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**CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY REVIEW, 2008-09**

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**SUMMARY REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To set out the actions which have been undertaken during 2008-09 by the Early Years Partnerships' Team to assist the Local Authority in 'shaping' the local childcare market and achieving childcare sufficiency for families in Darlington.

**Summary**

2. Work has been undertaken by the Early Years Partnerships' Team during 2008-09 to:
  - (a) put systems in place to measure parental demand for different types of childcare, on an on going basis via the Families' Information Service;
  - (b) develop methods to collect parents' views about the childcare they have accessed; and
  - (c) enable cases of unmet childcare demand to be recorded and analysed.
3. A brokerage service has been developed to ensure children with disabilities are matched with appropriate childcare placements. A network of 14 'Community Childminders' has been created who are appropriately trained, have experience of caring for children with disabilities and can offer placements overnight and during the weekend. The private sector is also being supported to offer high quality childcare to children with disabilities.
4. Childcare Sufficiency plans for 2009-10 include the provision of support and guidance to settings around providing a good quality, inclusive and sustainable childcare service to parents. Parents will also be provided with up-to-date information about financial assistance towards childcare costs, including tax credits. Other areas for development include that of securing feedback about childcare requirements from the more 'hard to reach' parents. Further consideration also needs to be given to more creative and flexible ways of providing childcare and access to social activities, to children and young people with disabilities.

**Recommendation(s)**

5. It is recommended that:-
  - (a) Scrutiny Committee note for information the progress towards Childcare Sufficiency during 2008-09; and
  - (b) Approve the 2009-10 action plan within the Childcare Sufficiency Review.

**Murray Rose,**  
**Director of Children's Services**

## Background Papers

The Childcare Act 2006, Sections 6 and 11

'Economic trends in Darlington', February 2009 report from Darlington Borough Council's Economic Regeneration Unit

'2004-07 take-up of Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit' Jobcentre Plus, July 2008

Nicola Davies : Extension 2803

S17 Crime and Disorder	Providing sustainable childcare has a positive impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	Providing good quality childcare has a positive impact on health and well being
Sustainability	No direct links
Diversity	There is a need to ensure that there is sufficient provision for the current unmet demand for places for children with disabilities
Wards Affected	All Wards
Groups Affected	Families and carers with childcare responsibilities
Budget and Policy Framework	The content of this report does not change Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Provision of sufficient good quality childcare has links to the Healthy Theme and Aspiring Theme of One Darlington through the provision of safe and stimulating childcare settings

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

6. The Childcare Act 2006, Section 11 requires Local Authorities to prepare a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 'at intervals not exceeding three years but also to keep it under review until it is superseded by a later one. Local authorities should consider updating the assessment whenever new data become available, but should do so to the extent possible at least annually'.
7. The first full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was undertaken by Darlington Borough Council during 2007-08. The main findings reported in March 2008 were that:
  - (a) unmet demand exists in Darlington for after school and holiday clubs/activities, especially for children over 8 year olds; and
  - (b) unmet demand exists for childcare in the Borough for children with a disability.
8. Childcare Sufficiency Reviews are required for 2008-09 and 2009-10 and a full Sufficiency Assessment should be carried out again in 2010-11. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has not issued guidance on the Childcare Sufficiency Reviews. Consultancy support via the Childcare Regional Network has however suggested that, reviews should set out what has been achieved during 2008-09 and actions planned for 2009-10 (taking into account any changes in the local demography or economy which may have an impact on the demand and supply of childcare).

### Progress towards Childcare Sufficiency in 2008-09

9. In May 2008 the Early Years Partnerships' Team created two working groups (the 'Childcare Group' and the 'Childcare for Children with Disabilities Group') to work on the main areas of unmet demand highlighted above. The groups include representatives from the Early Years Partnerships' Team such as the Service Manager, the Childcare Development Officers, the Locality Co-ordinators and the Families' Information Service. They also include the 'Aiming High for Disabled Children Manager' and a representative from Darlington Association on Disability.
10. Each group has its own action plan which feeds in to the Early Years strategy and the Darlington Children and Young People's Plan. Each action plan is up-dated on a monthly basis and is fed up from the Early Years Partnerships' Manager to the Assistant Director for Partnerships through performance clinics, to the Children's Services Senior Management Team.
11. Conducting a large annual survey to gather parental views about local childcare is neither required by the DCSF nor is it desirable; it is too costly and impractical. During 2008-09 systems have been developed to enable parental feedback to be gathered on an ongoing basis via the Families' Information Service (FIS) 'follow up' calls. Two weeks after the childcare is due to start, the FIS contact parents to check that they have been able to access childcare and that they are happy with it. Also, a simplified parental questionnaire has been drafted and is in the process of being piloted with parental groups in our Children's Centres. This will go on to the FIS/Service Directory website so that parents can complete it on line. Work has also been undertaken with the Teenage Parents' Development Officer at Mount Pleasant Children's Centre to adapt the questionnaire for our teenage parents. There are plans to run a more informal focus group to gather additional feedback from this group. Of course, all parents can also use the Council's own 'comments, complaints and compliments'

