

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006 sets out the government's commitment to give every child the best start in life and parents' greater choice and flexibility about how to balance work and family life. The Act places a duty on local authorities to improve outcomes for young children and reduce inequalities between them; to secure sufficient childcare to enable parents to work; and to provide information to parents about childcare and a wide range of other services that may be of benefit to them.

Under the Childcare Act local authorities are given a key role in shaping the childcare market within their area. Local authorities must work with providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors to create a sustainable and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of parents and carers.

From April 2008, the Royal Borough of Kingston must secure sufficient childcare so that parents and carers can continue or take up work, or undertake training or education that would help them enter work. We must also offer 12½ hours a week of free early years education for all 3 and 4 year old children where required.

This report aims to provide an assessment of sufficiency regarding the supply of childcare and parental demand for childcare to enable the Royal Borough of Kingston to perform its Childcare Duty as outlined in the Childcare Act 2006.

The assessment is a measurement of the nature and extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area. This will help the local authority to identify where the gaps are in the market and in consultation with key partners, plan and determine how they will support the childcare market to address these gaps.

Section 6 of the 2006 Childcare Act defines sufficient childcare as “sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in the (local authority) area who require childcare in order to enable them to;

- a) take up, or remain in, work, or
- b) undertake education or training, which could reasonably be, expected to assist them to obtain work”.

In determining whether childcare provision is sufficient a local authority:

- must have regard to the needs of parents in their area for:-
- the provision of childcare in respect of which the childcare element of the working tax credit is payable, and
- the provision of childcare which is suitable for disabled children

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment provides an analysis of the supply and demand for childcare and highlights the following potential gaps within the local childcare market:

Geographical gaps: a lack of childcare places in a geographical area

Income gaps: this is where there is a shortage of affordable childcare for the income groups populating an area.

Specific Needs gaps: where there is a shortage of suitable places for disabled children or children with other specific needs or requirements including those from specific faiths or community groups.

Age gaps: where there is a shortage of childcare suitable to meet the needs and requirements of children of a certain age group, this includes disabled children up to 18 years old.

Type gaps: this is where there is a shortage in the type of childcare for which parents may have expressed a preference.

Under the Childcare Act 2006 the local authority has a duty to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of working parents. Under this duty the authority must take account of:

Choice and flexibility: parents are to have a greater choice about balancing work and family life.

Availability: for all families with children aged up to 14 and up to 17 for disabled children who need it, an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their circumstances.

Quality: high quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce.

Affordability: families to be able to afford flexible, high quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment aims to determine how much, what types, and in what patterns childcare is needed, with regard to the following factors:

- The views of parents
- The views of children, carers, providers and the community as to the availability of childcare, eligibility for Tax Credits and the requirements of all children aged up to 14 and up to and including 17 for disabled children.

Current and planned childcare provision.

This includes registered provision and additional provision which is part of the extended schools programme;

- Socio – economic data and labour market patterns, including parents working atypical hours and families on low incomes;
- The needs of parents of disabled children;
- The perceptions of local employers on childcare sufficiency

To obtain information and specific data pertaining to the above the following has been gathered:

- Baseline socio-economic information including population profiles and population changes; deprivation; family incomes:
- Local labour market factors that may influence demand for specific childcare services:
- The levels and spread of current, and planned registered childcare provision across the authority analysed by type of care; age-group served; type of provision; and cost of care.

Our approach to the assessment involved the following methods.

In undertaking the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment a number of research methods were adopted. These included:

Demographic data from the Office for National Statistics, Childcare data from Ofsted and Kingston's Children's Information Service.

A review of the current supply of childcare through analysing published data and data held by Kingston's Children's Information Service.

Questionnaires

- Parent Surveys were carried out during July 2007 to December 2007.
- Childcare Provider's survey across the borough, with 100% response rate from group providers.
- Consultation with local employers via Kingston Chamber of Commerce.

2.0 Key facts about Kingston

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames in south-west London is the smallest of the 33 London boroughs. The borough is predominantly urban, the exception being the southern tip of the borough in Chessington.

From the 2001 Census, the population of the borough was approximately 150,000 in 2001, living in 61,400 households. Current data indicates that one in ten households in the borough include a child under five and population is predicted over the coming years to have a steady growth in the under fives.

There are 65.1% in full-time employment compared to the Outer London figure of 62.1%. Among full and part time employees 9.1% work mainly from home. The unemployment claimant count is 2.5%, compared with the outer London average of 3.8%.

