

SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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| Date of Meeting | Thursday 1 July 2021 |
| Report Subject | Childcare Sufficiency Assessment |
| Cabinet Member | Cabinet Member for Social Services. |
| Report Author | Chief Officer Social Services |
| Type of Report | Operational |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flintshire have a comprehensive Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) that looks at:

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

This report provides an overview of an Annual Progress Report that has been produced to assess progress against the actions, priorities and milestones identified in the full CSA (2017).

Previously the full CSA (2017) has proved to be a useful source of information when applying for Welsh Government early years grants. In this year of Covid-19 restrictions it has enabled the Early Years Support team to focus its efforts on supporting key workers in accessing fully funded childcare and ensuring the sustainability of the childcare providers. This has been achieved by using emergency funding grants from Welsh Government as follows:

Coronavirus Childcare Assistant Scheme (C-CAS) - £1,195,954.50

Childcare provider grant - £42,619.86

CPC-19 grant - £74,435.86

Childcare Offer Small Capital Grant (Covid-19 related) – £122,000.00

In total these grant have amounted to injection of £1,435,010.22 into supporting childcare providers which has been well received and enabled Flintshire to weather the Covid-19 restrictions well. As a result by the end of the financial year there has been a gain of 27 registered childcare places overall as compared with the end of the previous year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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| 1 | To scrutinise the effectiveness of the Council's strategic and operational 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

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| 1.00 | EXPLAINING THE CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT |
| 1.01 | <p>LEGISLATIVE BASIS AND STATUTORY DUTY</p> <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 in particular on the provision of sufficient, sustainable and flexible childcare that is responsive to parents' needs.</p> <p>This is developed with partners via the Flintshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) group in accordance with its Terms of Reference; and information, advice and assistance relating to childcare to parents, prospective parents and those with parental responsibility or care of a child.</p> <p>This is delivered by the Family Information Service Flintshire (FISF) under <i>Section 27</i> of the 2006 Act). During 2020 the Dewis system continues to be updated and is the childcare resource database used by the Family Information Service. The service is also updating its childcare website (www.fis.wales) accessible online.</p> <p>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, schools, 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.</p> <p><i>Section 22</i> of the 2006 Act places a duty on local authorities to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, provision of childcare that is 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 duty is supported by the Welsh Government PaCE (Parents and Childcare in Employment) programme which is designed to tackle poverty through sustainable</p> |

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| | <p>employment by providing individual support to out of work parents who consider childcare to be their main barrier to accessing employment and / or training opportunities.</p> |
| 1.02 | <p>FLINTSHIRE’S CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT</p> <p>The Childcare Act 2006 requires all Local Authorities in Wales to carry out a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) every five years. Flintshire’s CSA for 2017-2021 looked 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).</p> <p>The CSA (Appendix 1), has been refreshed for 2021 through an Annual Progress Report (Appendix 2), and details the actions, priorities and milestones to maintain strengths and address areas for development. This annual progress cycle sustains focus, and activity in supporting and developing childcare provision, and is led by the Childcare Development Officer for Flintshire.</p> <p>In order to carry out the assessment and gather the information required to achieve and deliver a successful CSA and Progress Report, it is necessary to undertake detailed consultations with a number of individuals, groups, agencies and organisations which are summarised in Section 3.00 of this report. To fill the gaps requires cross service and key stakeholder support, working with childcare providers.</p> <p>All of the information gathered for the Assessment and subsequent Progress Report has been analysed to present a picture of childcare supply and demand by post coded area as proscribed 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).</p> <p>The next full CSA is due by 30 June 2022. 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.</p> |
| 1.03 | <p>ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT – KEY ISSUES</p> <p>The Annual Progress Report (Appendix 2) identifies core strengths including an assessment that: childcare is well located and meets the needs of the majority of parents; childcare is generally reliable and the majority of respondents believed childcare is of good quality.</p> <p>However, there are clear areas of pressure, and gaps, which have been identified through an assessment of demand and supply and an analysis of overall provision with identification of issues facing specific needs of parents.</p> <p>The Annual Progress Report identifies the action/milestones that have been achieved during 2020/21 to respond to the gaps and areas for development. Highlights include work to recruit more childminders,</p> |

