



**Early Years**  
Northumberland

# Childcare Sufficiency

Short Annual Report  
2022-2023



**Northumberland**  
County Council



**Early Years**  
Northumberland

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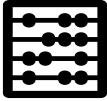





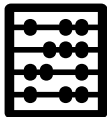
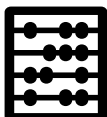



At the time of producing this report, Northumberland has sufficient provision to meet demand. However, as parental working patterns, demands, choice and preferences continually change, this remains only a snapshot in time.

The Early Years Team continue to closely manage the childcare market and remain proactive in their response, underpinned by robust service action and priority plans.



# NORTHUMBERLAND HEADLINE DATA 2021 (NOVEMBER 2022)

	POPULATION OF UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE	17576	5.43% of total Northumberland population
	POPULATION ESTIMATE FOR 2 YEAR OLDS	988	875 in 2022
	PERCENTAGE OF 2 YEAR OLDS TAKING UP A FREE PLACE	75%	Rising to <b>91% 2022</b> National average is <b>72%</b>  Rising further to <b>96%</b> locally November <b>2022</b>
	POPULATION ESTIMATE FOR 3 YEAR OLDS	3061	2959 in 2022
	PERCENTAGE OF 3 YEAR OLDS TAKING UP A FREE PLACE	100%	Rising to <b>106 2022</b> National Average <b>92%</b> Some children attend from outside the Local Authority area
	POPULATION ESTIMATE FOR 4 YEAR OLDS	3149	3156 in 2022
	PERCENTAGE OF 4 YEAR OLDS TAKING UP A FREE PLACE	104%	<b>101% 2022</b> National average <b>94%</b> Some children attend from outside the Local Authority area
	QUALITY (OF PROVIDERS RATED GOOD OR ABOVE BY OFSTED )	98%	<b>15hrs 2022</b> <b>94%</b> 2 year olds in Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding provision <b>91%</b> of 3 and 4 year olds in Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding provision
	NUMBER OF CHILDREN AWARDED EYSTAR FUNDING BY THE PANEL	112	
	IS THERE A NEED TO CREATE MORE CHILDCARE PLACES?	No. The emerging gap in the north and recent central part of the County has been addressed through a childminder recruitment drive.	



# PURPOSE AND LEGAL CONTEXT

## Purpose

It is a requirement by law for each Local Authority to report annually to elected members on how they meet their statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make their report available and accessible to parents.

This report has been prepared in line with our statutory duties. It is intended to provide an overview of the current childcare market sufficiency, an assessment of the challenges, local impact and priority actions moving forward.

## Legal Context

Good quality care and education in the early years, in which the PVI sector plays a crucial role, is instrumental in raising educational achievement of young children and supports the wider economy by supporting parents to work or take up training.

The following legislation outlines the specific statutory duties placed on the local authority with additional responsibilities undertaken due to Covid-19.

**The Childcare Act 2006** places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient childcare for working parents or those taking up training to work <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21>

**The Childcare Act 2016** extends the entitlement to 30 hours free childcare for working parents <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/enacted>

**The Children and Families Act 2014** places a duty on Local Authorities to report annually to elected council members and to make this report available and accessible to parents. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

Under the **Children and Families Act (2014) The Role of the Local Authority (LA)** the LA role is one of good market management and facilitation assessing supply and demand.

Securing sufficient childcare does not mean that the Local Authority must provide early years and childcare provision itself, although they can and may do where deemed necessary.

Local Authorities are required to publish their Local Offer as part of the SEND reforms. You can access Northumberland's Local Offer information by following this [link](#).

## **Data Source**

- Centrally held data from locality action planning and information management systems
- [Education Provision Statistics](#)
- [Office for National Statistics 2021 \(ONS\)](#)
- [Nomis](#) maintained by Durham University on behalf of ONS

# LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS AND POPULATION

## Population

In Northumberland, the population size has increased by 1.4%, from around 316,000 in 2011 to 320,600 in 2021. Slightly lower than the increase for the North East (1.9%). 6.5% are single family households of lone parent family with dependents

## Density

Northumberland is the least densely populated of the North East's 12 local authority areas. Whilst we can see an increase of 1.6% on 2001, Northumberland is recorded the 6<sup>th</sup> most sparsely populated local authority in England.

