

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION**

Thursday, 11 March 2021

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>EARLY YEARS SUFFICIENCY AND COVID19 RESPONSE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

The report provides the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an overview of Wirral's Childcare market sufficiency for the period of April 2019 – March 2020 plus the operations in response to Covid19 in 2020, securing childcare places specifically for vulnerable and keyworker children.

The report and strategy are aligned to priorities of Wirral Council's Plan 2025:

- Working for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes and raising the aspirations of every child in Wirral
- Working for safe and pleasant communities where our residents feel safe, and where they want to live and raise their families.

This matter affects residents across the borough.

This report does not relate to a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 19/20 for publication.
2. Note the Covid19 Response of Wirral's Childcare Providers. in continuing to offer Early Years Childcare and Education through such unprecedented times.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1** The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on Local Authorities in England to report annually a review of childcare to elected members and make the report available to the public. The report reviews the demographics of the area, the demand for childcare and supply of childcare. All this information is analysed to decide if there is sufficient childcare to meet the needs of families now and in the future.
- 1.2** Having a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment means that families are able to find childcare that meets their child's learning needs and enables parents to make a real choice about work and training.
- 1.3** In order to maintain Wirral's Childcare Sufficiency through such unprecedented times the collaborations between the Local Authority and the sector, when the country moved into its first Covid19 National Lockdown on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, were driven by maintaining sufficiency, business sustainability support, access to Public Health and PPE resource and dissemination of Department of Education guidance's.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1** There are no other options to be considered as the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is a statutory duty under the Childcare Act 2006.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1** Wirral's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) April 2019 – March 2020 outlines the following;
- 18,432 children aged 0-5
  - 384 early years providers
  - Average 80% occupancy of places
  - £40 - £43 per day average price for day nurseries/pre-schools
  - £36 per day average for childminders
  - £4.50 - £8.00 average for extended care provision.

Further information is outlined in the diagram infographic below.

- 3.2** The CSA identified that Wirral has a continued decreasing birth rate over recent years from an average of 3500 in the years 2013-15 to; **2017 – 3366, 2018 – 3242, 2019 – 3150**. This will need to be monitored in future sufficiency assessments, in order to prevent an oversupply.

# Wirral Borough Council Childcare Sufficiency 2019/20

  
There are 18,436  
children aged 0 to 5  
in Wirral

  
There are 38,346  
children aged 5 to 14  
in Wirral

  
**75%**  
of the working age population  
are in employment

**23%**  
of workers may require childcare  
during atypical hours  


  
55 children aged 0 to  
4 in Wirral have an  
EHCP

  
1676 children aged 5  
to 18 in Wirral have  
an EHCP

## 2 YEAR OLD FUNDING

- 32%** of 2 year olds are eligible nationally
- 35%** of 2 year olds are eligible in Wirral
- 81%** of eligible 2 year olds are taking up funding in Birkenhead
- 87%** of eligible 2 year olds are taking up funding in South & West
- 97%** of eligible 2 year olds are taking up funding in Wallasey



## AVERAGE PRICE OF CHILDCARE PER DAY

Day Nursery / Pre-School	• Under 1's • Under 3's • Over 3's	£43.96 £41.35 £40.38
Childminder	• Under 1's • Under 3's • Over 3's	£36.23 £36.23 £36.00
Extended Care	• Breakfast Club • After School Club • Holiday Club	£4.88 £9.13 £32.00

## 3 & 4 YEAR OLD FUNDING

- 98%** of 3 year olds are taking up a Universal funded place
- 96%** of 4 year olds are taking up a Universal funded place
- 2910** Extended Entitlement codes have been issued in Wirral
- 2811** Extended Entitlement 3 & 4 year olds are accessing a place

## PROVIDER OCCUPANCY



On average settings are about 80% full, and most have vacancies for all ages

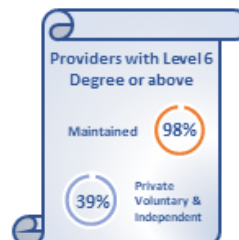
## AVERAGE OPENING HOURS

Childminder	Day Nursery	Pre-School
Open: 8am Close: 6pm	Open: 8am Close: 6pm	Open: 9am Close: 6pm
Before/After School	Holiday Clubs	Schools
Open: 7:45am Close: 5:45pm	Open: 7:45am Close: 5:45pm	Open: 8:45am Close: 3:30pm

## PROVIDERS DELIVERING FUNDED PLACES



**95%**  
of Providers are Ofsted rated Outstanding, Good or Met



## Parent Views

75% of parents were able to easily find childcare, with 75% agreeing there is suitable holiday provision available



Most parents require childcare all year round, with 23% requiring term time only. Over half of parents surveyed use Day Nurseries, 34% use Pre-Schools & 13% use Childminders



