

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 12 November 2019

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Early Years Sufficiency Annual Report

Is the decision a key decision? No

When does the decision need to be implemented? December 2019

Executive Lead Contact Details: Councillor Cordelia Law, Executive Lead for Children Cordelia.law@torbay.gov.uk

Supporting Officer Contact Details: Alison Botham, Director of Children's Services, Alison.botham@torbay.gov.uk

1. Proposal and Introduction

- 1.1 The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 – 14 years (or up to 18 years for disabled children).
- 1.2 As part of these duties, Torbay Council is required to report annually to Elected Members on the local arrangements to ensure those duties are met and a report is available and accessible for parents.
- 1.3 A copy of the Childcare Sufficiency Report (September 2019) is attached to this report at Appendix 1 and Cabinet are asked to approve the same.
- 1.4 The full report demonstrates that there are sufficient childcare places to meet the requirements for funded children in Torbay with enough spare capacity to accommodate children aged under 2 who may be accessing a place which their parents pay for. The report identifies that Torbay does therefore have sufficient capacity to accommodate all children who need a place, although parents may not always be able to access their first choice of provider.

2. Reason for Proposal and associated financial commitments

- 2.1 The Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019 provides an overview of the local childcare market, changes in the supply and demand for places and the actions necessary to ensure these are sufficient, accessible child care places in Torbay. The report has been updated to reflect the changes to Torbay wards which came into effect in May 2019.
- 2.2 The Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019 takes into account significant changes in Government Policy including the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) for disadvantaged two year olds, the universal entitlement (15 hours) for 3 & 4 year olds and the extended entitlement (30 hours) for working parents of three and four year olds which is now in its third year of operation.
- 2.3 Results show the population of children in Torbay is now plateauing, several years of high birth rates have now levelled off. An important consideration despite this is the housing development planned in Torbay which is having a significant impact on population forecasts which indicate a continued growth in demand for childcare, particularly in the Shiphay (Torquay) and White Rock (Paignton) areas. In addition, the impact of welfare reform, social mobility action plans and direction for parents to return to work is likely to continue, all leading to a continued increase in demand for childcare.
- 2.4 It is important to note that as a small Local Authority, the residents of Torbay who need it tend to have a thorough knowledge of the childcare market in the area and make judgements based on first, second or even third hand experiences of providers.
- 2.5 There is a significant trend for parents who would rather wait for a place at their preferred provider or location (e.g. a nursery on site or close to their preferred school) than find an alternative provider or location. This results in many children not starting their early education until sometimes 2 or 3 terms after they become entitled which can have a distinct impact on the take up rates for the 2 year old entitlement. Torbay has a significant number of economically inactive parents of which more than 50% have actively taken the decision to stay at home for the purposes of caring for their children and home.
- 2.6 This has resulted in a difficulty in managing demand. Some providers have low occupancy and advertised vacancies are difficult to fill, whereas some providers have extensive waiting lists and are already full for their September intake several months in advance.
- 2.7 From the parent consultation in 2019 it is clear that there is an ongoing issue relating to the availability and affordability of holiday childcare for early years and school age children. 35% of respondents to the consultation indicated that they need/use holiday childcare to enable them to work. Using the sufficiency data collated it is evident that term time, school-based provision is popular in the area, with school nurseries having

minimal vacancies. Therefore it is important that the issues related to a lack of appropriate and affordable holiday childcare are prioritised to ensure that working families who struggle for childcare for 12 weeks of the year can find a place.

2.8 The report contains an updated 2018 action plan which identifies progress made, in addition to the new 2019 action plan detailing the actions that will be taken to ensure childcare capacity continues to develop in line with demand.

2.9 Following its approval, the Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019 will be published on the Council's website as well as providing the evidence base for the ongoing dialogue with providers, partners and stakeholders on the development of future capacity.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

3.1 That the Torbay Childcare Sufficiency Report (September 2019) set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report be approved and published.

3.2 That Cabinet receive an update on the progress of implementing the actions in the Torbay Childcare Sufficiency Report at a meeting in May 2020.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Childcare Sufficiency Report (September 2019)

Appendix 2: Childcare Sufficiency Report (September 2019) Executive Summary

Background Documents

None