particularly in rural areas; support for the registration of Open Access Play-schemes; improving awareness amongst agencies and training providers, of the availability of crèche facilities in Flintshire; providing more information relating to nannies on the Voluntary Approval Scheme to be made available through the Family Information Service (FIS) (this is currently under review by Welsh Government); encouraging relevant childcare providers to widen the age range they cater for; encouraging and supporting unregistered providers of all types of childcare to register with CIW; promoting the availability of Working Tax Credits or Universal Credits and Employer Supported Schemes (including the new, nationwide Tax Free Childcare scheme); enhancing extended provision to meet the childcare needs of those working atypical hours before 8am, after 6pm, overnight and at weekends; encouraging sessional day care providers and out of school care providers to extend their hours to meet childcare requirements of working families; ensuring collaboration to ensure that working parents are able to access suitable provision to meet the Childcare Offer; developed holiday care provision in Mold and Holywell; provided more Welsh medium childcare of all types across Flintshire, particularly full day care and support to others to provide at least some bilingual elements; encouraging families with other languages to use established childcare settings; continued promotion of the Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE) project; support with completing applications for Childcare and Play grant funding and tax credits available to all who require support.

Many of these themes require sustained action with progress relating to planned improvement milestones.

Other issues reflected in the Action Plan include ongoing challenges to:

- Secure continuing development and sustainability funding for the sector
- Consistent and regular promotion and prioritisation of the grants available to settings and parents
- Enable continued investment in IT support for settings to be involved in the sufficiency assessment
- Achieve consistency with other programmes including the 3-4 Year Old funded Childcare Offer reciprocating the offer with bordering counties or Early Entitlement; streamlining the Additional Support grant procedures;
- Secure funding for the mandatory training schedule for supporting childcare providers and other training opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD);
- Promoting level 2 and Level 3 courses across all settings and introduction of the qualifications framework.

Work will continue throughout 2021 / 22 to respond to these challenges with progress reported in the full CSA report for 2022 – 2026.

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GRANT FUNDING AND WELSH GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The CSA Progress Report highlights the impact that Covid-19 had upon the provision of childcare across the county. In the first instance a

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| | <p>significant number of settings closed temporarily due to concerns about staff and children’s safety. Welsh Government reacted swiftly and with support from the Early Years Support team launched the C-CAS grant which enabled a large number of settings to remain open as they cared for the children of keyworker and vulnerable children. Further support included the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self Employment Income Support grant. Both grants have played a key part in retaining staff within the sector. However, childcare providers have experienced difficulties during this period in retaining or recruiting staff, with anecdotal evidence seeing staff leave for other sectors who are able to offer greater job security during Covid-19 restrictions.</p> <p>Further grants have followed aimed at supporting parents with children who have additional needs to access suitable childcare for their children, sustainability grants for childcare providers as they struggled with a drop in attendance as more and more parents worked from home and support for vulnerable children to attend childcare provision.</p> |
| 1.05 | <p>CHILDCARE OFFER</p> <p>At the start of the year the Childcare Offer funding was repurposed to fund the C-CAS for vulnerable children and key workers children, to attend their chosen settings. In September 2020 the Childcare Offer funding restarted to fund all eligible children as the C-CAS grant came to a close. During this year we have seen a number of settings expand their provision to meet the needs for Childcare offer places including a new childcare provider who has opened up wraparound childcare at Ysgol Merllyn, Bagillt – Bagillt has been an area of need for many years and this has made a substantial difference. The Childcare Offer continues to provide benefit to families in employment with many families extending their hours in work, advancing in careers or beginning employment or self-employed routes.</p> |
| 1.06 | <p>INFORMATION</p> <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, FIS Childcare Choices, FISF ‘help with childcare costs’ leaflet, universal credit support, social media and the www.fis.wales website.</p> |

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| 2.00 | RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS |
| 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 budget is used to support the expenditure for these processes, however, the budget has been considerably reduced since 2015/16 and the Childcare Development Officer post and Business Support Assistant post are fully funded from this budget along with contributions towards the Information and Support Officer post and the Brokerage Officer post (an externally sourced Officer post).</p> |

