

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-25
Meeting date	11 March 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to provide working families of children aged 0-14 (18 with SEND) enough childcare places in its area, where reasonably practicable. Each year Research and Children's Services colleagues assess the position of the market, providing parents, councillors, schools and private business ward level information as a planning tool to support access or expansion of places, while highlighting areas of focus for the year ahead.</p> <p>With significant government expansion of early years childcare and wraparound care currently taking place, this information and data is vital for private businesses seeking to enter the market and help the Council fulfil its statutory duties.</p> <p>The content of the assessment concludes that the Council is meeting its statutory duties. It is also important to highlight that, at the time of writing, the quality of our providers stands at 99.2% good or outstanding (compared to 97.8% in England).</p> <p>In addition to a briefing paper (appendix A) the data that helped form the assessment is accessible here.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The committee scrutinises the content of the review and the priorities (areas of focus) as set out in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-25 Briefing Paper before it goes to Cabinet.</p>
Reason for recommendations	To fulfil the Council's statutory duty to annually assess its childcare market.

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation

Background

1. Local Authorities are required to report to elected council members on how they are meeting the duty to secure sufficient childcare before making the assessment available and accessible to parents, schools and businesses.
2. The annual review has proved to be a useful planning tool for Children's Services and potential new providers have given feedback that the data within the assessment has been invaluable in helping them to plan for sustainable new business.
3. Local Authorities are required by legislation 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). There is also a duty to ensure enough government funded early education places are available for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 9 month to 2 year olds.

The annual sufficiency assessment

4. Local Authorities are required by statutory guidance to determine the appropriate level of detail in their assessment (including geographical division and date of publication). The information in the assessment is organised to match ward level data.
5. The assessment has been designed so that it can be reviewed and updated to inform the planning and development of early years services and to help existing and new providers to plan for expansion or new provision, which will be vital as extended government entitlements were introduced in 2024 and are set to expand further in 2025.
6. Several factors have been considered within this review including:
 - The state of the local childcare market/supply and demand
 - The state of the labour market
 - The quality and capacity of childcare providers
 - The number of funded early education places required
 - The number of school aged children
 - The needs of disabled children
 - The demand for school holiday care for children

- The demand for 30 hours extended entitlement for eligible children
7. Overall, BCP Council is meeting its statutory duty to ensure there are enough suitable early education and childcare places available. There is a good choice of childcare facilities available to families delivered through the private, voluntary, independent and schools' sector across the conurbation. We have also improved our Early Years Pupil Premium take-up to 16% (up from 6% in 2020), reaching our most disadvantaged children (there are no published statistics to measure EYPP performance, however).
 8. Developments since 2023-24:
 - 8.1 At the time of writing the assessment, there were a total of 292 childcare providers in the BCP Council area, offering a maximum of 7,696 places. This is a fall of 15 providers (11 of which were childminders) and 96 places overall since summer 2023.
 - 8.2 While some group providers closed, other providers were supported by Children's Services, where possible, in acquiring those sites to protect availability of those places for their community.
 - 8.3 New group provision has opened in Kinson, Bournemouth Central and Redhill and Northbourne, supplying a combined 130 new early years places.
 - 8.4 In summer 2024, 396 early years children were recorded as receiving additional SEND Support. This is a decrease of 10% in the last 12 months. A total of 7,325 primary and secondary school children received SEN support, 228 extra children than in January 2023 (3%).
 - 8.5 The latest occupancy figures, at the busiest point of the year, show occupancy rates at childminders was 93%, PVI settings was 90% and school nursery settings was 89%. Each sector having a small increase in occupancy year on year.
 - 8.6 Overall, the number of registered out-of-school provision has increased by 1 in the last 12 months.
 9. Areas of focus for 2025:
 - 9.1 **Childminders:** Nationally childminder numbers have halved in the past 10 years and locally, since the pandemic began in 2020, BCP Council has lost a third of registered childminders (approximately 70). An ageing cohort of childminders and a falling number of providers registering with Ofsted mean that the childminding profession is not being replenished at a sufficient rate to sustain itself. Childminders are only one part of the sector, but they give parents choice and flexibility. Their current contribution and that towards the government's expanded childcare and wraparound offer is invaluable. The council and the DfE are promoting working in childcare through the 'Do something big...' campaign, and newly registered childminders had been able to access a £600 grant to support their start-up costs. Some encouraging changes have happened at government level including the creation of a new category of childminder called 'childminders without domestic premises'. This is for childminders who will work solely from somewhere other than a home, such as a community or village hall. An increase in the total number of people (including childminders and assistants) who can work together under a childminder's registration from 3 to 4 and childminders are also given more flexibility to operate outside of their home (or someone else's) for more of their time. This will remove the requirement that at least 50% of the childcare must be provided in a home. The