## Age and Sex

51.2% of Northumberland residents are women and 48.8% men. There has been an increase of 28.9% in people aged 65 years and over, a decrease of 5.9% in people aged 15 to 64 years and a decrease of 3.4% in children aged under 15 years.

## 0-4year olds

Since 2011, the rate of 0-4 year olds has continued to fall –11%. 16.1% of children are under 15.

## Deprivation

Top 5 areas of deprivation in Northumberland are: Blyth - Cowpen, Ashington – Hirst, Newbiggin, Bedlington Station and Sleekburn according to 2021 Census Dataset at MSOA level.

**Data source:** Office of National Statistics 2021 First [ONS](#) and Second Release [ONS](#) and [Nomis](#) maintained by Durham University on behalf of ONS.



# OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE MARKET

Northumberland borders **Cumbria** to the **West**, **County Durham** to the **South**, **Newcastle upon Tyne** and **North Tyneside** to the **South and South East** and the **Scottish Borders** to the **North**.

The local childcare market is dominated by private, voluntary and non-profit sectors (PVI) which vary in provision size, quality and type. Provision, other than schools, range from full day care, sessional pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs and holiday clubs, offering choice and flexibility. They fall into the following registered categories, unless exempt by Ofsted, comprising of:

- **Childminders**
- **Childcare on domestic premises**
- **Childcare on non domestic premises**

**The Central and South East** locality covers **Morpeth, Bedlington, Cramlington, Blyth and Seaton Valley** school partnerships. **Seaton Valley** is the smallest in terms of settings but does cover a wide geographic area including **Seghill**. **Blyth** partnership has one of the highest rates of deprivation along with **Bedlington Station, Sleekburn and Newbiggin**. It is broadly the most urban part of Northumberland but parts of the **Morpeth** partnership are rural and more isolated such as **Harbottle**.

The **North** locality runs from **Ashington** up to **Berwick**. The school partnerships include **Ashington, Coquet, Alnwick** and **Berwick** and borders part of the central locality up to the far north Scottish border. The **Hirst** area of **Ashington** also falls under one of the highest areas of deprivation.

The **West** locality borders on Cumbria and Newcastle and has a wide geographic spread across **Prudhoe** and **Hexham**, with significant areas of rurality, particularly in the **Haydon Bridge** school partnership.

<b>Total Number of Registered Early Years and Childcare Providers, including Schools across the County</b>	<b>374</b>	This figure can fluctuate as providers enter and leave the childcare market.
<b>Total Number of Schools Delivering Early Years Provision</b>	<b>137</b>	
<b>Total Number of PVI Providers, including Out of School Clubs</b>	<b>105</b>	
<b>Total Number of Registered Childminders</b>	<b>131</b>	
<b>Total Number of Funded Settings Delivering Free Funded Entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds</b>	<b>188</b>	



# LOCALITY SNAPSHOT

## Ofsted Inspection Judgements

The first table below, provides an overview of settings judged Good or Above by Ofsted, the regulatory and inspection body. As you can see, the % is reflected by the number of providers in each locality area. It is worth noting that some settings may be due an inspection, which means the data could be subject to change. Those due or not yet inspected form part of the Early Years Team priority support visits.

## Service Level Agreement (SLA)

Providers across Northumberland have access to a comprehensive Training and Continuous Professional Development Programme, including additional support services accessed through a yearly Early Years SLA. The middle table below, provides a snapshot of the number and type of settings subscribed to the Early Years PVI and School SLA to date (November 2022).

## Good Level of Development (GLD)

The bottom table below, highlights how Northumberland compares against the national average. Children are defined as having reached a GLD at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) if they have achieved the expected level for the ELGs in the prime areas of learning and the specific areas of mathematics and literacy. Further details of the EYFS, the EYFS Profile and GLD can be found by clicking [here](#).

