



# **Childcare Sufficiency Report for London Borough of Lewisham**

Spring 2023



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## 1 Summary and plans

The Childcare Act (2006) requires local authorities in England to ensure a sufficiency of childcare for working parents, parents studying or training and for disabled children. The childcare sufficiency duty relates to the provision of registered childcare for children aged 0-14 years old and up to 18 years old for disabled children and children with additional needs. Under section 6 of the Act there is a requirement on local authorities to produce an annual sufficiency report on the availability and sufficiency of childcare in their area.

Lewisham Council want to make sure that local families can access the childcare and early education that they need. This will enable parents to make real choices about working and caring for children in order that both benefit from the social and educational boost provided by high quality early years education.

Many families in Lewisham are already accessing early years education and childcare which works for them. There are some families who are not yet accessing formal childcare due to choice, costs or perception that a setting is not able to meet the needs of their child. Parents who are accessing formal childcare are in general happy with the provision.

The Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service which holds responsibility for the seven areas of statutory duty relating to Early Education and Childcare is made up of 4 distinct teams; the Quality and Inclusion team; the Family Information Service (FIS); the Early Entitlement team and the Early Years Online and Business Support team. The service has as its core purpose:

*To ensure the highest quality, inclusive and accessible early years education and childcare for ALL children and families in Lewisham.*

There is recognition that all areas of the early years' service interlink together to ensure that all aspects of the statutory duties are delivered, supported and maintained. Our key strategic goals are guided by the Lewisham Education Strategy. In relation to what those priorities mean for the childcare market our identified priorities are

### **Priority 1: A place in a good school/setting for all children and young people**

#### ***What we need to do:***

- Ensure sufficient early years education through strategic planning and support to the local childcare market and quality of provision.

#### ***Measure of success***

Sufficient early years places available and increased percentage settings that are OFSTED good or outstanding



## **Priority 2: Supporting all children and young people to reach their potential**

### ***What we need to do:***

1. Ensure high take up of Early Years government funded places for eligible 2, 3 & 4 year olds.
2. Continue to build upon the Early Years partnerships to support home learning, personal, social and emotional, communication and physical development (*Healthy Early Years, Making it Real*).
3. Strengthen information sharing to support effective transitions from EY settings into primary school.

### ***Measure of success***

Increased take up of 2, 3 & 4 year olds Early Years entitlements

## **Priority 3: Embedding a culture of inclusion and equity**

### ***What we need to do:***

Continue to work with schools and settings to address the attainment gap for identified groups of children and young people.

### ***Measure of success***

Reduction in the attainment gap of identified groups of pupils in comparison to their peers

## **Priority 4: Collaborative school improvement to raise standards**

### ***What we need to do:***

Continue to focus setting improvement activity on teaching and learning, inclusion and narrowing the attainment gap between identified groups of pupils and their peers.

### ***Measure of success***

Percentage of schools and settings are OFSTED rated as good or outstanding are above England and London Average.





## **Our plans for childcare**

Our last sufficiency assessment summary was published in January 2020. The key points at that time were:

- Parents expressed difficulty finding childcare outside of school time.
- There is variation across the borough with accessing and finding childcare.
- Finding and accessing childcare for children with SEND is an issue for some parents.

Significant changes have been made to information and support offered to parents and providers.

Progress against these key points include;

- Out of school providers including Breakfast Clubs, After School Clubs and Holiday Clubs being encouraged to list their setting and vacancy numbers on the council's online childcare directory. Ongoing communication inviting settings to be listed has resulted in increased number of settings now being listed on the childcare directory.
- Family Information Service (FIS) consistently facilitate and attend outreach activities, including online sessions to engage with parents/carers. The service provides information on the types childcare available and how to access support with paying for childcare. In addition to this our Parent Champions programme supports with parent and community engagement.
- Children with additional needs: There has been a great deal of work undertaken to raise awareness of what 'reasonable adjustments' means as an early years provider. There has been a SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) consultation across the sector which included parents who, in the main for children 0-5, preferred a mainstream option for their children as opposed to a specialist placement, even if they knew their child would at a later stage be likely to require a special school place. The expansion of the service has meant that there is now dedicated resource to developing provider confidence and raising awareness of early entitlement for children with SEND
- We have built relationships with partners across the council, working closely with partners including Children and Family Centre, Job Centre Plus, Children Social Care and the Lewisham Refugee Resettlement team. The service is working closely on the programme implementing Family Hubs in Lewisham to ensure services are as integrated and connected as possible.