50% of parents use paid for hours, with 13% of those surveyed using 15 hours of funded entitlement, & 37% using 30 hours of funded entitlement

Almost a quarter of parents cited proximity to work as the most important factor in choosing childcare, followed by type of provider, type of funding offer, opening hours, flexibility and proximity to home



Less than 10% of parents told us they are aware of the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)



Only 5% of parents surveyed said they are aware of the Disability Access Fund (DAF) & Inclusive Practice Fund (IPF)

65% of parents surveyed told us they use informal childcare (i.e. friends and family)

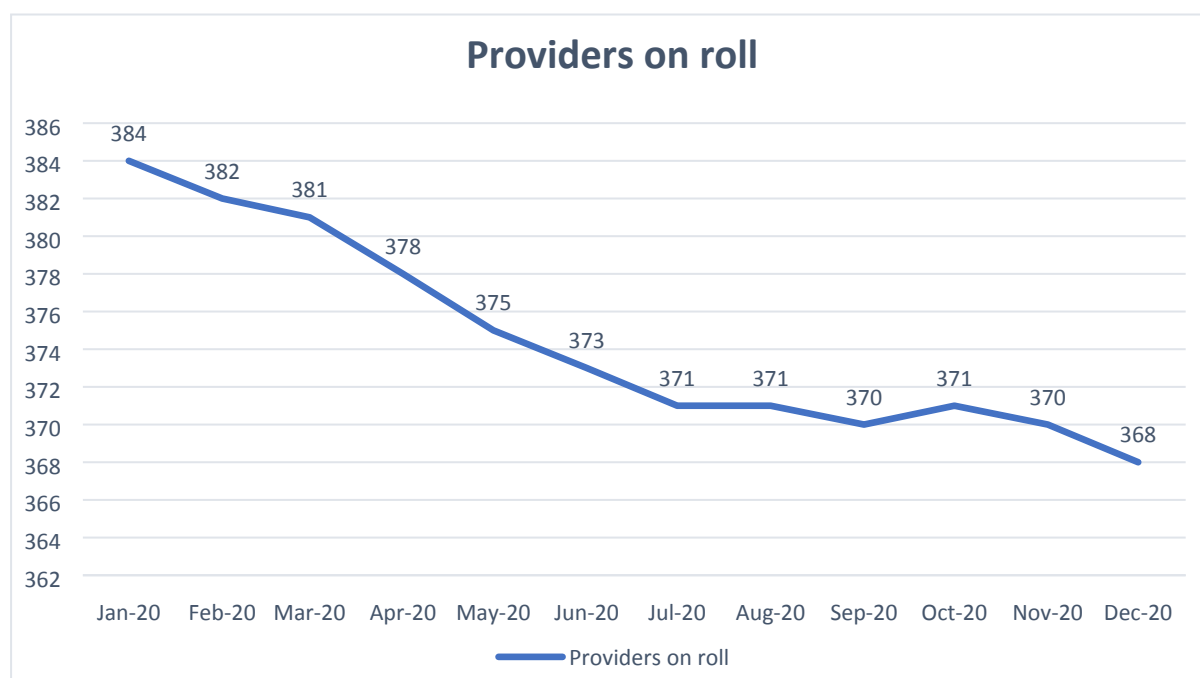


25% of parents told us they are aware of the 2 year funding entitlement, whilst 26% of parents are aware of 3 & 4 year old funding. 33% of parents surveyed are aware of the extended 3 & 4 year old funding entitlement



(Parents were surveyed via Focusgroups/Survey Monkey/Qualtrics/Canvas)

- 3.3** At the start of 2020, there were 384 Ofsted registered Early Years Providers on roll. At the end of the year there were 368, as below, a reduction of 4.42%



\*Graph image above shows a depleting number of providers from 384 to 368 across 2020.

- 3.4** The biggest decline has been in the Extended Care sector, with an overall reduction of 18.42%, followed by childminders at 5.11%, there was a slight increase in day nurseries of 1.52% and we end the year with one more Day Nursery than was available at the start of the year. There has been a reduction with Independent School of 25% but in real terms this is the closure of one out of the four Independent Schools that was open at the start of 2020 and had been under threat of closure for a considerable amount of time.
- 3.5** All 3 + 4 years olds are eligible for **universal** free childcare entitlements, with a % eligible for free 2-year funding, subject to criteria, which can fluctuate year on year. A proportion of working parents will also be eligible for an additional 15 hours (30 extended), again subject to an earnings threshold criterion, see below.
- All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 15 hours per week until they start reception class in school.
  - Children aged 3 and 4 where both parents are working, or from lone parent families where that parent is working. Earning a weekly minimum of the equivalent of 16 hours at national minimum wage or living wage and less than £100,000 a year.
  - Children aged 2 whose families receive certain benefits (including low-income families in receipt of in-work benefits), or those who meet additional non-economic criteria, are entitled to 15 hours per week. Nationally it is estimated around 32% of 2 years olds are entitled to this. Wirral has had fluctuation of % eligible, highest 43% to lowest

36%, so is variable. This is due to the socio-economic status of the cohort at point of eligibility.