The borough has a highly qualified population with 34.6% of residents having a qualification at degree level or higher compared to the England and Wales average of 19.8%.

The borough has a population of around 15% from black and ethnic groups, which includes the largest Korean community in Europe. The black and ethnic group population has increased from less than 10% in 1991. This is slightly lower than South London as a whole (17.4%) and notably lower than London (30%).

This section summarises the gaps in supply and demand for childcare in Kingston, along with our current response and future proposals to bridge current supply and demand.

3.0 Supply of Early Years Education

Kingston had the following mix of registered early years and childcare registered provision distributed across the Borough.

In January 2007 there were a total of 3,847 three and four year old children accessing early education within Kingston: 2,834 attending maintained schools, 23 nursery and 30 reception classes and 1,013 children attending within the 51 Private, Voluntary and Independent settings.

4.0 Early Years Education - Demand

Using population projection data from the Office for National Statistics and taking 2007 as the base year then the predicted population increase by 2010 is likely to be in the region of 3.2% nationally. If the population did increase by this level it would not necessarily generate a 3% increase in the demand for early education places. The projection for early education places for 2009 is an increase of 200, with a projected 3 and 4 year old population of 3,800.

In order to meet this future demand work will be undertaken during 2008 to identify settings that would be able to expand their current provision and identify venues to establish additional provision.

In January 2007 3,847 nursery education places were occupied by 3 and 4 year olds accessing their free nursery education offer in maintained, private, voluntary and independent early education settings in the borough. Whilst it would appear that availability of nursery education places is sufficient in most areas; the only exception is within the North Kingston area, New Malden and Worcester Park.

To support providers in the PVI and maintained sector in increasing the free early education offer for 3 and 4 year olds from 12.5 hours per week to 15 hours per week by 2010 offering choice and flexibility for parents/carers in Kingston. Full daycare providers perhaps should not rely on parents using childcare places on a full-time basis, as the demand is for increased choice of responsive places available on a part-time basis.

To support settings and schools to offer this flexible offer, an Advisory Teacher will work across all sectors starting summer 2008.

Consultation with parents undertaken during July 2007, found that most parents were well informed about early education entitlement and the choices that they had to take up places in maintained nursery classes, day nurseries or pre-schools.

5.0 Childcare - Supply

Childcare in Kingston is provided by a range of settings including; childminders; day nurseries; pre-school playgroups; crèches; out of school clubs; and holiday play schemes, Ofsted unregistered settings providing care for over 8's approved by an accredited quality assurance scheme, child carers approved under the Childcare Approval scheme.

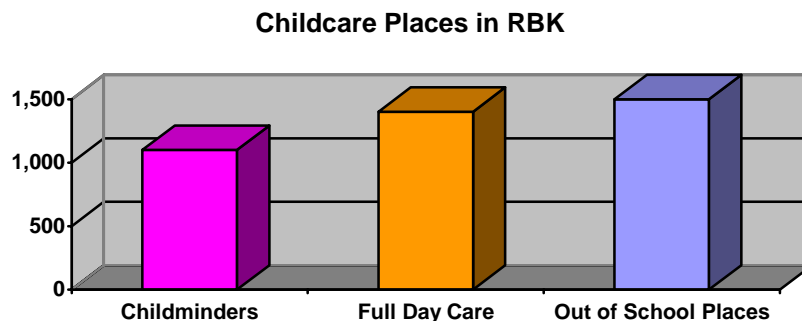
6.0 Current supply of childcare places in Kingston

In January 2008 Kingston had the following number of registered childcare providers.

302 Childminders,
32 full daycare,
26 sessional daycare,
44 out of school daycare and
8 crèches.

Kingston has a slightly higher number of registered places than the national average for childminders and out of school care. Childcare is defined as services offered for more than 4 hours per day.

The table below shows the number of registered places across the borough; registration is only required for services providing places for children under eight. Kingston has been working with secondary schools to develop childcare for children up to 14 years old, to offer both after school and holiday provision.



Kingston has achieved some “outstanding” grades recently from Ofsted.

Childminders: Of the 302 registered childminders within Kingston, 11 have received an “outstanding” Ofsted grading. This equates to 3.6% of our childminders, above the national average of 3%.

Group Care: “Outstanding” grades have also been awarded to two holiday playschemes; one after school club and one pre-school sessional group

7.0 Current geographical spread

Kingston has responded successfully to government targets for new childcare places and provides support and funding for the development of quality and to strengthen business sustainability across all settings.

