Mini Peer Review ~ Supporting an Early Years and Childcare Strategy

Delivered by the Local Government Association for Slough Borough Council
May - July 2024

Photo credits to staff and families at (from left or right) Zainab Ahmad (Childminder), Antz Kids and Chalvey Grove Children's Centre.

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1. Introduction

This is an essential time for Slough Borough Council to be considering its early years and childcare strategy. There has been a period of great change over the last four years; the national focus on the first 1000 days, (eg Best Start Programme), integrated working (Family Hubs Agenda) and the largest expansion of early years and childcare in a decade. In addition, Slough faces the additional challenges of turn over movement at senior leader and director level, significant financial pressure (through the section 114), and an acute focus on SEND and Safeguarding.

The potential for early years and childcare to impact positively and support sustainability across all of the aforementioned agendas has yet to be realised. As a result, the Local Government Association, were invited to deliver Mini Peer Review in June 2024, focusing on the gap between delivery and strategic priorities. The support formed the first part of a two-step LGA supported plan.

This report aims to highlight key findings and recommendations. The findings identify gaps, celebrate the successes achieved so far, build on the strong foundations laid by an extremely experienced team and managers. The report will create the content for an overarching strategy to hold and steer the work, moving forwards. Writing the strategy will form the second part of the LGA support and will take place over August – October 2024.

2. Methodology

A total of 28 local authorities have been supported by the LGA in reviewing and developing an early years and childcare strategy to date. The methodology used in Slough has evolved from our previous experience and in scoping with managers in Slough. Activities included;

- Initial scoping meetings to shape the support needed
- Presentation and discussion with the Lead Member and Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director
- Input at an appropriate Senior Management meeting
- Key stakeholder engagement sessions; e.g. staff who operationally manage services across the agenda, and early years and childcare sector representatives
- Engagement with parents and carers by joining activities already planned and offering space to share experiences
- An online search for support and information from a parent/cares perspective (mystery shopping)
- A review of existing council plans and strategies
- A report with recommendations
- A feedback session for Senior Managers/staff

In total 52 individuals we engaged in the process, 26 staff, 15 early years and childcare practitioners, and 11 parents.

The process of support was managed by Ann Van Dyke MBE, Consultant and LGA Peer.

Three LGA Peers also supported the process, by coordinating and facilitating the engagement sessions with staff, the sector and parents/carers.

Nicola dos Santos is a Children's Service Improvement Advisor for the Local Government Association and has previously managed and delivered services in Local Authorities including York.

Tina Suthers is the Operational Manager for Calderdale Public Health Early Years Service (Health Visiting, Breastfeeding Peer Support, Oral Health) and School Nursing and has a background in Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for the past 36 years.

Nikki Sealy is the Head of Early Years Quality and Sufficiency for Lewisham Council and has worked in Local Authorities managing services and change for a number of years.

3. Building on What Works

Slough are on an exciting journey to realise the full potential of early intervention and getting it right from the start. There is a clear commitment and passion throughout all levels of the organisation and across partners, to support, facilitate and enable Slough families to thrive.

A little bit of support goes along way
A particularly good example of this work can be seen in the start up and development of Blue Willow Nursery which since 2012 has developed from two childminders working to deliver high quality inclusive home based early education and childcare, to over 90 places in total across three sites. These developments have involved the drive and will to deliver of owners Yvonne Martin & Pav Holman working alongside local authority staff unlocking opportunities for regeneration and the securing of capital and premises.

Please refer to Appendix 1. For more detail on the development of Blue Willows and the role of the LA team in supporting regeneration, local employment and improved outcomes of children and families, as well as supporting legal compliance.

Cascading expertise to benefit more children - DfE expert and mentors
The EY team facilitated nurseries taking up the DfE Experts and Mentors programme, Mighty Acorns were one of the nurseries that really benefited.

The experts and mentors met with the nursery's Early Years Advisory Teacher (EYAT) to ensure the setting were able to get the most out of the support and ensure actions were picked up and further developed after the programme finished.

As part of the support they developed their curriculum and shared this with the staff.

In the third term following the new curriculum being implemented, they worked with their EYAT to review their curriculum and consider what further areas they wanted to develop to enable children to have the best outcomes from attending the nursery.

This work was recognised in their Ofsted Inspection report as good practice which impacts on all children in the setting.

Slough has a rich and diverse early years and childcare sector spanning self employed childminders, private and voluntary pre-schools and day nurseries, children's centres, school nurseries and nursery schools. There is also a rich mix of different services supporting families on the pathway to take up their early years provision. The joint working, facilitated by excellent relationship management has been critical in ensuring the LA meets it's duties to ensure seamless services for families.

A full set of Early Years case studies can be found at Appendix 2.

4. Summary of Recommendations

A series of recommendations can be found in sections 10 and 11, which includes feedback from all stakeholders involved in the process of writing this report from all 10 areas. This section aims to summarise key recommendations and offer some priorities for Slough moving forwards. A vast amount of experience and knowledge is held by operational managers and staff, which is converted into a solution focused positive culture of working which is evidently promoted and nurtured with all client groups (Children, families and early years practitioners including schools).

Strategic Leadership for Early Years & Childcare
The review process revealed a clear commitment to the Early Years agenda, however more can be done to ensure a mature and active ownership amongst senior managers. Expertise is held by operational managers and is dependent on relationships as opposed to structure and embedded knowledge at present. There is also a need to further promote respect for and value of the agenda across all departments.

A performance management data set, along with regular reporting at a strategic level could drive a more preventative approach to a range of council services.

The writing of the strategy for Early Years and Childcare could also support greater understanding and ownership of the agenda. The outcome will also create a framework supporting legal compliance and a needs-led approach specific for Slough.

Developing a Comprehensive Multi Agency Dataset
Whilst a great deal of data is collected, it is not yet coordinated to evidence needs and target resources as effectively as it could be.

A comprehensive needs analysis could support shared understanding of the early years and childcare needs of children and families across Slough, and clear performance management across the Childcare Act aims.

This work will be of particular importance in evidencing the current outcome and pathways for children with SEND and ethnic minority groups (who are also typically over represented by our least advantaged families). It will also support a more targeted approach to reaching and engaging families who typically do not engage in services in the early years.

Service Structure and Functions
There are excellent working relationships across departments and leaders. Working on the agenda. A shared passion and commitment as well as experience and knowledge is evident.

The current structure could be developed to ensure that delivery is supported by clear roles and functions, in order to maintain good relationships, (as opposed to being dependent on them). A series of planned steps suggested at the end of this section, to clarify role and function, and formalise a matrix of where specialist responsibility rests.

Strategic leadership could be dedicated to a market management function given the diverse and multi-agency nature of the full market of early years provision. Legal duties require LAs to deliver provision in the Early Years only as a last resort. The functions required are therefore data analysis, commissioning, the development of services (as opposed to delivery), the proactive management of multi-agency working across a range of services including health employment support, community services etc.

The operational delivery of services should only be where the market cannot respond which provides a sound rational for the existing plans to enhance assessment and support for children with SEND (and emerging needs).

The Council has already started to work on an outreach model for the centres. This will be essential to move from a delivery point for services is focussed on the families who come into the centre, as opposed to enabling <u>full</u> reach across the area. Again, this model should be designed with clear targets based on data, for reach, narrowing the gap and clarity of role and across all early years functions.

The Council is required to act as commissioner across the whole sector, and should consider how it reduces the likelihood of a two/three-tear system, (school nurseries, children centre childcare and PVI provision). Strategically managing the whole market as a whole can support the entire pre-birth to five population, as oppose to those within reach of each provider.

Again, linked to the commissioning cycle above, the Council could continue to move to a development and coordination role in the leadership of children's centres as opposed to direct delivery, considering targets to reach families across the whole area.

This work has already started, and could include identifying community spaces, supporting parent led activities, setting up (but not delivering) stay and play sessions etc to create community led universal services. Further enhancing the work with libraries could also be explored. The centre staff could also act as a key coordination point for proactive joint working to enable seamless services for families.

There are also opportunities to further enhance services for the early years children with SEND through this model (ie which would fit with the council only delivering services which the market will not respond with).

The aim of this coordination would be to maximise resources and work towards a more level playing field for providers, and ultimately greater choice of high quality provision for families. Children should receive the same high quality inclusive provision whether they access a childminder, pre-school, day nursery, children centre nursery or school nursery. That choice should also be consistent where ever in the borough they live.

The Council could also further support children with SEND with transitions from early years to schools (in particular if support is offered until the end of year one).

These suggestions would require the identification and pooling of all services currently supporting the sectors and families at present. But some quick wins to move towards greater compliance could include;

- Data sets to establish targets against the legal functions (including reach, engagement and take up by least advantage groups).
- Clarity of role and function through Service Level Agreements for the Children's Centres and Nursery Schools which separate any operational/delivery functions from the Councils strategic roles namely;
  - Children's Centre activity (family support, outreach and development with limited delivery)
  - Direct Childcare Provision (moving towards a level playing field over time)
  - Any additional services the Council is paying for through additional resource (ie that not allocated out to the wider market)
- The final SLA for additional services could also be linked it income generation targets to reduce the LA contribution over time.
- The SLAs could also clarify the longer term direction of travel, ie moving to a specialist development centre with a focus on inclusion in the mainstream.
- Agreeing the matrix between strategic direction from professional leads (ie market management, sector quality improvement, inclusion support etc), and those developing/delivering on the ground. Clarity here will be key to ensuring providers and families receive consistent messages and seamless services.
- Clarity of role across all those working pre-birth to five (ideally end of year one) within the matrix, and coordination within one service, ie all functions run up to the end of year one to support transitions and are located in one early years service to support efficiencies.

Focusing on Early Years Inclusion

Maintaining a focus on early intervention and prevention work for children with additional needs and SEND will be particularly important in the context of the local increase in the number of children requiring high-needs/high-cost statutory support. Children with SEND are also more likely to come from least advantaged families.

A great deal of work has already been achieved and the concept of creating development centres should be continued. The centres would support the continued development of expertise, enable assessment and support at the earliest stage, whilst retaining the key aim of supporting inclusion in mainstream early years provision.

The council have a significant opportunity to realise in being selected to work with the charity Dingley's Promise on the Comic Relief funded Inclusion Project. This project brings significant resource to transform the entire early years workforce over the next two years. Nationally the project currently has over 15,000 practitioners taking part, with 96% consistently reporting they can take more children with SEND as a result.

A focus on creating development centres, alongside upskilling the wider mainstream workforce through the Dingley's offer could significantly impact on inclusion rates as well as outcomes for children and costs to the council.

A particular focus should be placed on school engagement in the Dingley's programme as greater inclusion support was found in the private, voluntary and independent sector through the review. Improving a basic understanding of inclusion in the school sector could support the sufficiency of early years places too. Again, ensuring coordinated support across the whole sector, and supporting children up until the end of year one could impact positively on transitions and exclusions from school.

Securing Effective and Accessible Information
Whilst a good range of information exists locally, from a family's perspective it tends to describe services, as opposed to family need, which is not always helpful to families searching for services for the first time. Taking a strategic approach to delivery of the Family Information Service, considering how best we support families (who they are and what their needs are, understanding what their potential motivators are to engage, and how we influence), could help us achieve information which motivates change and promotes self-help.

There are also opportunities to pool resources and create a single information service for all things family related. This would simplify and improve access to information and self-help for families, and potentially create income generation opportunities from the sector and related services.

The information service remit will also be critical in driving change through managing parental demand for high quality services and could support positive and confident parenting to support the rise in social and emotional and speech, language and communication needs.

There is also a phenomenal opportunity for improved reach of families, information and tracking of data with birth registrations happening within the children centres. This is a critical factor in enabling good information reaches families are the earliest opportunity.

Managing Childcare Sufficiency
In the light of the current national childcare expansion, a key priority around managing childcare sufficiency, and in particular market expansion and development, will be essential to achieving new government priorities and legal compliance. Market management will be critical to supporting the planned extension of 30 hours of free childcare for children from 9 months, and improving wraparound childcare for school-age children. Again, focusing on the least advantaged families and children with SEND (who are often the same children) will be critical to narrowing, as opposed to widening, the attainment gap. Work to support new providers, and in particular childminders will be key.

Celebrating Diversity and Tackling Discrimination
Slough have already begun to measure the extent to which ethnic minority groups are impacted by disadvantage. There is an acknowledgement that persistent inequalities exist for

these groups and should be addressed as a priority across agencies. This work could include a systemic review and plan for example looking at representation of groups within the service itself, as well as culturally sensitive ways of working, representative marketing and promotion, identifying and celebrating champions, etc.

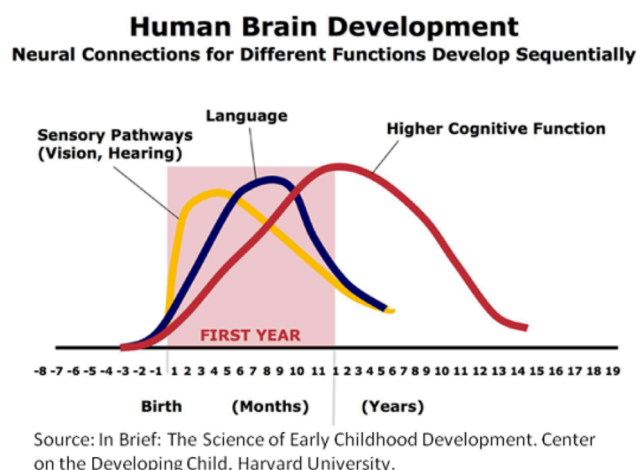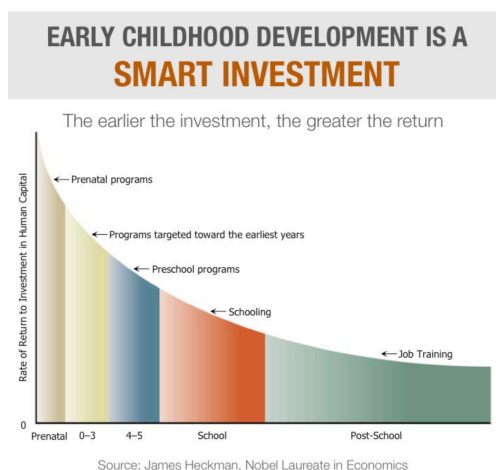## 5. The Evidence and Business Case for Early Years and Childcare

Early intervention and good early years provision has consistently evidenced a return on investment. This section offers some quotes and links to some of the research.

Research has shown us, time and again, that our development from conception to age 2 lays the foundation for our physical, emotional, social, educational and economic futures. The coordination of services, to enable a universal and targeted framework of support from pre-birth to aged five, is critical for improving the outcomes of children, families, communities and society. In short, there is no better stage in a child's life in which to invest, if we are committed to long-term change.

The Early Intervention Foundation produced a report in 2017 (the Cost of Late Intervention) stating that:[1]

"Nearly £17 billion per year – equivalent to £287 per person – is spent in England and Wales by the state on the cost of late intervention."

The return on investment for individuals and services collectively is also well documented. The Heckman Curve[2] is illustrated here and can be seen alongside recorded patterns of brain development from Harvard University for comparison:

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A **SMART INVESTMENT**

The earlier the investment, the greater the return

Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

Human Brain Development
Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially

Source: In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

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[1] https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016
[2] https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/

"The importance of the early years in laying the building blocks for a child's physical development, social and emotional well-being, and cognitive and linguistic capabilities is evidenced by a large, interdisciplinary body of research. As such, early childhood and the dynamics and challenges of family life are fundamental to considering how we might build a more resilient, productive, and cohesive society."

The changing face of early childhood in the UK
The Nuffield Foundation July 22

"Science tells us that a child's experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today will reflect the kind of world we will live in tomorrow. It tells us that investing in the start of life is not an indulgence, but economically, socially, and psychologically vital to a prosperous society.

Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation, December 2020
Ipsos MORI | State of the Nation: Understanding Public Attitudes to the Early Years, November 2020

Evidence that supports investment in the early years continues to grow, however, we have witnessed a series of challenges within our public sector over recent years, which prevented a coordinated approach to make this impact.

The number of children with SEND support and EHCPs has been rising since 2016 according to Government statistics[3], and research from Dingley's Promise in 2023[4] found that 95% of settings reported that the number of children with SEND had risen in the past year alone.

We know that disadvantage significantly impacts on child outcomes, and it is often a key factor in targeted approaches to support take up of early years provision. Where areas have layered the data sets for disadvantage and SEND together, we can see a direct correlation. The report "Investing in Early Intervention" from May 2022 documents similar concerns;[5]

*"Children with disabilities are at **greater risk** than non-disabled children **of experiencing both social and health inequalities.***

Social inequalities

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[3] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england
[4] https://dingley.org.uk/researchsurveyfindings2023
[5] https://cerebra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EARLY-INTERVENTION-REPORT-A4-FINAL.pdf

*Children with learning disabilities are **more likely to experience a range of social inequalities** than typically developing children. (Figure 1)*

Research has identified that children with learning disabilities across childhood and adolescence are, compared to other children:

*• 1.6 times more likely to be living in a family in **income poverty***

*• 2.1 times more likely to have **no adult in paid work** in the household*

*• 1.4 times more likely to have a mother with **mental health problems***

*• 3.3 times more likely to have a mother with **poor physical health***

*• 1.5 times more likely to experience two or more negative life events such as **bereavement and sexual abuse***

*• 1.5 times more likely to experience **poor family functioning**, for example, a decreased ability to problem solve or talk through problems as a family*

*• 1.3 times more likely to live in a **single parent household***

*• 1.9 times more likely to have a **primary carer with no educational qualifications"***

The national charity [Dingley's Promise](#) hold regular conversations with parents of children with SEND. There feedback also illustrates the links and potential for impact on wider council priorities such as mental health (child and adult), employment, and regeneration;

"Trying to find childcare was horrific, I ended up seeing my doctor I was so worried about my child, having to give up work and money."

"My mental health was suffering anyway. I needed a break from 24/7 caring and I just kept being told there were no spaces or I had to go through yet another process when other families just got theirs."

"Work was an outlet for me as well as an income source, but I had to move my work to weekends which means I cram 20 hrs work into 2 days and have no time as a family."

Parent representatives on the Dingley's Promise Parent Board

Public sector resources have been under pressure for some time and this has been compounded by COVID-19 and the diversion of resources to support local responses. The development of our latest policies and funding streams around Family Hubs and the Best Start in Life programme aim to address that imbalance and refocus services around the most critical years, delivering services where families are based.

"The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of two set the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional and physical development. There is a well-established and growing international consensus on the importance of this age range; it is part of the World Health Organisation's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health15, the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative16, and in England, both the NHS Long Term Plan17 and Public Health England's 2016 guidance on "giving every child the best start in life".18

The Best Start for Life, The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report,
HM Government 2021

Both the pandemic and cost of living crisis have exacerbated challenges faced by families, (and those providing services). An increase in the number of young children requesting additional support, along with resource pressures, is arguably creating a perfect storm to potentially widen the gap between our least advantaged children and their peers. Whilst the pandemic undoubtedly magnified these issues, it should also be noted that they existed and were in fact increasing before.

At the time of writing, an unprecedented number of families who had babies during lockdown have children now starting school. A high number of these children will have been born into a society where the wearing of face masks was the norm, outside of their homes, and socialisation was very limited. The usual activities of baby clinics, stay and play sessions and other activities for new parents did not take place for this group. Reports from families and professionals show that typical patterns of child development have been affected (in particular speech and language development and healthy attachments with parents, who may also have suffered stress). Our parents' confidence has also been affected by having missed out on opportunities to connect with other parents, gain advice and support and build friendships. All of which serve to secure a vital social network at what can be a challenging and isolating time of transitioning to parenthood. For further information about the effects of COVID on children, young people and families, NCB conducted key research.[6]

5. Our Interrelated Legal Requirements and Risk of Legal Challenge

The Childcare Act[7] 2006 and 16 sections 6, 7, 8 and 9, require LAs to secure childcare for working parents and the early education entitlements, whilst also outlining the LA powers to do so. The duties specify that provision for children with SEND should be secured for children up to the age of 18.

The Childcare Act was a pioneering piece of legislation, as it was the first act to be exclusively concerned with early years and childcare and early childhood services. The 3 key drivers in this act are:

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[6] https://www.ncb.org.uk/what-we-do/research-evidence/our-research-projects/research-exploring-impact-covid-19-pandemic

[7] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/notes/division/6/1

- To reduce child poverty
- To reduce inequalities between children
- To improve well-being for young children

The Childcare Act enables a framework for delivery (and legal challenge) under three key areas:

The 'early years outcomes duties' require the provision of early childhood services and joint working between agencies to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and narrow the gap. The outcomes duties also enable pooled budgets to support joint delivery, with the aim of supporting easy to access services from pre-birth to 5, at a universal and more targeted level.

The 'sufficiency duties' require LAs to ensure sufficient early education and childcare. Our least advantaged families are (at the time of writing) legally entitled to the early years education as children turn two, and all families of children aged 3 and 4. Working families are entitled to additional hours for 3 and 4-year-olds and the entitlements aim to support child development but also remove a barrier to employment by supporting access and affordability.

The sufficiency duties also require LAs to secure childcare for children aged 0-14, (or 18 for children with a disability) with the aim of enabling parents to take part in employment and employment-related activities. The role of the LA in securing sufficient places requires the use of data and a market management approach which uses parental demand, encouraging new start-ups and providing the workforce with training and business support.

The 'information duties' require LAs to ensure information is provided to both childcare providers and families, in order to meet their other childcare duties.

These legislative requirements are interdependent on each other. For example, improving the well-being of young children is reliant on securing integrated early childhood services, which support access to early education and childcare. Securing sufficient childcare requires information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents, in order that they may demand (ask for) a high-quality supply.

Whilst the requirements for producing and publishing childcare sufficiency assessments were repealed through the Children and Families Act 2014[8] it is arguably impossible to evidence that an LA has taken "reasonable steps" to secure childcare if they not first assessed the market.

The responsibilities of LAs were further defined by the Children and Families Act 2014, which seeks to improve services for vulnerable children and to support families. It underpinned wider reforms and policies to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no

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[8] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

matter what their background. This is further strengthened by the Equalities Act 2010 (which superseded the Disability Discrimination Act 1995).

This legislation is also underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC) (1992). The Convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that all children are entitled to.

A full table of legislation around early years and childcare can be found at Appendix 3.

6. A Snapshot of Slough

This section has been taken from the 2023-24 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment create by Slough Borough Council.

Slough is an urban town in the east of Berkshire, approximately 20 miles west of central London. It is home to 50,100 children and young people, 11,700 of which are aged 0-4. Out of a total population of approximately 149,600, this equates to 33.5% being below the age of 19, making the population of Slough significantly younger than the average for south east local authorities which stands at 23.1%. The average for our Berkshire neighbours stands at 24.2%, still significantly lower than Slough.

Our 0-4 year olds make up 7.4% of the population, higher than our Berkshire neighbours at 5.5% and south east local authorities at 5.1%.

The borough also includes a higher proportion of young adults aged 25-44 of 6.7% against the south east average of 5.5%, suggesting a large number of young families are resident.