- 3.6** The Local Authority receives a Designated School Grants (DSG) from Central Government, which has a dedicated Early Years Block of funding with a requirement from DfE to pass over 95% to those providers delivering funded early education places. Not all providers choose to offer free funding entitlements, through their own business modelling. However, parents may opt to use a different provider if they do not.

Wirral has a mixed economy of offering funded places across childminders, pre-schools, day nurseries, maintained nurseries and schools. This gives flexibility to parents.

### **3.7 Childcare providers delivering 2-year funded places**

There are 223 providers (58%) currently delivering 2-year funded places in Wirral:

	Childminder	Day Nursery	Pre-School	Maintained Nursery School	Independent School	School
Birkenhead	17	18	1	0	0	9
Wallasey	15	13	6	2	0	6
South & West	77	33	19	1	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b>

\*Image above shows number of providers across the various settings delivering 2-year funded places.

### **3.8 Childcare providers delivering 3 and 4-year-old funded places.**

There are 254 providers (66%) in our local authority currently delivering 3- and 4-year-old places:

	Child-minder	Day Nursery	Pre-School	Maintained Nursery School	Independent School	Maintained School	Extended Care
Birkenhead	15	18	1	0	3	22	2
Wallasey	13	13	6	2	0	15	0
South & West	64	33	20	1	1	22	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>5</b>

\*Image above shows number of providers across the various settings delivering 3- and 4-year funded places.

- 3.9** In summary, there are sufficient childcare places across Wirral to meet current demand with flexibility within occupancy levels to respond to growth once Covid19 socio economic and environmental circumstances return to more normal times. Planning for future sustainability is a key agenda and one that Wirral Council's Early Years team are preparing for, through a series of business recovery online information/training sessions across the next 12 months.

## **4.0 COVID19 RESPONSE 2020/21**

### **4.1 Sufficiency During COVID19**

Following the announcements made on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020 for a National lockdown, of Wirral's then 384 settings (inclusive of F1 provision in 62 schools), 168 (64%) reported as remaining open/partially open, with the remainder 216 closing. Closures were predominantly highest in the childminder provision, due to a lack of demand for places or through themselves having to follow the shielding advice from Public Health.

From Monday 6 April 2020 the Department for Education introduced a ***"New local authority data collection on early years and childcare provision"*** (DfE:2020). The requirement was for local authorities to provide information on the status of the early years and childcare settings in their area by completing a short online data collection form twice weekly on.

- Numbers and types of settings which are open/closed.
- Numbers of critical workers' children and vulnerable children accessing/in need of childcare.
- Any other information you wish to provide, for example availability issues/other problems or best practice that we can help address or share.

**Table 1: below gives an overview of responses to register returns during each lockdown period;**

	Average total open	Early years group settings	Schools	Childminders
Lockdown 1 Apr-Jun	200 – 55%	66 -49%	65 – 89%	72 – 43%
Lockdown 2 Nov	365 – 99%	129 – 100%	74 – 100%	162 – 95%
Lock down 3 Jan - Feb	277 – 76%	103 – 80%	53 – 80%	121 – 73%

**To note on above,** on average 39% of early years providers submitted their register. Providers and nursery managers cited no returns being due to having to work in ratio with children in rooms, not having administration time to respond to emails and being overwhelmed by new ways of working/demands being placed upon them.

**Table 2: below give an overview of the attendances of vulnerable/keyworker children during each lockdown reporting period;**

	Total ave. each week	Vulnerable children	Critical/keywork children
Lock down 1	823	50	564
Lock down 2	3080	81	1039
Lock down 3	2544	72	No longer collected

**To note on above**, in lockdown one a lower number of attendances was recorded, and this was echoed anecdotally, lockdown 2 was somewhere near normal. Lockdown 3 whilst critical/keyworker data was not collected anecdotally a lot more people stated they were critical/keyworkers needing places, with slightly less families keeping their children at home.

- 4.2** Whilst sufficiency has been met across this period the remobilising of the childcare market is a cause for concern in terms of sustainability for instance, some types of providers are finding it harder and harder to be competitive in the current climate. Many settings are advising parents that they will not accept children who attend another setting, due to the concerns around virus spread, and the impact on the setting if there is a positive case in the other setting. In circumstances where providers are unable to provide a more flexible delivery model to meet parent's needs, they are losing out on business as parents are choosing another setting who can be more flexible. Pre-schools appear to be particularly affected by this.
- 4.3** Looking ahead to the next 12 months, there may be a bigger impact on the sector from Coronavirus, whilst it is relatively easy to sustain a business in the short term, particularly when there is a lot of financial support available, in the medium and longer term it is much harder, as reserves are depleted and there may not be the same level of financial support available.