## **Getting information to families**

The Family Information Service (FIS) maintains the council's childcare directory that lists Ofsted registered childcare providers in the borough. There is also a FIS directory of other services that support children and their families, for example, youth clubs and support groups.

FIS continue to promote services for families at community events and local services including Libraries, Children and Family Centres and the local Job Centre Plus. Drop-in sessions are being re-established throughout the week to support families with accessing the free early education entitlements for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

The Lewisham Parent Champion Programme is a key element of FIS that supports with engaging parents within the community, to raise awareness of the early education and childcare entitlements. Parent Champions are parents/carers residing in the borough who volunteer their time to signpost other parents/carers to services that may benefit children and their families. Peer to peer support through Parent Champion community engagements have been received positively by other parents/carers.

## **Overall sufficiency in our area**

Based on data analysis, surveys of parents and childcare providers, and focus groups with parents in Lewisham, we have investigated whether there is enough childcare for all the families who want to use it. We have found that while most parents are happy with the childcare on offer, some have faced issues in finding out about, accessing and affording childcare.

Most parents/carers who responded to our survey do use childcare, but some 18% of parents of preschool children, and 25% of parents of school age children, do not use formal childcare. The most common reason was that it is too expensive (65%), and a further 18% of parents said that they were not happy with the quality available.

There were a total of 317 responses to the parent survey against a target of 500. Some parents/carers feedback that the survey was too lengthy therefore a shortened version will be created for future surveys.

15% of providers across Lewisham responded to the provider survey, this survey indicated 86% of settings currently have vacancies.

Many childcare providers currently have vacancies indicating there is no concern for sufficiency in the borough. Type of childcare available may not be the preferred choice for parents. There is ongoing work to raise awareness of places available at a childminder setting and why parents should be open to this option.



### ***Information about childcare***

Majority of parents/carers (84%) are aware of the Free Early Education Entitlements for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

There is progress to be made for the 32 families that informed us they are unaware of the council's online childcare directory [Lewisham Council - Find a childcare provider in Lewisham](#). Majority of childcare providers (66%) are currently listed on the childcare directory. The Family Information Service (FIS) make regular contact with providers inviting them to be listed on the childcare directory.

A proportion of families (30%) shared their preferred means of communication for finding out more about childcare in the borough.

Preferences include:

- Social media posts
- Health Visitor/new parent checks
- Leaflets/posters
- Email
- Text messages

In response to this feedback FIS has started using Gov.text service as a means of communicating with parents/carers using text messages. Emails are also sent to potentially eligible families received via the DfE list shared twice per term.

Emails are also sent to families confirming the outcome of their submitted application for a funded 2 year old place.

FIS will use feedback to develop a communication strategy aimed at improving engagement with families seeking information about finding and accessing childcare.

### ***Access to free childcare***

Across all types of eligible childcare providers, 70% offered at least one of the funded early education entitlements. The universal offer of 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds is the most widely offered, with 73% of all providers and 93% of private, voluntary and independent providers offering it.



### ***Quality of childcare***

The majority of parents are happy with the quality of childcare available but 18% would like to see improvement.

There are also parents (30%) who have difficulty finding out about the quality of childcare. FIS will be ensuring going forward that as information is shared about finding childcare there is also support with understanding the quality of childcare provisions and how this is measured by Ofsted.

### ***Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)***

One group of families who can find it difficult to access suitable childcare than others is those with a child with SEND.

Qualitative feedback from parents suggests that finding childcare for children with SEND can be difficult.

During parent focus groups challenge with finding suitable childcare for children with additional needs was highlighted along with the following points;

- A suitable childcare place is not always available
- Parents would like to be more included in the support offered to their child within a setting

Our SEND Partnership Strategy 2020 – 2023 states that in order to deliver the 3 key priorities cited we need to recognize that ‘It’s everyone’s business to be inclusive’, to truly make a difference to our children and young people with SEND we need a whole-community approach. A key aspect of this is that all education settings are high quality, inclusive and have the knowledge, understanding and skills to identify and meet the needs of CYP with SEND and how to access support.