The employment rate in Slough stands at 73.7%, which is an increase on last year. This is lower than the South East average of 78.5%. The unemployed claimant rate in 2023 is 4.5%, a reduction of 0.5% from last year. This is higher than the national average of 3.9% and is gradually improving, but still higher than the pre-pandemic level of 3.0%. (Source Annual Population Survey ONS)

Slough is one of the most ethnically diverse towns in the UK, with 32% of Slough residents born outside the UK and the EU, and 15.8% having been resident in the UK for less than 10 years. (Source: ONS Census 2021)

Slough is the third-most densely populated local authority area across the South East (after Portsmouth and Southampton). It is the fifth most densely populated Local Authority outside of London. 15.8% of Slough's households are overcrowded, much higher than the England average of 4.4%.

Slough unitary authority area was ranked 73rd out of the 317 English local authorities for deprivation in the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, significantly more deprived than other Berkshire and surrounding areas: Reading (141st), Hillingdon (151st) Bracknell Forest (284th),

South Bucks (292nd), Windsor and Maidenhead (304th) and Wokingham (316th). (Source: MHCLG English Indices of Deprivation 2019)

Overview

- Slough is made up of 21 wards
- It is bisected by the A4 (connecting Bath to London) and the Great Western Main line.
- It covers an area of 32.54 km² and is approx. 20 miles west of central London.

Education planning areas, by wards   Date: 04/2024
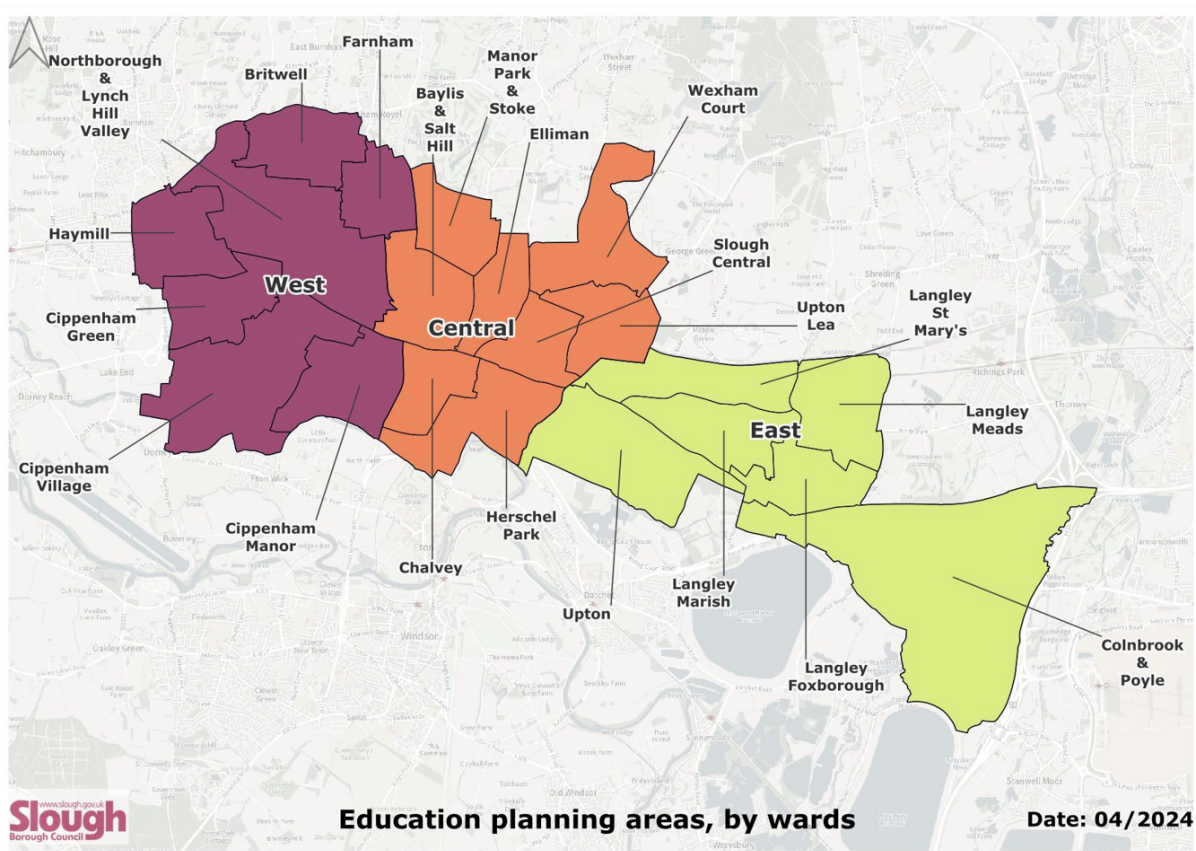
The Slough Early Years Service previously worked across 10 Children's Centre areas (CCA) which did not align with the ward boundaries of the borough. Due to the overall size of the borough it has been decided that it will be split into 3 distinct areas: West, Central and East which now also align with the new ward boundaries.

Population

The ONS birth data shows that the decreasing trend reported in the number of births during 2021 – 2022 across Slough has continued, with a further net drop of 164 in birth rates in 2022-23. Overall, the Central area saw the biggest decrease (106).

Area	5 years	4 years	3 years	2 years	1 year	Variance
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2021-22 to 2022-23
West	933	837	814	785	760	-25
Central	1007	1026	1006	1017	911	-106
East	673	659	586	554	521	-33
	2613	**2522**	**2406**	**2356**	**2192**	**-164**

The table below shows the breakdown of the areas at ward level

West	Central	East
Britwell	Baylis & Salt Hill	Colnbrook and Poyle
Cippenham Green	Chalvey	Langley Foxborough
Cippenham Manor	Elliman	Langley Marish
Cippenham Village	Herschel Park	Langley Meads
Farnham	Manor Park and Stoke	Langley St Mary's
Haymill	Slough Central	Upton
Northborough and Lynch Hill Valley	Upton Lea	
	Wexham Court	

The most significant factor affecting demand for places is the number of births in Slough. The graph below shows the number of births each year since 1997. Numbers rose steadily from 1999 until 2010-11 and 2011-12 when numbers were at their peak. Since then, the trend for birth numbers has been reducing and are forecasted to continue to decline.
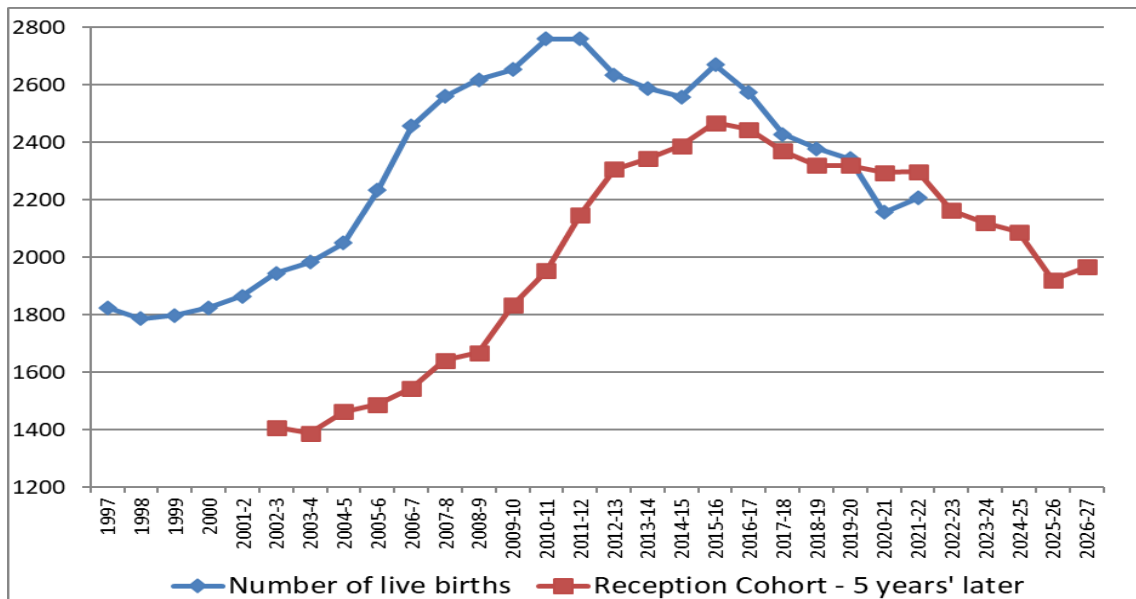
Sources: ONS live birth data and School Census

7. Wider Impact and Local Context, Council Corporate Plan, and Children and Young People Plan Priorities

The early years and childcare duties require local authorities to work in partnership across a range of agencies and departments. The duties include a requirement to pool budgets where appropriate. They reflect the multigenerational impact that families, and indeed wider communities, can and should have on our youngest children; that our children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of a wider society.

The LGA support process has aimed to engage senior leaders in conversations about how families can be supported through direct strategic linkage, across adults and community services as well as children's services (for example, housing, regeneration, employment and community development). In short, the greater the two way conversation across these agendas, the greater the long term sustainable impact on children and families and, in turn, communities and society at large.

We know that getting it right from the earliest stage is critical to achieving these aims. Good early years services and childcare provision enables communities to break a cycle of deprivation. As Sally Hogg from the 1001 Day's campaign states,

'Society is what happens when babies grow up'.

During the support process, senior managers engaged in conversations around the impact early years can have on the wider council priorities. It was acknowledged that early years should be seen as a key stage in its own right and that the impact of not creating focus,

investing and coordinating services early enough could create missed opportunities for children, families and communities as a whole.

The Council's strategy 'A Fresh Start 2023-2027' has defined the overarching purpose as :

"Closing the healthy life expectancy gap, by focusing on children

Slough has poor healthy life expectancy compared to neighbouring areas and one of the youngest populations in the country. A child's early development and experiences play a key role in determining future health and wellbeing. We will work closely with our partners and our community to improve outcomes for all Slough's children and give them a good start in life. Together, we will work to improve the conditions for families in Slough, seeking to enhance our borough's built and natural environment, as well as striving to improve the social determinants of health such as education, employment, income and crime. We will listen to the voices of children and young people and ensure they have a say in the future of our town."

3 Strategic priorities are identified

1 A borough for children and young people to thrive
2 A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives
3 A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough

The first priority aimed to create a place for children to thrive as they grow states that the borough commits to;

"Providing quality services for vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people Tackling high rates of child obesity Increasing children and young people's participation in decisions that affect them and in shaping the future of Slough"

The plan acknowledges that early years are of fundamental importance in shaping future education, employment and income outcomes, which collectively determine 30% of health and wellbeing.

It also recognises the importance of children's voice stating that children and young people have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, to be heard and to be taken seriously *(Article 16, UNCRC).*

Measures of success in relation to Early Years include:

* *Percentage of eligible 2 year olds receiving 15 hours of free early years education or childcare*
* *Percentage of children aged 2.5 years who received a child development review*

Commitments around Equalities in relation to Early Years recognise vulnerability both from a perspective of SEND and disadvantage

1 Providing quality services for vulnerable children and those with SEND
Recognises the diverse nature of Slough and that more needs to be done to promote equality

2 Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people
Commitment to putting equality and inclusion at the heart of role as an employer by supporting workforce to deliver this plan. Objective to recruit and develop a skilled, committed and inclusive workforce, where diversity is valued and, which is representative of local communities.

This document provides a firm commitment to embedding the early years agenda within strategic and operational activity.

Slough Well Being Strategy 2020- 2025 Health and Wellbeing Plan

The Slough Wellbeing Strategy includes a priority around 'Starting Well' which focuses on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It Is intended that The Starting Well theme is led by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

Slough SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024

The SEND and inclusion Strategy vision states:

"Through inclusive practice all children and young people are happy, healthy, safe, take an active part in their community and have fulfilled lives."

A positive of this strategy is that it explained at the end of the document that if you would like help with the translation of the document to call a particular number in 5 languages.

Of the other strategies reviewed the only other one that included a reference to translation was the **Slough Well-being strategy 2020-2025.**

Inclusive Growth Strategy 2020 -2025

The Inclusive Growth Strategy 2020 -2025 does not reference Early Years so could be strengthened. As a very comprehensive document that goes through the strategy in considerable detail, it misses an opportunity in not considering the need for childcare or include it in the priorities as a fundamental aspect of supporting residents into work.

8. Our Starting Point, Supply and Demand

This section of our report aims to support a data-driven needs-led approach to an early years and childcare strategy. We will consider the current supply of services, and open a dialogue

around how that might meet our strategic aims alongside the needs of our families (through a population needs analysis).

8.1 Current Services (Our Current Supply)

A good range of services exist for our pre-birth to 5 population, spanning a range of universal and targeted support; such as midwifery, health visiting, children's centres, information, LA EY and early help services and our early years and childcare sector. They include services from a range of other departments within the council as well as partners. Many services accessed by families will of course be more generic to families (communities) as a whole; for example, employment support, housing, libraries and GP surgeries. Services are coordinated and delivered through the four Children's Centres, which create opportunities for co-location and joint working.

Good retention of staff, excellent working relationships and a will to continuously improve are evident. Staff we excited and enthusiastic to share their experiences and ideas in the process for view. This reflects a culture of good change management and engagement in the services.

Slough, like all areas, face capacity challenges.

At the moment decision making is delegated to the service leads with little connection to the strategic decision makers. A Children and Young Persons Board exists which reports directly to the Health and Wellbeing Board. Whilst the cooperate and Wellbeing plans mention Early Years as a priority, there are no systems for reporting or decision making back to the responsible bodies, which create a disconnect. Greater connection to external agencies and services for adults could ensure an even better fit with a strategy based on the Childcare Act.

At a strategic level, a single post holder is proposed managing the strategic direction of travel, and the commissioning remit of the LA. As previously identified, it is also a requirement to manage external relationships, partnerships and joint commissioning, to maximise opportunities for joint working, efficient collaboration and seamless services for families.

An early years service brings together key elements of the statutory duties in a constructive and coordinated way. Sector support, such as quality improvement, inclusion, business support, and sufficiency agendas, sit alongside inclusion support for families.

There are elements of delivery in several of the directorates and departments. Some services are situated within the Partnerships and Social Care teams, whereas support directly to the early years sector is situated within Education.

There will be inevitable overlap with other service areas (for example, safeguarding) and understanding and defining the matrix (roles and responsibilities) will be key for good joint working.

The current separation of health services could create an artificial division (seam) for families. It will be essential, for example, that the health commissioner is ensuring health targets and

measures are led by the early years strategy, for joint working at the point of delivery to be possible. Commissioning arrangements (i.e. contracts and performance management) should therefore reflect this.

Excellent relationships exist with the early years and childcare sector locally, however the market remain unstable, and further changes are anticipated as the national expansion rolls out.

In Slough there is a mixed economy of providers who each offer a range of services, and this can be somewhat directed by the different demographics within the town. The trends in participation can vary from one Area to another, for instance the East Area has a much higher proportion of families accessing fee paying childcare provision compared to the Central and West Areas. This area therefore has a higher degree of 'childcare providers' offering full day care all year round. The settings in this area also tend to have higher numbers of children on their waiting lists, and this is expected to rise dramatically when the Working Parent entitlements for 2 year olds and babies from 9 months old comes into effect. The Central Area has the highest number of under 5 year olds living in the area, yet the take up of funded early education for 2 year olds is relatively low and there is little demand for childcare.

It has been historically difficult for the early years sector to provide a large number of places for children aged under 2 years due to the high staff to child ratio (1 to 3) and affordability. Predicting the take up of childcare for this age group is also difficult to assess as some families opt to access informal childcare with family and friends and this can vary from year to year.

Since 2019/20 Slough had seen places decreasing for under 2 year olds but the picture this year shows an increase of 149 places (44.74%) from last year's 333 places.

Slough is working closely with the sector to ensure that places increase in time for the rollout of 30 hour funding for 2 year olds and under 2s. There will continue to be close monitoring of places for children under 2, particularly in line with national changes such as government policy relating to maternity/paternity, funded early education and help with childcare costs.

Demand for childcare and in particular 2, 3 and 4 year old and 30 hours places are highly dynamic and is likely to fluctuate as we continue go through this recovery phase and the implementation of the new entitlements.

There has also been a decline in provision for school age children which is hope to be reversed with the national expansion.

The trends in take up of Early Years and Childcare are still unstable and the scale of this impact continues to develop, especially in conjunction with Brexit, the war in Ukraine, and rising inflation.

The number of claimants of Universal Credit is falling and therefore the number of claimants eligible for 2 year old funding is on the decline. (Source: DWP Universal Credit official statistics)

Childcare providers are continuing to rebuild their businesses in what is still seen to be the recovery phase of the pandemic, making decisions on their viability and sustainability which will impact the local market.

At the time of writing the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment noted the following gaps in provision.

Gaps in provision
- Registered childcare is available in every ward in Slough.
- The highest number of settings is in the Britwell and Cippenham Green wards, with 15 and 17 respectively
- The number of providers has decreased by 5, taking the number of settings from 190 to 185. The main loss was in the Childminder sector, where numbers dropped from 86 to 82, a loss of 4, and Children's Centres, dropping from 8 to 5. 1 Pre-School opened.
- Of the remaining 82 Childminders. 9 are inactive (not offering any care), and 30 have been providing Funded Early Education.
- Every other setting bar 1 nursery class of a maintained school provided Funded Early Education in the Autumn term 2023.
- Bright Horizons in Northborough & Lynch Hill Valley ward and the West area closed in December 2023 (after this snapshot was taken), with a loss of 62 places
- Slough has seen an increase in early years and childcare places of 733 to 5,469 from the previous assessment, an increase of 15.48%. However, the CSA previous to 2022 showed 5,705 places, so Slough's number of places is still lower than pre-pandemic levels
- Based on population size and local knowledge we are identifying insufficient places in 8 wards in the town: Cippenham Manor, Cippenham Village, Elliman, Farnham, Haymill, Langley Foxborough, Slough Central and Upton. However, as previously stated, parents in Slough appear to be happy to travel to take up their Funded Early Learning entitlement.
- There appears to be a shortfall of 2 year old places in the Central and West areas, however there is a surplus of places in the east, leaving a net surplus figure of 89.
- There is a shortfall of places in the East, but surplus in the Central and West areas gives us a surplus of 263 places for 3&4 year olds
- The difference between registered places and places currently being offered is 1,110. This could mean that there is existing capacity in the market should demand increase, especially in relation to the new entitlements for 2 year olds and under 2s.

8.2. Service Design and Positioning in Local Authorities

The positioning of early years and childcare services should reflect that it is an area of priority locally, which warrants discussion and decision making in a balanced way, alongside other areas of service delivery. Positioning alongside services such as safeguarding and education can dictate the direction of travel, discussion and decision-making, allocation and best use of resources and focus (achievement of aims). At present, some services (within the broader children's service) are defined by place, some by age and some by need/theme. Principles of

design should be applied, where possible, across the children and young people's agenda, to pro-actively promote joint working.

Local authorities which have situated their early years and childcare services as an equal partner to schools and safeguarding agendas, are better able to:

- Commit and coordinate resources which invest to save
- Ensure connection with, and impact on, related agendas; for example, safeguarding (which can also impact on Ofsted outcomes)
- Perform better for children and families
- Make decisions which impact on compliance quicker

Aligning line management (and commissioning) arrangements, to ensure an overarching service, could enhance overall direction towards the Childcare Act Aims. The Act suggests a service structure. The Sufficiency elements will also ensure that market management levers are applied to childcare for over 5s (as per the Act) to ensure support for parents to work (economic recovery, reducing poverty and supporting child outcomes).

Shared aims and a supporting framework based on the Act could further secure the excellent positive relationships in place already, along with ensuring a set of seamless services (as felt by families).

A Proposal for Service Design
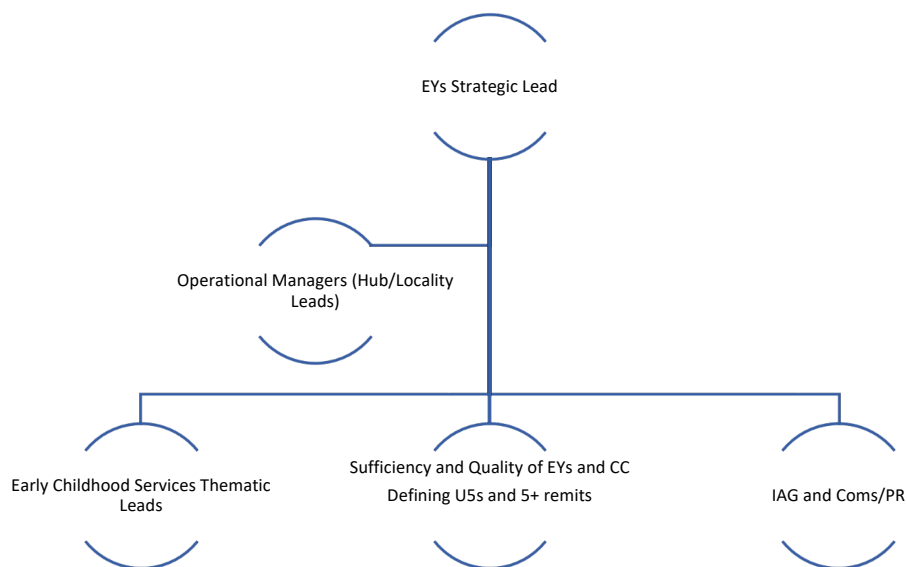
The diagram does not show services which support inclusion which would be integrated across the whole. Separate services for inclusion can often be more difficult to integrate with universal provision, and our service design should reflect our aims for structure to support delivery.

We are required in legislation to facilitate partnership working with a host of agencies to achieve our aims. Health, Job Centre Plus and the Voluntary Sector are all critical partners we are dependent on for compliance. Managing relationships and influencing change is, therefore, an ongoing and vital requirement of our Strategic Lead, as shown in the next diagram.

