



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	8 December 2023
Subject:	Childcare Sufficiency in Lincolnshire

Summary:

This report is intended to confirm the current childcare sufficiency position within Lincolnshire, clarify the findings of the online sufficiency surveys with Ofsted registered childcare providers and parents, and provide recommendations to support the development of early years and childcare places in Lincolnshire to meet the statutory childcare sufficiency duty.

Actions Required:

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

1. Support the actions within the report.
2. Agree with the publication of the Childcare Sufficiency Report for 2023.

1. Background

The local authority must report annually to elected members on how we are meeting our statutory childcare sufficiency duty to secure sufficient childcare and make this report available and accessible to parents.

Early Years and Childcare Support offers childcare providers access to effective support to deliver the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and ensure there is sufficient provision available for families in Lincolnshire. This support enables providers to effectively meet the needs of children and has a particular emphasis on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families, to reduce inequalities in child development and promote the school readiness agenda.

Evidence shows that attending high quality early education has a lasting impact on social and behavioural outcomes of young children. The entitlements make childcare more accessible and affordable for families and enables them to access training, work or increase their working hours if they wish to do so.

The local authority is responsible for determining the appropriate level of detail in the annual childcare sufficiency report, geographical division, and date of publication.

The local authority completed a sufficiency survey to review the availability of childcare in Lincolnshire in May 2023. The survey was designed to assess the sufficiency and sustainability of early years and childcare provision being offered in Lincolnshire.

One survey was designed to assess the sufficiency and sustainability of early years and childcare provision being offered in Lincolnshire. Providers were asked to confirm the services that they offer, to which age groups, opening hours, hourly cost, number of places they offered, and current take up.

The survey was widely promoted via social media and email communication directly with schools and childcare providers.

The survey had a high response rate with 96% of providers completing.

Please see Appendix A 'Lincolnshire County Council Childcare Sufficiency Report 2023' for the full report details and links to the data and findings.

In addition, a parent survey was hosted on the Let's Talk Lincolnshire online platform. A record 1,893 responses were received through this platform.

Please see Appendix B 'Engagement Report – Parental Childcare Sufficiency Project' for the full findings from the parent survey.

Following the actions in the annual sufficiency report from last year, the Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCC) has secured capital funding to support the development of childcare places identified within the childcare delivery plan.

The existing childcare delivery plan has been updated to ensure this is responsive to the needs within the report from 2022 and to include capital investment in areas from the current assessment for childcare developments. The service is working with existing providers and schools wherever possible to develop places with match funding investment from the sector wherever possible.

At the beginning of the year, Ofsted gradings for early years settings were becoming a growing concern with higher numbers of settings being graded as inadequate than previously seen. EYCC undertook a review of how the safeguarding and welfare requirements are supported in settings and implemented a relational based offer of visits to all settings who were due an inspection in the current cycle.

So far, those providers that have since been inspected who have taken up the offer of a visit have achieved a Good rating from Ofsted. The approach has been shared with key colleagues who support the Early Years sector to ensure there is consistency.

Over 100 providers attended sessions to help shape a CPD (Continuing Professional Development) opportunity in Lincolnshire. In June, countywide face to face Ofsted

Inspection seminars were held based on needs identified by the sector. Approximately 80 practitioners attended from a range of provider types. There was positive feedback with the majority of providers telling us they felt more confident following the seminar.

Lincolnshire was successful in securing a place on a National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) / Department for Education (DfE) funded project for four Local Authorities. The project focussed on a whole setting approach to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and 15 SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) took part and conducted SEND reviews in their setting. We also trialled partnering with five Outstanding Providers to work alongside aspiring settings to achieve at least a good outcome at their next inspection.

Early Years hold termly SENCO networks. To make these more interactive and to capture the knowledge and experience of the sector, solution circles have been introduced with the support of the Local Authority (LA) Practice Advisers from the Quality and Standards team. These are now embedded in the termly sessions so that SENCOs can offer advice and guidance to their peers.

In February 2023, EYCC was also successful in securing an opportunity to work with the National Children's Bureau on a small DfE funded project to improve the provision and support for the Home Learning Environment for young children with SEND in the area. This comprised training sessions for both practitioners and parents and we were delighted to be able to involve the Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum in this opportunity.

