



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 12 December 2024

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Children, Young People and Education
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	N

**SUBJECT: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To advise the Council's Executive Board of the outcomes of the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024 in respect of the Local Authority's statutory duty under The Childcare Act 2006 and 2016.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:  
Notes and approves the content of the Childcare Sufficiency Statement 2024 (Appendix 1)

## 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.

Local Authorities are required by statute to publish an analysis of their Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. In Blackburn with Darwen the Childcare Sufficiency Statement is a detailed analysis of findings and is published on the Council website under the Families Information service webpage.

## 4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

### Supply

The childcare sufficiency data shows that there is a plentiful supply of available early education and childcare places across Blackburn with Darwen for children aged birth to 8+ years to meet current demand, although the availability of places does vary across wards.

In the summer term 2024 the vacancy level has increased to 17% from 16% last summer 2023. This increase is attributable to a falling birth rate in the borough. The percentage of vacancies remains a concern and may lead to financial instability for some early year's providers. The service will continue to undertake a termly review of the vacancy levels across the borough to monitor any significant changes.

At a ward level, 4 out of 17 wards have a significant oversupply of vacancies which is an increase on the previous year by 1. There are 9 wards that have a healthy supply of available places, this is an increase of 3 from last year. There are no wards that currently have an undersupply of available places, this is down from 4 wards last year. There is 1 ward that did not submit any sufficiency data despite there being 2 providers in the area which offer places and do have vacancies.

From the responses received, the provision of out of school childcare places for children of statutory school age appears plentiful. There has been an increase in the number of providers offering out of school clubs and holiday provision since last year, which may be attributable to the new wraparound childcare funding.

### **Demand**

Based on the responses received, 55.6% of parents stated that they are aware of the Ofsted rating of the providers that they use, this is an increase of 7.6% from last year. Of those that are aware 84.29% stated that the Ofsted rating of the provider influenced their decision on which providers to use, an increase of 40.9% from last year.

The move to home based/hybrid working has seen parents request more flexible childcare provision. 23.81% of parents/carers however reported that they needed more flexibility in the times of the day that childcare is available, this is similar to last year (24%).

Whilst a small number of early year's providers have a waiting list for families requiring a place, this is due to parental preference of wanting a place at a specific early year's provider rather than lack of available places across the borough.

### **Free Funded Early Education places**

The take-up of two-year-old free funded early education places has increased on the previous year. As at the January 2023 census count, Blackburn with Darwen had a take up rate of 69%. The take up rate in January 2024 census increased to 70%, an increase of 1%. Uptake of the 2-year-old funded entitlement continues to increase with 76% local uptake in Spring 2024, compared to 75% at a National level, and 75% local uptake in Summer 2024, which is in line with the national uptake.

According to the January 2023 census, take-up of the three- and four-year-old early education places was 96%, increasing to 101% in January 2024, an increase of 5%. This could be linked to migration from other local authorities where childcare providers are located close to the border, or it could be due to a high number of new arrivals to the borough that have not been accounted for in the base population data.

### **Quality**

Early education and childcare providers in Blackburn with Darwen continue to provide a high-quality service. Of the early education and childcare settings that have been inspected by Ofsted, 87.87% have been rated as good, met or outstanding. 93% of LEA maintained Nursery Schools, Nursery Classes and Children's Centre nurseries are rated as Good or above by Ofsted. The service will continue to work in close partnership with early education and childcare providers to support the continuous quality improvement of our childcare provision.

Early education and childcare providers in Blackburn with Darwen report that they are struggling to recruit and retain staff, this is similar to recruitment issues being faced by many professional sectors. 65% of Local Authorities reported in the 'Coram Family and Childcare - Childcare Survey 2022' that it

was 'very difficult' for providers to find qualified or experienced staff and a further 29 per cent reporting that it was 'somewhat difficult'.

### **Childcare costs**

The average costs of a full-time childcare place (50 hours per week) in Blackburn with Darwen for children aged 0 – 4+ years remains lower than the England and regional averages as reported in the 'Coram Family and Childcare - Childcare Survey 2024'. However, the 3 - 4 year-olds is slightly higher than the regional average but lower than the England average. The average cost of after school care at an out of school club or childminder for children aged 5+ remains slightly higher than the regional average but lower than the England average.

Childcare continues to be a significant percentage of family expenditure that the vast majority of parents/carers report they would like to see reduced. However, only 17.4% of parents that use childcare indicated that they consider childcare difficult to afford. The service continues to actively promote the financial support available for parents, carers and families who choose to use formal childcare.

### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The [Childcare Act 2006](#) and 2016 requires all local authorities in England to ensure that there is sufficient registered early years childcare in place for working parents and those parents studying or training for employment.

### **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **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.

For the purpose of the annual assessment, consultations were distributed to:

- Children
- Parent/carers
- Childcare providers across the maintained, private, voluntary and independent (PVI) childcare sectors

#### **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.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Sara Malone , Pupil Place Planning Coordinator Carol Grimshaw, Head of Service - School System Support, Education</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	26 October 2024
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 – Childcare Sufficiency Statement 2024