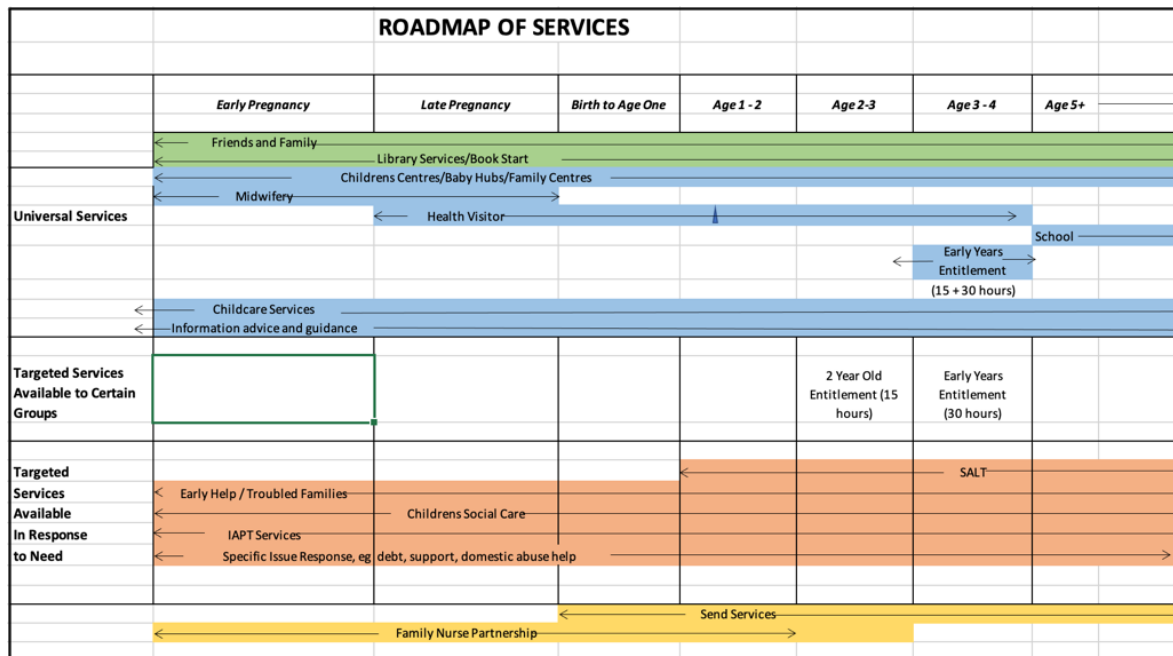The diagram illustrates just some of the key departments and agencies with whom the Strategic Lead relates and ultimately could pool budgets with.

```
                          EYS and CC
                         Strategic Lead

  Housing    Employment    Health    Communities    VCS    Libraries
```
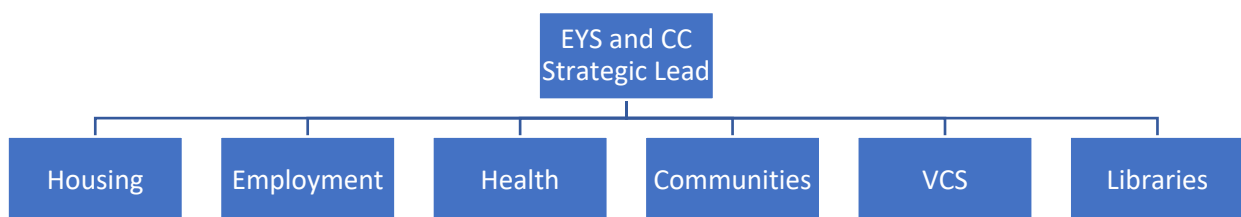
An Early Years and Childcare Strategic Lead also has a key objective to design, deliver, work with and commission a range of services, which are still evolving. They also enable a focus on applying for and attracting new funding, to continue to grow the preventative element of children services; in particular in the early years. We believe our structure shows that we are aware of and ready for our next policy changes, including but not exclusively:

- The development of the Start for Life and Family Hubs programmes (for which our established centres will be critical to both delivery and legal compliance). This will dictate our mode of delivery at a local level and require matrix management to successfully steer multi-agency/cross-departmental working whilst retaining essential expertise.
- The continuing development of childcare (for example, the holiday activities and food programme, supporting the sufficiency of childcare for school age children and potential reforms to the early years sector workforce).
- Commitments to expand early education in the future, made by all political parties.

The services will also reflect our needs analysis and strategic priorities. For example, balancing our universal services and touch points with more targeted offers of support. Our pathway of services will be mapped to create an open and transparent roadmap, building on the following:
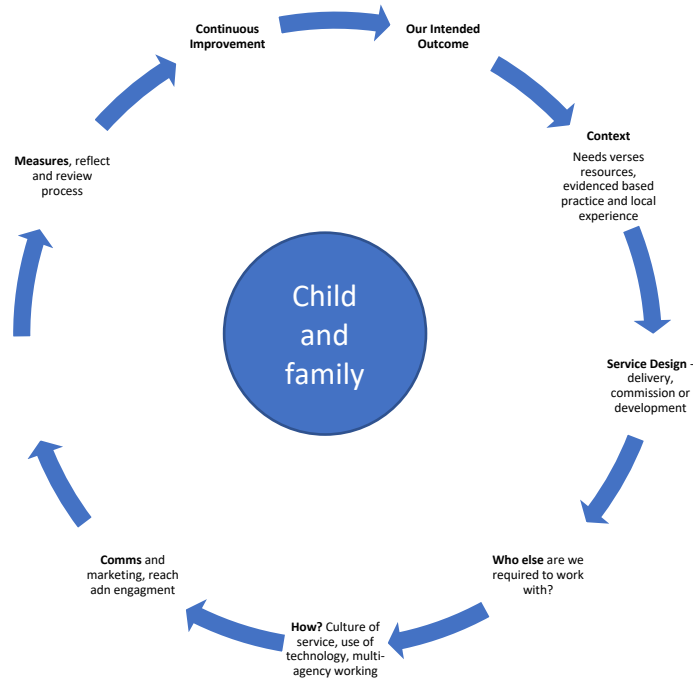
Diagram to show how we will ensure services and touch points support our family journey.
(A larger scale diagram can be found at Appendix 5)

ROADMAP OF SERVICES

	Early Pregnancy	Late Pregnancy	Birth to Age One	Age 1-2	Age 2-3	Age 3-4	Age 5+
Universal Services	Friends and Family						
	Library Services/Book Start						
	Childrens Centres/Baby Hubs/Family Centres						
	Midwifery						
		Health Visitor					School
						Early Years Entitlement (15 + 30 hours)	
	Childcare Services						
	Information advice and guidance						
Targeted Services Available to Certain Groups					2 Year Old Entitlement (15 hours)	Early Years Entitlement (30 hours)	
Targeted Services Available In Response to Need					SALT		
	Early Help / Troubled Families						
	Childrens Social Care						
	IAPT Services						
	Specific Issue Response, eg debt, support, domestic abuse help						
			Send Services				
	Family Nurse Partnership						

In making these suggestions, we seek to take into account the learning from COVID about smarter working. This has been highlighted by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (April 2020, updated September 2020), *The impact of COVID-19 on child health services,* and by H M Government (2021) *The Best Start for Life A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days, The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report.*

> *The increased volunteering, virtual multi-agency working and efficiencies created by reducing unnecessary physically face to face meetings and home visits may all be useful to include in a framework going forward. Incorporating digital familiarity within the public sector, digital access for families and co-production with families are also identified as vital to creating resilient services.*

As we re-align and re-design each service area, we will consider a cycle to ensure the most effective and efficient ways of working:

The diagram shows a circular process around a central "Child and family" circle, with the following stages connected by arrows in a cycle:
- Continuous Improvement
- Our Intended Outcome
- Context — Needs verses resources, evidenced based practice and local experience
- Service Design - delivery, commission or development
- Who else are we required to work with?
- How? Culture of service, use of technology, multi-agency working
- Comms and marketing, reach adn engagment
- Measures, reflect and review process

In service design, we should also consider the needs of working families throughout. There are a high number of benefit-dependent, low-income, working households in the area and our service design can be critical to whether families are enabled or prevented from entering employment. This can be particularly true for families of children with disabilities. It seems that, the higher the need for support from services, the less likely a family will be able to generate income and lift themselves out of poverty, if we are not mindful of how our services are designed.

8.3 Demand, Population Needs Analysis

Good service planning and the planning of resources are dependent on understanding what we are required to deliver (secure) and **who** our key customer groups are. A good population needs analysis will consider the number of children and families who are entitled to our services at both a universal and more targeted level. Understanding the needs of these key populations, broken into key groups, will be critical to ensuring a preventative, cost-effective agenda and the best outcomes for children.

The LA has a vast amount of data already being collected and a good commitment to using it well for service improvement. A single dashboard could be developed, which brings together a range of existing data to better understand the needs of children and families in the area. The process of creating the dashboard could, in itself, facilitate joint working between a range of departments, and better align service leads and the data collection staff.

Good population data exists through the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, broken down into Early Years and School Age children. Ethnicity data is also available. This information could inform wider service planning, particularly if an in-depth sufficiency assessment of provision for children with SEND were further developed.

[Slough Insights](#) reports key headlines for the area;

- Slough has a diverse, young population.
- Slough has pockets of severe deprivation.
- Slough has high levels of overcrowding and the largest average household size in England and Wales.
- There has been a larger increase in economically inactive people than active people in Slough since 2011.
- Slough has a high proportion of children in low income families and pensioners in poverty in Berkshire.
- There is a gap in income of £84 per week between Slough residents and those who commute into Slough for work.
- There are high levels of crime, including violent crime.
- Slough has generally good levels of educational attainment but is below the national average for post-16 education and qualifications.

Data is broken down into population, built and natural environment, work and labour market and vulnerability.

All of this enables a thorough and comprehensive analysis of who our most vulnerable families are, and sets the scene for a solid commissioning cycle to meet need.

[Slough's population](#) is one of the most ethnically diverse in the United Kingdom,[4][5] attracting people from across the country and the world for labour since the 1920s, which has helped shape it into a major trading centre. In 2017, unemployment stood at 1.4%,[6] one-third the UK average of 4.5%.[7]

According to the [2021 census](#), Slough is a large town with a population of 158,400 of which 46.9% of the population was [Asian](#), 35.9% [white](#), 7.5% [black](#), 4% [mixed race](#), 1.2% [Arab](#) and 4.5% of other ethnic heritage.[37] This makes the town one of the most ethnically diverse local authorities in the country outside of London.

In the last 20 or so years, there has been a major shift from a manufacturing to an information-based economy, with the closure of many factories (some of which had been in Slough for many decades). The factories are rapidly being replaced by office buildings. Hundreds of major companies have sited in Slough Trading Estate over the years, with its proximity to London [Heathrow Airport](#) and good motorway connections being attractive.

At the time of writing data for low income working and worklessness in families was not available.

9. Performance Management

To achieve the challenging aspirations set out in the local strategy as it develops, robust performance management will be key. The approach to this, however, is a pragmatic one; with resources stretched, the challenge is to use staff time to work with families rather than collect additional data. There is a wealth of data already in the Local Authority and the aim of the performance management framework will be to bring this together, in order to highlight what is working well and where to focus improvement. The framework below uses existing measures commonly collated by LAs:

- Commissioning arrangements and performance management indications
- Analysis already in place for other government monitoring (e.g., the Early Intervention Foundation Matrix)
- Data already submitted to central government (e.g., Foundation Stage Profile and Health Data)
- Data already collected by individual teams (e.g., time taken to complete SEND Plans)

The development of this framework could, again, as a task in its own right, facilitate joint working and shared-ownership, building on the population needs analysis described in the previous section.

As an overview and example of how the LA use existing information, and begin joint working on a performance management dashboard, the following table has been developed to support legal compliance.

Priority and legislative requirement and summary *(numbering relates to the Childcare Act legal section heading)*	Strategic Objective How will we meet this legal requirement?
1. Improve the well-being of young children. Reducing inequalities between young children in the area. Well-being includes: • Physical, mental health, emotional • Protection from harm and neglect • Education, training and recreation • Social and economic well-being **2. The Requirements to deliver Children's Centre Services** Requirement for agencies to work together and start to integrate services; this requirement was strengthened in 2009 by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act. Section 5A of this Act brought in the requirement that English	Our objective will be to improve the well-being of young children through good quality services that are well understood, easy to access and support families' needs; - To secure integrated early childhood services with seamless transition from universal, to preventive, to targeted services, meeting needs in the most efficient and cost-effective way; **We will demonstrate this by:** • Reducing the inequality in life expectancy at birth (PHE) • Reducing the number of children in absolute low income families (PHE) • Increasing the number of children achieving a good level of development aged 2-2.5 years (PHE)

Local Authorities must *'so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need.'* Local need was defined as the need of parents, prospective parents and children.	• Measuring school readiness – children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception year (PHE) • Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest of the cohort (DfE)
3. To secure integrated early childhood services Duty to facilitate and work together with partners to ensure children, parents, (including prospective parents) and families have access to services from the partners. Partners include: • Early Years provision. • Social services. • Health. • Employment and training. • Information and assistance (Section 12 FIS). Within this section, the LA has a duty also to identify those parents who could benefit from the services, but may not access them, (for whatever reason) and encourage parents to access services.	
6. To secure sufficient childcare for working parents Ensuring that there are sufficient childcare places, including for children with SEN and disabilities for working parents and those parents who wish to access education or training as a way into work **7. Secure free of charge early years provision** This is around ensuring sufficient places for those children in receipt of the funding. Sections 8-10 describe the discharging of the sufficiency duties and section 11 the repeal of the childcare sufficiency assessment duties. **13. To provide information, advice and training to childcare providers** Providing advice and training to persons providing, and those who intend to provide, childcare in their area and who are registered)	We secure sufficient high quality childcare and early years provision, working with providers from all sectors. **We will demonstrate this by:** • Monitoring the number of childcare places on the Early Years Register (Ofsted) and any changes • Monitoring the number of non Early Years registered settings and change in last 12 months (Ofsted) • Increasing the number of childcare settings with a good or outstanding Ofsted rating • Increasing the percentage of eligible 2-year-olds accessing early education entitlement • Increasing the percentage of 3 and 4 year-olds accessing early education • Ensuring robust sufficieincy planning for children with SEND

12. To provide information, advice and assistance to parents or prospective parents Must establish and maintain a service providing information, advice and assistance to parents, prospective parents, children and young people.	We will provide information, advice and assistance that is clear, easy to find and easy to understand. *Once performance management indicators are agreed, 'dashboard' indicators will be available here (e.g., annual mystery shop? Parent feedback loop?)*
Inclusion is a cross cutting theme in the Childcare Act, specifically: **Section 1** requires Local Authorities to improve well-being and reduce inequalities between young children in their area, so work done on planning and commissioning childcare must all be aimed at these goals. **Section 3** requires Local Authorities to promote childcare to parents who may not otherwise access it, which will clearly include parents of disabled children. **Section 6** imposes a duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient childcare in their area for parents who wish to work or study in relation to work, so far as is 'reasonably practicable'. Section 6(2) states that, in deciding whether childcare is sufficient, Local Authorities must have regard to the needs of parents for 'the provision of childcare which is suitable for disabled children'. **Section 8** gives Local Authorities a power to assist any person who provides childcare. This includes providing financial assistance. So, if an adjustment needed by a particular childcare provider to allow a disabled child to access its services goes beyond what is reasonable, then section 8 will allow the Local Authority to meet some or all of the cost	We will be inclusive in everything we do. **We will measure this by:** • Increasing the percentage of Education, Health and Care Assessments completed in the 20 Week Statutory timescale • Improving the performance of Children with SEND support outcomes in EYFSP • Narrowing the EYFS attainment gap for children eligible for FSM, those with SEND and those from minority ethnic groups • Specifically; measuring sufficiency for children with SEND, as a distinct part of the sufficiency assessment, e.g., through identifying take up in this group compared with the overall population, provider surveys and consultation, family engagement and feedback from partners.
Workforce development **something about the new accredited SENCO training?**	Our objective will be to enable, celebrate and support our staff, to continuously improve. **We will measure this by:** • Staff surveys • CDP opportunities • Feedback from families •

Transitions	Our objective will be to ensure that our pathways into, out of and across different services promote good life skills and the ability to manage change.
	We will measure this by
	• Reducing placement movement (setting/school/service)
	• Reducing exclusions
	• Reducing complaints
	• Parent surveys

10. Risks

The most obvious risks, at present, are that any delay in identifying and supporting needs which could be met early creates a potential risk of escalating these and other needs (as well a costs) later on. This scenario increases strain on the child and whole family, as well as increasing the cost of publicly funded support later on.

Nationally, our serious case reviews are highest within the 0 to 5 age group and even higher within the group amongst 0 to 2-year-olds. Universal services, from conception to 2 in particular, can support healthy parenting habits, positive attachments, and good relationships with services from before birth. Early identification becomes possible only with universal services in place, and universal support can also support good take-up of early years and childcare delivered in the PVI sector, including the early years entitlements which, in turn, act as a safeguard. Arguably, no other services can currently offer 15 and 30 hours a week of high-quality intervention for a least advantaged child at age 2, and for all children at 3 and 4.

There are additional, and more immediately felt, risks of legal challenge too, from families not knowing about, or not able to access, their legal entitlement to 15 and 30 hours of free nursery education, alongside the challenge of discrimination for families of children with SEND.

Families of children with SEND tend to access far less of the early years entitlements, and access services which tend to be during work hours. This can often lead to escalation of needs and a subsequent request/need for special school provision, need for statutory school support (EHCP), part time or deferred entry to school and, consequently, create a barrier to employment for those families over a number of years. The LA should continue to look at data sets for this group in particular, as the socio-economic status of these groups is likely to be much less advantaged than the population as a whole. It is likely to be the case that the current focus potentially contributes to holding our families in poverty, and our most disadvantaged families accessing the least amount of their legal entitlements.

The cost to these families, in terms of their entitlements to 15 and 30 hours of early education and childcare, and a loss of income through very limited access to employment, should be

considered. We know that maternal education, mental health and income level impact heavily on child outcomes.

There is, of course, a more immediate financial risk to the local authority from potential legal challenge. The cost of an early education place, for example, can be approximately £4000 per year per child. The cost of legal proceedings often far outweighs the cost of a place, and the LA also loses the direct income stream gained from the take-up of early education places (in particular the retained element). For example, for every 10 children who do not take up their early years entitlements approximately £40,000 of income is lost to both the LA and sector (and within that the retained element). It is also worth remembering that the vast majority of early years and childcare provision is delivered by the private and voluntary sector who, in turn, attract a high percentage of additional funding, generated through fees, grants and other contributions. This makes investment in activity to support good pathways *to*, and maximum take-up *of,* the early years entitlement vital for efficiencies, as well as being critical to improved outcomes.

For more information on the Business Case for Assessing and Securing Sufficiency for Children with SEND please refer to Appendix 4.

11. Themes and Recommendations Emerging from the Engagement Sessions

Combined Summary of Feedback from Managers, Staff, Early Years, Schools Providers, and Families

Introduction
This section consolidates feedback from three key stakeholder groups: managers and staff, early years and schools providers, and families. The engagement sessions were held to review the integration and effectiveness of early childhood services under the Childcare Act 2006, focusing on improving outcomes for children, ensuring sufficient childcare provision, and providing necessary information to families. A summary of common threads can be found at the end of this section.

Feedback from Managers and Staff

Key Issues
1. **Challenges in Delivering a Seamless Pathway of Services (Pre-birth to 5)**
   - Increasing SEND and Complex Needs: Growing numbers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and more complex needs.
   - Insufficient Resources: Financial constraints and staffing shortages impacting service delivery.
   - High Staff Turnover: Affects continuity and professional development.
   - Hard-to-Reach Communities: Difficulty engaging these communities and overreliance on digital solutions.
   - Silo Working: Limited communication and collaboration between services.
2. **Recruitment and Retention Crisis**

- o Workforce Shortages: National recruitment challenges exacerbated locally by a transient population.
- o Undervaluation and Overwork: Providers feel undervalued, overworked, and pressured by inspections.
3. **Sufficiency and Accessibility of Childcare**
   - o Limited Childcare Places: Growing demand with limited availability.
   - o Cultural and Financial Barriers: High rental costs and cultural barriers limit access.
   - o Parental Awareness: Lack of knowledge about available services and entitlements.
4. **Family and Community Challenges**
   - o Financial Hardship: Complex funding entitlements and financial constraints.
   - o Health and Developmental Support: Insufficient health visitor support and developmental checks.
   - o Parental Anxiety: Increased anxiety and differing expectations regarding child behaviour.
5. **Communication and Information Dissemination**
   - o Information Overload: Families struggle to navigate the abundance of information available.

Good Practices
1. **Effective Partnerships and Communication**
   - o Trusted Spaces: Libraries and children's centres with skilled staff.
   - o Effective Referrals: Strong relationships facilitate effective referrals, especially in speech therapy and audiology.
2. **Support Services and Training**
   - o High-Quality CPD: Comprehensive training for families, practitioners, and professionals.
   - o Community Engagement: Health buses and early help resources support engagement.

Recommendations
1. **Enhance Recruitment and Retention Efforts**
   - o Develop strategies to attract and retain professionals, especially for specialist roles.
   - o Provide robust support and CPD opportunities.
2. **Improve Service Integration and Collaboration**
   - o Foster better communication and reduce silo working.
   - o Implement a coordinated approach leveraging data for resource allocation.
3. **Increase Accessibility and Inclusivity**
   - o Streamline the Local Offer for user-friendly information.
   - o Expand translation services for diverse languages and cultures.
4. **Strengthen Community Engagement**
   - o Enhance outreach using trusted community groups and spaces and health buses.
   - o Increase funding and support for specialist provisions.
5. **Leverage Digital Solutions**

- o Improve digital platforms and utilize social media for clear communication.
- o Maintain and update online resources with dedicated staff.

6. **Promote Early Years Services**
   - o Use popular media to promote services and raise the profile of providers.
   - o Develop strategies to measure the impact on children's outcomes.

7. **Health and Developmental Support**
   - o Develop more children's centers and health visitor clinics for timely checks and advice.

Feedback from Early Years and Schools Providers

Key Issues
1. **Challenges Facing Providers**
   - o SEND and Complex Needs: Increasing demands and insufficient resources.
   - o Workforce Issues: Difficulty in recruiting and retaining a quality workforce.
   - o Resource Constraints: Limited childcare places and growing demand.
   - o Family and Community Challenges: Financial hardship, lack of reliable health advice, and increased parental anxiety.

2. **Local Support: What Works and What's Missing**
   - o Support Availability: SEN team, family support workers, and CPD offerings are valuable.
   - o Gaps in Support: Limited resources, systemic delays, and inadequate information dissemination.

Good Practices
1. **Innovative Solutions**
   - o Sensory areas, diverse activities, and multilingual support.

2. **Community Engagement**
   - o Libraries and children's centres as trusted spaces.
   - o Effective referrals and timely applications for EHC plans.

Recommendations
1. **Enhanced Recruitment and Retention**
   - o Develop strategies to attract and retain professionals.
   - o Improve job satisfaction with better support structures.

2. **Improved Service Integration**
   - o Foster better communication and collaboration.
   - o Implement a coordinated approach for resource allocation.

3. **Increased Accessibility and Inclusivity**
   - o Streamline information and expand translation services.

4. **Community and Family Support**
   - o Enhance targeted approaches to link with community and voluntary groups to support outreach to the hard to reach communities
   - o Increase funding for specialist provisions.

5. **Digital Solutions and Information Dissemination**
   - o Improve digital platforms and use social media for communication.

6. **Promotion and Awareness**
   - o Raise the profile of childcare providers.

  o Use data for messaging about service availability.
 7. Health and Developmental Support
  o Develop more children's centres and health visitor clinics.

Feedback from Families

Introduction
11 families engaged across five groups, with parents largely on maternity leave and children ranging from infancy to preschool years. Sessions reviewed early childhood service integration, sufficiency of childcare provision, and information availability.
Common Issues and Feedback

 1. Challenges of Parenting
  o Information Access: Difficulty in receiving timely and relevant information.
  o Work-Life Balance: Challenges in balancing work and parenting, exacerbated by commuting.
  o Isolation and Lack of Support: Pandemic-induced isolation and reliance on self-researched information.
 2. Journey Through Early Childhood Services
  o Midwife Support: Generally positive, especially for breastfeeding support.
  o Health Visitor Services: Varied accessibility, particularly during the pandemic.
  o Information Sources: Reliance on Google and personal networks for baby groups and activities.
 3. Support Utilised
  o Children's Centres and Library Sessions: Valued, especially when free.
  o Social Media and Online Resources: Frequently used for information.
  o Health Visiting Services: Appreciated when accessible but reported inconsistent support.
 4. Experience with Early Years/Childcare Provision
  o Limited Knowledge: Many parents are not yet accessing formal childcare.
  o Childcare Entitlements: Awareness exists but practical information is lacking.
 5. Finding Services
  o Reliance on Google and Social Media: Heavy reliance for finding services.
  o Desire for Consistency: Parents want more consistent information delivery.

