

Meeting: Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board

Date: 18 May 2026

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Early Years Sufficiency Update

When does the decision need to be implemented? n/a

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Councillor Nick Bye, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, nick.bye@torbay.gov.uk

Director Contact Details: Nancy Meehan Director of Children's Services
nancy.meehan@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report has been prepared to provide a review of Early Years Sufficiency

2. Background

2.1 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.

2.2 For this update the following key lines of enquiry have been listed:

- What action is being taken by the Council to influence the market and ensure there are sufficient early years places available to meet the demands across the whole of Torbay?
- What has happened regarding preparedness for the new requirements that came in for September 2025?
- Do we have over capacity of placements with the falling birth population?

3. Progress

3.1 What action is being taken by the Council to influence the market and ensure there are sufficient early years places available to meet the demands across the whole of Torbay?

- Sufficiency monitoring and engagement with the early years sector allow us to monitor capacity, occupancy and any emerging pressures. Overall occupancy across Torbay is at 94%. As a service we are proposing to move to termly data collection from both early years

providers and parents/careers to support our ongoing analysis of the childcare market and ensure we are responsive to the changing market and needs of families term on term. This will start for the Summer Term 2026.

- Current validation data for the expanded working parent entitlements for 30 hours funding indicate that:
 - Under 2's – 93% validated codes
 - 2 Year Olds – 95% validated
 - 3&4 Year Olds -96% validated

These high figures show that most parents who have applied for a code to access the entitlements have been able to secure a place in an early year setting.

- Ongoing provider engagement through visits, networks, finance system support and workforce development, contributes to provider sustainability helping settings remain open and viable therefore meeting the requirements form high quality accessible early years provision for children and families.
- Recruitment and retention continue to provider some barriers for providers when offering additional places for children. To address this, we have been working with South Devon College and local Secondary Schools to attend recruitment fayres, promote working in early years and engage young people, sharing career opportunities and pathways for progression.
- Working alongside a national organisation, Coram Pacey, we are developing our offer for Childminders. This will include localised campaigns on the 'Magic of Childminding' developing our website and support materials for new and prospective childminders and facilitating a local 'Buddy' system to encourage retention. In the last 6 months we have had 7 new childminders begun working in Torbay.

3.2 What has happened regarding preparedness for the new requirements that came in for September 2025?

- In the lead up to the full expansion of 30 hours funded childcare for working parents, providers received termly updates on funding and statutory changes, alongside direct practice and finance support, ensuring they were operationally ready for expanded entitlements. This support continues as the offer is embedded.
- Through both the School Based Nursery Grant and the Early Years Capital Expansion, 12 projects have been supported locally. Once all are completed this will generate approximately 110 additional places.
- Ongoing engagement with the School Based Nursery Programme has resulted in an additional bid for Phase 2 being approved by the Department for Education. This new expansion will increase sufficiency of places for 2-year-old children in an area of high disadvantage.

3.3 Do we have over capacity of placements with the falling birth population?

- Current data and information does not suggest an oversupply of places due to the falling birth rate with the average occupancy rate at 94%. The increase in hours from the

expanded entitlements has resulted in families being able to access an increased offer which has resulted in high occupancy rates.

- However local data and intelligence does suggest that some providers are reporting lower occupancy levels, whilst others are operating a wait list. There are two key factors which potentially impact this, parental choice and delivery models of provision. Whilst it is difficult to influence parental choice, we are actively working with some providers on their delivery models (particularly those who operate within traditional school hours, term time only) to support the increase in capacity and/or look at different options to ensure financial sustainability.

4. Recommendation(s)

- 4.1. That members note the content of the report