (Appendix One) has been completed for 2022-2026 and includes an Action Plan with priorities and milestones to maintain strengths and address areas for development. This report will be reviewed via an Annual Progress Report. This annual progress cycle sustains focus, and activity in supporting and developing childcare provision, and is coordinated by the Childcare Development Officer, Early Years and Family Support.</p>
1.06	<p>To carry out the assessment and gather the information required to achieve and deliver a successful CSA, Action and Progress Report, it is necessary to undertake detailed consultations with individuals, groups, agencies and organisations which are summarised in Section 3.00 of this report. To fill the gaps requires collaboration across service areas and with key stakeholders.</p>
1.07	<p>All the information gathered for the Assessment has been analysed to present a picture of childcare supply and demand by wards or Middle Super Output Areas as prescribed by the 2006 Act. In addition to the collation of this quantitative statistical data, representative umbrella organisations, providers and those accessing the childcare market have been surveyed to provide qualitative information. (See Section 3.00 below). Also, during 2021-23 work was undertaken with Nesta Cymru which has helped to further develop the Action Plan, along with other political, economic, social, and technological considerations.</p>
	<p>Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2026 – key issues</p>
1.08	<p>There are clear areas of pressure, and gaps, which have been identified through an:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ assessment of demand ➤ assessment of supply ➤ analysis of supply and demand of overall provision

<p>1.09</p>	<p>The CSA 2022-2026 identifies the action/milestones necessary to respond to the gaps and areas for development. The Actions include work to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support childcare providers to promote their services to parents, increase flexibility and support parents to access information about help with cost of childcare. • Ascertain through Welsh Government clear details of the Flying Start universal 2–3-year-old childcare phased expansion and how this will be delivered within the childcare sector in Flintshire (see Appendix two). • Analyse and assess further and investigate the possibility of opening new viable Welsh Medium provisions. • Ensure that childcare providers are supported to recruit staff who are fluent in Welsh and to encourage childcare workforce to improve their Welsh Language skills/levels. • Raise the profile of childcare as a career across Flintshire to increase recruitment and retention. • Provide support to help sustain sufficient childcare provision in Flintshire • Support settings with Covid-19 recovery to maintain sustainability. • Formally assess changes in sufficiency and fully review action plan annually. • Provide support and encourage childcare providers to provide out of hours care, particularly during school holidays, weekends, evenings and overnight where sustainable. • Work with partners as part of the national work across Wales to remove existing barriers to the accessibility of childcare and play provision for parents and families from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds in line with the Anti-Racist Wales action plan. • Support the development and quality of the Sector through advice, information and an aspirational capital programme for both ‘small’ and ‘large capital’ investment. <p>Many of these themes require sustained action with progress relating to planned improvement milestones.</p>
<p>1.10</p>	<p>The next full CSA is due by 2027. Work is already taking place to improve provider and parental involvement and feedback in the assessment to ensure a deeper understanding of the issues to enhance the assessment of demand, sufficiency, and areas for development. Work will continue throughout 2023/2024 to respond to these challenges with progress reported in the annual review for 2022/2023. This is particularly important with the phased implementation of the Welsh government funded 2-year old childcare to ensure sufficient places, and to limit any impact on childcare for younger and older children, whilst aiming to maintain pathways for children through the ages and programmes Flying Start 2-year old; 3-year old childcare offer; early entitlement.</p>