Wirral's Early Years team have opportunities to share these reflections from providers at Regional and Local discussion events with both Ofsted and Department for Education colleagues.

#### **4.4 Take up of 2, 3 – 4 year and extended 30 hours entitlements.**

On 17 March 2020, as the Nation prepared for lockdown, the government gave early years providers the reassurances that payments of early years entitlement places for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds from the Local Authority (LA) to providers would continue despite where settings were closed, on the advice of the government, or children were not able to attend due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

**The response of Wirral Council;** all funded payments for 2, 3 + 4-year free entitlements continued. There was a re-scheduling of summer/autumn term payments; estimates were paid out approximately one month earlier than anticipated, to at best maintain cashflows. In addition, the requirement to submit a "headcount" was paused at that time whilst DfE guidance was developed, which at a later point was deferred. This was very much welcomed by providers.

In addition, where a child's main base of 15 hours or 30 hours universal funding was not open and the child needed to attend another setting, the Family Information Service would broker payment of hours, so the parent or settings did not experience a financial deficit.

The disruption to early educational entitlements during the Summer term 2020, due to Covid19 issues, resulted in fluctuations of take up. However, since the commencement of the autumn term there have been positive signs of recovery across the 2, 3 + 4-year-old offer. Although, the recovery of the take up of extended offer has struggled as parents either continued to work from home and are not taking additional childcare hours or remain on a "furloughed" arrangement.

- **2-year-old take-up - Wirral actual 73.40% - National 69%**  
Increase of 4.40% (69% summer term) @ autumn Term 2020
- **3/4-year-old Universal take-up – Wirral actual 89.20% - National 91%**  
Increase of 5.2% (84% summer term) @ autumn Term 2020
- **\*3/4-year-old Extended take-up (30 hour funding) – actual 70% - National 90 % (Summer 19)**  
Reduction of 25.46% (95.46% summer term) @ autumn Term 2020

**4.5 \*30-hour funding** – discretionary funding was applied to families who had missed the 31<sup>st</sup> of August deadline date to renew their 30-hour funding code. 25 discretionary starts were authorised, these children were added to providers headcount submission so many were covered by the providers being paid on Autumn 19 headcount, to sustain take up.

**4.6** During the Autumn term the DfE informed Local Authorities that Early Years Providers and Schools would be paid as if COVID-19 had not happened and the autumn 20 headcount was compared to autumn 19 headcount for each provider. Early Years Providers and schools were then paid on whichever funding amount was higher. This saw several providers and schools paid on Autumn 19, detail below.

Paid on Autumn 19 - 109  
Paid on Autumn 20 - 103

When asked providers with lower numbers for Autumn 20 cited parents on furlough or made redundant or working from home and felt able to manage childcare to explain the dip in numbers.

When asked providers with higher numbers for Autumn 20 stated they had not done anything differently, a couple of providers had increased their marketing, and some felt word of mouth by parents to be the reason.

**4.7** For the Spring Term 2021, the DfE agreed to fund children based on expected attendance during headcount week, rather than actual, even if the family choose to keep their child at home. The guidance was;



- ***self-isolating due to exposure to coronavirus (usually a period of 10 days) in census week.***
- ***ill in census week.***
- ***absent due to parent/guardian caution (fear of child catching coronavirus), if the provider remains open to the child and they have not altered their parental declaration relating to expected hours with the provider.***
- ***absent due to parent/guardian choosing to care for child at home, only if the provider remains open to the child and the parent/guardian has not altered their parental declaration relating to expected hours with the provider.***
- ***clinically extremely vulnerable and is therefore shielding in line with government advice.”***

The exceptions were;

***Where the child is unable to attend their usual PVI/school provider due to restrictions on attendance made by the provider/school. The nursery provision has chosen to close.***

This change of course from Autumn 2020 guidance, which was very much welcomed by providers.

#### **4.8 Financial Support – Sustainability during Covid19**

Whilst Central Government set out a variety of funding streams to support businesses; Business Rates Relief, Small Business Rates Relief, Self Employed grants, Job Retention Furlough schemes, having completed a survey of financial sustainability with Wirral’s providers in May 2020, it was identified that despite these immediate cashflow mechanisms there remained key financial challenges to protect businesses medium term.

As an example of support accessed; -

**Business Rate relief-** there are 41 Nurseries receiving the new business rates relief for nurseries (Nursery Discount) for 2020/21. 39 of these were sent a revised bill (Demand) on 8<sup>th</sup> April advising of nil rate liability. If a nursery was eligible for Small Business Rates Relief on 11<sup>th</sup> March 20, then they will also have been entitled to apply for the £10K grant.

