

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

Date: 25 March 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title of report: East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2025

Purpose of report: To approve the publication of the East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2025

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the publication of the East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2025.

1. Background

1.1 The Childcare Sufficiency Duty is a statutory document. It outlines how 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 reports meets the Council's statutory duty under sections 6 and 7 of the Childcare Act 2006 (" 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) 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 In the Government's Autumn Budget in October 2024 the Chancellor announced that reforms to childcare for parents announced by the previous Government would still be implemented. This included new Early Years Funding Streams- to provide working families access to funded childcare places for children aged 9 months to 2 years old. Implementation of the reforms is set out below:

- The first change to the current funding offer commenced from April 2024 with 15 hours of funded childcare for eligible working families with 2-year-olds.
- From September 2024 15 hours for children aged 9 months and above.
- 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 3- and 4-year-olds.

The impact of changes to the National Minimum Wage and Employee National Insurance contributions are likely to make it harder for providers to be viable and for the sector in East Sussex to meet on-going demand.

1.5 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. Supporting Information

Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2025

2.1 The draft Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2025 can be found at Appendix 1 of this report and focuses on 2 key areas of the childcare market in East Sussex: measuring the demand for, and supply of childcare within the 5 districts and boroughs of East Sussex, identifying gaps in the market planning how to support the childcare market to address any shortfall of childcare places.

2.2 Demand for funded Early Years childcare places has returned to pre Covid-19 levels. Take up in the number of funded places for 2-year-olds in East Sussex remains consistent. East Sussex has seen a rise in the total number of children accessing a funded 3- or 4-year-old place, 1% above the national average of 94.9%. Since April 2024 the Council has also seen an increase of 3.5% in the number of families accessing the 30 hours extended offer, reflecting the increasing number of parents and carers returning to work.

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

2.4 In areas of the County where shortfalls of childcare places have been identified the Council:

- has supported established providers to look at increasing their current capacity;
- is working with new providers moving into East Sussex to open new provision; and
- is working with schools to apply for the Department for Education's School Based Nursery capital grant to increase early years places available at schools.

2.5 Since April 2024 the Council has taken action to support the Early Years sector to work towards the full implementation of working families funding streams for children aged 9 months by:

- Continued dialogue with all childcare providers;
- Continued support for families to find and/or access a funded childcare place;
- Collation of headcount data to continue to feed into updating current capacity and/or demand reporting considering new funding streams;
- Assess impact of changes to East Sussex Early Years workforce;
- Parental and provider consultations;
- Provider support meetings; and
- Provider consultation and/or Focus Groups, looking at issues around Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) children's access to early years provision.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 In conclusion, the Council has a duty to publish a Childcare Sufficiency Duty report annually. The draft document at Appendix 1 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.

3.2 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 2025.

CAROLYN FAIR

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Jane Spice
Tel. No. 01323 747425/ 07876 035 500
Email: jane.spice@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None