2. Conclusion

The outcome of the annual childcare sufficiency survey demonstrated that Lincolnshire has a good level of sufficiency of early years places across the county. However, South Holland district goes against that trend and remains an area of concern with regards to sufficiency of childcare places for all age groups. The data from the provider and parental survey is showing that Out of School places across the county are low and are not meeting parental needs.

Staff recruitment concerns within the sector are being felt locally and nationally with a shortage of qualified and experienced staff within the childcare sector. The shortage of staff is instrumental to the effective delivery and development of adequate places to meet parental need. The Government has announced that it will be running a national campaign in early 2024 to encourage people to consider a career in the childcare sector, and the early years and childcare support team is continuing to work with partners to promote careers in childcare locally.

There have been significant announcements from the Government in the Spring Budget, which has seen an expansion of the funded education places. From April 2024 the funded offer will include 15 hour funded places for 2-year-olds of eligible working parents. The offer will further expand to 15 hours for eligible working parents of 9-month-olds by September 2024. By September 2025, the offer will be 30 hours of funded education to children of eligible working parents from 9-months-old to school age. This will impact on the sufficiency of places needed. To what extent is unknown at present, but the initial

assessment is that the preliminary take-up of places will be by children who are already accessing childcare on a fee-paying basis.

In addition, the Government announced in the Spring Budget 2023 further investment to 2-, 3-, and 4-year-old funding rates on top of the increase pledged in the 2021 spending review. £204m has been invested nationally to create an unprecedented mid-year uplift in the funded rate from September 2023. The money will be paid as a grant with 100% passed through to providers.

In April 2024, the Government will invest a further £288m to increase the funding rate further. This will be paid to providers through the EYSFF (Early Years Single Funding Formula). The funded rate for 2-year-olds now exceeds the average rate for paid for fees in Lincolnshire and the funded rate for 3- and 4-year-olds is expected to reach the average rate of paid for fees in Lincolnshire by April 2024.

The service is monitoring the market closely, particularly for the changing demands of working parents and the employment market in response to the budget announcements. There is a particular focus on the out of school provision for 4–11-year-olds and a recruitment campaign to encourage more childminders into the sector. However, there is still a limited interest in this area, and we need to develop additional places where areas have limited or no availability of childcare places.

It is expected that additional places are required in several areas in Lincolnshire and the cost has been estimated cautiously due to the growing cost of new builds and the ability to develop provision in existing properties. Other cost efficiencies have been explored and where possible, the early years team is working with schools and existing providers to expand or develop places at minimal cost. Where this is not an option, further investment is required.

Lincolnshire now has 97% of settings rated good or outstanding, demonstrating an increase in quality across the county.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

The local authority has converted £0.780m of funding to develop new childcare places in the immediate areas identified within the sufficiency report and childcare delivery plan from the childcare sufficiency assessment (CSA) data in 2022.

The capacity within the early years team to deliver the childcare reforms will need to be reviewed. The Government's additional childcare rollout from April 2024, and full rollout of funded early years childcare from nine months in September 2025, poses the greatest childcare sufficiency risk for Lincolnshire. This, however, is a matter for all LAs to contend with, and the support from Government will be important.

There will be further funding increases in the amounts paid to local authorities to pass to providers for delivering the Government’s free childcare places moving forward, with an additional investment of £288 million already announced at the Spring Budget for 2024-25.

The Department has completed a consultation on how the funding for the new entitlements in 2024-25 will be distributed, to make sure it remains fair in light of the radically expanded free childcare offers.

A further £12 million is also being given to local authorities this financial year to support them to effectively roll out the new offers. In October 2023, LA Delivery Support Funding was announced to support Local Authorities to deliver on the expanded childcare reforms.

A report will be written and presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in January 2024 to clarify the additional childcare reforms and Lincolnshire’s position.

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Lincolnshire County Council Childcare Sufficiency Report 2023
Appendix B	Engagement Report – Parental Childcare Sufficiency Project

5. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities	Early education and childcare - Statutory guidance for local authorities (publishing.service.gov.uk)

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