The childcare market has developed according to historical supply and demand factors and more recently as a result of targeted childcare development through SureStart Extended School funding.

There are services for disabled children in Kingston across all age groups provided by the mainstream childcare sector and some specialist services delivered by the Early Years and Childcare Service and Team for Disabled Children.

There were 16.9% children on the borough’s 2007 primary school education roll, who had a special education need of which 1.7% with a statement and 9.5% had special needs identified that required intervention at School Action and 5.8% School Action Plus.

There are 242 children on the special school roll. All these children either had SEN statements or were part way through the statementing process.

Not all these children will be Kingston residents, so may not require childcare on school days.

8.0 Vacancies and waiting lists

Data from providers shows that 33% of all childcare providers had vacancies. These consisted of 8 day nurseries, 9 of pre-school groups, 14 of out of school clubs and 2 Crèches. 27 providers across the borough had immediate vacancies.

92 settings responded, of which 43 identified that they had waiting lists; 11 day nurseries, 23 pre-schools and 9 out of school. On these waiting lists, the number of children varied immensely. In some day nurseries, the numbers were smaller than for others, which we have concluded doesn't suggest unmet need in the borough, but others had 40 plus children on the waiting lists. This could be for several reasons; including the Children's Information Service suggestion that parent read the Ofsted reports to make informed choices. or the pressure on parents to secure a place before age eligibility. In the KT2 postcode area at the time of survey, 54 children were on a waiting list in one pre-school setting. Further work will be undertaken with this setting to look whether these children would be eligible for places if they were available, i.e. the child maybe too young for the settings registered age group.

9.0 Cost of Childcare - Affordability gaps

Data on the supply of childcare in Kingston shows that average PVI group settings costs per week are between £44 for sessional care and £250 for children aged 2 and under in full daycare. This compares to an inner London average of £205.00 and an England average of between £119.00 and £152.00. Childcare costs for 3 and 4 year olds in Kingston are between £7.50 per session and £218 per week for full daycare. This compares to an inner London average of £176.00 and an England average of £119.00 to £140.00. This suggests that parents/ carers in Kingston are experiencing affordability pressures similar to other inner London authorities and more acutely than the England average.

10.0 Consultation

Our approach to the assessment involved the following stakeholder groups and methods.

11.0 Childcare providers views

We sought the views of providers of childcare services and provisions for children and young people between the ages of 0 to 17 years of age, to include disabled children, living in the borough. This was administered through a postal survey.

We achieved a 100% response rate for the providers' survey from day nurseries, crèches and pre schools and 51% of childminders. Follow-up telephone calls were made to each childcare provider by the Children's Information Service (CIS) to encourage full participation. Respondents included full daycare nurseries, sessional daycare nurseries, out-of-school clubs, holiday playschools, registered childminders and crèche facilities.

12.0 Parents and carers

We sought the views of parents and carers of children between the ages of 0 to 17 years of age, including disabled children living in the borough. This was administered through a survey conducted in 4 ways:

- An on line questionnaire distributed to parents through Kingston schools, local authority website and local libraries.
- Face-to-face interviews with parents attending four events in the borough during the summer 2007.
- Parents forum event at Chessington World of Adventure
- Focus groups Korean and Polish parents

We achieved an on line response for the parents' survey of 158 parents. A further consultation exercise with parents will take place during February 2008 through Stay and Play sessions within Kingston's Children's Centres. Views and comments obtained will inform the final borough's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment document to be published in April 2008.

13.0 Children and young people's views

During the summer of 2007 seven Holiday Playschemes across the borough worked with us to obtain the views of the children using their clubs. Each of the following groups was given enough questionnaires for all their children. The forms were anonymous, although the children were asked to volunteer information on which area of Kingston they attended holiday care, and the area in which they live.

A total of 171 replies were received and analysis showed the following:

These features were considered most important:

- Nice, friendly staff 59%
- No bullying, name-calling or teasing 59%
- Feeling safe / bad behaviour dealt with properly 57%
- Freedom to choose what to do 55%
- Enough equipment to keep sharing and waiting to a minimum 55%
- A clean / warm / nicely decorated building 55%
- Fun - lots to do 55%

And these least important:

- A good mix of girls and boys 39%
- Separate areas for older and younger children 31%
- Peace and quiet when you want it 25%
- Toys and equipment: new or in good condition 25%

14.0 Employers' views

Views of employers were sought through online, postal and telephone surveys to obtain a better understanding of employment patterns in Kingston. There was also an opportunity to assess whether available childcare was affordable and flexible, meeting the needs of their employees which can often be a barrier to successful staff retention and the recruitment of new employees.

