

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children's Young People and Education (Please Select) (Please Select...)
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Children's Services and Education (Please Select)
DATE:	12 November 2020

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children's Young People and Education	(Please Select...)
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All	(Please Select...)
KEY DECISION:	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

SUBJECT: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2020

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To advise the Council's Executive Board of the outcomes of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2020 in respect of the Local Authority's statutory duties and functions as detailed in the Childcare Act 2006 and 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:
Notes the content of the report in relation to the 2020 review of Childcare Sufficiency across Blackburn with Darwen.

3. BACKGROUND

A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is a detailed investigation and measurement of the nature and extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment should not only look at the current position, but also have regard to trends or developments that are likely to affect demand and supply in the foreseeable future e.g. new housing developments or increases in childcare provision that may impact negatively on the childcare market due to over saturation/supply. The assessment should be kept under regular review to ensure that any assumptions remain robust and valid.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The childcare sufficiency data shows that there is a significant oversupply of available early education and childcare places for children aged birth to 8 years to meet current demand.

Sufficiency of Early Education and Childcare places for children aged birth to five years

The Autumn 2020 data collection advises that 44% of the early education and childcare places across the Private, Voluntary, Independent (PVI) and Maintained sectors in Blackburn with Darwen are currently vacant. This is an increase of 10% on the previous year. The increase in vacancies is mainly

attributable to the impact of Covid-19 for those families that are paying privately for childcare to enable them to either study or work. Many parents either have reduced the number of hours that their child would have attended a childcare setting, sourced alternative childcare or do not now require childcare provision due to working from home.

The PVI sector has seen the greatest impact in respect of a higher number of vacancies for children aged birth to 5 years. This is even more concerning considering that there are 232 fewer full time equivalent childcare places than at the same time last year across all sectors alongside a decrease in birth rates.

The take-up of the early education offer for 2, 3 & 4 year olds remains similar to that of previous years, and although some children have not attended for early education sessions during the pandemic period, children have remained on roll for this service. On a borough wide footprint, the take up of 2 year old early education offer continues to be below the national average.

On a ward level basis the current position highlights that 12 out of 17 wards have a significant oversupply of vacancies and it is within these wards specifically where the PVI sectors are starting to report sustainability concerns.

At this time, there are no additional funding streams available to the Local Authority specifically targeted at the early education and childcare sector although settings have continued to be funded, to date, for 2, 3 and 4 year old early education places at the same level that they were funded at in the previous year.

Sufficiency of Out of School Childcare places for children up until the age of eight years.

Vacancies across the Out of School Childcare sector are also high, with an average of 35% of places being unoccupied.

Quality of Provision

Early education and childcare providers in Blackburn with Darwen continue to provide high quality services, with 93.4% of Ofsted inspected provision rated as good or above.

Cost of Childcare

Across all sectors, the average price of a 50 hour full time childcare place in Blackburn with Darwen remains lower than the regional and national averages reported in the 'Coram Family and Childcare - Childcare Survey 2020'.

The local authority has a duty to secure sufficient, high quality, affordable, flexible and available childcare places to enable parents to study and/or work. Throughout the pandemic period, businesses have been advised to explore the additional resources made available by Government including business rates relief, small grants and staff furlough schemes. These schemes have offered the sector some economic support to date, however the impact of the reduced need for the provision of childcare at this current time, and the imminent end of the Governments pandemic financial relief schemes will result in some childcare settings (particularly across the PVI sectors) becoming financially unviable and may result in them closing.

Given the current high level of vacancies across the sector, a small number of closures would not negatively affect the Councils duty to secure sufficient childcare, and could create a more financially stable market. A key risk however would be managing the number and timing of any such closures to ensure that should the Council need to be in a position to procure or provide alternative childcare provision that they have the time and resource available to do so. The sustainability of the childcare sector needs to be closely monitored.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Current oversupply across the borough is a cause for concern in respect of the ability for businesses to remain financially viable. There is a high possibility that some businesses will not sustain should the current economic climate continue.

If in the future the local authority finds that there are not enough childcare and early education places to meet demand there will be a statutory requirement for the local authority to either procure the provision of new places or directly deliver this service themselves.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resource will be required from within the existing Early Help and Finance Teams to monitor the current and future position in respect of childcare provider sustainability.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

Early years and childcare provider sectors are consulted on a termly basis in respect of childcare sufficiency data

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Maria Nugent, Early Help and Support Service Manager Carol Grimshaw, Service Lead, Education
DATE:	24 September 2020
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Appendix 1: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2020 Data Dashboard