### ***Holiday childcare***

A number of parents of school age children (30%) currently access childcare outside of school hours.

The majority of out of school providers (55%) are currently listed on the council’s online childcare directory.

Parental demand for out of school childcare is greater during the school summer (44%) and half-term (43%) breaks. The least demand for out of school childcare is during the Christmas (21%) break.



## 2 Demand for childcare

### Population of early years children

In total, there are 20,877 children under the age of five living in our local authority. These children may require early years childcare.

*Numbers by age*

| Age    | Number of children |
|--------|--------------------|
| Age 0  | 4196               |
| Age 1  | 4163               |
| Age 2  | 4291               |
| Age 3  | 4121               |
| Age 4* | 4106               |

*\* Some four-year-olds will have started reception*

### Population of school age children

In total there are 27,530 children aged 5-11, and 10,679 children aged 12-14 living in our local authority. These children may require childcare before and after school, and/or during the school holidays.

*Numbers by age*

| Age    | Number of children |
|--------|--------------------|
| Age 5  | 4002               |
| Age 6  | 4046               |
| Age 7  | 4194               |
| Age 8  | 4169               |
| Age 9  | 3828               |
| Age 10 | 3720               |
| Age 11 | 3571               |
| Age 12 | 3708               |
| Age 13 | 3540               |
| Age 14 | 3431               |



## Number of children with special educational needs and disabilities

Children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) are entitled to support with childcare up to the age of 18 (age 14 for children who do not have a special need or disability). The number of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in our local authority is 3,185.

| Age                                       | Number of children |
|---|--------------------|
| Birth to school age                       | 90                 |
| Primary school (reception to year six)    | 1007               |
| Secondary school (year seven to thirteen) | 1577               |

*Data in table correct at: September 2022*

Children's needs change over time and are identified at different ages. Among the youngest children, SEND may only be identified when they start in childcare or school, and it can take some time from problems being identified to an EHC plan being issued. It is therefore possible that the number of children with SEND aged 0-4 is an underestimate. Some children have SEN but do not have an EHC plan.

## 3 Supply of childcare

### Number of early years providers and places

In total, there are 513 childcare providers in our local authority, offering a maximum of 9,348 early years childcare places. For reference, there are 20,877 children aged under five living in Lewisham (see 2 *Demand of childcare*).

| Type of provision                            | Number of providers | Number of registered places |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Childminders*                                | 327                 | 1635                        |
| Maintained classes in schools                | 51                  | 1509                        |
| Maintained nursery schools                   | 2                   | 244                         |
| Private, Voluntary and Independent Nurseries | 133                 | 5960                        |

*The data in this table was correct at: September 2022.*

\* Some childminder places may also be available for older children.

For private, voluntary and independent nurseries and childminders, the number of registered places represents the maximum number of children who can be on the premises at any given time. In practice, many providers choose to operate below their number of registered places.



Children may attend childcare full time or part time. This table records places for children who are attending full time, or for as many hours as the setting is open. In some cases, two or more children attending part time may use one full time equivalent place. For example, one child may attend in the morning and one child may attend in the afternoon.

### Early years vacancies

The following table shows the results from a survey we conducted of childcare providers in Lewisham, representing 14% of providers in Lewisham.

| <i>Type of provision</i>                     | <i>Number of providers who responded to survey</i> | <i>Total number of vacancies</i> |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Childminders*                                | 12   | 22                               |
| Nursery classes in schools                   | 8  | 59                               |
| Maintained nursery schools                   | 2  | 0                                |
| Private, voluntary and independent nurseries | 48   | 564                              |

Vacancy rates are a snapshot, and often change rapidly. In some cases, providers may have a vacancy which is only available for a specific age group, or for a particular part time arrangement. We ask providers to report vacancies to us so we can help with promoting them. Not all choose to do this. In general, vacancy rates are higher in the autumn when children move on to school.

