

CABINET
6 DECEMBER 2022

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY TASK AND FINISH REVIEW

Councillor Paul Crudass
Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee following a piece of work undertaken via a Task and Finish Review Group to gain a better understanding of childcare sufficiency and the general supply within the borough and the barriers to the provision of childcare provisions.

Summary

2. At a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 21 February 2022, Members received a report on the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2021/22 and discussed areas of the borough where they felt that sufficiency was not meeting demand. It was therefore requested that further information be brought to Members on demographical/community data.
3. At the Scrutiny meeting held on 27 June 2022, following further information provided by the Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion, Members agreed to undertake a piece of work around this via Task and Finish Review Group.
4. A meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 26 September 2022 and a note of the meeting and discussion is attached (**Appendix 1**).

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Considers providing assistance in communicating the availability of jobs in the childcare sector and include this communication of jobs in Events Planning, Jobs Initiatives, Publications and Digital communication; and
 - (b) Make local Members of Parliament aware of the concerns highlighted by Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with regard to the provision of sufficient childcare to meet the needs of our families.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported to ensure that the local authority is discharging its statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in our area.

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Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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| S17 Crime and Disorder | This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder |
| Health and Wellbeing | Good quality early education and childcare for children from birth to 14 years old and 18 years old for those young people with a disability, will assist in improving the health and well being of Darlington's 0 to 14/18 population and assists working families. |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change | There are no carbon impact or climate change implications in this report. |
| Diversity | There are no specific proposals within the report that impact on diversity issues. All providers must meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010 when delivering education and childcare. |
| Wards Affected | All wards |
| Groups Affected | All children aged 0 to 14 years/18 years for those young people with a disability will benefit from being able to access high quality, education and childcare in the Borough. |
| Budget and Policy Framework | This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework |
| Key Decision | Not a key decision |
| Urgent Decision | Not an urgent decision |
| Council Plan | Access to high quality, affordable and reliable education and childcare will improve the quality of life and the health and well being of children and young people in the Borough and will also enable their parents to access or maintain training or work opportunities. |
| Efficiency | There are no specific proposals within the report that impact on efficiency. |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | Access to good quality early education and childcare places in the borough improves the life chances of 2 to 4 year olds who are Looked After Children or who have left care and also, provides support to families. |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. The Council has a duty to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 or up to 18 for disabled children, and that local authorities report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.
8. Following the annual report to Members at their Scrutiny Meeting in February 2022 Members discussed affordability issues and the worrying financial situation for providers; the national retention and recruitment problems and the general uncertainty in the settings.
9. Members agreed to examine childcare sufficiency in more detail and the areas of the borough where they felt that sufficiency was not meeting demand.

Findings

10. Members recognised that there are no immediate concerns around overall sufficiency in the borough and that sufficiency issues were not solely in the gift of the Council to solve but recognised that the Childcare Act 2006 does place a statutory duty on Council's 'to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area'.
11. The provisions of the Act recognise that it may not be practical for a local authority to secure childcare to meet the requirements of every parent.
12. The Act also allows local authorities to provide support to childcare providers (including financial support) or to provide childcare itself, if no other provider is willing to do so (section 8, Childcare Act 2006).
13. Members felt that the data available in our current Childcare Sufficiency Report did not enable this Scrutiny committee to be assured that our Council is actually doing everything reasonably practicable to provide childcare for a number of families around the borough who required it.
14. The discussions which took place at the Task and Finish Review Group are summarised at **Appendix 1**.

Conclusion

15. The Review Group considered that one area where the Council could provide assistance was in communicating the availability of jobs in the childcare sector and recommended that this Council include this communication of jobs in Events Planning, Jobs Initiatives, Publications and Digital communication.

16. Members also requested that Cabinet make our local Members of Parliament aware of the concerns highlighted with regard to provision of sufficient childcare to meet the needs of our families.

Legal Implications

17. The Childcare Act 2006 does place a statutory duty on Council's 'to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area'.

Equalities Considerations

18. All providers must meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010 when delivering education and childcare.

Consultation

19. Members of this Scrutiny Committee met with the Parent Carer Forum on 16 March 2022.

Outcome of Consultation

20. To examine childcare sufficiency further.