	Childcare Offer and Capital Investment
1.11	<p>In 2019-2021 the Early Years and Family Support Team secured Welsh Government capital funding of approximately £6 million to enable the development of 10 childcare buildings and room renovation, with 9 having opened and one delayed due to Suitable Approval for Drainage approval. The primary purpose of this capital programme for the 3–4-year-old childcare offer was to facilitate and support the co-location of the childcare provision and Early Entitlement and to create a wraparound childcare provision wherever possible on school sites, providing for seamless services between childcare and education.</p> <p>A further £1m was secured November 2022 and by March 2023 £972,660.78 was 'bid' and spent for small capital grants to support registered providers with the Childcare Offer, Flying Start and Early Learning. These projects have been made possible through partnership working with key stakeholders, including the school modernisation team, head teachers, Early Years Support team, umbrella organisation partners including Early Years Wales, Mudiad Meithrin, PACEY Cymru and National Day Nursery Association.</p>
1.12	<p>The Childcare Offer has been successful in Flintshire, however, the take up has been a 'disruptor' to other programmes including Flying Start and Early Entitlement, and it is essential that all 3 programmes work together to ensure the best outcomes for each child. The partnership continually monitors the childcare sufficiency and work together on any impacts due to a reduction in spaces and impacts on child pathways. The introduction of the Childcare Offer has also seen a significant step towards more integrated childcare services with providers merging their Care Inspectorate Wales registrations to provide a more efficient and sustainable model of delivery.</p> <p>In-house, services meet to share knowledge and information about settings and the needs of children to ensure providers are supported to meet the needs of children with vulnerabilities or additional support needs. This ensures the best outcomes for the child through quality childcare provision.</p>
1.13	<p>During the pandemic childcare workforce staff retention and recruitment has become an issue and continues to be so. This issue requires urgent attention as it is impeding on the ability of the sector to develop and grow to meet the requirements of new Welsh Government childcare initiatives. Business support also needs to be provided for childminders to retain numbers as this year has seen a decrease in the overall numbers of childminders, not only in Flintshire but across Wales. Locally some childminders, wishing to increase their numbers, have been deterred due to incurred costs from Flintshire's planning department or requirements and restrictions imposed when childminders have attempted to increase their numbers. Every effort is being made to reach a solution for all parties.</p>

1.14	<p>Information to parents and settings is available through a variety of mechanisms including Welsh Government booklets, Early Years Support team newsletters to childcare settings, DEWIS information system, Family Information Service Flintshire (FISF) Childcare Choices, FISF 'help with childcare costs' leaflet, universal credit support, social media and the www.fis.wales website. Flintshire Early Years and Family Support are launching a new Early Years platform in consultation with parents, and this will further enhance signposting and availability of information. This is due to be launched Summer 2023.</p>
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
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2.01	<p>The local Authority is required to carry out a full CSA every five years and produce an annual review of the CSA's Action Plan. The Flintshire County Council Childcare core budget is used to support the expenditure for these processes and the Childcare Development Team salaries are also funded from this budget. The Childcare and Play Grant element of the Children and Communities Grant is under great pressure, and representations have been made for additional funds to support the valuable work in supporting access to childcare for parents/carers who wish to work and train, and to also provide additional support to children in settings that are presenting with Additional Support Needs, an increase in which has been very apparent post Covid.</p>
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2.02	<p>The Core Training Schedule is funded from the Childcare and Play Grant within the Children and Communities Grant. This Training Schedule provides Flintshire childcare providers with subsidised training courses in Basic Paediatric First Aid, Safeguarding Awareness, Food Safety etc. Working with the Early Years Pathfinder team a new Training Matrix has been developed to support childcare providers to identify training courses to meet their workforce requirements. It does alert providers of what they should be aspiring to for their job role.</p> <p>There have also been changes in the National Minimum Standards for Childcare and this may impact many settings as these changes relate in part to mandatory training in first aid and safeguarding, something we have always focused on, but only for our 'programme delivery' settings, and the requirements for childminding assistant to have a relevant qualification. We continue to work with Welsh Government and Social Care Wales to influence policy, guidance and implementation and share barriers and learning.</p>
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3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<p>In order to gather the information required to achieve and deliver a successful Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan, it is crucial to consult with a wide range of stakeholders.</p> <p>Under schedule 2 of the Statutory Guidance appropriate stakeholders have been identified and involved in the undertaking of the Assessment and the development of the Action plan. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umbrella / Professional partner organisations - Included on the membership list for the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Early Years Wales; ○ Mudiad Meithrin; ○ National Day Nursery Association (NDNA); ○ Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY Cymru); ○ Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs (CPCKC) <p>The <i>Childcare Act 2006</i> states that the EYDCP is responsible for “...ensuring the fulfilment of the duty under Section 22 and Section 26 of the <i>Childcare Act</i> to secure sufficient childcare provision and to assess, on an annual basis, the sufficiency of childcare in the Local Authority area.” (WG Guidance Circular 013/2008 p6). The Flintshire EYDCP will work collaboratively with relevant agencies to achieve the priorities identified in any Action Plans of the statutory <i>Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Medium Education Forum – The lead officer for the Welsh Medium Education Forum chairs this forum as it regularly discusses issues related to childcare and Early Years education. • Strategic Play Forum – The Childcare Development Officer regularly corresponds with the Flintshire Play Development Team; attends Play Sufficiency seminars and is a member of the Strategic Play Forum. • Careers Wales – The service is represented at Flintshire EYDCP meetings • Care Inspectorate Wales –The Early Years and Family Support Service Manager / nominated deputy attends a Biannual Engagement meeting with CIW. The Family Information Service team receives weekly reports from CIW containing the latest registered, cancelled and suspended registrations in the County; • Family Information Service – Provides information on childcare and is a confidential and impartial information, advice and guidance service for families with children and young people aged between 0 and 19 years of age (and 25 if the child has a disability). The FIS work with