system to feedback views regarding childcare.

12. A leaflet inviting parental comments about childcare sufficiency has been drafted and translated into the Borough's main languages. Feedback from the Borough's Polish community is now collected on an ongoing basis via the Early Years Practitioner at Skerne Park Children's Centre. The Local Authority has also supported the private and voluntary sector childcare providers to access the parental research package CEEDA which enables settings and the Local Authority to gather ongoing feedback about parental childcare requirements. Details about unmet demand are being recorded on the FIS system and analysed monthly with the Childcare Development Officers to look at ways of 'plugging the gaps'.
13. Finally, but most importantly, an action plan has been drafted which will support settings to consult with children to find out what sort of activities they like to get involved in outside of the school day. A small group of providers have been funded to attend the National Children's Bureau 'Listening to Young Children' training and good practice from this will be cascaded out to the remaining settings.
14. The promotion of tax credits in the Town Crier and via other media such as Early Years Partnership and Children's Centre events has been used to stimulate parental demand for childcare. Links have also been made with the Council's Economic Regeneration Team to enable new and existing employers to be reminded of the importance of childcare when employing and retaining staff. The Locality Co-ordinators have assisted in stimulating childcare supply by talking to schools about the need for 'reliable' after school and holiday activities for working parents.
15. During 2008-09 there have also been developments around childcare for children with disabilities. A brokerage service has been established whereby Childcare Development Officers work with parents and appropriate childcare settings, to provide children with disabilities with appropriate childcare placements. A network of 14 'Community Childminders' has been established, these childminders have undertaken the National Childminders' Association accredited training, have experience of caring for children with disabilities and can provide overnight and weekend care. Finally, a pilot has also been developed to provide a small number of private providers with appropriate financial, training and business support to care for children with disabilities.

### **Childcare Sufficiency Plans for 2009-10**

16. The main actions for 2009-10 are set out in the action plans on pages 6 to 18 of the draft Childcare Sufficiency Review, 2008-09.
17. The main development and area of concern since the last Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was carried out is of course the economic recession which has affected Darlington. This is apparent when you consider that in January 2009 for every unfilled job vacancy in Darlington there were 14.5 Job Seekers' Allowance claimants, as opposed to only 3.3 JSA claimants per unfilled vacancy in October 2008. It is difficult at this stage to predict exactly how the recession will affect the childcare market but there is already anecdotal evidence from settings that demand is decreasing and this could also affect supply of places in the medium term. Also, parental take-up of the childcare tax credit in Darlington is relatively low at only 19%.

18. Taking this into account the main childcare sufficiency priorities for the year ahead are to:
  - (a) assist local childcare providers to be sustainable:
  - (b) work with settings to continually improve quality and make settings more inclusive;  
and
  - (c) provide parents with up-to-date information about financial assistance towards childcare costs, including tax credits.
19. Other areas for development include utilising existing networks to develop ways of gathering feedback about childcare requirements from the more 'hard to reach' groups, such as Black and Multi Ethnic parents, low income parents and local employers.
20. We need to ensure that existing providers who have developed to enable unmet childcare needs to be satisfied, such as the 'Community Childminders' have access to required support and specialist training. There is also a need to look at 'buddy' childcare to enable children and young people with a disability to access clubs/social activities and to work with other major stakeholders to ensure that such activities are actually accessible. Further consideration is also to be given to creative ways of providing care for those children and young people who would prefer to stay in their own home. Finally, we also need to ensure that information about childcare and activities, for example, on the Service Directory is fully accessible to all parents.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

21. The Childcare Sufficiency Review has been on the Darlington Borough Council web pages since the end of March 2009 for consultation with parents and any other interested groups.
22. No additional comments have been received.