profession still, however, needs ongoing local and national support to reverse the trend of falling Ofsted registrations.

- 9.2 **Day nurseries and preschools:** Our current providers tell us that recruitment and retention of staff is the biggest barrier to expanding their places, or in some cases even meeting their current Ofsted registered maximum places. Although currently sufficient, the retention of our existing providers carries even greater weight with the increased expanded entitlements from 2025. The number of group settings that have closed and not been reopened under new ownership is small but still has an impact on each local community. The council continues to work with those who are wishing to close, signposting to providers seeking new or further premises. This protects the childcare places and staff and will continue to ensure statutory duties are met. The government is currently promoting childminding as a profession as well as working in childcare through a 'Do something big... work with small children' campaign and the Council continues to promote childcare as a profession working with professional partners including the DWP/Jobcentre Plus. If providers cannot staff their businesses adequately, this impacts on the number of childcare places available for working families.
- 9.3 **Bearwood and Merley:** This area continues to undergo significant housing planning and development, raising critical concerns about the adequacy of childcare availability. Currently, Merley lacks the capacity to provide year-round childcare support for working parents. To address this shortfall, developer contributions should be included in the infrastructure package to accommodate the increased demand for early years care brought by the proposed developments. With housing developments in mind, childcare providers should consider Bearwood and Merley as an area with potential.
- 9.4 **Boscombe West:** This ward is highlighted as few families stay within their ward for 2, 3-and 4-year-old funded childcare, which is likely due to a combination of ongoing lack of provision in the area but also the proximity of other provision in neighbouring wards. It is considered an area where new provision is encouraged as, with a current estimated 521 resident 0–4-year-old children, there are no longer any childminders and no preschool provision, whilst three day nurseries currently serve the area. The lack of childminders here, and overall, is particularly concerning.
- 9.5 **Expanded Entitlements for 9 month to 2 year olds:** Children's Services is confident that there are currently sufficient places for the 15 hours expanded entitlement for 2-year-olds and the first term of entitlement for 9-month-old children should be considered a success with no known unplaced children, despite some concerns raised when the entitlements were first announced in 2023. The next challenge for BCP Council and nationally is the expansion of entitlement from 15 hours per week to 30 hours per week from September 2025. The latest forecast information from the DfE suggests that there may be a sufficiency gap of 368 places at that point, with Hamworthy and Newtown & Heatherlands wards having the largest forecast shortfall. The Council, however, are currently in the process of allocating capital funding to providers to increase their places, in readiness for September 2025 with funding for **276 new places** already approved to date. Progress and outcomes can be viewed through [this](#) dedicated webpage. the expectation that several hundred new 1- and 2-year-old places can be funded. In addition, the DfE themselves are offering up to 3,000 schools the opportunity to make use of unused classrooms to introduce early years education onsite (school or privately run), with several BCP

primary schools applying in the first phase of funding. It is vital that the leadership and planning officers support the need for new and expanding provision and that every opportunity with capital funding is used to effectively increase the number of places available for working families. that capital funding is distributed fairly and with the best outcomes possible in mind.

The following table shows the current and forthcoming entitlements, based on a 38 week year.