Number of Providers Good or Better (in Ofsted inspection)	South East	North	West	% Total/Average	% of Total Providers
Number of Childminders	42	23	19	106	82
% of Childminders	78	79	83	83	
Number of PVI Nursery Settings	15	20	27	75	83
% of PVI Nursery Settings	68	91	87	83	
Number of Schools	18	31	40	108	79
% of Schools	82	66	95	79	
Number of OOSC	5	1	1	11	48
% of OOSC	63	100	20	60	
Number and % of Providers Subscribed to the Early Years SLA 2022 by Setting Type	South East	North	West	Total in SLA	% of Total Providers
Childminders	11	17	22	18	14
PVI Nursery Settings	64	77	45	56	62
Schools	68	55	57	89	65
OOSC	100	0	0	10	48

2022 EYFS Profile	Northumberland	National
GLD	67.4	65.2
Inequality (FSM) Gap	26.1	19.7
GLD for Children SEND	54.3	52.1
Inequality (SEND) Gap	47.2	46.4

# KEY FINDINGS



- The population locally is changing, with data showing a decline in birth to 4 year olds
- The market remains in a dynamic state of flux and the impact of Covid 19 is still yet to be fully realised
- Business support has been effective to help stabilise the market, but more support is required due to new financial challenges
- Supply has been fluid, although few childminder enter the market
- The working patterns, needs, demand and preferences of parents/carers has and continues to change, which has contributed to a greater need for business support in some areas.
- Small gaps in the north and central parts of the county were successfully addressed through a childminder recruitment drive, quickly closing gaps in supply and demand

- Staff recruitment and retention has become an increasing issue in parts of the county, meaning some settings cannot run at maximum capacity, impacting sustainability
- Not all providers qualified for the Energy Relief Scheme, causing concerns for some providers post March 2023
- SEND is increasingly on the rise posing significant challenges for providers
- We have seen a **35%** rise in requests for Inclusion support over the past academic year
- Quality generally is rising, with **97%** providers rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted
- The average cost for local childcare is **£5.10**, which looks slightly lower than the national average reported by Coram Family and Childcare Survey 2021





# TAKE UP AND QUALITY OVERVIEW

Number and percentage of children by provider's Ofsted inspection rating' for 15-hour entitlement, 30-hour entitlement, Good, Inadequate in Northumberland between 2021 and 2022 (November 2022)

		15-hour entitlement		30-hour entitlement	
		2021	2022	2021	2022
<b>Outstanding</b>	Number of registered 2 year olds	73	74		
	Number of registered 3 and 4 year olds	870	937	295	363
	Percentage of 2 year olds registered	14%	12%		
	Percentage of 3 and 4 year olds registered	16%	16%	18%	19%
<b>Good</b>	Number of registered 2 year-olds	426	496		
	Number of registered 3 and 4 year olds	4,181	4,268	1,297	1,483
	Percentage of 2 year olds registered	80%	79%		
	Percentage of 3 and 4 year olds registered	75%	75%	77%	76%
<b>Requires Improvement</b>	Number of registered 2 year olds	29	53		
	Number of registered 3 and 4 year olds	393	377	68	81
	Percentage of 2 year olds registered	5%	8%		
	Percentage of 3 and 4 year olds registered	7%	7%	4%	4%

Data Source for the above: [Education Provision: Children Under 5 years of Age](#)

2021 is the first year of data covering COVID-19, collected during January's national lockdown. Further Ofsted performance data related to quality judgements, regional and national comparisons can be obtained from [Ofsted Data View](#)



# INCLUSION

Local Authorities are required by law to have SEN [Inclusion Funds](#) for all three and four year olds with special educational needs (SEN) who are taking up their free entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken.

These funds are intended to support local authorities to work with providers to address the needs of individual children with SEN. This fund will also support local authorities to undertake their responsibilities to strategically commission SEN services as required under the Children and Families Act 2014.