#### **4.9 In May 2020 Wirral Council launched the Early Years Exceptional Circumstances Grant, of £350k, for Early Years Providers to apply for where they met the criteria of.**

##### **Essential Criteria;**

- Provision remained open continuously during weekdays from 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 for key workers and vulnerable children.
- The provider has reviewed and utilised all available government funding streams.
- The provider is experiencing significant financial impact – This had to be evidenced by either a bank statement for the specified periods or a cash flow statements.

##### **Desirable Criteria;**

- The provider undertakes to take children from other settings that had to close.
- The provider has submitted registers to early years team.

The purpose of the fund was to provide temporary “exceptional circumstances” funding for providers of childcare who remained open and in doing so experienced “significant cashflow issues” either through not being eligible for any other funding e.g., small business grants, business rate relief, support for the self-employed, the small business grant scheme or awaiting such funds. As there were two waves for the fund this was altered slightly for the second wave to include childminder’s who had to close due to not having sufficient children or health reasons as they were unable to apply for many of the other grants available at the time.

\*The table below indicates the number of settings received financial support.

Total Awarded:		57 £286,000.00
Small	Medium	Large
38 £114,000.00	6 £42,000.00	13 £130,000.00

### **Remaining Exceptional Circumstances Grant funds**

Discussions held at the Early Years School Forum working group between council officers and representatives from Wirral’s Childminder Association, Wirral’s National Day Nursery Association Group, Early Years School Forum Representatives, out of school Representatives PVI and Maintained Nursery Representation agreed that remainder £64,000.00 be distributed to all providers to source further required Personal Protective Equipment.

#### **4.10 Collaborations/Communications**

Two of the key ingredients to ensuring Wirral’s Early Years Childcare and Educational settings continued to delivery essential services to vulnerable, keyworker children in the initial months to All children in later months has been through strengthened collaborations between Council departments, across Liverpool City Region colleagues, Regional and National networking, such as Local Government Association.

Most importantly the strengthened partnerships and communications with Local Authority, providers, parents and key stakeholders has resulted in a collective response to such unprecedented times.

In summary;

- Shared central government guidance with Providers as soon as it was made available, along with links signposting providers to important and useful information and support channels.
- Created an attendance register for providers to complete to enable the capture and track the number of children attending settings and for providers to use to claim double funding for any children temporarily attending their setting.

- Working with finance department in arranging for providers to receive funding payments sooner than they usually would to support their cash flow.
- Shared a wealth of financial advice to providers informing them of the different types of financial support available to support them through the pandemic.
- Put together and distributed FAQ's to providers so they had a quick reference guide to answer any queries they had, this was regularly updated as guidance changed.
- Supported providers in obtaining PPE by providing contact details of reputable suppliers, and later providing PPE packs to all providers. To date an additional £25K has been sourced has been identified to further roll out PPE in response to lockdown 3.0.
- Provided settings with COVID-19 packs including outdoor banners, social distancing stickers and more.
- Distributed risk assessment and operational plan templates to settings to enable them to put these in place before the reopening of settings to all children from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020.
- Worked closely with Wirral's Public Health consultant in delivering key messages through bespoke network sessions for providers.
- Worked with Council audit team to ensure good financial protocols were in place for Exceptional Circumstances fund.
- Have an officer representing the wider Early Childhood Service at the weekly Humanitarian Cell.

**4.11** In working with colleagues across the wider Council the Early Years team was able to, through the Winter Covid19 Grant that came into the authority, reach out to those children accessing 2-year funding and Early Years Pupil Premium, both of which are often pre-cursors to Free School Meals eligibility. Working collaboratively with Council In partnership with North Birkenhead Development Trust and Wirral support was targeted to families previously have not received such support. Uptake was 48% which given this was the first attempt, this collaboration was celebrated. One parent commenting 'I'll be able to buy Christmas dinner now we have other food'.