Summary of Challenges
 1. Information Overload: Too much information at once leads to important details being forgotten.
 2. Access to Information: Reliance on self-researched information due to professional support gaps.
 3. Service Accessibility: Physical distance and costs of activities pose barriers.

Good Practices
 1. Children's Centre Activities: Highly valued for providing safe, engaging environments.
 2. Health Visitor Support: Positive when accessible, offering useful advice.

Recommendations

1. **Timely Information Sharing**
   - Improve the timing of information delivery, focusing on antenatal and early postnatal periods.
2. **Digital Communication**
   - Use SMS messaging and digital platforms for age-appropriate information.
3. **Local Access**
   - Increase the number of local Children's Centres and free or low-cost activities.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity**
   - Address language barriers and cultural diversity.
5. **Integrated Services**
   - Foster collaboration between early years, midwifery, health visiting, and childcare providers.
6. **Strengths and Needs Assessment**
   - Conduct assessments to identify strengths and gaps in services, considering pandemic impacts.

Summary of Common Threads in Feedback from Managers, Staff, Early Years, Schools Providers, and Families

1. **Challenges in Service Delivery and Integration**
   - Increasing SEND and Complex Needs: All groups reported a rise in children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and complex needs. Insufficient resources and support were major barriers to effective service delivery.
   - Workforce Issues: Difficulty in recruiting and retaining quality staff, high turnover rates, and a lack of continuous professional development (CPD) were consistent concerns.
   - Resource Constraints: Limited childcare places and financial resources were frequently mentioned, impacting the ability to meet demand and provide quality care.
2. **Access to Information**
   - Information Overload: Parents and providers noted that the abundance of information, especially immediately post-birth, can be overwhelming and lead to important details being forgotten.
   - Navigating Information: Both families and providers struggled with accessing timely and relevant information about services and resources. Reliance on self-researched information due to gaps in professional guidance was common.
3. **Support and Engagement**
   - Community Engagement: Trusted community spaces like libraries and children's centers were highly valued for their supportive environments and engagement activities.
   - Health Visitor Support: Inconsistent access to health visiting services was a concern, with positive experiences noted when support was available.
4. **Family and Community Challenges**
   - Financial Hardship: Complex funding entitlements and financial constraints were major barriers for families accessing childcare and support services.

- o Isolation: The pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation among parents, with limited in-person support available.

5. **Recruitment and Retention**
   - o Undervaluation and Overwork: Providers felt undervalued and overworked, contributing to high turnover and recruitment challenges.
   - o National Recruitment Issues: Local recruitment challenges were compounded by broader national issues in attracting early years professionals.

6. **Recommendations for Improvement**
   - o Enhanced Recruitment and Retention: Strategies to attract and retain professionals, improve job satisfaction, and offer robust CPD opportunities were recommended.
   - o Improved Service Integration: Better communication and collaboration across services to ensure a seamless support network.
   - o Increased Accessibility and Inclusivity: Streamlining information, expanding translation services, and increasing the number of local children's centres and free activities were suggested.
   - o Timely Information Sharing: Providing well-timed information, particularly during antenatal and early postnatal periods, was emphasized.
   - o Digital Solutions: Utilizing digital platforms and social media for information dissemination and communication was recommended.
   - o Cultural Sensitivity: Addressing language barriers and cultural diversity to meet the needs of all families.

By addressing these common threads, the council can work towards improving early years and childcare services, thereby better supporting families and improving outcomes for children in Slough.

12. Mystery Shopping online support for families and providers

This section describes a mystery shopping exercise conducted through the review. The exercise aims to provide pointers for how families and providers experience searching for support, and aims to help shape future improvements to information strategies locally.

Mystery Shopper from a Parents Perspective
Initial search terms for 'things to do for kids in Slough, resulted initially in activities that would carry a cost, such as Go Ape, Windsor Castle, Salt Hill Activity Centre, however further down the list there was a website with Free Events and Attractions in Slough, which when clicked on did have a variety of parks, walks and museums in a colourful display that was useful. There was also a calendar of local events happening in some of the listed venues.

When the search was changed with reference to 'support for me and my baby in Slough' I was directed to a list that included Parenting Support in Slough via Slough Family Information Service, Home-Start, Slough's Parenting Offer, which was quite helpful. Interestingly it also threw up a selection of people also asked questions around safeguarding and a 24hr helpline.

Whatever the reason, **Home-Start Slough** provides non-judgemental, practical and emotional support to help build your family's confidence and ability to cope. By getting the support you need when you need it, your day-to-day family life and your children's future will be so much brighter.

Home-Start Slough
https://homestartberkshireeast.org.uk › get-support ⋮
Get support | Home-Start Berkshire East

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How do I contact Slough mash?	⌄
What is the 24 hour helpline for parents in Scotland?	⌄
When should I contact mash?	⌄
How do I email Slough benefits?	⌄

Feedback

Slough Family Information Service
https://www.sloughfamilyservices.org.uk › advice ⋮
Parenting support in Slough
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https://www.sloughfamilyservices.org.uk › service ⋮
Home-Start Berkshire East - family support
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Slough Borough Council
https://democracy.slough.gov.uk › documents PDF ⋮
Slough's Parenting Offer
supporting the parent-child relationship (such as parenting programmes) in ... Family Information Service on 01753. 476589 or **visit www.slough.gov.uk**.

When the question was framed around concern for my toddler in Slough, without being specific about the concerns, the list did throw up how to find a Children's centre in Slough via Action for Children and further down the list, the Slough Family Information Service again, but again the people also asked questions that came up where in relation to Safeguarding concerns.

Once the search became more specific and asked for help with my toddler's speech in Slough, there was a more refined result and the first hit was reassuring to be able to call the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust 9BHFT) to speak to a Speech and Language Therapist.

you can call Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT) on 0118 904 3700 to get advice from a Speech and Language Therapist. Lines are open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9am to 3.30pm. Practitioners can call the service to discuss communication concerns.

S Slough Family Information Service
https://www.sloughfamilyservices.org.uk › directory › site ⋮

Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) support for your child

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People also ask ⋮

When to worry about toddler speech?   ⌄

How do I know if my toddler needs speech therapy?   ⌄

What age is considered speech delayed?   ⌄

What causes delayed speech in toddlers?   ⌄

There was also a link to St Mary's Primary School who were advertising the Speech and Language Support available to all families in Slough with a child aged from birth to pre-school via the Speech and Language Team and Yew Tree Road Children's Centre.

A little down the list was the link to the Public Health Service – Health Visitors which when clicked on took you to a page with helpful tips on Speech and Language development that could be practiced at home.

When searching for how to find childcare in Slough, the search engine brought up a mix of private agencies as well as national forums to search for childcare providers before you came to Slough Borough Council. Once entered, the Slough Borough Council website was easy to navigate and did give a comprehensive catalogue of alternative options for Childcare provision.

Little Ones London
https://www.littleoneslondon.co.uk › agency › nannies ⋮

Find Experienced Nannies

Find Nannies with Little One — Interviews Will Be Arranged At Your Convenience. Call Us For a No Obligation Discussion! We Pride Ourselves On Our Deep Understanding Of Integrating a Nanny Into Your Home.
Full Time Nanny · Open Today 8am - 6pm · Nanny search · Domestic Couples · Contact Us

Sponsored

Childcare.co.uk
https://www.childcare.co.uk › childminders › slough ⋮

Childminders in Slough | search on Childcare.co.uk ®
Search by postcode to find someone you can trust. Reviews from other parents.

People also search for	✕
childminder slough	slough nursery
nanny slough	slough children's centre
slough council nursery admissions	slough social services
childcare slough	slough family services

Sponsored

N Family Club
https://www.nfamilyclub.com ⋮

Best Nursery In Slough | Contact Us Today
Each child receives a personalised approach to inspire them to become a life-long learner.

On reflection, as a parent you would have to be specific in order to find the support that might meet your needs, and there is a slight concern that parents would be put off by some of the frequently asked questions that came up related to the searches around safeguarding children. This might have a negative impact on parents perception of themselves, for example giving the connotation that people who search for support might fall under the banner of Child Protection and require Children's Social Care support.

Mystery Shopping from a Providers Perspective
Searching for terms like 'how do I register as a Childminder in Slough?' brought up a range of private childminder organisations/agencies, but also the Slough Borough Council website with guidance on becoming a childminder in Slough.

Changing the question to find out what support there is for Childminders in Slough did bring a positive reference to the Early Years Team in Slough Borough Council, which was inviting and friendly in it's terminology, making me want to click on to find out more.

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Changing the search term to training for early years providers in Slough brought up four sponsored hits for Continuous Professional development that must be subscribed to.

However the fifth link was the Slough Borough Council website with a direct link to Early Years Continuous Professional Development. It was clear what was on offer through this site and much of what was on offer was free. There was also resource available to download, including an Early Years Professional Development Portfolio.

And the 'people also asked' was relevant to the initial search.

Searching from a potential childcare provider perspective

When searching how to set up childcare in Slough, the first hit was about finding a local childminder, however the next hit titled 'becoming an early years and childcare provider-Slough' gave you a follow on link to where you would find what each of the different types of childcare providers were, and unless you clicked on some headings at the top of the page you could easily miss the useful information. Interestingly, the third link was entitled exactly the same as the second so many people may just skim past it, thinking it was the same, however, this was the link that did take you to the start of the journey, and the steps you need to undertake in becoming a childcare provider in Slough. If I was planning to set up a childcare facility this would be useful.
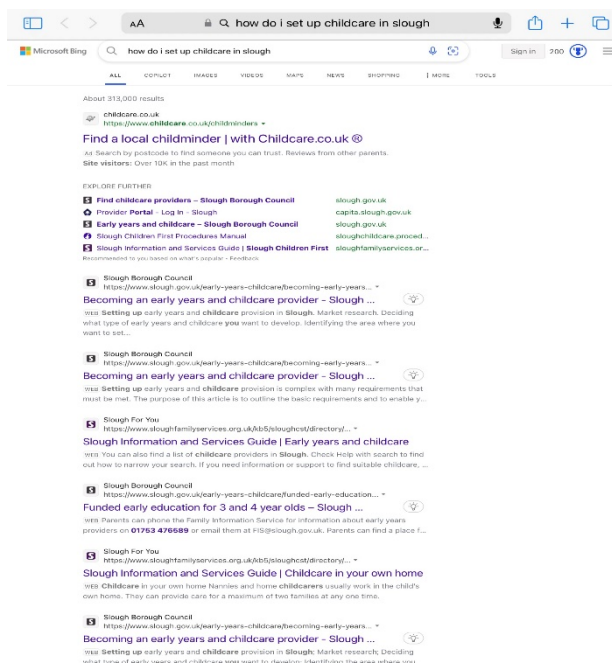
The 'becoming a childminder' section of the webpages were very well presented and easy to follow. Particularly the potential earnings based on funded children was a good guide for anyone contemplating becoming a childminder https://www.slough.gov.uk/early-years-childcare/childminding.

In conclusion, using simple and basic search terms in the search, threw up a lot of differing information avenues, that anyone, wishing to find activities for early years or childcare, or becoming a childcare provider may get lost in. Having duplicate headings, that took you to different parts of the Slough Borough council website wasn't helpful and could lead people to just give up. There is lots of useful information available, but the search pathways that people would use, may not necessarily get them to the where they need to be to find what they are looking for.

13. Recommendations

In this section of the report we have aimed to pool our collective experience of working with local authorities nationally; gathering the best of best practice and complementing what emerged from the support process locally.

We have addressed the recommendations under key headings, which may help with your local strategy.

13.1 Strategic Management and Accountability

LAs often develop frameworks of accountability for early years, as a response to the latest policy area (for example, Family Hubs). This can lead to a 'project' type approach, create artificial service seams and slow down decision making. **Creating an overarching accountability group,** which is based on the legal framework, can help LAs to maintain a

coordinated and strategic steer. This group should include those with influence over the agenda in it's widest sense; for example, Libraries, Community and Adult Services and Employment Support.

Structural, socio-economic causes and drivers should be addressed in a multi-agency way and accountability and reporting should include the most senior leaders, across a range of agencies, to ensure the breadth of the Act is led by the LA, but collectively actioned by all agencies. Decision-makers across agencies carry a responsibility for engaging and influencing wider partners: such as, health services, community/regeneration, employment support, and housing.

Work streams could then be developed to ensure forward movement; e.g., data and performance management, information, service design and positioning, inclusion and workforce development. Work streams could also be formed around the latest policy direction and, in turn, moved to operational delivery through a project management approach, but would still be held by the overarching framework.

Some detailed, measurable quick wins should be addressed; for example, relating to Family Hubs which ensure early years, and particularly the established Children's Centre agenda, remains a central plank and key stage in its own right.

The key priority for the accountability group, in the first instance, will be to oversee and agree a single strategy based on the legal requirements. It will also be vital for the overarching accountable body to remain strategic and differentiate between operational activity, delegating functions, accordingly.

13.1.2 Writing an Early Years and Childcare Strategy

The purpose of this report is to support the writing of a strategy locally. The key headings used in this report could be transferred to a strategy for example:

- Introduction and Acknowledgements
- Summary of Recommendations
- Methodology
- What Are We Collectively Trying to Achieve?
- The National Context and Our Legal Framework
- Wider Impact and Local Context, Council Corporate Plan, and Children and Young People Plan Priorities
- Our Starting Point, Supply and Demand
- Performance Management
- Risks, Themes, Ideas and Recommendations

There should be a process of negotiation to ensure that early years and childcare strategy priorities are firmly embedded within wider strategic plans for the council, and within children's services, as well as related adult services, such as libraries, communities and employment support, (and vice versa).

Once an overarching accountability board is formed, reporting should be mapped to the Lead Member, Chief, Executive and Director of Children's Services, or equivalent, and maintained on a regular basis.

13.1.3 Data Collection to Create a Population Needs Analysis, Performance Management and Enhance Data Sharing Arrangements

The LA should continue to develop the data set with key stakeholders, to support the continual assessment of need and monitoring of performance. More detail could be gathered on population sets (and the needs within core groups and areas), in order to match the current supply of services, alongside our aims, against the size and needs of our population locally.

The LA could also develop conversations around data systems and data sharing to ensure seamless services are delivered.

The LA should continue to facilitate data and performance management meetings, bringing together key leads locally, who can continue to develop the data set and ensure relevant information is used to inform strategic leaders and support service accountability. The LA should use the data to ensure a needs-led approach to meeting the duties and functions required under the childcare act. Service design based on what is needed, as opposed to resources available, could also enable the development of services in the community sector (i.e., the LA and partners do not necessarily need to deliver everything and can build on a community development approach and supporting peer support).

13.1.4 Raising and Maintaining the Profile and Ownership of Early Years and Childcare Services

The profile of early years should be raised and maintained, to support greater value across services, agencies and communities. A series of activities could be agreed across agencies and departments involved in the agenda, for example:

- Briefing and regularly updating the Lead and other members
- Celebrating good practice and case studies evidence and change, through social media and local communications
- Identifying champions who will hold a specific remit for publicity and communication
- Piggybacking other local communications, to promote Early Years across the range of agencies and services
- Communicating the strategy, accountability framework and service priorities, far and wide, and creating a cycle of updates within related senior management meetings
- Reviewing and updating schools for a membership, if required, and ensuring induction opportunities are available
- Creating a reward system; for example, 'provider of the month'
- Engaging senior leaders – for example, the Chief Executive – and local members in publicity

- Ensuring that a communications plan is developed for all events; for example, conferences, network, meetings, openings, etc.
- Ensuring outcomes and activities relating to EY children are included in all strategy implementation plans; i.e., SEND and Inclusion strategies
- Recognising the role of, and investing in, EY settings and services as early intervention and prevention services

Several early years providers noted that, because the early years sector as a whole can sometimes be seen as less professional or important than other children's service areas, early years and childcare providers felt less valued than other early years professionals (for example, health visitors). Specific activity to promote the achievements and profile of early years providers could support recruitment and retention, as well as improving relationships across the sector as a whole and beyond.

Nationally, press and social media coverage of early years services frequently focuses on the climate as unsustainable, or as a sector in crisis. Several providers noted that, whilst it is important to ensure that the very real challenges faced are flagged nationally, it is not always helpful to improving the profile of the sector amongst families, or those who could potentially be working in or developing services.

13.1.5 Opportunities for Pooled Budgets, to Reduce the Number of Service Areas and Support Seamless Delivery

Across all areas, it was noted that there are a large number of different services which families could be working with at any one time. National agendas which have been fragmented from the top create fragmentation and siloed working at the point of delivery.

The Childcare Act (early years, outcomes duties) both requires and facilitates opportunities for joint working across key services, in order to support more integrated working.

Consideration could be given to mapping existing services, identifying share times and objectives of service delivery, and exploring the potential for pooling budgets. Shared resources might impact positively on service delivery, and should also be considered in terms of systems for potentially improving information sharing between services and with families.

13.1.6 Service Design and Delivery, a Single Pre-Birth to Five Service

At present, there does not appear to be a clearly defined set of services that are coherently located. Some services (within the broader children's service) are defined by place, some by age and some by need/theme. Whilst, to an extent, good joint working negates the need for a single service, structures – and particularly the overarching aim of where services sit – can dictate the direction of travel and focus.

Aligning line management (and commissioning) arrangements, to ensure an overarching shared aim, could enhance overall direction towards the Childcare Act Aims. The Sufficiency elements would also ensure that market management levers are applied to childcare for over

5s (as per the Act) to ensure support for parents to work (economic recovery, reducing poverty and supporting child outcomes).

Shared aims, joint measures and a supporting framework could enhance the excellent positive relationships in place already, along with ensuring a set of seamless services (as felt by families).

New roles and new structures could be supported by good induction, to share and enable a whole team direction of travel.

Understanding our matrix management approach and clarifying where roles and responsibilities lie will be key to ensuring the right services are happening at the right time and in the right way.

A clear structure and performance management framework could enable staff to feel united around a shared aim and further enhance the excellent collaborative working in place. It could also illustrate to them how progression routes could be accessed.

An even stronger connection to strategic council-wide priorities could elevate wider awareness of greater potential impact. An awareness of impact can act as an incentive for the staff and collective services.

To realise the potential, the framework of performance management could link, from the highest-level aims through to service plans, commissioning frameworks and individual performance management. This would support staff to recognise the impact they have on wider agendas.

13.1.7 Acknowledging and Supporting the Key Role of a Strategic Lead for Early Years and Childcare

Often, the position of Early Years Strategic Lead becomes diluted where resources are stretched, and in some cases can create a conflict of interest. This is particularly evident when a role involves managing both specialist and universal services, and the direct delivery of services along with market management. There can also be an inability to realise efficiencies and savings, where the strategic remix is diluted by operational management responsibilities.

As discussed previously, a single strategic post, to enable focus and realization of effective and efficient ways of working, could benefit the overall children's strategy locally, as well as impact positively on regeneration.

Actively seeking and supporting peer supervision from outside of the local authority for professional development – for example, encouraging connections with other strategic leads from other LA areas – can strengthen impact locally.

Supporting dedicated time for professional development, through organisations such as the LGA, who provide research reports, case studies and activities to support an evidence-based steer locally.

13.2 Pro-actively Managing Integrated Early Childhood Services

This section of recommendations relates to the duties to secure integrated working between services from pre-birth to five years (the early years outcomes duties).

13.2.1 Actively Supporting Positive Joint Working Across Agencies and Departments

Planned and coordinated joint working, from pre-birth to five, is essential to avoid fragmentation and disengagement, to support the best use of resources, and to create a single service 'feel' for families.

There are well-recognised challenges in joint working across the many agencies involved in supporting children and families. Technology, capacity, cultural barriers, geography and competing priorities are frequently mentioned. In the report *Beyond Boundaries* (July 2022 ISOS Partnership, produced for the London Councils) a number of enablers are mentioned:

Purpose and priorities:

- Sustained, long-term senior leadership commitment to working beyond boundaries to deliver the best possible early years outcomes
- A common agenda, collective analysis and shared approach across all partners in the local authority, health service and the private, voluntary and community sector
- Joint monitoring, governance and problem-solving forums to pursue goals and objectives on early years integration
- Communicating the strategy and the rationale of early years integration to everyone in the system. When changes are being made, listening, and being able and willing adapt

People and place:

- Strong mutual understandings of roles, responsibilities, priorities and pressures across the early childhood workforce
- A core of working practices that bring a wide range of staff together on a day-to-day basis to build relationships and respond to needs
- Aligned locality-based organisation that is 'of' and responsive to the community
- Presenting as a single, cohesive early years service to families, with consistent messaging about the offer and clear entry points – no wrong door

Partnership and process:

- Effective information-sharing with partners – taking a purposeful, clear and positive approach
- Establishing shared goals and constructive, open dialogue with delivery partners – including commissioned partners and those not directly commissioned
- Valuing families and the community as partners in shaping and delivering integrated early years support
- "Do, review, reform" – embedding a cycle of continuous improvement as a joint endeavour

Multi- agency and multi-disciplinary working should be deliberate and planned; for example, in practical terms:

- Designing a framework for accountability, clearly outlining where responsibilities and decision-making rest (for example, the difference between line-management, supervision and area based leadership, where it may be across two service areas)
- Understanding and mapping the pathways and touch points, where services can join to support both families and professionals, to be able to see the child's journey and observe who else they are working with
- Making structured time to share information about, and with, children and families
- Making structured time to share information about, and with, the different roles which play a part in the child's journey (i.e., for professionals)
- Using IT effectively to reduce the number of meetings a family could take part in
- Using the key worker role to ensure coordination

- An induction requirement for anyone working with family from pre-birth to five could include spending time with other services, to understand related roles and support better signposting. This should be extended to include the childcare sector, to support a range of professionals to more confidently and positively support take-up.

13.2.2 Creating the Pathways and Balancing Universal and Specialist Approaches

Midwifery and Health Visiting services create unique touch points with families, as well as providing direct services. These critical relationships can pave the way for how families engage with services and how they seek and secure advice and support themselves. A common theme throughout the support sessions was that multi-agency working takes pro-active management, to build relationships and create a seamless service from a service user perspective. The LA should also consider the messages that are given at each stage of service delivery, and what each service leads to next (i.e., does it encourage a self-help model or dependence through an assessment and intervention approach?).

Ensuring that universal services are able to seamlessly work with more specialist services should be reflected in all areas. Ensuring Library Services are fully engaged in service mapping and design could help further enhance their considerable expertise, resources and impact. There could be opportunities to be realised from shared learning across the different services which actively aim to support speech and language development. Pooling expertise and planning deliberate strategies, whilst using an agreed framework and measurements, could ensure the right approach both reaches a universal audience and meets emerging needs, and acts as a preventative service.

Linking the specialist expertise of key services to a universal offer could help move to preventative working, for example language development support, provided online, which is shared by health visitors (and able to be accessed by families searching for it themselves).

13.2.3 Role Development - Moving from Operational to Strategic to Maximise Impact

Some staff (including those in new roles) could move away from the operational roles, in order to have greater strategic impact. Without a clear direction, induction, and measures in place, there is a risk that staff will fall into familiar (reactive and operational) roles.

This was recognised by a variety of services including the childcare sector.

For example, one proactive piece of work could be to facilitate a half-day induction to the market management role of the LA for those involved with sufficiency agenda (effectively all those who work with the early years and childcare Sector). This could support understanding about the different and interdependent functions of information for families, quality improvement, place development and support for early years providers, and ensure maximum use of pooled resources and functions.