Northumberland, although not a statutory duty, extend this support to include funded two year olds as well as three and four year olds as part of our commitment to early intervention and to enable early years providers to meet the needs of individual children with low level emerging SEN needs. Locally, funding is accessed through EYSTAR, Short Term Additional Resource.

Between **September 2021** and **August 2022**, Northumberland received **302** requests for inclusion support in comparison to **223** the previous year.

A high percentage of children requiring additional support already had Speech and Language involvement and many had access to [Northumberland Portage Service](#) also.

## Two Year Olds

In summer term 2022, **762** children accessed the two year old offer which is **93%** of eligible children. Of these, **20 (3%)** received SEN support via the Inclusion Fund. No two year olds received funding via EHCP.

## Three and Four Year Olds

In summer term 2022, **84 (2%)** children out of **4781** children taking up their entitlement had an EHCP and **54 (1%)** received support via the Inclusion Fund.

## Inclusion Support

**272** requests for Inclusion Support were received this academic year. This is **4%** of the full 2, 3 and 4 year old cohort. Requests were from the following localities:

- **145** in Central and South East Northumberland
- **71** in North Northumberland
- **56** in West Northumberland

# INCLUSION



At the time of the request being made, many children had input from other professionals (where known to the SENCo):

**72 children (26.5%)** had Portage involvement

**171 children (62.9%)** had SALT involvement (some only had a referral and hadn't been seen yet).

Following input from the Inclusion Consultants, **58.9%** of the requests did not apply for additional funding – they were supported with advice and guidance around environments and the graduated approach.



## Inclusion Fund (EYSTAR)

**18** Early Years Inclusion Panels have been held to discuss EYSTAR applications.

**112** children were awarded EYSTAR funding by the panel. **46 (52.4%)** children received 1 round of funding, **49 (55.8%)** went on to receive 2 rounds of funding and **19 (21.6%)** received 3 rounds of funding.

**59.28%** of children allocated EYSTAR Funding have an Early Help Assessment in place.

Roughly **73%** of EYSTAR requests were for boys.

**92 (80%)** of EYSTAR requests state communication and interaction as the primary needs.



# CHILDCARE COSTS

Private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers set their own rates, which means the cost of childcare can and does vary across the County. Childcare costs are very broad and depends on many factors such as the setting type, quality, overhead and business costs and the delivery of their childcare model. Settings need to ensure they are viable and sustainable. Therefore, it is difficult and more complex to provide an exact like for like comparison, as each setting offers their own unique service.

Childminders negotiate their childcare costs with parents, depending on the level of service required and whether they offer additional extras such as nappies, meals and outings, including a reduced rate for siblings. Although childminding costs do vary, costs tend to be more closely aligned within the sector in comparison, due to less variance and business overheads.

Whilst childcare costs can be extremely high depending on the level of service required, the DFE provides a range of funding streams for eligible parents, including Tax Free Childcare across the UK. This helps to make childcare more affordable for parents, so it is essential that providers continually promote the various funding streams available, maximise the take up of all eligible 2, 4 and 4 year funding and [additional sources](#), where eligible, such as Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) and Disability Access Fund (DAF). Our 'Narrowing the GAP Champions Project', designed to close the attainment gap by maximising the take up of eligible funding streams, showed a positive impact and increase in take up. The [Narrowing the Gap Project Report](#) offers an interesting read. This funding not only benefitted the eligible children in their care but also supports an efficient financial business model.

## **Local Business Support Survey**

Findings from a recent local Business Support Survey carried out by the Early Years Team in **November 2022**, revealed a marginal increase in childcare costs overall across the County since last year. Whilst some group providers reduced their rate to support the changing needs and financial affordability for parents, others increased to meet inflation and rising costs. From those surveyed, this highlighted a reduction of **9%** to **£5.10** per hour for group provision. There was no differentiation in costs despite the different age ranges and higher ratio requirements for under 2's. This compared to **£4.89** per hour for childminders, a rise of **11 %** since our last CSA and **£3.64** for Out of School Club. This means the cost of childcare locally is below the national average for 3 and 4 year olds according to the [Family and Childcare Trust 2021](#). However, it is important to bear in mind that this is just a snapshot in time, as the average rate for childcare is likely to rise due to recent national inflation and a substantial hike in energy costs from Spring 2023.