### Number of school age providers and places

There are currently 60 Ofsted registered out of school childcare providers

The table below shows the number of early years childcare providers and places according to Summer 2022 operating provisions.

| <i>Type of provision</i>           | <i>Number of providers</i> | <i>Number of registered places</i> |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Breakfast club – primary school    | 48                         | 332                                |
| After-school club – primary school | 16                         | 803                                |
| Childminders*                      | 292                        | 1038                               |
| Holiday club                       | 43                         | 1663                               |

\* number of childminders registered for school age children places



Tracking supply of childcare for school age children is difficult because not all of this type of provision is registered with Ofsted. It is possible that we have under-counted the provision of breakfast and afterschool clubs and holiday clubs. Parents may also use provision which is not considered 'childcare', for example sports or arts clubs after school or in the holidays.

## **4 Funded early education**

### **Introduction to funded early education**

Some children are entitled to free childcare, funded by the government. These entitlements may be accessed over 38 weeks per year.

- All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 15 hours per week (570 hours per year) 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, are entitled to 30 hours per week (1140 hours per year) until they start reception class in school<sup>4</sup>
- 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 (570 hours per year).

Parents do not have to use all the hours of their funded entitlement. They may choose to split them between providers. With the agreement of their provider, parents may also spread them across the year – for example, rather than taking 15 hours for 38 weeks a year they could take just under 12 hours for 48 weeks a year.

### **Proportion of 2-year-old children entitled to funded early education**

In our local authority, 28% of 2 year olds are entitled to funded early education. This equates to around 1,182 children per year in 2022. The number of children entitled has been falling for the last few years, which may be due to the introduction of Universal Credit.

### **Take up of funded early education**

The proportion of eligible children taking up their funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in our local authority is:



| Age         | % of eligible children Lewisham | % of eligible children Inner London |
|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Age 2       | 61%                             | 62%                                 |
| Age 3 and 4 | 80%                             | 76%                                 |
| 3 year olds | 81%                             | 75%                                 |
| 4 year olds | 84%                             | 78%                                 |

*The data in this table is based on Department for Education data gathered during the early years census in January 2022 and published in July 22.*

<sup>4</sup> Available to families where each parent (or one parent in a single adult household) are earning the equivalent of working sixteen hours per week on the minimum wage.

### **Providers offering funded early education places**

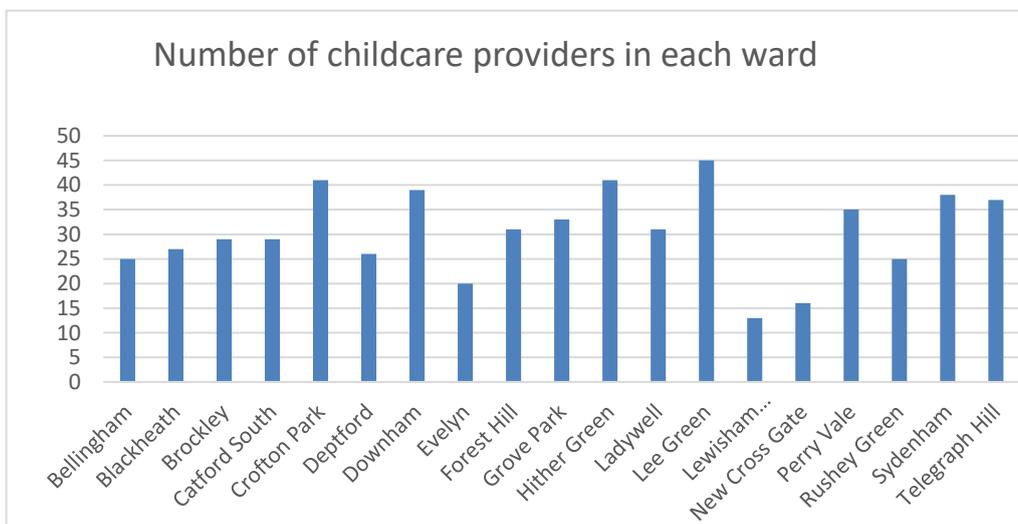
Providers are paid directly by Lewisham council and are funded by central government, for delivering funded early education. They are not required to offer these entitlements to parents, and of course parents may choose to use a different provider if they do not. Some providers offer a restricted number of funded places.

