



Report of the Cabinet Member for Community (Support)

Special Cabinet – 29 September 2022

Swansea Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022

Purpose:	To approve the findings of the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA). The Assessment forms a statutory duty on local authorities to 'secure sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents', therefore it relates to compliance with a statutory responsibility
Policy Framework:	Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Childcare Act (2006)
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal. The duty to assess childcare sufficiency includes a requirement to consult with key groups including all stakeholders
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that Cabinet: 1) Approves the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment attached at appendix A 2) Supports the identified Actions in section 4 to develop an Action Plan to address areas for development identified in the CSA
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of the 2006 Childcare Act, a duty was placed on all Wales local authorities to 'secure sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents'.

1.2 The Duty on all authorities to secure sufficient childcare requires the completion of a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment every 5 years (previously 3 years) and the publication of any findings including actions towards sufficiency.

1.3 To date, assessments have been completed in 2011, 2014 and 2017.

2. The 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

2.1 The 2022 Assessment was undertaken by the Childcare & Play Sufficiency Manager within the Partnerships & Commissioning Service of Social Services under the Early Years Programmes Lead Officer. Additionally, a Sufficiency Assessment Support Officer post was created in September 2021 to support completion.

2.2 The assessment was undertaken internally between July 2021 and May 2022 and featured extensive consultation with children & young people, parent/carers, professionals and the general public, as well as several stakeholder working groups representing the protected characteristics.

2.3 The assessment is structured according to statutory guidance provided by Welsh Government.

2.4 Significantly, the 2022 CSA has been compiled at a time of major change and uncertainty. The Covid-19 Pandemic above all else has massively impacted findings, views and data. Additionally, developments such as a commitment to extend the Flying Start Offer to include two year olds were emerging at the time of assessment which meant that the overall position identified may well change considerably in the near future.

2.5 As a result, much of the findings and recommendations are heavily caveated as being reflective of the current situation. Most identified actions will include the requirement to re-assess over the coming year.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Whilst noting point 2.5, key findings of the Assessment were;

Overall, there appears to be sufficient childcare, based on attendance, waiting lists, vacancies and consultation responses. However, this is impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and there are certain barriers that remain. This is a consistent view across areas and childcare types.

- **Cost of childcare is a barrier** and the primary barrier to access for families with many feeling it is not a viable option. Several responses noted that comparative costs against income from employment meant they were unable to continue to work.

- **Take-up of tax-free childcare** is low by comparison which adds to the issue. This national scheme reduces childcare costs.
- **Swansea is an area of diverse needs** – with a marked difference between the most and least affluent, those with easy access to provision and those in rural communities having to travel to childcare. This can make planning for childcare problematic, as well as impacting upon the sustainability of settings operating in areas of need.
- **Most families’ desire pre-childcare doesn’t translate into reality** – with a much higher number intending to access formal childcare, often bilingually, than end up taking this up. The comparative data from families prior to their child requiring childcare presents a marked difference. This needs further consideration.
- **The quality of formal childcare** is high according to most of those consulted. Feedback from parent/carers was consistent that they were pleased with the service that they received.
- **Financial sustainability is a concern for settings**, despite considerable additional funding in response to Covid. Many settings stated that they were unsure if they would continue to be operating over the next 1 to 2 years. Whilst there is inevitable turnover of providers, particularly childminders, this figure was notably high.
- **Settings are struggling to find staff**, with many vacancies remaining open for some time and the sector feeling undervalued as well as believing the profession warrants higher pay to justify the responsibility.
- **The proposed expansion of WG Early Years Expansion will have a considerable impact** although how exactly is to be confirmed at the current time. This is something that will need to be a particular area of focus over the coming months.

4.0 Next Steps

4.1 A comprehensive set of recommendations and associated actions can be found within the full report however key recommendations include;

- **Increase the take-up of tax-free childcare**, through engagement, awareness and support for settings, so families know they can pay a reduced amount for registered childcare
- **Support those in greatest need**, such as those on lower incomes, or with specific need barriers to access childcare such as additional learning needs (noting that processes currently exist to offer this support)

- **Undertake additional research** that delves deeper into perceived areas of concern such as why intentions for childcare do not always materialise, or areas with a potential shortage in childcare.
- **Support the childcare workforce** through access to training, guidance and Continued Professional Development (CPD). The local childcare sector plays a vital role and needs to feel supported to maintain this and to develop.
- **Promote childcare as a career**, to ensure settings are not short of staff and childcare is seen as a reputable career with a salary to match. Settings are struggling to recruit and need to feel there are high quality candidates available.
- **Continued sustainability support** for the sector including grant funding and business health checks that will allow them and us to measure how they are doing and if more assistance is required.
- **Plan for the development of the WG Early Years Offer Expansion as part of Programme for Government**, by considering likely implications, planning with key stakeholders and putting steps in place

4.2 The CSA includes an annual action plan which details progress towards meeting the identified actions. For each action, a timescale is set with a view to all actions being achieved by submission of the next assessment in 2025. There needs to be ownership of these actions and a commitment to collaborative working from internal and external partners.

4.3 Additionally, the CSA and its recommendations should advise all relevant planning, policy and funding to support its implementation. This will be achieved by ensuring CSA actions mirror or are reflected in other relevant plans and vice-versa.

4.4 Ultimately, the CSA is an evolving document and the process for assessment will continue over the next five years, including ensuring all stakeholders, not least Swansea's parents / carers are engaged and continue to have the opportunity to feed into it.

5.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

5.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

5.2 The duty to undertake a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment requires local authorities to consider each of the protected characteristics and respond to any shortfalls or areas requiring additional focus.

5.3 As part of the 2022 CSA, specific consultation was undertaken with;

- representative groups supporting children & young people with additional learning needs
- those from and representing ethnic minority groups
- Children & young people including pre-school children (via observation) and school-aged children up to year 6.
- Swansea's Poverty Forum, including a specific engagement to consider implications of childcare costs for those living in, or at risk of, poverty.
- Additionally, a range of surveys were developed including for parent/carers, children & young people, professionals and staff within the sector. These surveys allowed for identification of individual characteristics and needs and any associated barriers or other areas to address.
- The draft CSA Public Summary and Action Plan must be displayed on the authority's website for 28 days prior to submission to allow for additional feedback.

5.4 As such, an IIA Screening for Relevance was completed which identified no further action was required.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. The associated action plan details resource implications relating to each action,

with a focus being on ensuring available resources are appropriately channelled to best meet need.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 Submission of the assessment will ensure that the Council complies with its statutory duties under the Childcare Act 2006 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix A Swansea Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022

Appendix B IIA Screening