50 employers from a range of services in Kingston were consulted as part of the assessment.

15.0 Summary and overview of responses

There do not appear to be any significant difficulties in accessing quality childcare provision in Kingston from the responses received, but the cost of childcare is highlighted as the biggest barrier causing recruitment or retention issues amongst these employers.

Further consultation with employers is ongoing to obtain a wider picture of the work patterns of employees in Kingston to successfully develop affordable childcare services where needed.

16.0 Market Analysis and Conclusions

Geographical gaps

Through information from Kingston's Children's Information Service, north Kingston has been identified as currently requiring further early education provision.

Income gaps

Childcare in Kingston is more expensive than other parts of the country but for many people, salaries are also higher. Therefore more people can afford to pay for childcare. However, for people on low incomes childcare is more expensive than in other areas.

With low levels of poverty, in most parts of the borough the majority of families in Kingston are able to choose which childcare to use and are therefore active consumers particularly in relation to criteria such as accessibility, quality and flexibility.

For most working families, their incomes alongside tax credit or employer support are sufficient to pay for services.

Families that require additional support are likely to be those living in poverty and for whom the high childcare prices make it difficult for them to move from benefits and into work. The proportion of income that childcare takes up for a family on the lowest incomes can make work seem less attractive.

Parents who do not work or who work but fall outside of the tax credit system, or who do not access the tax credit system through lack of trust, often require additional support to access a wider range of services and life choices.

In Kingston the take up of formal childcare by families eligible for more than the family element of the tax credits is lower in Kingston than nationally, with only 14% of eligible families claiming this compared to 16% nationally.

The development of more Children's Centres in Kingston will provide information and sign posting for parents to the Children's Information Service, reaching communities where parents are more likely to be entitled to the higher level of tax credits.

Specific needs gaps

The need for additional provision for disabled children with complex disabilities has been identified for both after school and holiday provision.

Time gaps

Most childcare services in Kingston are typical in meeting the needs of parents working standard hours. Day nurseries and childminders commonly open within the hours of 7.00am to 7.00pm; out of school clubs operate until 6pm.

With plenty of jobs both locally and in London many parents said that there is demand for extended hours childcare because of shift work and commuting early in the morning. Some parents said that they need childcare to cover the long working days that are typical of the professional and managerial roles. Kingston has a number of two-parent families who juggle childcare to accommodate the working patterns of both working parents around the standard hours offered by providers. Where parents – and especially lone parents – need flexible care, there is a limited amount on offer through childminders.

Consultation with parents and employers identified some demand for childcare operating outside of usual hours, with earlier opening and later closing the most common request, but with some demand for weekend care.

Childcare places

Norbiton Children's Centre will provide 17 new childcare places for children from birth to three years from April 2008.

The Early Years and Childcare Service will review provision of free nursery education places both in the maintained and PVI sector; explore the demand and development of additional wrap around places and promote childminding in areas where there is insufficient group childcare places.

There is an identified need in the south of the borough with Ellingham, St Mary's and St Paul's schools currently not having access to childcare for school age children.

Disabled children

Kingston knows that providing childcare services for disabled children with complex needs costs approximately three times more than other provision. Kingston will continue to explore ways to make sure that all children have access to childcare and out-of-school activities by extending the number of after school places provided by both inclusive and specialist provision.

Age Gaps

Childcare for children under 2 years of age is provided by childminders and day nurseries. Kingston has an above average amount of provision that is registered and available for this age group but analysis of vacancies suggests that there is limited availability with the predicted increase in population for 2009.

Whilst the borough has sufficient overall levels of childcare, there are still areas for further development, in particular for children under two years old and for young people 11+ year olds before and after school. Further consultation needs to closely match demand with areas where supply might be developed.

To take this forward we propose to:

- (a) Promote childminders who have vacancies for children under 2 and where gaps are identified, recruit additional Childminders within this geographical area by advertising Childminding Start-up Grants.
- (b) Work with secondary schools within the borough to develop provision for other children that wraps around out of school activities to offer parents childcare that meets their needs.
- (c) Develop through extended schools holiday care for older age children.