Whilst the Government [Energy Bill Relief Scheme](#) and [Energy Price Guarantee](#) recently introduced to help insulate local businesses and households from rising energy costs, our survey revealed many providers, especially PVI groups, were increasingly concerned post March 2023, when the scheme is due to end. Because of this, most providers have indicated the necessity to increase their rates on an incremental scale to remain sustainable and business support has been offered to those who expressed support.

## **Help with Childcare Costs**

Government help with childcare costs for parents, is available for children under 18. Further details can be found by clicking on [Childcare Choices](#).

## **Early Years Free Funded Entitlement**

All eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds have access to free education entitlement. More information is available for parents by clicking on [Free Education Entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds](#). Details on local childcare available can be found by clicking on [Early Years](#).

# BUSINESS SUPPORT AND KEY PRIORITIES

Like any successful business, sustainable quality childcare requires a good level of business acumen and a well-defined business strategy, with robust systems and processes firmly embedded, regardless of the provision type.

This helps to project and forecast ahead and sharply pivot in response to marked forces and an unpredictable and dynamic landscape and social and economic flux. However, these skills often remain underdeveloped as business management does not typically form part of an early years qualification. In Northumberland, many are small enterprises and community and voluntary groups, including childminders. This means they don't have the luxury of a head office and additional resources who can effectively carry out this vital function. To this effect, we have worked hard over the past few years to help increase business management and acumen to ensure the same level and importance is given as Ofsted and the EYFS.

Based on the findings, we have tailored our support in partnership with [RedKite Innovations](#) to help develop bespoke outcomes for individual providers by embedding relevant strategies and tools directly into their business through a tailored and personalised approach.

This involves:

- A unique 1-1 bespoke coaching model
- Promoting effective marketing strategies to match the current climate
- Promoting relevant grants to support individualised projects
- Sharing a revised tool kit of resources
- Offering top tips
- Continuous promotion of Tax Free Childcare
- Maximising the uptake of the funded entitlement and other funding streams
- Sharing case studies
- Promoting an Early Years Funding Ready Reckoner, developed by the Early Years Team



# OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES

## Internal

- Endured restrictions, limitations and flexibility has posed many challenges for providers
- Limited talent pool impacting on the management of supply and demand
- Qualification gaps means some staff cannot be included in ratios
- Supernumerary staff working in ratios impacting on the day-to-day systems management
- Managing staff and child wellbeing
- Covid related impact on attainment
- Higher ratios requirement for babies and 2 year olds
- Rise in SEND
- National funding rate does not cover costs
- Managing constant changes, pressures and demands
- Loss of private fee-paying parents due to more informal childcare
- Changes in pay conditions and remuneration
- National minimum and living wage and pension increases
- Underdeveloped business skills and acumen
- Confusion around staff qualifications and DFE list
- Maternity cover and costs

## External

- Rises in energy and utility bills
- Dynamic and unpredictable market creating a constant state of social and economic flux
- Limited pipeline with a significant drop in the quantity of school leavers undertaking early years qualifications and apprenticeships creating a shortage of talent pool
- Rise in informal childcare arrangements
- Decline in childminders entering the market
- Decline in qualified agency supply staff



# SUSTAINABILITY

Currently, Northumberland has sufficient provision to meet demand. Small pockets of need were proactively addressed through a recruitment drive seeing newly registered childminders in the Central and North locality areas, closing any potential gaps in the market.