#### **4.12 Key Challenges Faced by Wirral's Childcare Sector.**

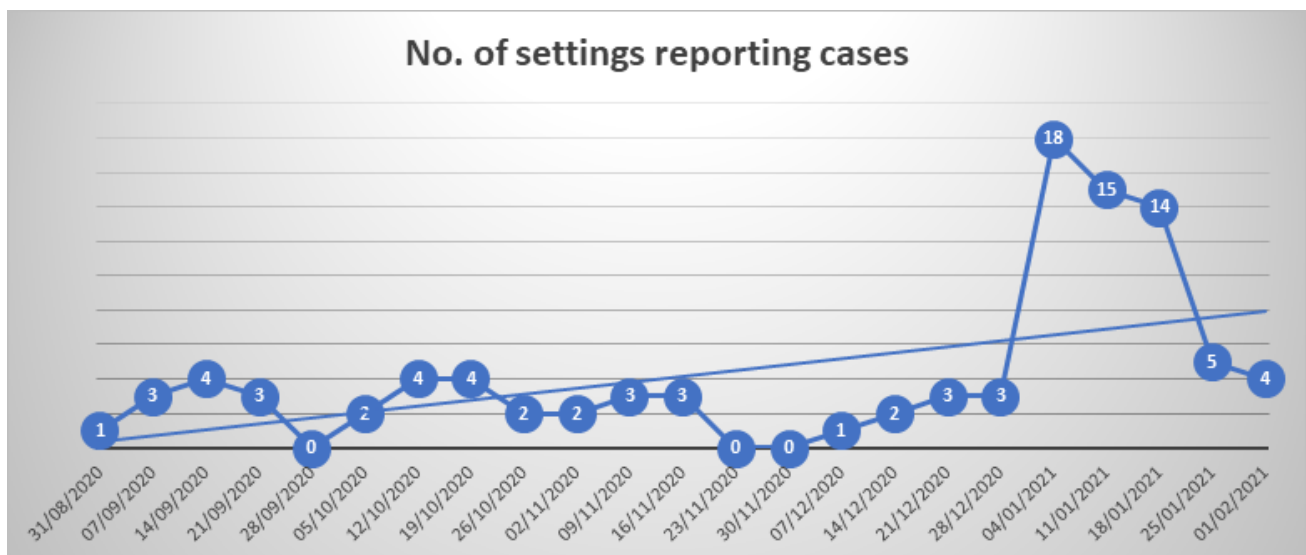
The efforts of Wirral's Childcare Providers in their response to Central Government calling upon them to remain open to vulnerable/keyworker children in lockdowns 1.0 + 2.0 and thereafter to ALL children in lockdown 3.0 should be acknowledged.

Many of Wirral's Early Years providers faced difficult business decisions from the onset of Covid19, where settings remained open, partially open or closed, all of which had financial implications. The Early Years team offered a method of summarising Central Government funding streams and would regularly survey for an understanding of who was accessing which, in order to further signpost.

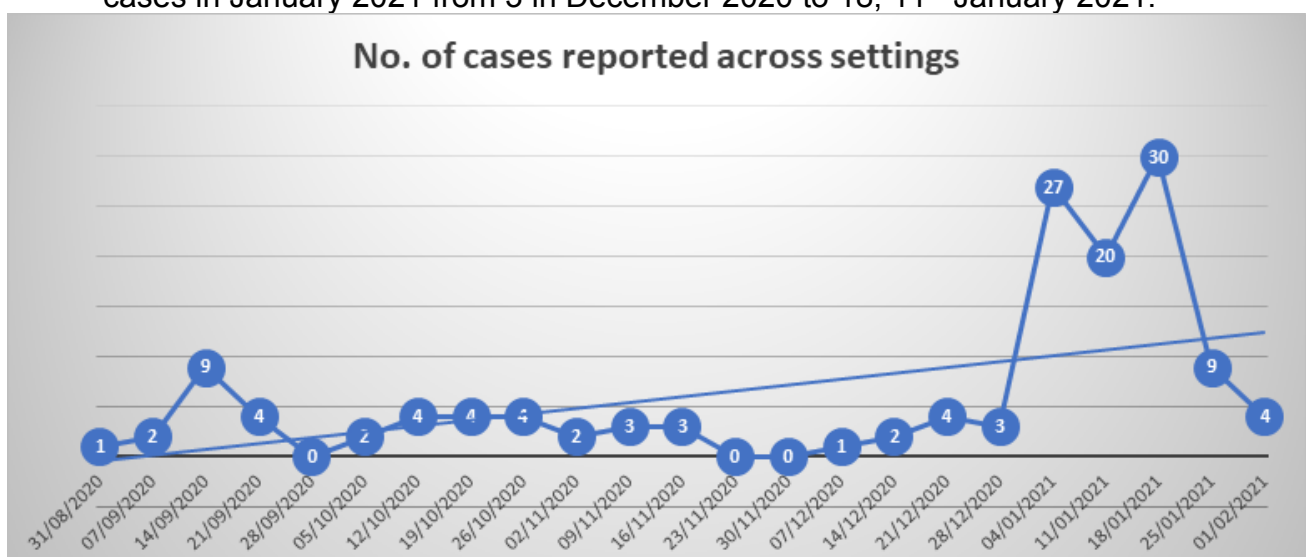
Furthermore, through surveys, virtual networking, one on one telephone discussions with providers highlight key challenges are as below.

- New hourly free entitlements funding rates for 2021/22
- Ability to reclaim VAT.
- Commitment to Business Rates in the future.
- Impact of Extension to Furloughing of staff.
- Access to Lateral flow testing given new variants in the community.
- Maintaining staff ratios with increased positive reporting than previous lockdowns.