The table below shows the proportion of providers registered with Lewisham council to offer funded early education places.

| Type of provision          | Number of providers | Age 2 targeted | Age 3 and 4 universal 15 hours | Age 3 and 4 – extended 30 hours |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Childminders               | 327                 | 54%            | 55%                            | 46%                             |
| Nursery classes in schools | 51                  | 96%            | 100%                           | 96%                             |
| Maintained nursery schools | 2                   | 100%           | 100%                           | 100%                            |
| Private, voluntary and     | 138                 | 88%            | 92%                            | 90%                             |



## Total number of providers by ward





## 5 Prices

### Prices of early years childcare

For early years childcare outside the funded entitlements, we report on average prices per hour, reported to us by settings. There may be variations to prices based on the number of hours a family uses, with reductions for longer hours, or discounts for sibling groups. There may be additional payments for additional services, e.g. lunch and other meals which are not included in these prices.

Schools have an agreement between them that they will as a general rule charge the same for additional hours as the current funded entitlement rate. Where there is a difference, this will have been agreed by the board of Governors

Prices are based on the providers that have informed FIS. (We need to check on this for maintained nursery schools as I know they charge a higher rate.

| Price per hour    | Private, voluntary and independent nurseries | School and maintained nursery schools which make charges to parents | Childminders |
|-------------------|--|---|--------------|
| 0 and 1 year olds | £7.00  | N/A   | £7.00        |
| 2 year olds       | £7.05  | £10.00  | £6.87        |
| 3 and 4 year olds | £6.70  | £10.00  | £6.63        |

### Prices of school age childcare

Most recent response (17%) to our survey of out of holiday clubs indicate the cost of a full time place (i.e. 40 hours) is £142 per week.

There is ongoing work to have better knowledge of charges for all out of school providers.



## 6 Quality of childcare in our area

### Ofsted inspection grades

All childcare providers who provide places for children under the age of 8 for a period greater than 2 hours at a time must register with and be inspected by Ofsted, who give them an overall grade for the quality of their provision. Childminders and private and voluntary providers are on the Early Years Register, and schools and stand alone maintained nursery schools are on the Schools register. The grades for both registers are equivalent. Schools with nurseries have an overall inspection grade for the whole school and most also have a separate early years grade.

Both schools and early years providers have four possible Ofsted grades: 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement', and 'inadequate'. Some providers are still awaiting their first full inspection. These providers are excluded from our calculation.

Nursery classes in independent schools do not generally have an Ofsted grade.

| <i>Type of provision</i>        | <i>Total number of providers</i> | <i>% achieving good or outstanding</i> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Childminders                    | 327                              | 98%                                    |
| Nursery classes in schools *    | 51                               | 98%                                    |
| Maintained nursery schools      | 2                                | 100%                                   |
| Private and voluntary nurseries | 133                              | 96%                                    |
| <i>Total</i>                    | 513                              | 97%                                    |

\* early years grade if available, otherwise overall school grade

Overall effectiveness for early years registered providers in England achieving good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection as of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 is 97%, equating to that Lewisham.

## 7 Parents' and providers' views of sufficiency in our local area

### Parent survey

We conducted a survey of parents in Lewisham to understand better their experience with accessing and finding childcare. We heard from 317 parents. Some questions were not answered as noted in feedback due to length of questionnaire. The varied response rate to some questions is therefore taken into account in the overall analysis of individual questions. We use the term 'parent' broadly throughout this section to describe all parents, guardian or foster carers, and other relatives who are responsible for a child.



## ***Key findings***

- **Quality of childcare:** Over a third of parents (34%) are happy with their childcare place and 57% agree there is enough space in the setting. A large number of families (78%) are unaware of the Ofsted website that publish inspection outcomes for childcare providers. 39% of parents are however happy with the quality of their childcare.
- **Finding childcare:** how easy or difficult parents find it to find and afford childcare varies with 65% of parents expressing that the cost of childcare is their greatest challenge. Some parents (30%) found it easy to find childcare in their local area.
- **Awareness of free entitlements:** while 84% of parents are aware of the free early education entitlement 41% are not eligible to access a funded place. Of those parents accessing a funded place 30% also pay for additional hours.
- **Reasons for using childcare:** The most common reason for using childcare was so that parents could work (67% of parents). Parents (13%) also chose not to use childcare as they felt it is too expensive.
- **Childcare directory:** Many parents (73%) are yet to familiarise themselves with the council's online childcare directory. FIS continues to promote the funded early education entitlements at outreach events within the community alongside raising awareness of available childcare providers.