13.2.4 Exploring and Utilising a Whole New Toolkit for Working

Many Local Authorities are in the process of reviewing service delivery across a range of areas, in order to take account of and use the best methods (tools) to affect the most positive outcomes. COVID-19, and specifically lockdown, pushed to the fore a range of new ways of working which, typically, were not routinely used before. Some Local Authorities have seen an improvement in outcomes as a result of change. For example, in Poole, breastfeeding rates increased as a result of support moving online to social media.

Our new toolkit is now far more extensive and can support positive change, where used effectively (for example, using the best tool for the intended outcome, for the individual family circumstance). Face-to-face meetings and activity will always be preferable for some situations. However, our alternatives are now vast; for example, telephone, social media, video calls, meetings, training, webinars, pod casts etc.

13.2.5 A Community Development Approach to Service Development and Maximising Opportunities for Peer Support

Throughout this work, and with all areas, one key theme emerged repeatedly. Both parents and those working in early years frequently commented on how useful it was to meet with those in the same position as themselves. When questioned further some of the benefits included;

- Connections which created friendships and positive, supportive relationships which, in some cases, lasted for years
- Reduced social isolation at a time of great change
- Improved confidence from knowing you are not alone in your experiences
- Increased knowledge, information and advice

Parent-to-parent peer support can be enormously beneficial to families and can promote positive parenting. It can also potentially alleviate some pressure on Local Authority resources.

In one LA, Health visitors offered to coordinate the setting up of a small WhatsApp group of new parents as they came into contact with the service. The groups are established with permissions and enable a contact with another parent in the same boat. Often these groups turn into meet ups, which in turn can create friendships, which grow sustainable supportive relationships and, in turn, support confident parenting.

Parent-led support groups (either face-to-face or online) can take very little resource to set up, but make a lasting difference to families; for example, parents and carers of children with SEND. This group of families, in particular, can be extremely isolated, as their experiences are by nature felt by fewer families. COVID-19 has also magnified the difficulties of isolation, and some families now simply lack the confidence to engage in activities they haven't engaged in before.

13.2.6 Workforce Development

An overriding theme, in all areas and all sectors, was the difficulties around recruitment and retention of staff; most worryingly, the impact of this on universal service delivery, which, in turn, places more pressure on specialist support later on. Health visiting services, along with the early years provider workforce, were of particular concern and, in some areas, the latter was beginning to impact on the sufficiency of places and take-up of the early years entitlements, particularly by children with SEND.

Whilst many of the issues faced by the overall workforce require national attention, several strategies that local authorities can take were shared through this process.

- Developing a specific early years workforce plan as part of overarching Children Service planning
- Developing relationships with local colleges, careers services and Job Centre Plus and jointly hosting recruitment fairs and events to promote working in the sector and pathways through it
- Developing resource packs and training for providers and local teams, and support pathways between and through each sector working in the early years
- Specifically, considering strategies to recruit men and other underrepresented groups into the sectors
- Using publicity and marketing, as part of an ongoing communications plan, to promote rows across the sectors, from apprentices through to management positions
- Utilising local networks and mentoring/buddy systems to support those new to leadership
- Aiming to counter or utilise negative publicity which comes out nationally. For example, could one crisis, in a different part of the care sector, provide opportunities in the early years sector?

13.3 Childcare Sufficiency and Securing High Quality Early Education and Childcare Places

Nationally, it is recognised that the sector faces significant resource pressures, as funding, the cost of living and recruitment and retention difficulties continue to grow. Across all areas, this picture was emphasized and, in the vast majority, there were reports of closures and staff shortages now impacting on sufficiency levels. It should the noted that the group of families most likely to feel this impact are those with young children with SEND, who are often our least advantaged families.

Some settings also feel they need to replace and provide services which may previously have been delivered by Children's Centres (for example, family support and speech and language support). Other settings reported that, where families could afford to pay for specialist support, they were doing so, as opposed to waiting for free local services. This could illustrate a further divide between the most and least advantaged families.

Similarly to some council staff, some practitioners were keen to move (back) to strategic roles which could have positive impact across the whole setting, as opposed to operational

functions (for example, staff are faced with lots of assessments, as opposed to being able to impact on the overall quality for all children).

There are good peer networks in place, which could be built on and strengthened, in terms of start-up and ongoing support. Social media and online support could be utilised here, along with the promotion of provider-led support.

Business support, linked to the regular provision of sufficiency information, could be strengthened and become a 'norm' of the local networks and routine conversations. For example, regular updates about birth rates, 2YOs, employment etc, and defined models to meet need, along with marketing support to tap into demand, will be key.

Whilst resourcing for pump-priming new provision is unlikely, an audit of local space provision, local business support, regular sharing of data and potential partners locally (for example, schools) could be offered.

Managing business sustainability is extremely complicated for the sector and should be pro-actively supported. Some settings could be juggling up to 20 different funding streams, and COVID-19 has added further complexities around staffing levels, welfare and practice. Quality childcare is dependent on quality staff, which is dependent on good and steady income.

Monitoring and predicting demand will be key. Economic decline and resulting unemployment could result in a growth in the number of eligible two-year-olds and the need for re-modelling local childcare delivery to meet the needs of both working and non-working families. Regular market monitoring and, most importantly, feeding that information back to the childcare sector, so they can respond with the appropriate business planning, will be critical.

Childcare for children with disabilities should be carefully monitored and pro-actively managed. A specific sufficiency assessment of childcare for children with SEND across the age range will be vital in measuring and driving change (see section below).

There may also be opportunities to combine services and funding streams; for example, are the same families of children with SEND accessing the same providers of Short Breaks, the Holiday Activities and Food Programme, and childcare to enable work?

A focus on both the supply and take-up of two-year-old places should also remain a priority, as a critical plank in our preventative working. Close attention should also be paid to the services which make up the pathways to a two-year-old place (ensuring a positive introduction to childcare is made at the earliest opportunity).

Our information for families should play a critical role in continually improving the quality of provision locally. Parental demand (parents asking for high-quality provision) is the most effective lever for change, as has been seen with the rollout of new entitlements such as 30 hours free childcare.

Quality improvement will be supported through training and development opportunities. Resources now require a shift, however, towards an information and coaching role within the LA, as well as celebrating successes and case studies and promoting sector lead support. For more information about securing sufficiency for children with SEND (and all children), refer to Appendix 7.

13.4 The Information Duties

Good relationships exist between various departments and several pathways have already been developed. Digital delivery has been embraced.

Typically, in LAs where online information is clear, concise and easy to find, the number of calls to the Local Authority for advice and support were fewer. Where information was fragmented and service-focused, the number of calls was higher and were made later.

A clear Early Years Strategy with inclusion at its heart should include the provision of information for families, which will also support professionals too. Information services should:

- Consider the strategy's information needs, in terms of the aims of the services, who the audiences are, what behaviour change we are aiming to achieve (e.g., take up of service or influencing parenting), what motivates change for key groups and, therefore, what might the best message and method be?
- Improve the profile of early years at all opportunities, to support greater value across services, agencies and communities and also attract entry to the workforce.
- Promote universal and self-serve options for families, as well as targeted support. Building from the universal contact points, such as midwifery, health visiting and the early years entitlements, creates a huge opportunity to redirect resources towards a self-serve culture.

- Include links to peer support (parents and providers) as normalised universal services.
- Build on the developing pathways (or road maps) to support the management of expectations and confidence, for families to understand 'what next?'
- Use marketing and promotion to target key groups with key messages (for example, awareness of early intervention services and the two-year-old entitlement, the promotion of DAF and the Inclusion Fund to providers and parents alike).
- Support positive engagement with families by creating a celebratory 'can do' culture, as opposed to a culture of assessment and intervention.
- Showcase positive parenting and normalise asking for help and self-help options.
- Consider where and to whom information is delivered (for example, is there a stigma attached to some service offers?).
- Ensure materials are translated and relevant to all groups in the LA.
- Ensure accessibility by using a range of messages and mediums.

Ultimately, the information strategy should take the key aims of our service areas and motivate change to achieve them. Our information is effectively our marketing for our overall

and individual business plans. What are we trying to achieve? Who is our audience? What motivates them to change? What is the best medium or message for us to reach them?

13.5 Early Years Inclusion

The council and partners have taken positive, pro-active steps to promote an inclusive approach to all provision. Throughout the process, staff reported a commitment to getting services right for **all** children.

Understanding what we are including children and families in, links us back to our overarching aims based on the Childcare Act. If we accept that the aims of the act, and therefore our local strategy, are to improve outcomes and narrow the gap, inclusion, through the consideration of our diverse communities and the different needs and abilities of children, will be key. Our services will aim to ensure integrated services from pre-birth to five, the sufficiency of early years and childcare provision, supporting children and families in terms of employment and related activities, and good information to ensure accessibility to services and support in its own right. And, as for all children, pathways into the Early Education entitlements (and broader, childcare offers) will be key.

There are specific challenges for this group of children, their families and those providing services. Increasing levels of need and demand, the impact of Covid (and, in particular, the isolation of lockdowns) and reduced service budgets alongside increased costs, create a perfect storm for widening the gap nationally at this time.

A key priority will need to be focused on further enhancing inclusive universal services (and take up), and ensuring that resources target specialist support in line with need.

13.5.1 Data Driven Early Years Inclusion

The starting point for this work should be a comprehensive needs assessment, as part of the ongoing Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, which should be based on data, trends, and the views of families, mapped against current and potential supply (and resource).

Appendix 6 provides suggested ideas for creating a baseline and measuring impact from work the charity, Dingley's Promise, has been leading through its funded work with over 30 local authorities. Measuring demand, could, for example include:

- Your total population of children in the EYs
- Live emerging and additional needs
- Tracking back to triangulate and understand the journey and impact
- Breaking down into those who accessed specialist and mainstream
- Parent/carer consultation
- Complaints, whistleblowing, intelligence from partners
- Understanding needs <u>and</u> impact – EYPP, 2YO data, deferred entry to school, part time entry, socio demographic data, etc.

An analysis of supply could include:

- Places available for the whole population (Ofsted downloads)
- Specialist places?
- Questionnaires - inclusive places or places business planned for?
- If you can't ask, can someone else ask for you?
- Intelligence from on-going conversations

This work could lay the foundations for then layering on data about impact, for example EYFS data, inspection outcomes and public health data.

13.5.2 Further Enhancing the Universally Inclusive Early Education and Childcare Offers

In terms of an inclusive, universal childcare sector, conversations focused on the high levels of needs being presented and on the lack of the resources required to support. In some cases, this had led to children and families being turned away from or having restricted access to the legal entitlements to early education and childcare to support employment. A number of considerations should be noted:

- Whilst the local authority holds duties to ensure sufficient provision for children with SEND, providers are also legally required not to discriminate against specific groups.
- The culture of reactive working seemed evident. For example, providers were looking at whether or not they could support a child, as they were approached, rather than proactively business planning for a percentage of children who will always require additional support locally.
- There was a lack of awareness amongst providers and parents of the availability of tax-free childcare at the higher rate to support children with SEND.
- The cost of supporting children with SEND was not spread across the whole setting, in terms of planned income and expenditure. There was a reliance on securing external funding for this group as needs were identified, usually from the local authority.

These findings were common across all areas and, whilst resource struggles are very real, there are clearly actions which could support the current situation. Awareness raising, amongst families and providers, around the equalities act, steps providers can take, in terms of business planning for inclusive places across the whole setting, awareness of different business models and awareness of funding streams, such as tax free childcare, for example.

13.5.3 Managing Expectations and Utilising Information

As with many areas, there is a need to manage parent expectations throughout the pathway of services. Parents will naturally want what is best for their children and, where good specialist provision is available and has a good reputation, other options will not always be valued as highly. It is vital to ensure that families know the purpose and aim of services they are engaged with. For example, is it to provide an ongoing service or to support the child and family to make the next step into a different service (for example mainstream, support)?

There is a good level of information available about the local offer, once you know what the term *'local offer'* means. Online information services are critical as a first port of call for families and can create the culture of working with services locally. Online support is our

universal service and needs to be accessible and reflect the search terms that families, as opposed to service providers, use.

Language, terminology and culture should reflect our highest expectations for children and families. Many processes (nationally) drive an assessment model to identify and support needs, as opposed to celebrating success and potential. By nature, some funding sets criteria to identify needs and allocate resource. Paradoxically, this can exclude children and/or leave them isolated even within mainstream provision, as well as adding to the burdens on families of children with SEND.

13.6 Encouraging Self-Help and Celebration to Support a 'Thrive' as Opposed to 'Survive' Culture

The council could encourage further a culture of positivity, raised expectations and self-help across all services for families through:

- Exploring how initial conversations are framed (from diagnosis, are families supported to celebrate difference or seek extra resource?)
- Considering the integration with health services (midwifery) and realising the potential positive impact of the health visitor role
- Ensuring a feedback loop for the continual improvement of information services. Fully utilising social media and celebrating case studies to raise expectations and create new norms (for both families and professionals)
- Actively planning and managing multi-agency working and the use of IT to limit the number of meetings families are required to attend (families tell their story repeatedly which can break down trust)
- Peer support between families could be further extended and developed through voluntary sector development at low cost
- Promoting mainstream provision as the best option (for most children), to support a shift in parent expectations and move demand away from specialist places
- Supporting a genuinely inclusive and welcoming mainstream sector through awareness raising, training, sector-led peer support, peer networks and using good information to parents to increase demand for inclusive services
- Supporting and publicising universal provision to continually strive to be inclusive (regular training, sharing good practice, publicising success stories, and supporting families to know that 'good' is the norm)
- Ensuring clarity of all service aims and communicating a road map of where families may start and end up (the pathway of services for that child)
- Promoting and supporting take-up of DLA and ensuring it and EHCPs are introduced as early as possible. This will lever in related resources and improve transitions to school, as well as supporting an inclusive childcare sector and improving outcomes for children.
- Considering the employment needs of families of children with SEND throughout. Families of children with SEND could make a legal challenge against the council if they are not able to access their full entitlements, including 30 hours of free childcare. Many of these families would benefit in terms of household income (lifting them out

of poverty) and their mental health (working can give purpose and direction outside of a 24/7 caring role).

The facilitation of peer support has been identified across all service areas for both those providing services and for families. For families of children with SEND, however, the support of other families can provide a lifeline. Facilitated peer support, whether through social media or face-to-face activities in some areas, leads to service development and delivery by families too, empowering families to own services, creating a collective voice and reducing pressure on publicly funded services.

13.7 Celebrating Diversity and Tackling Discrimination

We know that minority ethnic families face additional challenges when they seek early years services, including early help or family support. Inequalities are reported widely.

High-quality family support, delivered in the right way at the right time, can make a real difference for children and their families. It can mitigate risk factors and increase the protective factors in children's lives, giving them the best chance to realise their potential.

There are, however, stark and persistent inequalities in outcomes for children from minority ethnic groups. For example, by the age of 4–5, Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller children are the least likely of all ethnic groups to reach developmental targets in relation to communication and language, and physical, social and emotional development. Pakistani, Bangladeshi and 'Other' Asian children, Black Caribbean, Black African and Other Black children, Other White children, Mixed White/Black Caribbean children, and children from Other ethnic backgrounds were also less likely than average to be school-ready. Conversely, White British, White Irish, Mixed Other, Mixed White/Asian, Chinese and Indian children were all more likely than average to be school-ready.1

Improving the way family support services work for minority ethnic families.
June 2022, Stephanie Waddell, Miriam Sorgenfrei, Grace Freeman, Montel Gordon, Milly Steele and Hannah Wilson.

1. Department for Education (2020). Development goals for 4 to 5 year olds. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/ education-skills-and-training/early-years/attainment-of-development-goals-by-
2. children-aged-4-to-5-years/latest

A number of proactive approaches are in place and could be built on to ensure a shared approach is embedded in the strategy.

- Understanding the local population and the needs of key groups should form part of the overarching needs analysis and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of impact.
- Reach and engagement activity across all services should take account of the population needs analysis and identification of key disadvantage groups.
- All services working with children and families must embed effective approaches to eradicate racist and discriminatory practices. A clear process for identifying, reporting and acting on any such practices should be shared.
- Service design should consider the demographic characteristics of families as part of service, auditing and reform.

- Community-based, grassroots organisations should support understanding, engagement and capacity building, as well as the evaluation of services locally.
- Workforce planning should not just reflect the needs of local communities, but include a focus on building the skills needed to encourage trusting relationships with minority ethnic families.

13.8 Managing Effective Transitions

Within the early years services and the wider children service arena, it is important to consider how it feels to a child and family to transition from one area to the next. Families report several *'cliff edges'*, where service delivery and approaches change dramatically. For example, moving from university specialist support, starting early years or childcare provision, moving into school (along with negotiating childcare for school-age children) are key milestones to note.

General principles for managing good transitions can be integrated with the wider children service planning:

- Keeping the child's experience central throughout
- Ensuring parents and carers are informed and supported to lead transitions processes
- Facilitating and supporting joint working between services where transitions will be frequent
- Identifying good practice and sharing to create new norms
- Linking to wider integrated service and information service plans
- Insuring the monitoring and evaluation of transitions is included in wider service planning

13.9 Participation and Engagement of Children and Families Throughout

A common theme, across all areas, was the difficulty to engage parents and carers in conversations about service delivery in the early years. Positive conversations were held with those who did take part, about actions LAs could take moving forwards;

- Developing an agreed strategy across early years' service sectors, specifically for engagement, clearly defining the differences between consultation, coproduction and encouraging delivery of services and peer support throughout
- Considering how the views of children are fed into the overall strategy and plan
- Linking any engagement activity to the needs of families locally, to ensure an incentivised approach. For example, could engagement be a byproduct of the development of peer networks?
- Considering different approaches for different activities; what is it we want to engage with families about and why? What could their motivation be for the engagement, and what is the best method to achieve that? Considering the different options; for example, focus groups, quick and simple surveys, online conversation through social media, and ongoing conversations with staff, structured around key themes and questions.

- Can the existing activities be piggybacked? For example, a parent support group, which offered time to network at the end, was noted as particularly beneficial for parents in one area. Facilitated networking could develop peer support between parents, as well as acting as a key engagement point.
- Utilising existing networks and groups locally, but ensuring 'outside the box' thinking, so as not to overwhelm the same families over and over.

13.10 And Finally, Building on Strengths and Growing Resilience Throughout

There is a great deal of positive commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children and families in the area. Members of staff are aware of resource pressures and are constantly adapting to change. There is also a huge amount of experience, knowledge and skill across a range of services, and a will to share learning internally and externally.

These strengths should be capitalised on through both practical change (as suggested in this report) and by promoting the positive culture of working which is evident. There is clearly a commitment to working with families in a way that celebrates what they and their children *can* achieve, as opposed to assessing what they cannot. This culture of working ultimately has the potential to filter through to families too, helping them to help themselves and each other for the benefit of children.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Blue Willows Day Nursery

Appendix 2: Case Studies Early Years

*Appendix 3: Legislation, Policy and Research Impacting on Early Years and Childcare
        Strategies*

Appendix 4: Early Intervention for Children with SEND. The Business Case for Measuring and Securing Sufficiency for Children with SEND

Appendix 5: Road Map of Services

*Appendix 6: Measuring Childcare Sufficiency for Children with SEND
        in the Early Years*

7: Securing Childcare Sufficiency for Children with SEND

Appendix 1. Blue Willow Day Nursery

Blue Willow Day Nursery was founded by local childhood friends, Yvonne Martin & Pav Holman, who set up Blue Willow Childminding Services in 2012. Yvonne became a registered childminder in December 2009 shortly after her son was born. She cared for 6 children under the age of 8 and within a year, a successful childminding service had been established and full capacity reached. In January 2012, the childminding setting moved to a larger premise and a partnership began with Pav Holman who was also a registered childminder. Blue Willow Childminding Services was established in April 2012. Within 2 years full capacity was reached with no further opportunities to grow the business.

There natural progression was to grow the setting into a nursery provision, and they started looking for a suitable premise in the summer of 2014. They expressed an interest and were awarded a lease of a council building and raised 40k through grants and their own income to refurbish the building to make it fir for nursery use. Blue Willow Day Nursery opened in November 2015 in Salt Hill Park, Slough.

After 1 year of trading, they were successful in applying for a Capital Grant provided by the DFE aiming to enhance and extend current settings in line with the new 30

hours entitlement for 3 and 4-year olds in September 2017. The nursery increased in size from 26 places, to 56 places. This refurbishment was completed in August 2018 and to this day it's a successful Nursery who were recently awarded a 'Good' from Ofsted in March 2018.

In July 2019 Blue Willow Day Nursery applied for a further Capital Grant to build an Eco Roundhouse in the garden area of the nursery. The application detailed plans to develop another 24 early years places for 2, 3 & 4 year olds.

This was subsequently followed by the opening of their second day nursery in Holmer Green, High Wycombe in April 2023.

Yvonne Martin and Pav Holman are extremely passionate and dedicated to providing a unique and exciting learning environment for children, that continues to evolve as they explore new ways of working and shaping young children's learning. There original values of homely environments, mixed aged socialising and outdoor play is still at the heart of their nursery. They are now discovering how to inspire naturally inquisitive minds with natural and authentic resources.

Early 2018 the Education team at Slough Borough Council were asked by the planning department to discuss the requirements under a section 106 agreement for the Horlicks development. The calculations for early years quickly showed that there would be a big increase in the need for early education and childcare places due to the number of residential properties being developed on the site. The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment for that year also present a deficit of places in the area. Work quickly began with the developers Berkeley Homes to negotiate and identify a suitable location for a nursery provision. By may 2019 Berkeley Homes began promoting the development including that of a new nursery allocated in the main Horlick factory development.

In July 2022 the early years service began to engage with Berkeley Homes to explore the level of interest in the development from the local childcare market. Following an expression of interest approximately 9 local providers visited the site and from there 6 providers submitted business proposals to Berkeley Homes. After a quality assurance process the team decided that there was one business case that meet the needs of the community and the board decided to award the approval to Blue Willow Day Nursery in May 2023.

Between May 2023 and April 2024 the nursery team worked around the clock to prepare for the building works to start to create a unique 90 place nursery in the iconic Horlicks factory building. The Blue Willow Day Nursery builders began work to convert the space in April 2024 with a final handover in September 2024.

On Friday 13th September 2024 Berkely Homes and Blue Willow officially opened the nursery development on the Horlicks factory site. The nursery plans to open to children on 30th September 2024.

