

Report to: **Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability**

Date: **25 March 2024**

By: **Director of Children’s Services**

Title of report: **East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2024**

Purpose of report: **To approve the publication of the East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2024**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the publication of the East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2024.

1 Background

1.1 The Childcare Sufficiency Duty (Appendix 1) is a statutory document. It outlines how East Sussex County Council (“the Council”) plans to secure sufficient childcare places, as far as is reasonably practicable, for parents who are working, studying, or training for employment. The report covers childcare for children from birth to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). The publication of this report meets the Council’s statutory duty under sections 6 and 7 of the Childcare Act 2006 (as amended) (“the Act”).

1.2 The Act gives councils a role in shaping the childcare market. The Council is committed to working with providers from the private, voluntary, and independent sectors (“PVI sectors”) and the school run sector to create a strong, sustainable, and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of families and supports children’s learning through the Early Years Foundation Stage (“EYFS”).

1.3 Councils are required to secure fully funded places offering 570 hours a year over no fewer than 38 weeks, and up to 52 weeks for every eligible child in their area, until they reach compulsory school age (the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday). Although this is a legal duty, attendance by children from birth to age five at any early education or childcare setting is voluntary. It is not compulsory for a child to attend education provision until the term after their fifth birthday.

1.4 The Council is required to report annually to elected members and publish information for families to show how it is meeting its sufficiency duty. This includes providing specific information about:

- the supply and demand for early education and childcare places
- affordability, accessibility and quality of early education and childcare places
- details of how any gaps in provision will be addressed

2 Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2024

2.1 The report focuses on two key areas of the childcare market in East Sussex:

- measuring the demand for, and supply of childcare within the five districts of East Sussex, identifying gaps in the market; and
- planning how to support the childcare market to address any shortfall.

2.2 To assess the supply and demand for childcare places, the Council compares current known capacity with predicted demand. This takes account of factors such as births, housing growth and patterns of inward and outward migration.

2.3 Since April 2021, demand for funded Early Years (“EY”) childcare places has returned to pre Covid-19 levels. Take up in the number of funded places for two-year-olds in East Sussex remains consistent. East Sussex has seen a rise in the total number of children accessing a funded three- or four-year-old place, 1% above the national average of 92%. Since April 2022 we have also seen an increase of 3% in the number of families accessing the 30 hours extended offer, reflecting the increasing number of parents and carers returning to work.

2.4 Despite these encouraging figures, we have seen a number of early years providers take the difficult decision to close for viability reasons. The Council is working with the childcare market to fill any gaps in provision caused by these closures.

2.5 In the Government’s Spring Budget in March 2023 the Chancellor announced reforms to childcare for parents, children, the economy, and women. This includes new EY funding streams to provide working families access to funded childcare places for children aged 9 months to two years old. Implementation of the reforms will be over the next two years as set out below and will have an impact on the capacity of the sector in East Sussex to meet on-going demand:

- The first change to the current funding offer will commence from April 2024 with 15 hours of funded childcare for eligible working families with two-year-olds.
- From September 2024, 15 hours for children aged 9 months and above will be implemented.
- By September 2025 eligible working families will have access to 30 hours of funded childcare for children aged 9 months+ in line with the current extended 30 hour offer to eligible families of three- and four-year-olds.

2.6 To support EY providers, the Council’s EY Funding and Improvement teams are providing training on new IT systems and EY provider information meetings are taking place throughout 2024 and 2025.

3. Actions to date

3.1 The table below lists the key actions taken by the Council since the Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2023 was published last year, as the Council moves forward to the implementation of funding children aged two from April 2024.

| Date | Communication/Action |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Actions from January 2023 onwards | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued dialogue with all childcare providers • Continued support for families to find/access a funded childcare place • Collation of Headcount Data to continue to feed into updating current capacity/demand reporting considering new funding streams from April 2024 • Assess impact of changes to East Sussex EY workforce – on-going • Parental consultation – Autumn 2023 • Provider support meetings spring/summer 2024 • Provider consultation/Focus Groups, looking at issues around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) children’s access to early years provision – spring/summer 2024 |

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

4.1 In conclusion, the Council has a duty to publish a Childcare Sufficiency Duty report annually. The document supports the Council's statutory obligation of on-going assessment of childcare provision for children aged 0-14 years old (and up to 18 years old for children with SEND) in East Sussex.

4.2 Accordingly, the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability is recommended to approve the publication of the East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty for 2024.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None