## ***Demographics of respondents***

Key points:

- 53% of parents are currently working 30 hours or more, 27% work part-time hours and 5% of parents who responded are seeking employment.
- Children are in the main being cared for by both parents (67%), while 27% are cared for by one parent.
- The majority of respondents (95%) were the parent of the child. The remaining 5% were a guardian or foster carer.
- 75% of parents speak English as the main language in the home



### ***Type of childcare of families are using***

35% of families are accessing childcare at a private voluntary or independent (PVI) nursery. 15% of children are accessing their childcare place at a school nursery or nursery class within a school. 10% of families access their childcare place with a childminder. For children of school age, 30% are attending after school clubs and 28% attend after school activities such as sports and music.

When parents who are not using childcare, were asked why they do not, they most commonly responded that childcare is too expensive or that they do not need childcare. These reasons were especially prominent among parents of children below school age. The availability of childcare places does not appear to be a distinctive reason for parents in Lewisham to not use childcare. However, it should be noted that response rates to this question are relatively low.

### ***Awareness of funded childcare***

Awareness of the funded entitlements is generally quite high. While 84% of parents said they were aware of the funded early education entitlements for two, three and four year old some parents (35%) indicated they were not eligible to access the extended 30 hours.

There may also be some confusion over eligibility criteria for accessing the universal 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds as 29% of parents indicated they were not eligible. **All** three- and four-year-olds are eligible to access the universal 15 hours regardless of household income.

80% of parents were in full or part-time employment so therefore may be eligible to access the extended 30 hours available to working families.

### ***Affording childcare***

Many parents (65%) expressed difficulty affording childcare. 27% of parents access support with childcare costs through tax free childcare and 18% access other means of support such as working tax credits and universal credit.

### ***Quality of childcare***

Many parents (39%) were happy with the quality of childcare currently accessing with 30% finding it easy to find childcare in their local area. 60% of parents felt their children had enough space within the setting.



## **Provider survey**

We conducted a survey of childcare providers in Lewisham to find out how many places are being delivered and challenges they may be experiencing. We heard from 86 childcare providers offering 3,568 places, some of whom provided for preschool children, school children, or both.

### ***Key points***

- Many providers (56%) are experiencing staff challenges which include appropriate qualification and experience of available staff.
- 49% of providers who responded have staff vacancies.
- 64% have a vacant childcare place
- Of the total number of children known to be accessing a childcare place 41 currently have an EHC plan.
- 68% of all providers offer the full range of early education entitlements for two-, three- and four-year-olds
- 90% of private, voluntary and independent nurseries offer both the universal and extended funded 15 hours early education entitlements

### ***Challenges faced by providers***

We asked childcare providers an open-ended question about the biggest challenges they face at the moment in providing high quality childcare that families can afford. Some key themes were:

- Difficulties attracting and retaining qualified and suitable staff – some ascribed this to low wages in the sector.
- Some providers told us they had adjusted or adapted their opening times.
- A number have also reviewed their hours of operation to meet parent demand.

## **8 Focus groups with parents**

We ran two focus groups, one session being online and the other in person with a total of 13 parents. Sessions were an open discussion of the parent survey that had been completed. The majority of parents in attendance are caring for a child 3 years old or younger.



Key points of discussion were:

- The cost of childcare being the main factor when deciding to use formal childcare
- The availability of suitable places for children with additional needs
- Where a child has identified additional needs parents would like to more included in the support offered at the childcare setting
- The awareness and support for children with allergies can at times be lacking at childcare settings
- The majority of parents are aware of the funded early education entitlements
- The low number of parents who are aware of Tax Free Childcare
- Identification of the main social media platforms used: Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp
- The lack of information available to help with choosing a type of childcare or particular setting e.g. what to look for and questions to ask
- The challenge of not being able to physically go into a setting for a show around. Particularly an issue during and post covid.
- The challenge of finding out of school care for a child attending primary school

Parents found the sessions helpful, in respect of the information shared about finding childcare, different types of childcare available, choosing childcare that best suits the needs of their family and hearing other parent's experience with accessing childcare. The majority of parents in attendance were first time parents with a new born and just beginning to think about childcare. These parents found the session especially helpful as it allowed time to consider their childcare options including whether to return to work full time or part-time.