Over the past year, we have seen a growing change in the local childcare market. Whilst we have sufficient provision and the market has remained reasonably stable due to intense support, grant funding and maximising funding streams, we remain in a constant dynamic state of social and economic flux. This makes it very difficult to predict the future landscape. A local Business Support Survey carried out by the Early Years Team in November 2022 reinforced this, showing the working patterns, needs, preferences and demands of parents has and continues to change, with some citing redundancy, working from home or using informal childcare as some of the reasons for fallen occupancy. Although a small number of providers saw an unexpected increase resulting in a waiting list, the majority are currently operating **50-75%** below occupancy due to many variances.

Typically, profit margins in childcare are minimal, meaning the vast majority of providers have very little reserves to draw upon during these challenging economic times. The impact of external forces, along with the significant spike in energy costs, including the increase in pay and remuneration, has seen the severity and scale of support this year at its highest since the last recession. With the [Bank of England](#) suggesting we are heading into a new long recession, this compounds the uncertainty of the local market as providers will undoubtedly need to make some tough business decisions.

Although we had a small response rate to the survey, the majority who responded highlighted concerns post March 2023. The feedback has been extremely valuable in helping the Early Years Team to examine the current challenges, strategise priorities and proactively tailor the appropriate level of support and need for 1-1 coaching sessions through RedKite Innovations. This builds on the business support offered by the Early Years Team as we strive to increase good business acumen and build new mindsets and culture change around business management.

The challenges of staff recruitment and retention reported nationally are not as severe in Northumberland, however, we have seen emerging issues locally. Providers cite limited talent pool and a lack of agency staff available, which has created enduring limitations and restrictions for some providers in parts of the County. This has had a ripple effect when managing parental demand. One of the biggest threats for sufficiency is the potential for providers to cap numbers due to recruitment and retention issues. Whilst parents currently have a choice of childcare, this would have a knock-on effect to the sustainability and potential business growth and market recovery.

This dynamic flux makes it difficult for a small number when they are trying to encourage growth and new intake when staff supply is increasingly scarce. This has resulted in the need for closer market management, the promotion of greater collaboration between providers and the necessity to tailor bespoke support to assist providers to examine and readjust their business model and safeguard against a challenging economy.

We have worked closely with the University of Sunderland who offer providers a 'top up' solution where some degrees do not have an element of assessed practice to work in ratios under the EYFS. This is helping to contribute to the staffing crisis.

# SUSTAINABILITY

The Early Years Team continuously encourage providers to maximise all funding streams available and claim the relevant funding for eligible children, where entitled. This is not only essential to ensure all children receive their full entitlements but it equally strengthens business resilience and the agility needed to pivot and navigate incoming change.

RedKite Innovations have been instrumental in supporting both the Early Years Team and providers when considering a new culture change and marketing strategies that meet the current climate.

As stated in our last CSA, the changing market and workforce not only has implication for the sector, including training and qualifications but also for the economy, social mobility and educational attainment of children and young people, especially vulnerable key groups.

Despite a challenging year, we encourage a sustainable business approach and remain optimistic as settings adjust and show resilience. Providers across the County remain strongly committed and dedicated to supporting children and families and relationships continue to strengthen, creating a stronger infrastructure as we move forward during uncertain times.

Evidence tells us the quality of a child's early experiences has the biggest impact on life-long outcomes. Many central initiatives have been rolled out by Central Government, aiming to stimulate market recovery.

Although there is not one solution to the current climate, we have some creative ideas and a robust plan in place to meet our sufficiency duty, in partnership with colleagues, wider agencies and initiatives. As we unite in response to a constantly changing and challenging economic landscape, this will help us to ensure essential services and opportunities for young children and families remain available to improve best outcomes, school readiness and the future life chances of our next generation.



# NORTHUMBERLAND'S CSA PRIORITIES

Whilst we continue to focus on the same 5 key priorities which feed into the wider Early Years Team Priority Plan, 3 themes have emerged and require closer attention:

- Recruitment and Retention
- Focusing on supply and demand
- Identifying gaps and how best to address these

The Early Years Team continue to closely monitor the local childcare market and respond proactively to change.

## Priority 1

### **Sufficiency and Flexibility of Provision**

Continue to support the sufficiency and flexibility of provision across the County, especially in rural areas of identified need.