Provision for older children

Holiday care is generally open to a wider age-range of children than after school care with provision being offered in primary schools. Some Extended School services are beginning to bridge the gap for activities after school for older children, but some parents would like the kind of service that they often have access to in primary schools to continue in the early-years of secondary school. In response to this the Out of School Childcare Development Adviser is working with secondary schools to address this.

17.0 Recommendations and proposed actions

Given the local authority's role in managing the childcare market (from 2008), the following recommendations should be followed to bridge current supply and demand gaps.

Early Years Education

There would seem to be sufficient early years education provision to meet existing demand.

There is currently no case for developing any significant number of new places other than in North Kingston. This will meet the identified need by Children's Information Services for additional places being required in this geographical area.

We plan to:

- explore further the need for additional places in New Malden and Worcester Park after further consultation with settings and Children's Centres within these areas; and
- continue to consult with parents to see how they would like their early years education entitlement delivered in a more flexible way including on school sites and fitting in with the school day and then we will work with schools to offer wrap around places.

During autumn 2008 further work will be undertaken by the Early Years and Childcare Service to identify where future services will need to be developed in order to meet the projections for early education places for 2009 is an increase of 200, with a projected 3 and 4 year old population of 3,800.

To support providers in the PVI and Maintained sector in increasing the free early education offer for 3 and 4 year olds from 12.5 hours per week to 15 hours per week offering choice and flexibility for parents/carers.

Childcare for children under two years old

Funding is being made available for Norbiton Children's Centre to provide 17 new childcare places for children from birth to three years from April 2008.

In order to meet the identified need the Children's Information Service will promote childminding to parents in areas where there is insufficient group childcare places and for children under two years old.

Childcare for school age children

There is an identified need in the south of the borough with Ellingham, St Mary's and St Paul's schools currently not having access to childcare. In order to fill this identified need it is proposed to develop one club that will serve all three schools.

The childcare market will need to be monitored over the coming year to ensure that sufficiency is maintained. This is particularly important in areas where the population is set to increase.

Tax Credits and other financial assistance

Children's Centres, the Children's Information Service and Job Centre Plus should work closely in continuing to provide an advocacy service to parents in order to maximise all the available financial assistance including the Early Education Funding, Care 2 Learn packages, Working Family Tax Credits and Childcare Vouchers.

We propose to enhance and build on the approaches by:

- Promoting further information on tax credits throughout the borough; making sure all providers, outreach workers, Extended School staff and Family Liaison Workers can assist parents in applying for tax credits
- Undertaking a targeted campaign to raise awareness of the financial help available with childcare costs with emphasis on the Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit
- Working with the JobCentre Plus to assess and act upon changing requirements for parents when they wish to work or train
- Working with childminders to identify the number who will accept the Childcare Voucher Scheme and encouraging this sector to actively promote all the financial assistance that is available.

Childcare Affordability Programme

Consideration should be given to the promotion of a discretionary fund to enable lone parents to become familiar with childcare settings before they are employed i.e. 'taster sessions' whilst they are looking for a job.

Kingston has submitted a bid to the LDA to be able to offer childcare to people returning to work or accessing training.

Quality of provision

Continue to raise the quality of childcare and early education provision by:

- Ensuring all childminders are suitably qualified or working towards a level 3 qualification; and ready to implement the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- To continue to support pre-school setting to undertake the QUILT [quality improvement] scheme.
- To promote quality assurance schemes for settings not requiring registration with Ofsted.

Inclusion

To support early years and childcare providers in providing support for children with additional needs. Kingston's Inclusion Officer will continue to work with settings to increase the confidence and capability of the childcare workforce to provide high quality services for disabled children by:

- making sure disability equality training is available in all settings and evaluating the impact of disability equality training
- ensuring bespoke training is available to all providers

To continue to consult on unmet demand for childcare being available for children with disabilities who have working parents.

In order to provide fully for children with additional needs and disabilities, it is essential that childcare providers have continued access to appropriate support and training. So that settings have appropriate facilities and resources, it is recommended that identified capital funding be used for this purpose from the 2008/09 allocation.

Sustainability

In order that existing childcare in Kingston is sustainable through market forces, SureStart and Extended Schools funding to the sector needs to be focused on supporting existing high quality provision to reach and maintain sustainable occupancy rates, while recruiting new providers (mainly childminders) to cover future demands and flexibility

Where new services need to be developed to fill gaps identified through further consultation, the role of the Early Years and Childcare Service will be in supporting market-led developments. In areas where the market is not operating, services will be supported linked to developing provision within Extended School and Children's Centres.