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| 2.02 | The Childcare Development team Training Schedule is funded from the Children and Communities grant. This Training Schedule generates a small income which provides for delivery of a further Training Schedule for childcare providers across the county. |
| 2.03 | Occasional additional funding streams are secured to support the work of the Childcare Development team. For example the Families First Disabilities Consortia applies grant funding administered by Action for Children which enables the processing of Additional Support grants, including the Childcare Offer Additional Support grant. |
| 2.04 | Funding secured in 2019 is in the process of enabling the development of 11 large capital projects amounting to over £5 million. These large capital programmes are aligned to the 3 – 4 year old Childcare Offer to facilitate and support the co-location of the childcare provision and foundation phase to create a wraparound childcare provision wherever possible. |
| 2.05 | There was also £500,000 allocated for small capital grants to support all registered providers with the Offer, and additional funding secured during the year. Decisions are made on a partnership basis with key stakeholders, including the school modernisation team, head teachers, Early Years Support team, umbrella organisation partners including Early Years Wales, Mudiad Meithrin, PACEY and National Daycare Nursery Association. |

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| 3.00 | IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT |
| 3.01 | Staffing - The Childcare Development Officer and the Business Support Assistant posts within the Childcare Development team are fully funded from the Flintshire County Council Childcare Budget The FCC Childcare budget has, since 2015/16, faced considerable reductions with a clear associated risk to available resources and ongoing operations. |
| 3.02 | Process costs – As above, and funded from the Flintshire County Council Childcare Budget, the CSA requires a staff commitment and a financial commitment to cover surveying and consultation and production costs. |
| 3.03 | 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. |

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| 4.00 | CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT |
| 4.01 | 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. |

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:

- Safeguarding Children Board;
- Umbrella / Professional partner organisations - Included on the membership list for the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) are:
 - Early Years Wales
 - Mudiad Meithrin
 - National Day Nursery Association (NDNA)
 - Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)
 - Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids Club (CPCKC)

The *Childcare Act 2006* states that the EYDCP is responsible for “...ensuring the fulfilment of the duty under Section 22 and Section 26 of the *Childcare Act* 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 *Childcare Sufficiency Assessment* (CSA). (Extracted from Flintshire EYDCP Terms of Reference – please refer to Appendix 3).

- **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. And conversely the Welsh Medium Education Forum Chair, alongside the Mudiad Meithrin’s Deputy Manager for North and Mid-Wales region regularly attend the Flintshire EYDCP where there is assured co-ordination of issues related to local childcare in the Welsh medium sector;
- **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. The Play Development Officer has provided a 100% response to all CSA surveys of Open Access Play-schemes, both registered and excepted;
- **Job Centre Plus** – The Job Centre Plus service is represented at Flintshire EYDCP meetings by PaCE (Parents, Childcare and Employment) representatives;
- **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** – The Family Information Service provided integral support in the processing of SASS returns and the parental and employer surveys and this information was used to inform the supply and demand sections of the CSA. The completed CSA is published and promoted via FIS information sharing

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| | <p>channels so that it is accessible to parents / carers, childcare workers and other professionals with an interest in the sector;</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 (Section 12); • Local Employers – FISF support local employers by providing information to employees; attending jobs fairs; providing outreach support and surveying employers for the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. Local employers were contacted and several completed a postal survey and this provided an insight into barriers that are faced by parents returning to work and the range of childcare services that are required to meet their needs. • Other stakeholders consulted include – schools; local authority departments such as Planning, Housing, Lifelong Learning; the Healthy Pre-schools team and social housing landlords including Clwyd Alyn Housing Association. This consultation usually took the form of emails and face to face discussions. |
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| 5.00 | APPENDICES |
| 5.01 | CSA Progress Report 2020-2021 |

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| 6.00 | LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS |
| 6.01 | None |

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| 7.00 | CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS |
| 7.01 | <p>Contact Officers: Gail Bennett, Early Years and Family Support Service Manager E-mail: gail.bennett@flintshire.gov.uk</p> <p>Byra Foulkes, Early Years Support Manger E.mail: byra.foulkes@flintshire.gov.uk</p> |

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| 8.00 | GLOSSARY OF TERMS |
| 8.01 | <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</p> |

people who use services and their carers. They also provide professional advice to Welsh Ministers and policy makers.

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.

Dewis – Website and database with social care and wellbeing information.

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.

Flying Start - Flying Start is a Welsh Government programme to provide a range of services helping children get the best start in life.

Foundation Phase: the statutory curriculum for all 3 to 7 year olds in Wales, in both maintained and non-maintained settings.

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).