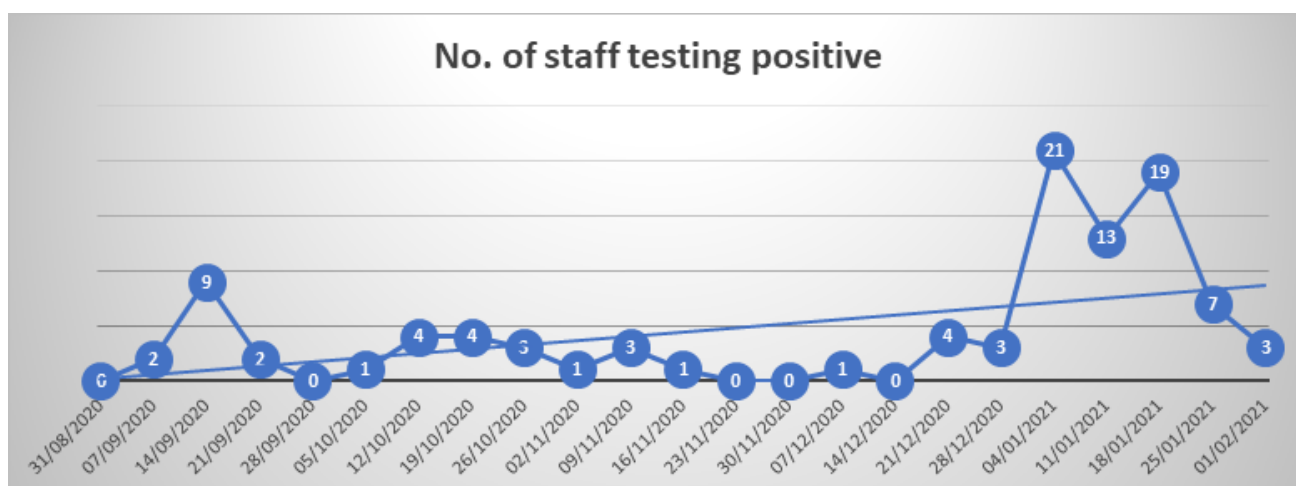
\*The biggest challenge of late has been the increased prevalence of Coronavirus in settings since January 2021.



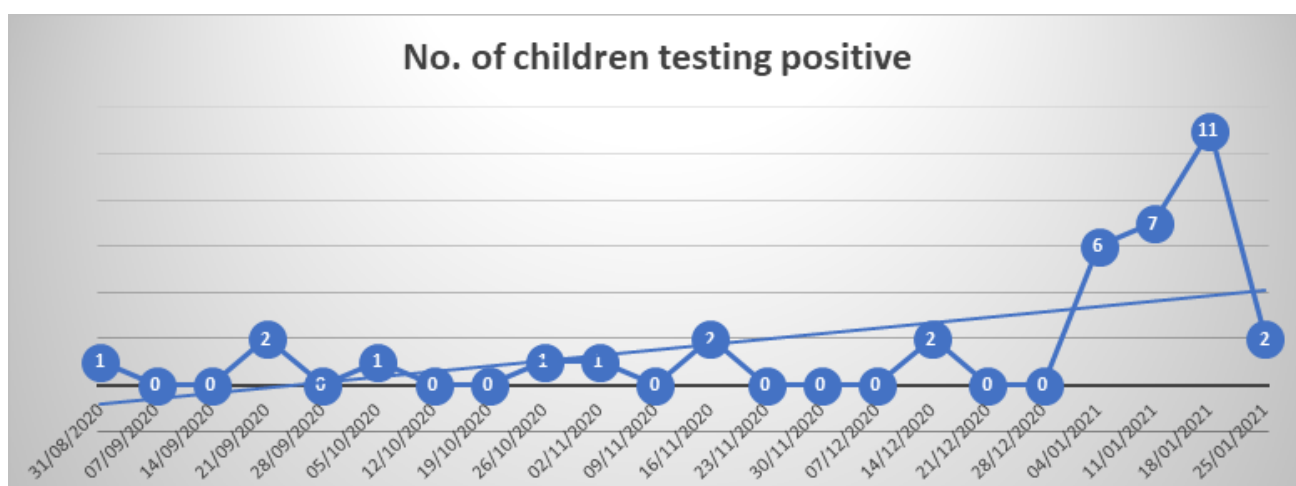
\*Graph above indicates number of settings reporting a rise in positive coronavirus cases in January 2021 from 3 in December 2020 to 18, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021.



\*\*Graph above indicates number of settings reported cases in January 2021 from 3 in December 2020 to 30, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021.



\*\*\*Graph above indicates number of staff tested positive in January 2021 from 4 in December 2020 to 21, 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021.