The majority of parents were aware of the funded early education entitlements but not as clear about each elements eligibility criteria.

Some parents were unaware of the Ofsted website and understanding how quality is measured for registered childcare providers. Different Ofsted outcomes of Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate were explained. How a setting is funded was also discussed, for example, DfE guidance to local authorities not to fund early education entitlement places in settings judged inadequate.

Information about the financial support available with childcare costs were explained including funded early education entitlements for two-, three- and four-year-olds. Extended 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds alongside tax free childcare were also discussed.



A representative of Department for work and Pensions (DWP) was also present at both sessions. They were able to explain available benefits for in and out of work parents, such as the flexible support fund and budgeting advances.

Deposits and retainer fees were discussed such as the amount to be expected. Such charges are at the discretion of the individual childcare provider. Parents were however assured for children only accessing a funded place retainer fees should be returned within a reasonable period.

Parents were also reminded that invoices should make clear all charges and that funded place must be free at point of delivery. For example, should a child be accessing more than the universal funded 15 hours per week, these hours should be deducted from the total before a setting applies their hourly charge to any additional hours purchased.

## **9 Methodology and lessons learned**

Lewisham Family Information Service (FIS) collated data already held by the service along with feedback from parents/carers and childcare providers through surveys and ongoing communication.

The data held and updated directly via the daily Ofsted data feed, that comes by arrangement into the Lewisham early years management system means certain questions did not need to be included in the survey of childcare providers. Ofsted registered places and the ward in which the setting is located are included in data held by the service.

### **Survey of parents**

We used a survey of parents to gain insight into local demand for childcare, including awareness the free early education entitlements. We aimed to reach 500 parents in Lewisham.

### ***Designing a questionnaire***

We designed a questionnaire which had the following key parts:

- Demographic information about parent/carers
- What, if any, childcare the respondent uses
- Why the respondent does, or does not, use childcare
- Respondents' awareness and use of free childcare
- Respondents' views on the quality of childcare
- Respondents' views on information about and access to childcare



Online survey was conducted using the council's Citizen Space along with in person surveys completed at outreach events and parent focus groups.

Feedback from parents is that the survey was too lengthy and during analysis it was apparent not all questions were answered.

### ***Collecting responses***

Communication of the survey was shared via the council's social media platforms and e-newsletter. Childcare providers were asked to share the link to the survey along with hard copies of surveys handed to parents/carers for completion.

Children and Family Centres were also asked to share link to the online survey with their registered families.

FIS also conducted some in-person outreach with local stakeholders such as libraries, children's centres and nurseries where we delivered printed out flyers and asked for them to be displayed.

In addition, we arranged with local children's centres and libraries to attend a handful of stay-and-play sessions where we spoke with local parents about our research, handed out flyers and conducted some in person surveys.

### ***Outcome***

We reached 317 parents, 74 of which were in person at outreach events or focus groups. The level of response was below our initial target but as feedback suggests the length of the survey was a factor.

### ***Lessons learned***

- Collecting responses from parents was challenging and resource heavy but the feedback received provides valuable insight into their experience of accessing childcare
- The length of the survey was a factor, therefore future surveys will be shortened

### ***Survey of childcare providers***

We asked all local childcare providers to complete a survey. Our aim was to understand where childcare places and vacancies are spread across the borough and settings who offer free entitlements.



### ***Designing a questionnaire***

We designed a questionnaire which had the following key parts:

- What type of childcare provider respondents are
- How many places and vacancies respondents had
- Open-ended question about the issues respondents face

The provider survey was emailed directly to providers omitting questions of information already held by the service. Although the survey was much shorter in comparison to that of parents/carers response was still below target. A total of 86 responses were received.

### ***Collecting responses***

Using the database of childcare providers held by the service, we emailed the survey to all childcare providers asking them to complete it. A follow up email was sent to encourage completion and highlighting the importance of provider feedback in helping the service to determine level of support required for the sector. Explanation was also provided that feedback would contribute to this childcare sufficiency report.

