

Meeting Title	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Early Years Entitlements Funding
Meeting Date	30 th September 2021

Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):	Catherine Underwood Nicholas Lee
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Background:

The Local Authority has a range of Statutory Duties* and the duties regarding the provision of early years entitlements funding for 2, 3 and 4 year olds and the production of an annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) and interim updates sit within the Council's Early Years Team.

The administration of the early years entitlements funding is governed by a legally binding Provider Agreement, which is refreshed and agreed to annually, with all providers offering funded places. In the 2021/22 financial year there are a total of 163 Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) childcare settings signed up to the Provider Agreement to offer early years entitlements places to 2, 3 and 4 year olds and to receive the associated funding. This equates to 88 childminders and 75 group-based settings.

Furthermore, 73 City schools with nurseries, also offer universal funding of 15 hours per week to 3 and 4 year olds, with a smaller number of schools offering 15 hours a week to eligible 2 year olds the term before they turn 3 and also to 3 and 4 year olds of working parents who are eligible for up to 30 hours of funded early years entitlements provision per week.

The quality of childcare remains high in Nottingham, with 99% of Day Nurseries and Pre-schools and 95% of Childminders in the PVI sectors graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted. The Early Years Team work closely with partners and colleagues such as Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC), Early Help and Families Information Service to support participation in the early years entitlement.

Purpose of Report

This report has been requested by Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee to review uptake of the early years entitlements, with particular regard to;

- Access to early years provision
- Take up of early years entitlement, with a focus on awareness of opportunities and cultural issues
- Sustainability of early years providers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

The Early Years Team have recently completed an update of the CSA information for the Summer Term 2021 and the information for this report has been drawn from this document, which is attached for further information.

Access to early years provision

Early years providers had the opportunity to remain open throughout the pandemic, at the height providing places for vulnerable children and children of key workers only. As restrictions have lifted over recent months, many families have returned to early years provision and based on the current CSA and the number of vacancies available, there are sufficient childcare places across the City for all age groups for families seeking early years provision.

There has been a small decrease in the overall number of childcare places available in the City compared to

the Autumn Term 2020, however this decrease is significantly lower than the national picture and working with colleagues in the Families Information Service, early years providers and direct correspondence with parents, there is no indication that parents have been unable to access a required childcare place at their preferred or local provider.

Take up of early years entitlements, with a focus on awareness of opportunities and cultural issues

Overall, the uptake of childcare places across the city has increased slightly compared to participation in the Autumn Term 2020. The greatest increase was in uptake of childcare places for 3 and 4 year olds and the only decrease has been in participation in after school childcare provision, much of which can be attributed to a change of parents working arrangements as a result of the pandemic.

- Uptake of 2 year old early years entitlement (15 hours) by ward
 - 12 wards have seen an increase in take up since Autumn 2020, with overall participation across the City increasing by 2% since Autumn 2020 (see CSA, page 10). Ward take up varies between 51% - 80% and there is a Key Performance Indicator for a target of 75% take up across all wards, which measures are being taken towards with targeted marketing and engagement work (see CSA, page 15).
- Uptake of 3 and 4 year old universal early years entitlement (15 hours) by ward
 - 13 wards have seen an increase in take up since Autumn 2020, with overall participation across the City increasing by 8% since Autumn 2020 (see CSA, page 11). Ward take up varies between 41% - 89%.
- Uptake of 3 and 4 year old extended early years entitlement (30 hours) by ward
 - As with the other early years entitlements, there has been an increase in participation of this early years entitlement compared to Autumn 2020, with an additional 300 children accessing 30 hours provision during the Summer Term 2021 (see CSA, page 12)

A building of uptake across all early years entitlements is expected as our communities move forwards after the height of the pandemic and participation levels are formally measured through the CSA updates, which take place in the Autumn and Summer Terms, historically the lowest and highest participation points within the academic year.

There is no evidence to suggest that there are, or have been, concerns from parents/carers regarding accessibility to early years provision. Approximately a third of settings are based in the wards of highest deprivation and close working relations are established with partners supporting parental engagement, such as SSBC, who work within these wards and encourage participation in local initiatives, for example SSBC ward-based family mentors support with participation of 2 year olds.

Through our extensive [continuing professional development](#) offer, which is available online to all early years providers, we are working with local partners, Equation, who will be delivering training on the identification and impact of Domestic Abuse, Liz Pemberton (the Black Nursery Manager Ltd.) on exploring race in an early years setting, in addition to an offer of English as an Additional Language and other statutory training, such as Prevent and Safeguarding Children.

There are over 92 children across the city currently benefitting from [Early Years SEND funding](#) (EYSF) and on average 15 children per term are in receipt of [Disability Access funding](#) (DAF) in the Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector. Both the EYSF and DAF provide financial support to childcare providers and schools to include a child with SEND. Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator's (SENCO's) have access to continuous professional development via the Local Authority or other training providers, with 81% of all lead SENCO's having completed the LA SENCO training in the PVI Sector. 40% of group settings have joined the LA SENCO Network where they receive relevant local and national information on SEND agenda's and ongoing training to update their skills and knowledge.

We continue to work on agendas and strategies consulting with, and engaging providers, to improve children's outcomes and reduce inequalities such as the forthcoming Speech, Language and Communication Strategy for the City.

Sustainability of early years providers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

Childminding remains the most transient type of provision within the City and the closures represent some natural churn (moving out of the area). The LA host briefing sessions for those planning to register as a childminder, with 2 sessions delivered since January 2021 to 10 prospective childminders working towards Ofsted registration.

When comparing Summer 2021 data to the previous year, the net difference in pre-school provision was a loss of 2 providers, due to lack of parental demand which had started to decrease before the pandemic. Since producing the Summer 2021 CSA, 1 new provision has opened.

The Early Years Team work closely with providers to support the early identification of any sustainability concerns so corrective measures can be implemented and the Early Years Website hosts a range of tools, resource, vodcasts and information to aid business sustainability to ensure our childcare sufficiency duty continues to be met.

The LA also regular meetings with the DfE to raise any sustainability concerns and seek additional support as required.

It should be noted that information contained within this report relates to data collated during the Summer Term 2021. The impact of the pandemic on childcare in general continues to emerge and will do so for many months to come. The gradual return to the workplace by parents/carers is positive for childcare demand, though situations can change rapidly. Close working with the sector will support the Local Authority to be aware of such changes and will ensure that current data is used at all times when planning sufficiency intervention.

Attachments:

- Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, Summer 2021