Appendix 2. Case Studies – LGA Early Years

Chalvey Early Years Maintained Nursery School: Case study 1
Child xx attends the afternoons in the resource base
Significant and complex medical needs, including preverbal and non-mobile
Learning is facilitated by the skilled practitioners in the SRP to provide targeted and individual support and adaptation to the curriculum to meet the child's individual needs
Benefit from the inclusive ethos and practice, child xx and they key worker join the mainstream and the children are encouraged to engage with xx in sensory play, such as moving coloured scarves to support their eye gaze and attention, whilst the mainstream children develop their empathy and understanding that all children are unique and we need to respect and value each other
This has supported the parents to feel more relaxed about allowing their child with SEND to attend a nursery and to be part of play with other children of their age

Chalvey Early Years Maintained Nursery School: Case study 2
Child xy has trisomy 21 and enrolled in the mainstream nursery
The team used their home visits and settling in process to establish a positive relationship with the child and parents, so that they could gather the information needed to understand xy's abilities, needs and interest, and therefore ensure the team were appropriately prepared for xy to start
The nursery has inclusion embedded in their practice and provision, they recognise children as individuals and carefully consider and plan how best to adapt the environment, resources and learning opportunities to ensure all children are included
Staff are trained and confident in meeting individual needs and a range of SEND strategies
Language and communication is supported throughout with visuals and signs to enable all children to be understood and engage
Child xy has benefited from the communication support in the environment and is now eager to engage with peers and adults, make requests, and share their ideas ad emotions at their communication level
This has enabled xy to develop good social relationships
Initial child xy had limited mobility, preferring to bottom shuffle, this impacted on independence and in particular accessing free flow to the outside learning area alongside the other children
The staff have worked consistently not only on physical skills but in resilience and confidence to enable xy to move between the inside and outside areas

Chalvey Early Years Maintained Nursery School: Case study 3
The nursery run a weekly stay and play in a separate room in the school
They have used the session to demonstrate play activities that support early learning at home and how this is extended within a nursery setting
Many of the parents that attend are reluctant to send their child to nursery because they feel their needs are better met at home, this can be culturally or because a child has SEND
The skilled interactions with the parents has developed their understanding about the benefits of their child being in a nursery and 9 out of 10 parents have taken a place in with CEY MNS or another local setting

Chalvey Early Years Maintained Nursery School: Case study 14
The whole staff attended AET EY MSA training delivered by the Early Years Advisory Teacher. Although the nursery has a SRP and practice is shared, the training enable the staff to reflect as a wider team on their current practice and what elements they could do even better to ensure children are supported to flourish and staff are confident and skilled in meeting individual needs

Working with the HT, the training was planned to maximise the learning opportunities and key information from the training to relate specifically to the nursery, the team and the children and families

Muddy Boots Day Nursery: Case Study
The nursery place significant importance of their parent partnership including having difficult conversations that will enable them to work with parents to best meet a child's needs
Child xz joined the nursery and was quiet and lacked communications skills
From initial observations and conversations with the parent, the nursery worked with the family to share early communication strategies to build xz confidence and language skills
A referral was made to SaLT and CYPIT, and has resulted in a diagnosis of ASD
The expert work of the key worker with regularly reviewed IEPs and support from their EYAT to successfully embed language strategies, the child has made good progress and this September has transitioned to a mainstream primary school
At the end of the summer term xz sat alongside her peers and joined in with singing
She not only responds to peers and adults but will seek out familiar adults to communicate independently

ToadHall Day Nursery: Case Study
Child xyz has a diagnosis of ASD and parents were concerned about his experience of nursery and future potential
The Sendco and team carefully planned IEPs and shared strategies with parent to enable xyz to benefit from his nursery experience and reach his full potential
The Sendco made a request for EHCNA and although the assessment was agreed the plan was not finalised in time for transition to reception with the child's peers
The parent requested the child remain at the nursery
The nursery supported the parent to look for the best local school to meet xyz's individual needs
The child remained at the nursery for an additional year, the Senco and key worker carefully considered and planned how to adapt the curriculum and learning so that xyz would continue to make progress and not feel isolated following his peers transitioning to school
They were mindful that the child was physically different in size and experience to the children moving into the preschool room, and equally that xyz should not feel limited by remaining, or lacking of new experiences
The learning had to be considered to enable xyz to be supported in areas of SEND but to facilitate and extend his learning in he areas of strength

DfE expert and mentors: case study
The EY team facilitated nurseries taking up the DfE Experts and Mentors programme, Mighty acorns were one of the nurseries that really benefited
The experts and mentors met with the nursery's EYAT to ensure the setting were able to get the most out of the support and ensure actions were picked up and further developed after the programme finished
As part of the support they developed their curriculum and shared this with the staff
In the third term following the new curriculum being implemented, they worked with their EYAT to review their curriculum and consider what further areas they wanted to develop to enable children to have the best outcomes from attending the nursery
This work was recognised in their Ofsted Inspection report

Alba Montessori (Teeny Bopper)
Took part in the DfE Experts and Mentors programme

As part of the programme they worked with the mentor to consider the adults role in facilitating children's learning in the outside area, and the types of resources that enhance learning opportunities

The staff were committed to review their practice and the owner recognised the potential impact on children's learning, particularly in terms of children with SEND, and funded new resources for the outside

The impact was clearly observed in the children's engagement in learning which led to children being more focused, playing in a positive social way with each other and less incidents of children being frustrated

Staff felt confident in following a child's lead/interest and using their expertise to extend learning, rather than using their time to manage children's behaviour

PDP3

Arc Preschool were in the first cohort to complete the PDP3 programme as promoted through the EY team

The Early Years Advisory Teacher made regular contact with the setting to ensure staff were accessing the online modules and attending the webinars

The manager feedback that from the initial session there was an impact on how staff were talking and working with the children, even from the most experienced staff

The maths element enabled the staff to reflect on opportunities for maths throughout the environment and curriculum as well as teacher led learning

Cherry Trees Day Nursery enrolled 6 members of their team in the programme, at a time when engagement with training can be a challenge this was a significant commitment by their team. The practitioners that completed the training actively shared what they had learnt with their room teams to consider the golden threads of communication and language, maths and PSED

APPENDIX 3: Legislation, Policy and Research Impacting on Early Years and Childcare Strategies

Legislation (each link takes you to the relevant legislation which is updated daily)	Summary points	Practice Guidance & Reviews
The Children Act 1989	• Reflected 1989 United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child • Welfare of children is paramount • Introduced section 47 enquiries	• Working Together to Safeguard Children (last major update December 2018 with a recent additional guidance December 2020) https://thecpsu.org.uk/news/2020-12-amendments-to-working-together-guidance-2018-dec-2020/) **2020 Key Point Up-dates** • Teenage relationship abuse has been added as an area of risk • The importance of mental health concerns for children has been emphasised throughout the revised document. • Mental health has been added to physical health (p.7 & p.14) and the significance of mental health concerns about a child has been linked to abuse, neglect or exploitation • The impact of domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour, has been integrated throughout the revised guidance • Criminal exploitation has been added to the areas of risk, which practitioners should be developing their skills and knowledge to address Keeping Children Safe in Education (2020) – updated January 2021 to include Covid guidance and Brexit guidance https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

The Children Act 2004	• Placed responsibility on safeguarding partners to plan together to safeguard children. • Introduced Early Help • Introduced Common Assessment Framework	Children Act 2004 – last updated in July 2018 to reflect changes brought about by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care https://www.eif.org.uk/report/covid-19-and-early-intervention-understanding-the-impact-preparing-for-recovery
The Childcare Act 2006 This was amended by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, and then by the Families and Children Act 2014 (see below)	• Duty on local authorities to ensure sufficient childcare. • Local authorities required to provide information to parents and families • Agencies are required to work together with integrated services. • Introduced the Early Years Foundation Stage • Reformed regulation of childcare (OFSTED changes) The 2009 Act (amidst a raft of legislation around apprenticeships and learning) set out targets around Children's Safeguarding Boards and Children's Centres Later supported by regulations: • Local authority duty to secure Early Years provision free of charge (2012) • Various regulations around amendments to the EYFS	Marmot Review (2010) – focussing on reducing health inequalities. https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review Graham Allen review (2011) – the need for early intervention https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-intervention-the-next-steps--2 Several reviews of the Early Years and Foundation Stage statutory framework including introduction of welfare requirements Sarah Tickell's Early Years Foundation Stage Review framework https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-early-years-foundations-for-life-health-and-learning-an-independent-report-on-the-early-years-foundation-stage-to-her-majestys-government

	Regulations made under this Act both around Early Years Entitlement: • The Local Authority (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) Regulations 2014 (S.I. 2014/2147) • The Local Authority (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 2018/146).	Unknown Children Destined for Disadvantage – Ofsted-2016 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/helping-disadvantaged-young-children-ofsted-thematic-report The first 1001 days manifesto https://www.wavetrust.org/1001-critical-days-the-importance-of-the-conception-to-age-two-period https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs-framework/changes-to-the-early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs-framework
Equalities Act 2010 (this superseded the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)	• Legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. • Replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. • Introduced protected characteristics	Disabled Children and the Equality Act for Early Years (Council for Disabled Children) 2010 https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/disabled-children-and-equality-act-2010-early- .
Child Poverty Act (2010)	• Placed a duty on Local Authorities to prepare a 'Local Child Poverty Needs Assessment' setting out the needs of children living in poverty in the area • Local Authorities have a duty to prepare a child poverty strategy to set out the measures they propose to take to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty.	Government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2010) next steps report (2013). Frank Field Poverty Review (2010) Policy Paper 2010 to 2015 government policy: poverty and social justice updated 2015.
The Children and Families Act 2014.	• Introduced a 26-week time limit for courts to decide whether or not a child should be taken into care.	Special educational needs and disability code of practice January 2015.

	• Introduced the Education, Health and Care Plan to support children and their families from birth to 25 years. • Made it a requirement of all state-funded schools to provide free school lunches for all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. • Made amendments to the law to protect children in cars from the dangers of second-hand smoke.	
The Childcare Act 2016	• Extended the entitlement to 30 hours free childcare, over 38 weeks of the year, for three and four-year-olds in families where all parents are working.	Early education and childcare statutory guidance - Gov.uk Summary of the key provisions in the Childcare Act 2006 (latest version 2018)
Children and Social Work Act 2017	• Increases Local Authority Support for Looked After Children and clarifies roles of partners in safeguarding boards and the remit of serious case reviews. • Defined a 'Safeguarding Partner' as being the local authority, whose responsibility it is to agree on how they will co-ordinate their safeguarding services, to act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others, and to implement local and national learning from serious child safeguarding incidents. • Local authorities will be required to promote educational attainment of children who have been adopted or are in other long-term arrangements.	Helpful overview from Children England https://www.childrenengland.org.uk/children-and-social-work-act-2017

Appendix 4.

The Benefits of Early Intervention

The Business Case for Assessing and Securing Sufficiency for Children with SEND

Contents

1. Introduction

The paper has been written by Dingley's Promise, a registered charity supporting inclusion in the early years nationally. As a provider of specialist early years provision across the country, we aim to support inclusion in mainstream settings wherever possible and appropriate. We also work nationally with local authorities and partners, as well as central government, to drive an inclusion movement for young children with SEND.

Our main aim for this paper, is to support Local Authority (LA) leaders to justifying the business case for investment and assessment require when securing childcare sufficiency for children with SEND, in accordance with their statutory duties. It may also support wider early intervention agendas and has been designed to enable the reader to use key sections in their own papers and reports.

From our extensive work with LAs, providers, and families nationally, we are aware that with each expansion of the early years entitlements nationally, it has negatively impacted upon the ability of children with SEND to access the 15 hour entitlements, let alone 30. As a consequence, there are significant risks as the new early years entitlements expand, that provision for children with SEND will again drop.

This paper draws on our experiences of working nationally supporting LAs, parents, providers and a range of stakeholders and decision makers, through the introduction of many new national policies and entitlements.

2. Why Investment is Essential Now More Than Ever

We are aware that LAs are under significant pressure to "do more with less". Strategic priorities to make savings and find efficiencies are coupled with an acute focus on safeguarding following high-profile cases, and a constant threat of inspection and intervention.

LAs consistently report increasing numbers of children with SEND. There is a growing pressure on special school places and supported provision within mainstream. In Solihull for example they report an increase in children starting school with an education health and care plan (EHCP) of over 200% since 2019.

The increased cost of living is impacting on both our early years providers market, and on families. The sector faces significant sustainability challenges, in particular around the recruitment and retention of staff. There is also an increase in demand for childcare to support low income working families, and even greater need for families to work.[9] Where research has been conducted it has found a direct correlation families affected by poverty and those caring for a child with SEND.

In Swindon for example local research conducted in 2022 indicated that whilst 94% of the overall eligible population of 2, 3 and 4 years olds access the full early years entitlements, just 45% of children with SEND were able to do so.

The research also found a significant disparity between mothers who are able to work, with just 16% of mothers of children with SEND working, compared to 61% of the general population of mothers in

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[9] https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/How-are-the-lives-of-families-with-young-children-changing-Nuffield-Foundation.pdf

that area.[10] Research also found that children with SEND were more likely to face a part time or deferred entry to school than their peers.

This sobering information reflects that despite the consensus of agreement over the positive impacts of early intervention in our years for children with SEND, this are the group accessing the entitlements the least. This continues to have a direct impact on their long-term outcomes and increases the gap between them and their mainstream peers.

The new early years entitlements pose a real opportunity to ensure children are accessing early years education sooner. The Government confirmed that early years SEND funding streams will be extended to cover all of the new entitlement hours to support children with SEND to access[11]. This has the potential for a number of very positive impacts:

- Enabling earlier intervention and in turn lead to better life outcomes for our children in the future.

- Helping settings who have been struggling with only being given funding for part of children's hours to access the full funding and remove the need for settings to self-fund.

- Supporting LAs to see younger children with SEND accessing their entitlements and getting the best early intervention.

- More children should have the opportunity to moving on to mainstream education/

- A greater number of parents could feel supported from the beginning of their child's educational journey.

These factors provide us with a unique opportunity to recalibrate how we manage early intervention as a fundamental part of our change management process.

The expansion of early years entitlements could, if embedded and owned strategically, support a shift in both demand and supply of services in the early years.

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[10] https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/campaigns-and-research/research/

[3] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65670dd9312f40000de5d56c/Early_years_funding_-_Extension_of_the_Entitlements_Consultation_Response.pdf

3. The Evidence Base for Early Intervention and Impact on Children with SEND

Early intervention and good early years provision has consistently evidenced a return on investment. This section offers some quotes and links to some of the research.

The Early Intervention Foundation produced a report in 2017 (the Cost of Late Intervention) stating that:[12]

"Nearly £17 billion per year – equivalent to £287 per person – is spent in England and Wales by the state on the cost of late intervention."

The return on investment for individuals and services collectively is also well documented. The Heckman Curve[13] is illustrated here:

"The importance of the early years in laying the building blocks for a child's physical development, social and emotional well-being, and cognitive and linguistic capabilities is evidenced by a large, interdisciplinary body of research. As such, early childhood and the dynamics and challenges of family life are fundamental to considering how we might build a more resilient, productive, and cohesive society."

The changing face of early childhood in the UK
The Nuffield Foundation July 22

"Science tells us that a child's experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today will reflect the kind of world we

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[12] https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016
[13] https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/

will live in tomorrow. It tells us that investing in the start of life is not an indulgence, but economically, socially, and psychologically vital to a prosperous society.

Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation, December 2020
Ipsos MORI | State of the Nation: Understanding Public Attitudes to the Early Years,
November 2020

Evidence that supports investment in the early years continues to grow, however, we have witnessed a series of challenges within our public sector over recent years, which prevented a coordinated approach to make this impact.

The number of children with SEND support and EHCPs has been rising since 2016 according to Government statistics[14], and research from Dingley's Promise in 2023[15] found that 95% of settings reported that the number of children with SEND had risen in the past year alone.

We know that disadvantage significantly impacts on child outcomes, and it is often a key factor in targeted approaches to support take up of early years provision. Where areas have layered the data sets for disadvantage and SEND together, we can see a direct correlation. The report "Investing in Early Intervention" from May 2022 documents similar concerns;[16]

*"Children with disabilities are at **greater risk** than non-disabled children **of experiencing both social and health inequalities.***

Social inequalities

*Children with learning disabilities are **more likely to experience a range of social inequalities** than typically developing children. (Figure 1)*

Research has identified that children with learning disabilities across childhood and adolescence are, compared to other children:

- *1.6 times more likely to be living in a family in **income poverty***

- *2.1 times more likely to have **no adult in paid work** in the household*

- *1.4 times more likely to have a mother with **mental health problems***

- *3.3 times more likely to have a mother with **poor physical health***

- *1.5 times more likely to experience two or more negative life events such as **bereavement and sexual abuse***

- *1.5 times more likely to experience **poor family functioning**, for example, a decreased ability to problem solve or talk through problems as a family*

- *1.3 times more likely to live in a **single parent household***

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[14] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england
[15] https://dingley.org.uk/researchsurveyfindings2023
[16] https://cerebra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EARLY-INTERVENTION-REPORT-A4-FINAL.pdf

- *1.9 times more likely to have a **primary carer with no educational qualifications"***

We regularly hear reports from LAs and families, that when families are looking for an early years place for a child with SEND, they are turned away. This often happens only after disclosing their child's additional needs. The impacts on day-to-day life can be extensive and devastating. Some of our parents report:

"Trying to find childcare was horrific, I ended up seeing my doctor I was so worried about my child, having to give up work and money."

"My mental health was suffering anyway. I needed a break from 24/7 caring and I just kept being told there were no spaces or I had to go through yet another process when other families just got theirs."

"Work was an outlet for me as well as an income source, but I had to move my work to weekends which means I cram 20 hrs work into 2 days and have no time as a family."

Parent representatives on the Dingley's Promise Parent Board

4. Our Interrelated Legal Requirements and Risk of Legal Challenge

The Childcare Act[17] 2006 and 16 sections 6, 7, 8 and 9, require LAs to secure childcare for working parents and the early education entitlements, whilst also outlining the LA powers to do so. The duties specify that provision for children with SEND should be secured for children up to the age of 18.

The Childcare Act was a pioneering piece of legislation, as it was the first act to be exclusively concerned with early years and childcare and early childhood services. The 3 key drivers in this act are:

- •   To reduce child poverty
- •   To reduce inequalities between children
- •   To improve well-being for young children

The Childcare Act enables a framework for delivery (and legal challenge) under three key areas:

The 'early years outcomes duties' require the provision of early childhood services and joint working between agencies to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and narrow the gap. The outcomes duties also enable pooled budgets to support joint delivery, with the aim of supporting easy to access services from pre-birth to 5, at a universal and more targeted level.

The 'sufficiency duties' require LAs to ensure sufficient early education and childcare. Our least advantaged families are (at the time of writing) legally entitled to the early years education as children turn two, and all families of children aged 3 and 4. Working families are entitled to additional hours for 3 and 4-year-olds and the entitlements aim to support child development but also remove a barrier to employment by supporting access and affordability.

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[17] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/notes/division/6/1

The sufficiency duties also require LAs to secure childcare for children aged 0-14, (or 18 for children with a disability) with the aim of enabling parents to take part in employment and employment-related activities. The role of the LA in securing sufficient places requires the use of data and a market management approach which uses parental demand, encouraging new start-ups and providing the workforce with training and business support.

The 'information duties' require LAs to ensure information is provided to both childcare providers and families, in order to meet their other childcare duties.

These legislative requirements are interdependent on each other. For example, improving the well-being of young children is reliant on securing integrated early childhood services, which support access to early education and childcare. Securing sufficient childcare requires information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents, in order that they may demand (ask for) a high-quality supply.

Whilst the requirements for producing and publishing childcare sufficiency assessments were repealed through the Children and Families Act 2014[18] it is arguably impossible to evidence that an LA has taken "reasonable steps" to secure childcare if they not first assessed the market.

The responsibilities of LAs were further defined by the Children and Families Act 2014, which seeks to improve services for vulnerable children and to support families. It underpinned wider reforms and policies to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no matter what their background. This is further strengthened by the Equalities Act 2010 (which superseded the Disability Discrimination Act 1995).

This legislation is also underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC) (1992). The Convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that all children are entitled to.

The governments green paper SEND Review: right support, right place, right time[19] further commits us all to identifying need at the earliest opportunity in high quality early years provision, and will bring a series of new requirements on LAs which will include ensuring families are aware of, and part of planning provision. These actions will inevitably require us to have a greater understanding of the supply and demand for provision locally, in order to plan for effective places.

Worryingly, there appears to be a general level of acceptance by families of children with SEND, that they are somehow 'less entitled' to their early education and childcare provision than other families. We have also heard through our own consultations with parents, that many give up employment as a result of not having the right early years provision for their children. We know this families are further impacted at transition phase, where many parents are forced to give up again many give up employment if their child is only able to take up a part time place or reduced hours. It is therefore imperative that LAs consider taking all reasonable steps to secure sufficient places by both measuring and then managing the sufficiency of the local market.

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[18] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted
[19]
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/624178c68fa8f5277c0168e7/SEND_review_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf

5. The Financial Case – Short, medium, and long-term impacts of not investing

There is, of course, an immediate financial risk to the LA from potential legal challenge where families cannot access their legal entitlements. The costs of a legal challenge alone can take up funds which could otherwise be supporting children. Shockingly, in 2023, local authorities won only 1.7% of SEND appeals at a cost of £99.2 million.[20]

For every place not taken up there is a loss of direct income to the LA, as funding from central government is based on take up locally. An element of this funding is also retained for central functions in the LA such as administration and management, and includes the measuring of sufficiency. LAs could calculate lost income, for example if the cost of an early education place is approximated to be £4000 per year per child, for every 10 children who do not take up their early years entitlements approximately £40,000 of income is lost to both the LA and sector.

We recognise the further impacts of this loss of potential income to the early years and childcare sector which will inevitably impact negatively on both the quality and sufficiency of places locally. The childcare sector is of course a large employer in its own right, as well as an enabler for families (in particular women) to work.

Children who are not supported in the early years are far more likely to require specialist support when they are identified, frequently as late as at school age. This significantly impacts on costs for public services, which in many cases could be reduced or even avoided if needs and pathways are supported earlier, as described in more detail in the case study on page 11.

The cost to families, in terms of the lack of access to their entitlements of 15 and 30 hours of early education and childcare, as well as the loss of income through limited access to employment should be considered. We know that maternal education, mental health, and low-income levels[21] impact heavily on child outcomes.

It is also worth remembering that the vast majority of early years and childcare provision is delivered by the private and voluntary sector who, in turn attract a percentage of additional funding, generated through fees, grants and other contributions. This makes investment in activity to support sufficiency places, along with good pathways *to*, and supporting take-up *of,* the early years entitlement vital for efficiencies, as well as being critical to improved outcomes.

Recognising the impact of early intervention, it is critical that we address the use of the High Needs Block. This funding should be given for children in the early years who have high needs [22], while SEN Inclusion Funding is designed for those with emerging needs.[23]

In some LAs, Inclusion Funding has become the sole provider of early years SEND funding, with the high needs block funding being dominated by schools. We believe that the best use of this funding is to also provide the right early intervention to children with high needs in the early years. This is critical for children's outcomes, and also for long term spending in the LA, as investing earlier is cheaper and will longer term reduce the need to spend later and without the impact of leading to the same positive outcomes or opportunities for children.

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[20] First Tier Tribunal for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SENDIST) 2023, Ministry of Justice.
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2023
[21] https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/maternal-mental-health/
[22] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2023-to-2024/high-needs-funding-2023-to-2024-operational-guide
[23] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2023-to-2024

Across the country, high needs block funding is overspent due to rises in numbers of children needing support. As places become scarce, so parents learn not to trust that the system can cater to the needs of their child and this in turn leads to even more requests for support. This cycle of a lack of high-quality appropriate provision, and worsening trust in the system from parents, needs to change in order to reduce the pressure on the system. A key way to improve this is to invest in early intervention for children that need it, to ensure that by the time they reach primary school they have had the best chance to develop. Their families would have experienced getting the right support, either from the mainstream or specialist education system, and therefore trust that their child will be properly supported in education. It is also worth noting that parents who do not trust the system are likely to believe that the only way for their children to get the right support is to go for an EHCP and often special school placements, even if educators believe they could thrive in the mainstream.

