

Appendix 2: Additional Information

1. Sufficiency

- 1.1. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure equal access for all children and young people to a sufficient, sustained market of high quality free early education and / or childcare provisions and the production of an Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment that provides a snapshot report of the supply of places, by School Panning Area, across all types of early years education and childcare provision.
- 1.2. In Kent, these statutory duties are undertaken by Kent Analytics within the Council in partnership with the Sufficiency and Sustainability and Partnership and Integration Teams within the Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) in The Education People (TEP). TEP undertake these duties as part of their Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council.
- 1.3. To complete the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Kent Analytics, undertake modelling to calculate the number of 0-4 years olds requiring childcare places in Kent. EYCS carries out an annual survey to collect information about demand and availability of childcare places across the sector. Using this information, as well as data from other sources, TEP assess potential demand and sufficiency of places, to determine whether there are enough childcare places across the market to ensure that every child who needs or wants a place has access to one.
- 1.4. While the overall number of providers is failing, Kent's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment report 2022/23¹ indicates a current oversupply of childcare places for children 0 – 4 year-old across Kent in general, with a Kent wide surplus of 7083 places.
- 1.5. The same assessment shows that whilst the vast majority of families access childcare within the same district in which they live, nearly 10% of families (over 4000 0 – 4-year-olds requiring childcare in Kent) travel to other districts for this purpose.
- 1.6. "Free For 2" (FF2) is Kent's name for the government's free education programme aimed at addressing the disadvantage gap in relation to childcare. The most common reasons given by parents to explain why they had not taken up their FF2 offer, is in relation to availability issues, with parents saying they are waiting for a funded place at their preferred setting, that there were no places available in their local area, or parents preferring to attend a setting outside Kent.

¹ https://www.kelsi.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/91237/Childcare-Sufficiency-Assessment-2022-23.pdf

- 1.7. It is likely that families travel to other districts to access childcare for one of the following reasons: lack of quality childcare, lack of affordable childcare, lack of sufficient local childcare and parental choice.
- 1.8. This reinforces the suggestion there is a localised supply and demand issue, meaning that although there are sufficient places, those places are not always where they are needed.
- 1.9. Feedback from other local authorities indicates that new childcare places tend to emerge in affluent areas creating a surplus in those areas. This creates a deficit in areas with higher indices of multiple deprivation in relation to demand and therefore less choice for families. Some unitary Local Authorities have established processes between their planning departments and those responsible for their statutory sufficiency duty. This enables them to have greater oversight of requests to set up new nursery provisions and have more influence on where new provision is established. No such arrangement exists in Kent.
- 1.10. To address some of the disparities described above, the government is planning to expand the early years free entitlements, in a phased approach, starting April 2024. This is intended to help parents back to work to boost economic growth.
- 1.11. There is concern that existing challenges within the sector are likely to be exacerbated by this programme. Data obtained from TEP indicate that only an average of 31% Kent providers currently offer places to under 2 year olds, with the lowest percentage in Maidstone and Sevenoaks (both at 23%) and highest in Canterbury and Folkestone and Hythe (both at 43%).
- 1.12. Evidence from the Early Years Alliance and the Coram Family and Childcare suggest that the funding for existing entitlements is insufficient. On top of this, the recent cost of living challenges, and inflationary pressures have left early years entitlements funding falling behind the cost of delivery. In Kent, as is the case nationally, there are significant risks regarding the early years sector sustainability. Increasing numbers of established businesses have closed down or looking to close in the near future. Several stakeholders interviewed describe a sector “on its knees” and staff “burnt out”. The TEP Childcare Sufficiency Officers (CSO) reportedly invest over 50% of their time in supporting PVI early years providers to remain sustainable.
- 1.13. When the expansion to early years entitlements starts to be rolled out, some providers, with tight budget margins, may find themselves forced out of the market, as they will no longer be able to cross-subsidise the ‘free’ hours by charging families more for additional hours. Alternatively, providers may choose not to offer the funded entitlements. Similarly, regarding the ratio change, some providers have expressed their reluctance to reduce their current adult to child ratio, citing safeguarding concerns.

- 1.14. Issues associated with this may disproportionately impact on children with SEND. Nationally, findings of [Coram's Childcare survey for 2023](#) conclude that children with SEND are not taking up childcare places to the same extent as their peers, and that training and confidence of mainstream early years and childcare providers are critical barriers in supporting children with additional needs in mainstream settings. A recent report of the [Disabled Children's Partnership survey \(Failed and Forgotten, March 2023\)](#), highlights that 3 in 4 parent carers have had to give up employment (or their whole career) due to the lack of support available for their disabled child.
- 1.15. These findings were echoed in stakeholder engagement undertaken as part of the early years review with Early Education (research partner) identifying in their report that "Parents / carers of children with SEND may experience rejections from settings due to insufficient support and lack of accountability."
- 1.16. Currently, Kent's Childcare Assessment Tool does not have a specific breakdown for children with SEND or any other vulnerabilities meaning that sufficiency of placements for children with SEN in early years is not understood or identified proactively as it is for school age children.
- 1.17. This is because early years education is non-statutory, people can register at multiple places and parental choice is a key determining factor.