## Priority 2

### **Address Recruitment and Retention Issues across the PVI Sector**

Work strategically with multiagency partners to close the skills gap and build stronger career pathways to address the current and longer-term emerging issue around geographical staff recruitment and retention and the promotion of more men in early years.

## Priority 3

### **Maximise Take Up**

Maximise take up and ensure all eligible parents/carers have access to the free universal and extended entitlement for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

## Priority 4

### **Support Sustainability, Business Skills and Acumen**

Promote sustainable and viable provision across the county through tailored business and marketing support and bespoke training. Signposting settings to available grant/ funding streams where available.

## Priority 5

### **Support Workforce Health and Wellbeing**

Promote the health and wellbeing of the workforce through signposting to training and relevant local support services.



# ACTIVITY TO SUPPORT CSA PRIORITIES

## Activity to Support CSA Priorities 2023-24

- Monitor birth data
- Drive recruitment in areas of identified need
- Continue to promote effective collaboration between providers
- Tailored business support
- Conduct strategic and locality-based planning meetings and carry out agreed actions
- Continue to work creatively and collaboratively with DWP, local College, Universities and Training providers to support staff recruitment and retention across the County
- Signpost to health and wellbeing training and relevant support services
- More joined up working with our local Adult Education and Skills team will strengthen solutions to generate a new pipeline coming into the market



## Activity to Support CSA Priorities 2023-24

- Support offered to maximise funding streams
- Continue to roll out of the free funded entitlement and uptake of 2 year old places
- Carry out Business Health Checks
- Deliver bespoke Training and Professional Development Programme
- Competitively priced SLA
- Support providers with improved job adverts to attract higher level of quality applicants
- Work collaboratively with a range of multiagency partners to promote a diverse workforce and more men in early years
- Closely monitor and proactively respond to market changes
- Carry out market exit interviews





# CONCLUSION

The local childcare market continues to change and we remain in a dynamic state of social and economic flux. The local market has adjusted and appears somewhat resilient, considering the wealth of internal and external pressures and challenges. This is largely due to a range of intervention and support services preventing permanent closure and the fluidity of provision, with new providers entering the market where a few provisions closed, not all of which were Covid related.

An important part of sufficiency is assessing supply and demand. A recent Business Support Survey carried out in November by the Early Years Team, played a key role in meeting our statutory duties and good market management. Whilst we currently have sufficient supply to meet demand, we understand parental needs, choices, demands and preferences has and does continue to change making it difficult to predict the future stability of the childcare market as we enter a long recession.

Quality of provision continues to improve with all eligible children having access to good quality childcare and effective systems and processes are in place to support providers to maximise all eligible funding streams. However, the main challenges are related to a rise in SEND, staff recruitment and retention, confusion over qualifications and an emerging skills gap and the increase in the attainment gap exasperated by the pandemic.

Work is currently being undertaken to support settings and to address the skills gap through a multiagency approach. More joined up working with Adult Education is helping to strengthen a creative and dynamic model with the intention to help generate new interest in apprenticeships and early years qualifications, creating a more in-house pipeline entering the market as we move forward. Systems are in place to support settings with the rise in SEND.

The Early Years Team remain in regular close contact with local providers enabling them to continuously monitor and proactively respond to market changes. Regular locality planning meetings are held during the year, including frequent support visits carried out by the Early Years Team. In addition, providers have access to a comprehensive Training and Professional Development Programme, accessed through a competitively priced Service Level Agreement. The relationship between providers, partner agencies and the Early Years Team continues to be one of our key strengths in meeting our statutory duties.

As the market can change very quickly, the information and data provided is just a snapshot in time. We all continue to learn from the pandemic and strengthened partnership working. The Early Years Team remain optimistic and continue to support providers and manage market sufficiency across the County to meet the Local Authority's statutory duty.

We recognise, to establish the stability of the market and changes in parental choice, preferences and demands, it is important to carry out a more in-depth study which includes wider consultation with parents and early years settings.