	9 month old (working)	2 year old (working)	2 year old (disadvantaged)	3&4 year old (all)	3&4 year old (working)
Currently	15hrs	15hrs	15hrs	15hrs	30hrs
Sept 2025	30hrs	30hrs	15hrs	15hrs	30hrs

- 9.6 **Wraparound Provision:** Increasing the 8am to 6pm wraparound places offered to working families is a key local and national priority. While BCP Council has a healthy before school offer, there are gaps in the after school offers for parents. Over the next two years, with the use of the DfE's Wraparound Care Programme Delivery Fund, the council will be working with all schools and private providers to ensure that a term-time 8am to 6pm offer is in place at every primary school, where needed, as well as increasing capacity. Capital funding from the DfE will also be available to enable this. The 2025-26 childcare sufficiency review is expected to fully report on a successful increase in 8am to 6pm places in BCP Council.

At the time of writing the Council are underway with two phases of funding that schools and providers can apply for. The intention is that all funding allocated to BCP Council will be committed to the sector by the end of March 2025, with agreed funding being paid in stages through to the end of the government's funding programme, March 31 2026. The application and allocation process is ongoing however, at the time of writing, over **600 new places**, or places that will extend to 6pm, have been approved. Ongoing progress and outcomes can be viewed through [this](#) dedicated webpage.

10. The childcare sector has had a difficult time since the pandemic. Their funding rate has been low and their ability to recruit and retain staff on a wage commensurate with the responsibility of educating children is therefore impacted. As places have slowly fallen this has, to date, been mitigated by a falling birthrate. There has been some positive movement with government funding, insofar as the rate paid for 9 month to 2 year olds is not competitive with existing private rates and in many cases over and above a providers rate, however the funding rate for 3 and 4 year olds (where children are universally entitled) remains a sticking point
11. Whilst the Council is currently sufficient, 2025 and beyond is expected to bring some challenges as the Council aims to fulfil its duty to provide its residents enough places. Government have indicated the number of places that may be lacking in BCP from September 2025 however the Council have sought to mitigate that through distribution of capital funding, which continues at the time of writing.
12. Councillors should be aware that the childcare sector may seek political support for planning applications or leasing of council owned property. Providers may also continue to lobby for business rates relief.

Options Appraisal

13. None

Summary of financial implications

14. Local authorities are required, by statutory guidance, to maximise families' take up of government funded early education. The government introduced, from April 2024, a new 15 hours per week entitlement for some working families of 2 year olds. Expanding that to 9 month old children from September 2024 and doubling the entitlement to 30 hours per week from September 2025. This may have a financial impact on existing provision as many eligible parents will move from paying privately at a provider set rate to receiving funded entitlement at a local authority rate. It should be noted however that the local authority funding rate for 9 month to 2 year olds is often higher than that charged privately by providers.

Summary of legal implications

15. The Local Authority has a duty to secure sufficient childcare for working parents, parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 (or up to 18 for disabled children) (Childcare Act 2006). An annual review and reporting on the local picture enable us to fulfil this requirement.

Summary of human resources implications

16. None

Summary of sustainability impact

17. None

Summary of public health implications

18. None

Summary of equality implications

19. Through this assessment the Council are providing private businesses the tools and publicly available datasets to determine where they might choose to expand or create new provision. As Children's Services is not directly involved with private business decisions and that childcare funding for families follows DfE led criteria (no discretion), an EIA has not been created.

Summary of risk assessment

20. The Council need to work proactively to ensure that parent demand in both early years and school aged wraparound is met by private business and school provision. With demand unmet parents may not be able to work or work the hours that they would like. All ages and groups are important, but Children's Services will be emphasising the needs of disadvantaged 2 year olds and children with SEND when working with providers on expansion.

Background papers

21. This report is produced using the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-25 Briefing Paper, which is attached as an appendix. The source data (an interactive PowerBI) cannot be formed as an appendix, but is available [here](#) and will be

published on the Council's Childcare Sufficiency webpage, along with the briefing paper, upon conclusion of this democratic process.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-25 Briefing Paper