A high proportion of the early years and childcare sector report being under significant financial pressure for some time, with concerns around sustainability, recruitment and retention being prevalent for a number of years. These pressures are reported by LAs to have a disproportionally negative effect on the ability of the sector to meet the needs of children with SEND. Any additional pressures on resources, (time and costs), perceived or actual, are highly likely to result in children being turned away as the pressure to fill places as economically as possible is vital to setting sustainability.

Research by the Early Years Alliance in 2022[24] found that 92% of settings reported having to spend their own money on SEND support – something that they are increasingly unable to do in the difficult financial situation they are in. This directly leads to families being turned away when the settings realise their child has SEND – Dingley's Promise research[25] found that one in five children had been turned away, and the Early Years Alliance found that 28% of settings had admitted turning children with SEND away back in 2022. The turning away of our children is something that is growing and is worryingly becoming a norm in the sector despite equality duties.

The move to the new EYFS with its focus on reducing tracking of children is good news in general but could also be seen as a barrier to wider inclusive practice. The difference between working with a child with SEND where it is necessary to provide evidence to LAs of their needs to access funding, compared to working with other children who now have much reduced paperwork and tracking, is stark. For settings already struggling to support children with SEND effectively, this is another reason why settings may decide not to admit a child with SEND.

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[24] https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/too-little-too-late-report#:~:text=Of%20all%20respondents%20providing%20care,they%20do%20so%20'regularly'.
[25] https://dingley.org.uk/researchsurveyfindings2023

5.1 Case Study – The Cost Benefits of an Assessment and Brokerage Centre Service

Our service in West Berkshire supports around 50 families per year, and of these 50 around 25 children attend our Centre. When children come to us, they are unable to attend mainstream provision for a number of reasons. There may be a lack of parental confidence, a lack of skills in mainstream settings or perceived behaviours that challenge those mainstream settings. However, in the last year, 90% of the children that left us went to the mainstream rather than to specialist settings.

Around half of our children leave us each year and the cost of a special school place is around £60,000 per year. The average cost of a mainstream school place in England is approximately £7,460 per year. This means each child who goes to special school costs approximately £52,540 per annum.

This means that of the expected 12 children who leave our Centre annually, we would expect around 10 of them to transition to the mainstream. Just one year of these children being in mainstream education would then save the LA £525,000 per year.

This number increases annually as the children stay in mainstream education, making the financial impact cumulative to a maximum of £34,650,000 per annum assuming all ten children stayed in mainstream education until the end of year 11. It is of course very unlikely the whole cohort will stay in mainstream education for the whole of their journey, but this figure is the maximum annual saving possible.

The cost of this provision in 2023-24 will be £180,000 per year. In terms of investment and reward per child, the cost of 15 hours in our centre for one child per year is £11,700, or £23,400 for two years. We have worked out scenarios for one and two years in our provision, and then cross referenced with the time children spend in the mainstream after they leave us. The numbers are as follows:

Scenarios	Total cost	Total saving (if 1 yr at DP)	Total saving (if 2 yrs at DP)	ROI per £1 invested (in DP for 1yr)	ROI per £1 invested (in DP for 2yrs)
One year in mainstream	£52,500	£40,800	£29,100	£3.49	£1.24
Two years in mainstream	£105,000	£81,600	£69,900	£6.97	£2.99
Primary mainstream	£315,000	£204,000	£192,300	£17.44	£8.22
Whole education in mainstream	£577,500	£244,800	£233,100	£20.92	£9.96

There is no standard time that children will need to stay with us, as we transition them to the mainstream only when they are ready, as are their families and the next setting. This means that children stay with us for a range of periods, but from the figures it is clear to see that the sooner they leave us the bigger the saving for the LA in the long term.

6. Outcomes for Wider Children's Services -
Safeguarding and Supporting our Most Vulnerable and Least Advantaged Children.

Consistently, for over 10 years, the highest number of Serious Case Reviews (the review which takes place after a child death in a local area), have been with children under the age of five[26]. Within the group the highest proportion has consistently been with 0 to 1—year-olds. Clearly support through good early years provision from pre-birth to 5 offers a phenomenal opportunity to identify, support and safeguard our most vulnerable children. There are not many social workers who could afford to spend 15 or 30 hours a week with our most vulnerable children for example.

Families using provision are more likely to be supported by related services as our sector offer an invaluable check in with parents and carers often twice a day (at drop off and pick up), and often sign post to other services. 15 hours a week (as a minimum) of high-quality intervention delivered predominantly by the private, voluntary, and independent sector is a highly effective safeguard for our most vulnerable children.

Our discussions with LAs show that where they had taken a data driven approach to understanding demand it is often our least advantaged children who access the least amount of early education. In Swindon for example they tracked children in school with an EHCP and discovered that just 46% of children with SEND accessed their full entitlement compared with 84% of children without SEND. 10% of this group accessed no early years entitlements which effectively meant they started school with little or no support beforehand.

Alarmingly almost 80% of the group were also eligible for EYPP suggesting they are families on low incomes. This group typically went on to access school on a part time basis or had entry deferred, and we frequently hear reports that children with SEND are far more likely to be offered reduced hours in the early years and as they start school. So it seems our least advantaged children are accessing the least amount of provision, yet we know accessing early years impacts on both child and families outcomes.

School Based SEND Support

Most LAs report inadequate resources to support children with SEND locally across all service areas. Early years provision can identify needs and disabilities early, moving and reducing the need for costly resources as children reach school age to the early years. Some LAs estimated that by identifying and supporting a child in the early years with SEND to access universal early years and then school, a saving of £60,000 per child per year can be made. See case study on page 11 above.

Health and Wellbeing

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[26] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1123 286/Learning_for_the_future_-_final_analysis_of_serious_case_reviews__2017_to_2019.pdf

Supporting early education for children with SEND goes beyond the provision in settings. Staff provide a unique relationship with parents and carers often connecting with them twice a day every weekday, providing advice and support as well as signposting.

Health visitors for example provide a critical point of contact for most families. According to the national commissioning framework[27] used by all LAs they are required to support awareness and take up of all the early years entitlements.

Health visitors are also required to work with providers for the integrated health check at 2 years. Early years providers deliver a family support role both directly for children in the activities and services they deliver, and the contact and support they provide for families, in some cases every day at drop off and pick up.

Family Hubs

The range of services provided both universally and specialist support for families and young children, and the coordination of the services alongside early years providers will be enhanced through Family Hubs. This provides a unique opportunity for early intervention, supporting parents and carers to form patterns of relating with their child which will support positive development and independence from the earlier stage.

Sign posting will also be a key function for Hubs and the coordination of information. Again, this provides an opportunity to support the delivery of our information duties and ensure parent carers are aware of their entitlements and supported to take them up.

7. Outcomes for the Whole Council

Children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of society. It is essential that services for families of young children are well connected to services for adults, and the early years agenda can significantly support wider council aims in that process. This section shares some examples of how the connections could be realised.

Regeneration, Employment and Housing

Without a high quality and sustainable childcare sector our local economy as a whole will also be impacted on as a percentage of our workforce at any one time will require childcare to be able to work. The issues disproportionally effects women creating an untapped workforce.

The two leading organisations for mums in the UK, Pregnant Then Screwed and Mumsnet[28], have conducted the biggest survey of its kind into the impact childcare costs are having on families.
The survey of **26,962** parents of young children found that:

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[27] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthy-child-programme-0-to-19-health-visitor-and-school-nurse-commissioning/commissioning-health-visitors-and-school-nurses-for-public-health-services-for-children-aged-0-to-19
[28] https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/one-in-four-parents-say-that-they-have-had-to-cut-down-on-heat-food-clothing-to-pay-for-childcare/

"62% say that the cost of childcare is now the same or more than their rent/mortgage. This rises to 73% for single parents, and 73% for parents who work full time.

43% of mothers said that the cost of childcare has made them consider leaving their job.

40% of mothers said they have had to work fewer hours than they would like because of childcare costs."

Early years services can both break an intergenerational cycle of deprivation and support an immediate childcare need to enable families to take up employment and employment related pathways.

The childcare market itself is also a substantial and developing sector. It also nurtures a diverse workforce, from parent volunteers and apprenticeships to chain nursery managers and self-employed childminders.

Early years and childcare supports families into employment and lifts families out of poverty. These shared objectives provide a rational for the duty on LAs to work with partner agencies. It is essential that the LA shares regular information with partners on support available to families, and that they receive regular intelligence about demand and supply (as an indicator of sufficiency for disadvantaged families).

Capital strategies

Most LAs are working to reduce their physical buildings and in the process, support the local economy and where possible create an income stream. Childcare development remains a LA duty (ensuring sufficient childcare) and we have seen libraries, school caretaker bungalows, youth facilities and care homes all being converted for childcare and early years service delivery purposes. Creating centres such as the one we describe in our case study on page 10 could support good use of buildings and create a cost benefit as well a supporting compliance.

Corporate Communications and Public Relations

Most LAs will have targets to improve public relations and engagement with the local communities they serve. LAs should engage their communications teams to create positive 'good news' stories and vastly increase social media following for the whole council as a result. The information duties require LAs to inform families about early years entitlements and the range of services supporting the early years and childcare two. Families of 0 to 14 year olds (16 for children with SEND), make up a significant proportion of any population, the potential reach for each LA.

8. Summary and Next Steps You Can Take

Justifying the case for change can become yet another task added onto an ever growing to-do list. From our experience LA leaders, just like providers, are extremely committed to inclusion, but struggle with a range of priorities, some of which may be conflicting.

In many areas, the lead for early years and sufficiency may sit entirely separately from those leading inclusion in the early years, and in some areas, leadership is combined or even missing altogether. This section aims to suggest some considerations in raising the strategic profile and council wide commitment to early intervention and early years inclusion.

Next Steps You Can Take:

1. Do you have an early years and childcare strategy which has a central focus on early years inclusion throughout? Developing an overarching strategy based on the legal requirements of the Childcare Act can help create structure for any new early years and childcare related policies, and evidence "reasonable steps" are taken to secure compliance.
2. Have you engaged your lead member for children's services in a conversation about the risk of legal challenge as the new entitlements roll out? Members can be supportive in ensuring the wider council benefits are realised. They can also support the financial arguments for early intervention across a range of agendas.
3. Does your service structure (the council organisational chart) reflect your legal requirements and needs of delivery? This is particularly important for areas who may have lost strategic posts which drive forward the agenda locally. We often hear that early years inclusion is everybody's business, but without dedicated resource it can quite quickly become nobodies.
4. Have you clearly articulated the existing funding streams and case for change by illustrating the cost benefits of early intervention? Many senior managers and members are firefighting and won't know the detail that you do. Nationally in children's services there is often a focus on provision for school-age children and safeguarding, and the opportunities to stop and think about the benefits of early intervention are not always there.
5. Can you identify your champions? Lots of senior decision-makers have been around for a while, and some may have heard of previous early intervention programmes which were supported and successful. Can you create a think tank for those interested who might be able to help you develop a plan to raise awareness and gain support.
6. Can you tailor your messages to gain support from different quarters? As you can see from this paper there are different benefits of considering early intervention for different departments and agencies. Tailoring your messages and slowly but surely having individual conversations may also help your cause.
7. Can your schools forum be an enabling platform? Schools forums technically play an advisory role in setting budgets for early years on schools. Ensuring earliest representation is critical, however supporting awareness and understanding of the broader legal functions of the LA with regard to early years and early intervention is critical. Regularly updating the forum and ensuring a basic understanding will support.

8. Do you use publicity and marketing to continually raise the profile of early years and early years inclusion in general? There is a lot of negative press out there and by regularly celebrating successes and providing positive feedback you can ensure a focus on the difference early intervention can make, as opposed to what isn't working or is lacking.
9. It's not what you do it's the way that you do it! If you are writing a paper or inviting someone to a meeting think about the "sell". What are their priorities right now and how can your agenda support that?

Finally, it's important to recognise that whilst local government agendas have grown, resources haven't always kept up. People are often asked to juggle a range of agendas and we should never assume that the parties involved in decision-making are as up to date in their knowledge on a specific service area as we are.

Institutional memory is short, as constant reorganisations change and multiply individual's roles. Raising the profile and benefits of early intervention should therefore never be seen as a one-off task, but an ongoing conversation to support wider council objectives and maximise resources, as well as improving outcomes for all children and families.
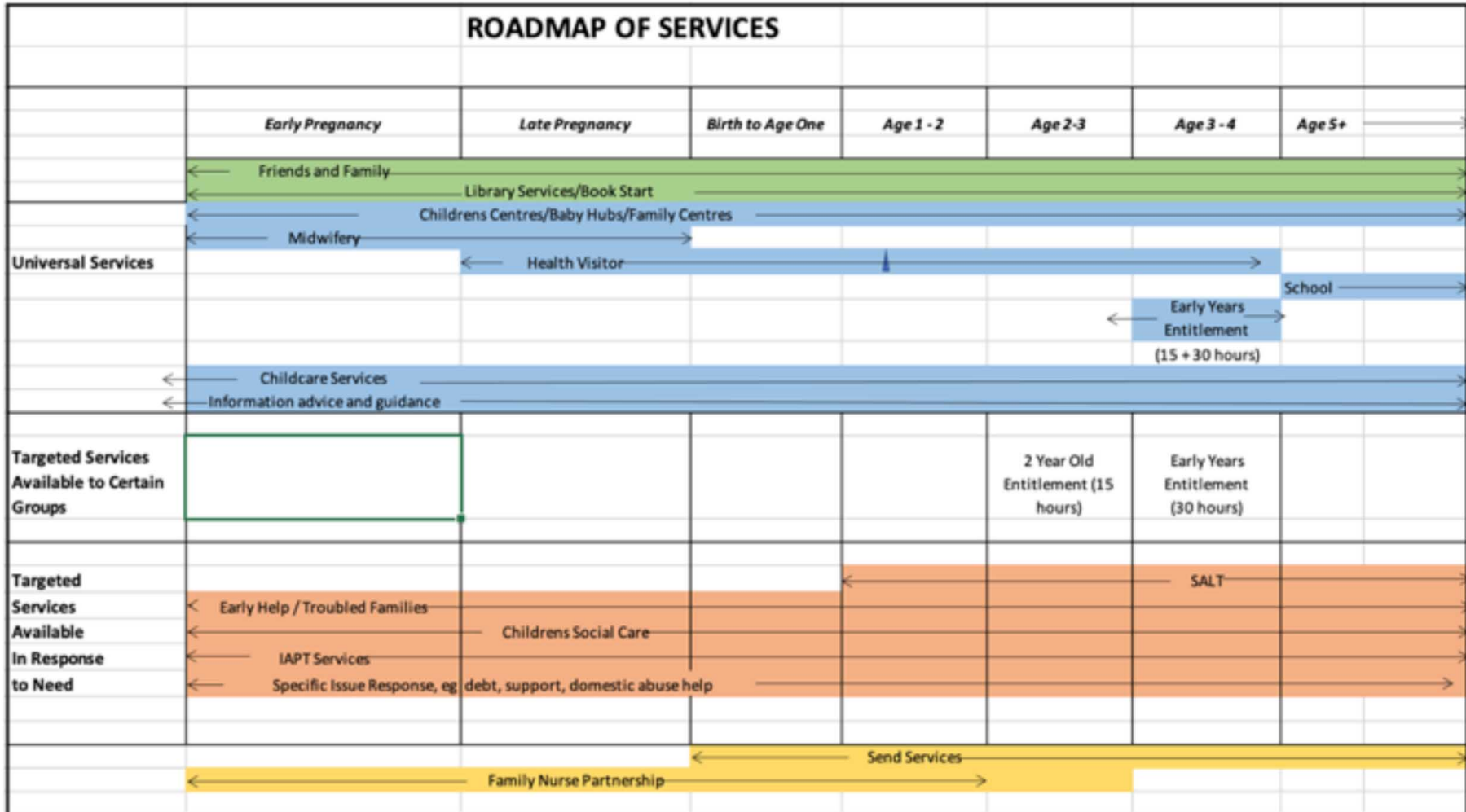
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APPENDIX 5: Road Map of Services

ROADMAP OF SERVICES

	Early Pregnancy	Late Pregnancy	Birth to Age One	Age 1 - 2	Age 2-3	Age 3 - 4	Age 5+
Universal Services	Friends and Family →						
	Library Services/Book Start →						
	Childrens Centres/Baby Hubs/Family Centres →						
	Midwifery →						
	Health Visitor →						
							School →
						Early Years Entitlement (15 + 30 hours)	
	Childcare Services →						
	Information advice and guidance →						
Targeted Services Available to Certain Groups					2 Year Old Entitlement (15 hours)	Early Years Entitlement (30 hours)	
Targeted Services Available In Response to Need				SALT →			
	Early Help / Troubled Families →						
	Childrens Social Care →						
	IAPT Services →						
	Specific Issue Response, eg debt, support, domestic abuse help →						
			Send Services →				
	Family Nurse Partnership →						

APPENDIX 6:

Assessing Childcare Sufficiency for Children with SEND in the Early Years

Have you Taken Reasonable Steps?

Dingley's Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion Project

Assessing Child Sufficiency for Children with SEND in the Early Years

Contents

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Dingley's Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion Project

Introduction and Background

This paper has been written by Dingley's Promise, a registered charity supporting inclusion in the early years nationally. As a provider of specialist early years provision across the country, we aim to support inclusion in mainstream settings wherever possible and appropriate. We also work nationally with local authorities and partners, as well as central government, to drive an inclusion movement for young children with SEND.

As a charity we have been involved in influencing change nationally for a number of years now, and in 2021 we secured funding from Comic Relief to improve the sufficiency of early years places for children with SEND.

This paper presents ideas developed and built on from our work with our partner Local Authorities on the project and aims to support Local Authorities to focus specifically on assessing and securing Childcare Sufficiency for children with SEND and their families.

Local authorities, early years providers and families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) tell us that children with SEND are often not able to access their early years entitlements to the same extent as the overall population of eligible children. Current unprecedented pressures on the sector around recruitment and limited funding to support inclusion, are resulting in even higher numbers of children with SEND not being able to take up their entitlements, having reduced timetables, or in some cases being excluded.

Our own experiences also suggest that confidence and skills are a major barrier to inclusion. Our own recent research conducted in autumn 2023 found.

- 95% settings stated that the number of children with SEND is rising, and 79% say the rise is significant.

- One in five parents reported being turned away from settings.

- 27% of settings felt one year ago they had no more space for children with SEND, when settings considered the impact of the new entitlements, this figure rose to 57%.

- Only 15% of local authorities believe they have enough provision for children with SEND and 78% think the new entitlements will make it worse.

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As the expansion of the entitlements roll out, we are highly likely to see an increased demand for places which will exacerbate current pressures. The prospect of affordable childcare is in many areas already reshaping and there is therefore a real risk of an even greater gap developing between children with SEND and their peers in the take up of the new entitlements.

Legal Requirements and Risk of Challenge – have you taken reasonable steps?

The Childcare Act[30] 2006 and 16 sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 places a series of duties on LAs which require them to secure sufficient childcare for working parents in their area, and to secure the early education entitlements. The duties also outline the LA powers they can use to do so. The duties specify that provision for children with SEND should be secured for children up to the age of 18. Whilst the requirements for producing and publishing childcare sufficiency assessment were repealed through the Children and Families Act 2014[31], it is unrealistic to suggest that an LA has taken "reasonable steps" to secure childcare, if they have first not assessed the market.

The Childcare Act requires us to ensure the sufficiency of places as a critical part of both improving child outcomes and reducing inequalities. This demand us to consider the childcare needs of families, both in terms of the early education entitlements, and also childcare which enables families to work and undertake work related activity. The two are inextricably linked and the methods and levers used to secure both are the same.

Typically, an assessment and resulting action plan through which any gaps are addressed, is an absolute minimum requirement for evidencing that an local authority has taken "reasonable steps" to secure sufficient provision.

For more information and links to the legal frameworks please refer to our related paper, *The Benefits of Early Intervention, The Business Case for Assessing and Securing Childcare for Children with SEND.*

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[29] 2023 Research Findings - Dingley's Promise

[30] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/notes/division/6/1

[31] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted

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How Local Authorities are Currently Assessing Supply and Demand for Children with SEND

In 2021, we looked at local authority Child Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs) to see how local authorities were measuring sufficiency for children with SEND. An internet search of over 20 CSA's online at that time found no specific methodology or analysis for this group, in relation to early years and childcare.

We also asked the 30 local authorities we were working directly with at the time, many of whom had been selected to work with us on the basis of their forward thinking approach to inclusion. Still, we found no specific methodology for assessing supply and demand for this group. There was instead a tendency to name the steps providers could take to support inclusion through utilisation of specific funding streams, as opposed to an assessment of whether sufficiency had been secured.

Our collective concern at that time was that the lack of assessment practice and awareness of sufficiency was in its own right adding to the problem and preventing local authorities from supporting inclusion. If local authorities are not specifically measuring demand, how can they be evidencing need, making a clear case of the need for resource, and demonstrating impact? Without a focus on measurement, they may also inadvertently be portraying a message that this area of work (i.e. meeting the needs of families with children with SEND), is not as important as others.

What we typically found was that a sufficiency assessment will include analysis of supply and demand using the following information including but not exclusively.

- Socio-demographic data (usually to locality level)
- Employment and workforce trends
- Questionnaires and feedback from providers
- Questionnaires and feedback from families
- Local intelligence, e.g. feedback from the Family Information Service (or equivalent), Job Centre Plus etc.

Some CSAs also contained a consultation with families of children with SEND, but an analysis of supply and demand was again across the whole population as opposed to specifically for this group.

Most areas conducting this global research still highlighted that they had insufficient places for children with SEND. Worryingly, despite there being no specific assessment for this group, families of children with SEND still emerge as having insufficient places.

It is important to remember that children with SEND are a specified group within the legislation, therefore a specific activity is necessary in order to provide a reasonable measure from which to create a baseline and action plan to secure sufficiency.

What we can collectively do to measure sufficiency for children with SEND

Our discussions with Local Authorities have outlined some possible steps which local authorities could take to specifically assess provision for children with SEND. They have been implemented by several LAs including: Swindon, Reading and Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. In all three of these areas the LA has been able to reshape local services and secure additional resource to evidence and respond effectively to unmet need and potential risk of legal challenge.

The methodologies and resulting data sets have created a great deal of discussion locally amongst senior leaders. The data supports an understanding of wider Children's Service and LA concerns around increasing numbers of children with SEND and a lack of specialist provision. In short, the data provides the evidence base for change and planning for school places, as well as creating a baseline for measuring the future impact of expanded entitlements on children with SEND.

Please note that the measures we have pooled here require interpretation and analysis locally, as well as a layering of intelligence to formulate assumptions and substantiate findings.

4.1 Suggested Demand-Side Measures
Successfully understanding demand for our population of children with SEND involves looking at current and historic information. We know children's needs may not present until they are in school, and that there will always be a number of children who are not known to any services until that point. Local intelligence is also key to help layer on some acceptable assumptions.