### ***Outcome***

A total of 86 providers responded to our survey therefore representing a limited proportion of the childcare sector in the borough.

### ***Lessons learned***

- Childcare providers were less responsive to complete the survey than we had expected.
- When we telephoned childcare providers, many did not answer. Of those we spoke to, nearly all were unable to take part in the survey on the telephone, and while most said they were willing to complete the survey in their own time, many alluded to their busy schedules and capacity as a barrier.
- A handful of the providers we spoke to said that they were eager to share the survey of parents with the families they work with, because it would benefit them, but did not feel the same way about the survey of providers. It appeared that an incentive to complete it was lacking for some providers.
- Offering providers an incentive such as the chance to enter a prize draw for goods that they can use in their work may have increased the response rates.



## **Forward Planning**

Termly surveys of childcare providers will be conducted and contribute to the annual childcare sufficiency report.

Feedback from ongoing outreach events within the community will be maximized to give better understanding of the demand for childcare across the borough and contribute to offered support for providers and parents.

Developing our understanding of the local childcare sector including demand, availability of places, take up of Free Early Education Entitlements and overall effectiveness of provisions are all continued priorities of the service.

Parent surveys will be conducted online to allow for better analysis of data received. Survey will also be shortened in response to feedback from parents surveyed for this report.

FIS outreach events in the community will be fully utilised to inform parents of the Free Early Education Entitlements and provide support with accessing placement. Communication of under used available support, such as tax-free childcare, will also be prioritised throughout all our communication channels.

Overall effectiveness of childcare settings and take up of Free Early Education Entitlements is incorporated into the Lewisham Education Strategy and that of Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service. Ongoing monitoring of such data helps with any targeted support that may be required for parents and providers.



## Conclusion

Feedback through our ongoing communication with parents and childcare providers highlight challenges emerging due to past Covid restrictions leading to changes in working patterns and a shift in demand for childcare.

Childcare providers feedback the challenge they are facing is due a lack of qualified staff within the sector. Staff with higher qualification are also not attracted to the sector due to low wage. This challenge is being faced by Lewisham and other local authorities across the country.

In order to address this recruitment challenge many childcare providers felt they are left with little choice but to limit places.

Providers are encouraged to be flexible with their model of delivery in order to attract parents with varied working patterns. For example, many parents now have the option of working from home or having a hybrid model of working.

Lewisham council being one of the larger employers in the borough and having a hybrid workforce has understandably contributed to the shift in parental demand for childcare in the borough. Recent change to working model where desk based staff are now expected to work from the office for 40% of their working week should result in a further shift in demand for childcare.

Financial support was made available to childcare providers during Covid restrictions but the increase in energy and food costs is now adding pressure to a sector already strained by the current recruitment challenge.

Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service has provided a toolkit for childcare providers to support their sustainability. Challenges are also discussed during monitoring visits with support around adapting delivery model to meet the changing working patterns of parents.

Family Information Service has begun to increase outreach sessions within the community, engaging with parents to understand better their childcare needs.

Information on financial support available with childcare cost is shared with parents including how to access funded early education entitlement and Tax-Free Childcare (TFC).

More attention is now being drawn to TFC as many families are not accessing this support. Government commitment to increasing take up is highlighted by the DfE recently commissioning Hemsall's (childcare consultancy) to raise awareness of TFC, increase



understanding of it and motivate parents and providers to use it.

Lewisham has seen minimal closures of childcare providers therefore not indicating an immediate childcare sufficiency issue but this is being closely monitored as the sector evolve through the current economic crisis.

## 10 Data sources

The data sources for this report are:

- Child population: based on ONS mid-year population estimates 2020
- Number of children in receipt of EHC plans: based on data held by the local authority
- Supply of childcare: based on data provided to us by Ofsted, who regulate early years provision in schools and childcare provision. this has been supplemented with local intelligence from the survey of providers.
- Vacancy rates: from survey of providers
- Funded early education: data on take up of funded early education entitlements is based on the Early Years and Schools Censuses, which are taken every January and published by the Department for Education in the statistical collection *Education provision: children under five years of age*. Data on entitlement to a funded early education place for 2 year olds is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- The price of childcare: from survey of providers
- The quality of childcare: data on childcare quality is provided by Ofsted.