	<p>public, private and voluntary sector organisations to ensure our customers know where and how to access information and support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbouring Local Authorities – Regular contact is maintained with neighbouring local Authorities which include Wrexham County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council and Cheshire West and Chester. Through consultation with cross border colleagues, we have been able to share information regarding Early Years education places and parental enquiries. This information is included within the Cross Border section of the CSA report. • Local Employers – FISF support local employers by providing information to employees and attending jobs fairs; providing outreach support and ensuring the digital system meets need. • Other stakeholders consulted include – schools; local authority departments such as Planning. This consultation took the form of a SmartSurvey.
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4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	<p>Staffing - The Childcare Development Team are funded from the Flintshire County Council Childcare core budget. Salary inflation and increased demand on the service is resulting in a clear associated risk of these services being reduced to meet budgetary constraints. Every effort is made to maximise Service grants which can support childcare development to ensure the statutory duty is met, and Welsh Government programmes can have maximum take up by children and families.</p>
4.02	<p>Process costs – As above and funded from the Flintshire County Council Childcare core Budget, the CSA requires a staff commitment and a financial commitment to cover surveying, consultation and translation costs. During 2021-2022, Welsh Government provided an uplift to the Childcare and Play grant which included a £10,000 contribution towards the cost of producing the full CSA Report. However, there has been no confirmation of further funding to support the production of the on-going CSA Annual Progress Reports for the following 5 years.</p>
4.03	<p>There is a statutory duty upon all Local Authorities in Wales to produce a CSA; therefore, failure to deliver a robust assessment will result in local scrutiny and scrutiny from Welsh Government, alongside an impact on the strategic planning and direction of the local childcare sector and a likely impact on employment opportunities. All CSA's and Action Plans are submitted to Welsh Government annually and published.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix One Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Report 2022-2026
5.02	Appendix Two Flying Start Universal 2 Year Old Childcare Roll Out

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
	<p>Contact Officer: Gail Bennett, Early Years and Family Support Service Manager</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 703953</p> <p>E-mail: gail.bennett@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
<p>Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) – The inspectorate that has the powers to review Local Authority social services at a local and national level, to inform the public whether services are up to standard, to promote improvement of services and to help safeguard the interests of vulnerable people who use services and their carers. They also provide professional advice to Welsh Ministers and policy makers.</p> <p>Childcare Sufficiency Assessments: A report that brings together a range of different data and information to develop a picture of the current childcare market and to identify whether there are any gaps in supply.</p> <p>Early Entitlement: A child’s right to universal pre-school education on a part-time basis. Flintshire administers EE and 3-4 year old childcare through one team.</p> <p>Family Information Service - A confidential and impartial information, advice and guidance service for families with children and young people aged between 0 and 19 years of age. The FIS work with public, private and voluntary sector organisations to ensure our customers know where and how to access information and support.</p> <p>Flying Start - Flying Start is a Welsh Government programme to provide a range of services helping children get the best start in life.</p> <p>Early Education: the statutory curriculum for all 3 to 7 year olds in Wales, in both maintained and non-maintained settings.</p>

The Childcare Offer': 30 hours of funded childcare and education for 3 and 4 year olds, in working families for 48 weeks a year.

Working parents: both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family), with each parent earning, on average, a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW). Some of this is still to be defined as the work develops.