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Demand	
What do we want to know?	**Suggested methodology (collated LA wide but also broken down by locality where possible)**
Total number of children with SEND, by needs in the early years at any one time	Tracking back children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in school, across reception, year 1 and 2 (to see an average of 3 years, and emerging trends), to quantify the number of children who would have had additional needs had they been identified in the early years. This data could be broken down by type of needs and by looking at children accessing specialist support and mainstream. It is also critical to track children on SEND support in the same way – particularly as research from the Education Policy Institute suggests that children in deprived areas are less likely to get an EHCP and more likely to be put on SEND support.
	Referral rates for assessments (e.g. Section 23 Assessments) and requests for additional support in the most recent year could also be added to compare historic with more recent data. This comparison of historic and current needs can support the identification of children not known to services and not taking up any of their early years entitlements. It can also support an understanding of how accurate using current data will be over time and track improvement in the data accuracy.
	It's important to quantify the hours taken up by children with SEND as opposed to how many took up some hours where possible, as we know many children with SEND are offered significantly less than their entitlements state. Some LAs have been able to do this through their payments processes and others have had to develop the data collection over time. Some LAs also consider asking families at the end their time in early years what their typical weekly take up hours were.
Percentage of children with additional needs in relation to the total population	Overall population data divided by the above data. This is incredibly rich information for the childcare sector who should also be business planning for a percentage of their intake each year who will always need some form of additional support (i.e. setting intake which is representative of the local community).

Take up of places by children with SEND in comparison to the overall population	Again, looking back at the take up of all the entitlements over a three year period, by place and hours accessed, age groups and provider type as well as showing split placements (movement between settings).
Understanding the direct correlation between disadvantage and SEND	To further understand demand LAs should also track the numbers of these children accessing EYPP, and two year old entitlement uptake according to income status. For impact data across the whole of the EYFS and beyond LA's should also collate information about delayed and deferred entry to school, and part time provision.
What we know locally about attitudes, needs, and wants	Parent/carer feedback collected through a range of means e.g. whistleblowing procedure, local forums, and specific consultation. Intelligence collected from Family Information Service (FIS), support services, providers, and employment support services etc. Indicators of poverty, socio demographic data and employment profiles.

4.2 Suggested Supply Measures

Assessing the supply of places is complicated as our providers are required to operate inclusive settings. This means that simply asking providers if they have places for children with SEND obliges them to say yes, or fear being in breach of their funding agreement locally and code of practice. We know the reality is more complicated however and inviting **and welcoming** the lived experiences of providers is critical to building good relationships and therefore providing support where needed.

Supply	
What do we want to know?	**Suggested methodology (collated LA wide but also broken down by locality where possible)**
Places available in specialist early years provision	Places reported as available by Ofsted (the Ofsted down load) Places reported by known specialist early years providers (local intelligence, FIS, questionnaire, and conversations) including childminders.
Places available in the mainstream early years sector	Returns (e.g. questionnaires) from the sector – thinking carefully about the questions asked is important so as not to mislead (or suggest it's ok to turn children away). LAs told us asking about inclusive places offered, places providers would like to offer, places planned for financially as part of business planning may support more useful picture. Creating an ongoing and safe conversation sector will also enable regular feedback as well as support. Inviting, welcoming and logging concerns can support your local intelligence as well as drive change.
Adjusting for assumptions in developing an informed position about supply	Collating the experiences of families, providers, JCP, local support staff, take up of Disability Access Funding (DAF), SEND Inclusion Funding (SENIF) and Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

4.3 Are we sufficient? How big is the 'gap'?

We could argue that a simple comparison of take up rates between children with SEND and the overall eligible population gives us our answer. For example, in one of our areas who completed this work, over 94% of the overall population of eligible children took up their early years entitlements, compared with approximately 50% of children with SEND. Because the take up is lower we could simply argue there is insufficiency.

Many local authorities however suggested a more flexible approach, taking account of parental preference and trends to adjust local action planning. For example, many parents of children with SEND have told us they did not think they were "as entitled" as other families to the full entitlement. Changing cultural norms and raising awareness will take time, however it is essential to avoiding a legal challenge from families who may not be aware of their basic entitlements. After all, the information duties within the Childcare Act 2006 require local authorities to inform families of their legal entitlements.

Considering wider strategies around disadvantage will also be important. For many areas completing this work, they found that the group of children (with SEND) also tend to be our least advantaged families. We have also seen a direct correlation between children with low take up of early years places and deferred and part time entry to school. It is reasonable to infer that despite early years education having the greatest impact on our least advantaged children, these children are accessing the least amount of provision from birth through to statutory school age.

Summary

Securing the funding for support, training delivery and other areas of market management, will require sound evidence to support your business case. If you can't evidence it, you can't make a case for change. Specifically measuring sufficiency for children with SEND can give you a baseline for measuring change as the new entitlements roll out, as well as supporting your wider local authority business case and plans for inclusion. It is also vital for providers locally to have a clear picture of supply and demand to remain sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to changing needs.

Local authorities should keep in mind the overall aims of supporting child outcomes, reducing inequalities, and enabling parents to work, when assessing the market and action planning for sufficiency.

Remember that gathering any data will be a challenge, often for a number of departments who may be new to understanding why it is critical for securing legal compliance. It will also need to be refined over time and will certainly throw up more questions than answers when you start! Starting small with the tracking back exercise would be our recommendation.

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Short terms steps to begin your assessment for children with SEND.

1.	Use our previous paper The Benefits of Early Intervention, The Business Case for Assessing and Securing Sufficiency for Children with SEND, to make a business case for the time and resources locally to undertake this work.
2.	Identify your champions at a senior level and brief them before you begin. Getting buy in from those with the data and resources will be key.
3.	Can you bring all those with a part to play in gathering the data together as a time limited working party? You could use this and our related papers to shape the meeting and work out what you collectively can do now, and what will need to come later.
4.	Outline the legal requirements, risk of challenge and likely impact of not measuring sufficiency in all your conversations. Your data people will likely not be familiar with the early years and childcare agenda, and you may not be aware of what's collected and what's possible.
5.	Start with the tracking back exercise to begin to build your baseline to work from. Layer on as much related data as you can and remember to look at the hours of take up as opposed to how many children took up their entitlements.
6.	Engage your parent carer forum or voice group, but remember they are often overwhelmed with requests. Your internal and external staff will also be in regular contact with families of children with SEND who in our experience are often keen to help. Collating the views of parents and carers is likely to give you quotes you can use to bring your final report to life for the range of readers who will see it.
7.	Think about what you can do now, but also next. The identification and then analysis of data is likely to create as many questions as answers in the short term, however establishing a data set you can return to each year, and constantly improving your measures for collecting live data will help establish and embed new ways of working which will simplify the process over time.

8. Don't forget to geek out! LAs we have worked with have been really excited to finally be able to evidence what we have often known anecdotally and begin to work towards change. Whilst the data you present is likely to illustrate a concerning picture it is also the first step in being able to do something about it.

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APPENDIX 7.

Securing Childcare Sufficiency for Children with SEND

in the Early Years

Have you Taken Reasonable Steps?

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Dingley's Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion Project

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As a charity we have been involved in influencing change nationally for a number of years now and in 2021 we secured funding from Comic Relief to improve the sufficiency of early years places for children with SEND. This paper presents ideas developed and built on from our work with our partner Local Authorities on the project and other parts too.

The paper aims to support Local Authorities to focus specifically on securing Childcare Sufficiency for children with SEND and their families and builds on the previous papers create in this series, The Benefits of Early Intervention, (The Business Case for Assessing and Securing Sufficiency for Children with SEND) and, Assessing Childcare Sufficiency for Children with SEND in the Early Years.

We hope that in response to these previous papers we will begin to see a common approach to measuring sufficiency for children with SEND and evidencing the case for change locally and nationally. This paper considers the next steps in supporting LAs to consider the "so what" question, in relation to what we can do to take reasonable steps to secure provision, once we know what sufficiency looks like.

2. Legal requirements and risk of challenge – have you taken reasonable steps?

[The Childcare Act](#)[32] 2006 and 16 sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 require LAs to secure childcare for working parents and the early education entitlements, whilst also outlining the LA powers to do so. The duties specify that provision for children with SEND should be secured for children up to the age of 18.

The Childcare Act requires us to ensure the sufficiency of places as a critical part of both improving child outcomes and reducing inequalities. This involves us considering the childcare needs of families both in terms of the early education entitlements, and childcare which enables families to work and undertake work related activity. The two are inextricably linked and the methods and levers used to secure both are the same.

The Childcare Act enables a framework for delivery (and legal challenge) under three key areas:

- The **early years outcomes duties** require the provision of early childhood services and joint working between agencies to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes and narrow the gap. The outcomes duties also enable pooled budgets to support joint delivery, with the aim of supporting easy to access services from pre-birth to 5, at a universal and more targeted level.

- The **sufficiency duties** require LAs to ensure sufficient early education and childcare. Our least advantaged families are (at the time of writing) legally entitled to the early years education as children turn two, and all families of children aged 3 and 4. Working families are entitled to additional hours for 3 and 4-year-olds and the entitlements aim to support child development whilst also removing a barrier to employment by supporting access and affordability.

  The sufficiency duties also require LAs to secure childcare for children aged 0-14, (or 18 for children with a disability) with the aim of enabling parents to take part in employment and employment-related activities. The role of the LA in securing sufficient places requires the use of data and a market management approach which

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[32] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/notes/division/6/1

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uses parental demand, encouraging new start-ups and providing the workforce with training and business support.

- The **information duties** require LAs to ensure information is provided to both childcare providers and families, in order to meet their other childcare duties.

These legislative requirements are interdependent on each other. For example, improving the well-being of young children is reliant on securing integrated early childhood services, which support access to early education and childcare. Securing sufficient childcare requires information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents, in order that they may demand (ask for) a high-quality supply.

3. **Market Managing for Inclusion (the "so what?" question)**

The purpose of any sufficiency assessment is to enable an action plan to be published locally which details steps the LA a will take to ensure sufficient provision as far as is reasonably practicable. The range of information gathered will inform a detailed plan potentially covering the following areas for market development for example:

- Information to be shared with families to enable demand-led change in the sector.
- LA approaches to the development, commissioning, and direct delivery of provision
- Workforce development activity to support the recruitment and retention of staff in the sector.
- Business support activity to facilitate sustainability through information sharing, training and peer support.

Remember the role of the local authority in securing sufficient provision is to signpost, develop, and commission provision, only delivering directly as a last resort. The issues and challenges impact on all concerned so finding collaborative solutions with families, providers and the local authority is key.

3.1 Establish What You Want and Need Your Provider Market to Look Like

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Your CSA will give you information about unmet need. But what are your key principles which ensure your market is diverse, inclusive, and high-quality? Most LAs, families and settings we work with say they would like our early years sector to reflect a welcoming, inclusive, and diverse society.

Many areas identify a small number of providers who will be brilliantly inclusive. Often those providers develop a good reputation locally and parents, professionals and even other providers frequently refer families of children with SEND to them. The impact of this can be high numbers of young children with SEND in a small number of settings, and some settings becoming 'specialist' by default. We refer to this as the honeypot effect. If our aims are to promote inclusive practice across the mainstream wherever possible, then celebrating every setting who operates inclusively and changing up our champions will be key to achieving a fully inclusive early years.

The first step in developing your childcare sufficiency action plan will be to articulate your vision for an inclusive, high quality sector for all families.

3.2 Using Data to Drive Change Through Market Growth and Development

Your Childcare Sufficiency Assessment provides the evidence base for what you need to do to achieve your vision. Regularly updating it and using it to inform your existing and potential sector is a key requirement of securing sufficiency.

Every year there will be providers who close and those who open. A dramatic change in demand, such as new entitlements, will magnify change in supply. There will be providers who can meet the new challenge and those who cannot. Continually supporting and encouraging the start-up of provision, which is needed, of high quality, and inclusive, is critical for securing sufficient inclusive provision. Market management can effectively manage the turn over and improvement of a sector, particularly at times of change in supply and/or demand.

These are key actions LAs can take to drive new inclusive provision:

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- Publicise your CSA and specifically your SEND data analysis as it is critical business information for potential providers considering setting up, and existing providers to enable them to respond to changes in supply and demand locally. The information shows gaps in the market to support providers business planning.

- Actively recruit new providers to start up sharing examples of inclusive providers and how they are successfully offering places which represent the whole community.

- Provide start up support and normalise high quality inclusive provision. This can be done online or in person, buddying with local connections who already deliver inclusive practice effectively.

- Make a business case to your senior managers if your data shows you are short of assessment centres or specialist support or potentially provision which can support children into mainstream this needs to be raised. These facilities are unlikely to be delivered through market forces alone so the LA may well provide them as a last resort in order to maintain sufficiency.

- Regularly share your data with your existing providers through emails, networks, and business planning support sessions. Showcase examples of different providers who are acting inclusively to create new norms and avoid the "honeypot" effect.

- Support all providers from start-up to business plan for inclusion. For example, are they calculating their income and expenditure on a population with no children needing additional support? Or are they calculating income and expenditure based on a percentage of the population (reflecting their local community as gathered in the CSA) who will always need additional support?

- Proactively promote your Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) document to underline what is considered standard delivery for all children, and to support new norms forming as new providers come into the market.

- Make sure providers are regularly invited to talk about challenges with inclusion, as opposed to becoming stuck and simply turning families away. Avoiding a blame and shame culture will enable more supportive and productive conversations and lead to more overall inclusion.

- Support and challenge but do not collude! Have the conversation about exclusions and the challenges providers are facing but remember your role as a local authority is

to secure provision through market management levers. Your customer is the child and family. Have open discussions about the Equalities Act and risk of challenge to a provider who excludes. Offer all the opportunities you can to support inclusive practice using a coaching approach. Clarify with providers your role in implementing all your levers to support change across the market.

- Identify and promote your funding streams where you know extra resource will make the difference. Do not forget that as well as the DAF[33] and SENIF, your High Needs Funding Guidance[34] also clearly states its purpose is to support young children with complex needs.

- Most providers will be aware of and actively promoting Tax Free Childcare as they know any support with the cost of childcare that families can access, will ultimately benefit them in setting realistic charges. On our travels and through our conversations with providers we have yet to meet any providers who are actively promoting tax free childcare at the higher rate for children with SEND. This is a crucial funding stream for supporting inclusion which needs careful solution-focused conversations.

- Try to avoid the publicising of the honeypot effect, by changing up the providers you are celebrating locally.

3.3 Using Parental Demand to Drive Change - How Supporting Families Can Support Sufficiency

Many local authorities we work with have excellent relationships with parents and carers locally, it can also however be difficult to engage with families in the early years as they may well still be coming to terms with a new diagnosis and negotiating unfamiliar systems and services. Engaging families can bring about change that other market leavers cannot however, so considering how you use your information duties and inform all parents of what good inclusive provision looks like can bring about huge change. An example of this was the huge

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[33] Disability Access Funding is currently linked to DLA take up so promotion will be key
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2023-to-2024
[34] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2023-to-2024/high-needs-funding-2023-to-2024-operational-guide

degree of initial resistance from the sector when 30 hours was first announced as a policy, however once families were fully aware and choosing provision on that basis, the response from the sector changed dramatically.

Market management is about managing both supply and demand. Here are some steps which can support demand led change.

- Creating a checklist for choosing childcare for parents with children with SEND when selecting suitable childcare.
- Creating a choosing childcare check list for ALL parents which considers inclusion and diversity as the norm and represents how all children benefit from being in settings which reflect an inclusive, diverse, and welcoming society.
- Widely sharing and promoting your OAP document, so parents understand what provision should be available to their child in every setting.
- What does good inclusive practice look like, can you share and celebrate good practice case studies across a range of providers.
- Create a safe and confidential whistleblowing route for families who are turned away. It can be useful to signpost families who have negative experiences into your parent carer group so they can become part of the solution and influence change.
- Do you have parent carer representatives in your local parent carer forum for early years? We know this can be difficult as many families are facing stress, however we have also seen some fantastic parent carers lead dialogue with the sector and support local authority planning. This includes.
- o Parent carers meeting with each other to discuss their experiences of choosing and taking up early years to gain support.
- o Speaking about their experiences at provider networks, conferences, and webinars. It can be powerful to hear the impact e.g. loss of work, income, mental health, housing.
- o Parents and carers who actively promote good inclusive providers on social media can also help create new norms.

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Lots of families we have spoken to have had extremely difficult experiences of accessing provision which can lead to frustration, anger, and extremely negative impacts on their family life. Any work with families should therefore be handled sensitively to ensure that negative experiences lead to positive solutions moving forwards. Parents and carers who have engaged with us after having difficulties tell us that being part of the solution for other families to come can help them move from feeling frustrated and angry, to empowered.

It is also important to recognise that when parents are not able to access the right support at the beginning of their educational journey, it is likely that they will want to secure the highest levels of support as they go forward including specialist provision and EHCPs. It is our responsibility to make sure families do not have to fight from the earliest moment for the right support for their children and will over time lead to greater trust in the system, and lower levels of demand for specialist provision.

3.4 Supporting confidence and skills.

We have yet to meet providers who do not want to operate inclusively, but so often our workforce is under tremendous pressure and the practicalities can seem impossible. We also fully acknowledge that funding, recruitment, and retention are significant issues at present. An increase in demand for places resulting from the expanded entitlements is likely to create even more pressure on recruitment and retention difficulties.

We do know from our own experience and discussions with settings that by growing levels of confidence and skills it can have a huge impact on inclusion rates in an area. Our own Comic Relief Funded Inclusion Training Programme, which is at the time of writing reaching over 12,000 practitioners nationally, has seen some phenomenal results. At this time 98% of those who have completed our short online Inclusive Practice course alone tell us they believe they can take more children with SEND as a result.

Whilst some areas are able to prioritise spend on training, others may need to evidence need and potential change (your CSA) first. There may be other avenues of free training your

workforce can access. Many areas are supported by Stronger Practice Hubs which have access to free training for settings in their area, and in some cases offer free SEND training.

Other avenues for support might be through the Early Years SEND Partnership[35] which includes free webinars and training from Dingley's Promise, Nasen, Contact, NCB, CDC and Speech and Language UK.

One area of training that many setting leaders have said is currently lacking is core child development knowledge in newly qualified practitioners. This is something that is critical for early identification of needs. In response, the Department for Education has created online training that all settings can access for free[36]. It is also worth mentioning that the Early Years Educator qualification criteria has changed, and in currently being rewritten to include a whole section on SEND and inclusive practice, something which was very much neglected in the current course content.

On February 2nd, the DfE announced a recruitment campaign to help combat the current pressures on the sector and support new entrants[37]. 20 LA areas will also be able to offer a £1000 bonus to new starters. Inclusion in our minds should be at the heart of all induction and CPD.

3.5 Reduce paperwork for settings.

When the EYFS changed in 2021, one of the key differences was that there was a significant reduction in the tracking of children expected by practitioners. This change was made to reduce the pressure on settings and encourage more time spent directly working with an understanding each individual child. While this is in general a good thing, what it meant was

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[35] https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/about-us-0/networks/early-years-send/early-years-send-partnership-resources?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI5t7ds8-thAMVg49QBh3gEgYOEAAYASAAEgIbE_D_BwE

[36] https://child-development-training.education.gov.uk/

[37] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/childcare-recruitment-campaign-launched#:~:text=A%20major%20new%20national%20recruitment,more%20childcare%20places%20for%20parents.

that the difference in the amount of paperwork needed for a child with SEND compared to other children was now significantly different. Where settings are under financial pressure, this may mean that they end up turning children with SEND away because they simply do not have the staffing to do the paperwork that secures funding to give the child the best start.

The Department for Education has recognised these concerns and is in the process of creating new guidance on early years SEND assessments, to minimise paperwork and allow practitioners to focus on the child rather than tracking progress. Local authorities need to look at the systems they use to distribute SEND Inclusion Funding (SENIF) and consider whether they need the application process to be as detailed as it is now. In research by Dingley's Promise, a third of settings reported that too much paperwork is the main barrier to access, and one in five say the main barrier is that the time taken to access the funding is too long.

Local authorities could review their paperwork demands, and ideally shift the emphasis to reporting rather than application. There has been an increasing push for settings to write applications for funding and support rather than health professionals or local authority staff, and this is a disincentive for many from taking children with SEND.

Simple application procedures that get the funding to where it is needed quickly are likely to see a rise in inclusion and inclusive places being offered and reduce the numbers of parents experiencing being turned away by settings is something that is critical for their long term trust in the system.

3.6 A Word About Carrots and Sticks

At Dingley's we advocate for positive change and creating new and exciting norms of inclusion. We have yet to meet a provider who set out wanting to exclude children with SEND and it is for this reason that the leavers we suggest are on the whole about supporting and celebrating potential solutions.

ann.vandyke@dingley.org.uk May 24

We appreciate the significant pressures there are so many providers at this time, however the interrelated legislation surrounding inclusion in the early years is in place to ensure active discrimination does not occur. Local authorities have the power to remove funding if they feel that their local funding agreement has been breached. Clearly the direct exclusion of children on the basis of SEND cannot be tolerated.

We also include in our Manifesto for Inclusion[38] that we do not believe that an Ofsted grading of Outstanding can or should be reached where there are no children with SEND considered or attending. Delivering high quality provision cannot in our minds be achieved without it also being inclusive as a fundamental principle of working.

4. Summary and Steps you Can Take

Securing the funding for training delivery and other areas of market management will require sound evidence to support your business case. In short if you cannot evidence it, you cannot make a case for change. Our hope is that this paper is read in conjunction with our previous two in this series, **The Benefits of Early Intervention**, (The Business Case for Assessing and Securing Sufficiency for Children with SEND) and **Measuring Childcare Sufficiency for Children with SEND in the Early Years**.

Securing sufficiency requires a specific skill set along with consideration of all of the legal functions and duties relating to it. Our experience has been that often the experts with the knowledge and skills to manage change are no longer employed or have a plethora of related roles to juggle. Here are some steps which may help in the immediate and longer term to support you:

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[38] https://dingley.org.uk/manifesto/

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1. Do you have a dedicated lead for securing and managing sufficiency? Securing inclusive places is clearly a fundamental part of the legal requirements. Can you use the papers we have created to secure funding if needs be?

2. Audit where the staff are within your LA and partner agencies who carry any of the roles we have described in this paper. Can you bring them together to ensure experience is pooled, roles are understood and are connected eg quality improvement and inclusion are both achieved through market management, for example demand led change drives quality improvement. Establishing a joint plan will be key if you do not have a dedicated post holder(s).

3. Use your CSA analysis to collectively develop a description of what you would like and need your provider market to look like. Use the Childcare Act Framework to ensure you are not straying from your public duties but state your principles too, making sure inclusion is central throughout. If you do not state what you are aiming to achieve it is difficult to plan how to get there. A shared statement based on the legislation can also help secure the right people in ownership and delivery.

4. Can you audit the activities you currently deliver across different roles, to identify gaps using our suggested headings above?

5. Develop (and publish) a detailed action plan (using the information in this paper) with clear timescales and any gaps highlighted as risks. Are you managing the turnover of the market to create positive change for example, or simply working with the market you have now as your totality?

6. Share your plans with senior managers and leaders including your lead members.

7. Engage families of children with SEND in the planning and delivery process. Are you utilising demand led change and supporting families to be part of positive change?

8. Review your training offers locally to support new norms around induction for all staff. Are you making the most of any free training available to support your core activity? Are you incentivising the completion of training using local reward systems?

9. Focus on solutions and celebrate successes to create excitement in meeting children's needs and counter the negative norms which can be present.

10. Inform your providers of your plans and engage them in a welcomed and ongoing conversation. Ensure you outline your role in securing provision (ie that your customer is both child and family, *and* to work with providers too).

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