\*\*\*\*Graph above indicates number of children tested positive in January 2021 from 0 in December 2020 to 11, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

- 4.13** Wirral is in line with other LAs in offering community asymptomatic testing for any EY providers that do not fall under the current government scheme for maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries. The license for home-testing using LFDs has not yet been granted for widespread use. However, at a local level a consideration is being made to an extension of opening hours across one or two working week days for ease of access to early years staff.

## 5.0. RECOGNITION OF GOOD PRACTICE DURING COVID19

- 5.1** The Chief Executive of the National Day Nurseries Association recently wrote to Wirral's Chief Executive, Paul Satoor and Director for Children, Families and Education, Paul Boyce, in relation to the support the early years team has shown to the childcare sector during COVID-19. The National Day Nurseries Association is 'the voice of the sector' and has more than 60 networks of nursery operators that meet regularly across the UK.

The letter said;

"We understand that your Early Years Team has taken a number of actions during the pandemic which made this challenging period more manageable for providers. Our coverage up and down the UK means that we are often made aware of the relationship between local authorities and the sector. Where a local authority has been identified as having worked hard to get the balance right between high quality childcare being available for the few during lockdown; and future-proofing the sector so that post-COVID, sufficient childcare places are available for all that need them, we believe this should be highlighted and acknowledged.

At a time that has been difficult for us all, we really do appreciate your support to a sector which is quite often forgotten, over-looked or ignored but yet so vitally important to children, families and the economy. I would like to thank you for the collaborative working with providers in your area and for acknowledging the crucial role that childcare plays within the economy and its recovery."

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1** The Early Years grant income for 2020-21 will be based on 9/12ths of the January 2020 Census plus 3/12ths of the January 2021 Census. As the January 2021 Census information is not yet available, the latest grant income notified by ESFA for 2020-21 is solely based on the Census numbers for January 2020. On that basis it is indicative only and will change as more information is made available. The final Early Years Grant allocation for 2020-21 will not be confirmed until Summer 2021.

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** Under the Childcare Act 2006, the Local Authority has a duty to have sufficient places to meet parental demand.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS**

- 8.1.** Accuracy of CSA reporting needs caution as presently it is reliant on manual inputting by providers at specific times. Whilst at same time they struggle with reduced number of staff in work, with managers called into children ratios.
- 8.2** There is a new Early Years portal being developed, within the Capita Better Start system, which will enable providers to self input at a time more for their convenience. The Council is likely to move from Capita to the Liquid Logic Early Years Education, in which will again enhance to capabilities of accuracy of CSA reporting.
- 8.3** PPE resource continues to be an issue for the continued period of COVID19 and providers inform on the increased costings applied by some suppliers.
- 8.4** Larger nursery chains/nursery sites may struggle with fixed costs of premises where reduced children numbers reduce therefore no need to have full capacity of rooms open. In addition reduced children number/hours may result in reduced income to cover overheads.

## **9.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 9.1** A consideration of risk is what the new normal will be once Coronavirus is brought under control, many parents may not return to needing the same level of childcare as they did before the pandemic, many businesses are thinking about making the move permanently to home working, having to work flexibly throughout the pandemic has shown employers that it is possible to do this whilst still meeting business need, so in the future many more parents may continue to work at home, working flexibly around school drop offs and pick-ups, meaning before and after school care may not be required to the same level.
- 9.2** Sustainability across Wirral's childcare offer, specifically of extended holiday care provision, given high numbers of parents working from home and feeling they can manage without professional childcare.
- 9.3** There is also a risk that with continued parent anxieties of children returning to early years provision, a continued delay or nonattendance of critical early years educational opportunities may impact on early identifiers of developmental delay or SEN.

## **10.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 10.1** The Early Years team regularly seek provider and parental feedback through surveys. The feedback is analysed, and then new practice is initiated where appropriate. We then provide feedback to providers about the results and impending changes.
- 10.2** The team also liaise a lot more frequently with National Day Nursery Association and the Childminder Association. They provide useful feedback on behalf of the sector and are quick to respond to our requests. Over this year the representatives have changes and looking forward we need to include more settings to ensure providers not in the NDNA and childminder association are included, this could also include extended care and pre-school. This may give broader views and further increase representatives thoughts from the sector across Wirral.
- 10.3** The Early Years school forum sub-group representatives supported the development of the EYFE agreement, clarifying sections to aid understanding and ensure transparency. The providers gave useful feedback and further improved the relationship between the council and sector.

## **11.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1** A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

## **12.0 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1** There are no environmental and climate implications arising from this report. It is anticipated that the assessment of Wirral's childcare market and operations to support during continued Covid19 restrictions will have no impact on the emission of greenhouse gases.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2019-20

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Wirral's Childcare Sufficiency Report 2019 – 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>