

Northumberland County Council Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

June 2024

Executive summary

This Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has been put together by Coram with input from Northumberland County Council.

From the evidence assessed as part of this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, it appears that **Northumberland has sufficient provision to meet demand**. However, this remains only a snapshot in time and could change substantially as the new funded entitlements to early years childcare and school-age wraparound childcare are introduced and parental demand, as well as provider supply is impacted.

New funded entitlements to early years childcare and school-age wraparound childcare.

In Spring 2023 the government announced expansions to early years funded entitlement:

- Since **April 2024**, working parents of 2 year olds can access 15 hours per week
- From **September 2024**, working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3-years-old can access 15 hours per week
- From **September 2025**, working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3-years-old can access 30 hours free childcare per week.

The government also announced the National Wraparound Childcare Programme to provide before and after school childcare from September 2024 for primary school aged children during term time, such as breakfast clubs and regular afterschool provision.

The assessment that Northumberland has **sufficient provision** in most areas of childcare is evidenced by the fact that:

- Providers in Northumberland surveyed said they have **vacancies** for typical hours care, holiday care for school age children, and for the funded childcare entitlements.
- **Take up rates** for the three and four-year-old funded entitlements are higher than the national average and the take up rate for the two-year-old entitlement for disadvantaged children is 89 percent, above the national average.
- Almost three-quarters of parents surveyed were happy that childcare providers are in convenient **locations** for them, although some parents said that places are harder to find in more rural areas of Northumberland County Council.
- Providers surveyed were planning to increase **capacity** to meet expected upcoming demand, including a third by recruiting staff and one in five by increasing staff hours.

However, this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has also highlighted some areas which could affect future sufficiency, including:

- **Government expansion to childcare** – early years entitlement expansion for children aged 9 months to three years and funding for wraparound care for primary school age children is likely to substantially increase expectations around childcare and demand by parents.
- **Variability in vacancy rates** – while overall there appeared to be adequate vacancy rates in the providers surveyed, this was unevenly distributed across areas in Northumberland with many areas appearing to have very limited vacancies.

- **Sustainability** – there has been a decrease in the number of Ofsted registered providers and number of places, mainly due to decreases in childminders. While almost 9 out of 10 providers surveyed were confident or very confident that their setting will still be operating in six months, childminders were overall less confident.
- **Demand** – there appears to be high demand for childcare, with almost half of parents surveyed stating they want to use more childcare, and almost a quarter more saying that they may want more childcare in future.
- **Affordability** – The cost of childcare in Northumberland is generally higher than the North East average, and some types of childcare are more expensive than the national average. Almost half of parents not using childcare who were surveyed cited affordability as a reason for not doing so. While almost two-thirds of all parents surveyed disagreed that childcare was affordable. In addition, over a third of providers surveyed had increased prices charged to parents in the last six months and a quarter were planning to in the next six months.
- **Care in atypical hours** – there was a lack of supply of childcare in atypical hours and there was demand from a significant minority of parents.
- **Gaps in awareness of support for childcare** – of parents surveyed, there were significant gaps in knowledge of government support for childcare, including Universal Credit for childcare and Tax Credits for childcare and to a lesser extent on Tax Free Childcare and the early years entitlements.
- **Lack of adequate SEND provision** – there has been an increase in the number of children with SEND across all age groups in recent years. Almost half of parents of a child with SEND who were not currently using childcare said they were not able to find a place that caters for their needs.
- **Future demand** – Population estimates for children, especially pre-school children show a decrease in the coming years, although the widening eligibility for funded places could still lead to an overall increase in demand. This could potentially outstrip currently available vacancies.

There are a number of areas to consider in the upcoming expansions to funded childcare:

- Given that parents in Northumberland want to use more childcare, and cost is the biggest factor in them not being able to do so, the new entitlements could present a risk to future sufficiency if most newly eligible children take up their places.
- Most providers in Northumberland are generally planning to offer the entitlements to some degree, mostly to children already attending their settings.
- Only a third of providers surveyed said that they have the capacity to provide additional spaces for 15 hours of care for all children from the age of 9 months with working parents (from September 2024), although this figure does rise to 44 percent when 30 hours will be offered from September 2025, potentially due to the longer timeframe.

Recommendations for improving childcare sufficiency in Northumberland include:

- Continue to map supply and demand, especially for the new funded entitlements, looking in particular at areas in Northumberland which appear to have less vacancy rates and higher levels of children between 9 months and 3 years.

- Work closely with providers and the childcare workforce to provide help with recruitment, training for staff, and support to allow staff to attend training events without negatively impacting provider capacity.
- Support providers to offer more flexible, atypical hours for early years childcare, and work with them and existing wraparound providers to support them to work together to offer wraparound childcare.
- Improve access to information, including an update and redesign of the childcare section of the Northumberland County Council website

The methodology used to undertake this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is set out in Annex 1.

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Glossary of acronyms and key terms

1.1.1 Acronyms

- **CSA:** Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
- **SEND:** Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- **EHCP:** Education, Health and Care Plan
- **IDACI:** Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
- **ONS:** Office for National Statistics
- **PVI:** Private, Voluntary and Independent
- **EYFS:** Early Years Foundation Stage

1.1.2 Key Terms

- **Childcare on non-domestic premises:** Refers to nurseries
- **Childcare on domestic premises:** Refers to childminders
- **Home Childcarer:** Refers to nanny or au pair, that takes care of the child in the child’s own home
- **Funded early education entitlements:** Refers to the 2 year old, 3-year-old and 4-year-old early education funding provided by the government
- **Wraparound childcare:** Refers to before and after school childcare
- **Atypical hours:** Refers to childcare provided outside of standard 9am-6pm weekday hours
- **Take up rate:** The proportion of eligible children accessing funded early education place
- **Maintained nursery and state-funded primary schools:** Refers to nursery classes in state-funded primary schools
- **Sustainability:** The ability of childcare providers to continue operating
- **Private, voluntary and independent nurseries:** Refers to non-maintained early years settings

Purpose & legal context

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.

Good quality care and education in the early years, in which the PVI sector plays a crucial role, is instrumental in raising the 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 is one of good market management and facilitation, as well as 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 so where deemed necessary.

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

2 What does the supply of childcare look like in Northumberland?

In order to assess the sufficiency of childcare in Northumberland, this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) looked at trends in the number of providers and places, estimated vacancy rates, and providers' views on changes they have recently made and will likely make in the near future.

2.1 What are the number of providers and places in Northumberland?

The latest data from Ofsted's '[Childcare providers and inspections](#)' dataset (from 31 Aug 2023) shows that there are a total of 203 childcare providers on the Early Years Register (EYR) in Northumberland, plus another 37 providers that are not on the EYR. Of the 203 providers on the EYR, 103 are childminders and 100 are classified as 'childcare on non-domestic premises'.

There are 6 childminders who are not on the EYR, along with 5 providers of 'childcare on non-domestic premises', and 26 providers classed as 'home childcarers' (providers such as nannies, who provide care in the child's own home). None of these providers have any registered places.

Northumberland also has 137 schools delivering early years provision, 22 of which are state-funded, governor-run provision under community powers, which enables them to take on two year olds.

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.

According to Ofsted, Northumberland has 4,798 registered childcare places, of which 727 are with childminders, and 4,071 are with providers classed as 'childcare on non-domestic premises'. Children may attend childcare full time or part time.

Table 1: Number of providers and registered places, by provider type¹

Type of provision	Number of EYR providers	Number of EYR registered places
Childminders	109	727
Childcare on non-domestic premises	105	4,071
Childcare on domestic premises	0	0
Home childcarer	26	0
TOTAL	240	4,798

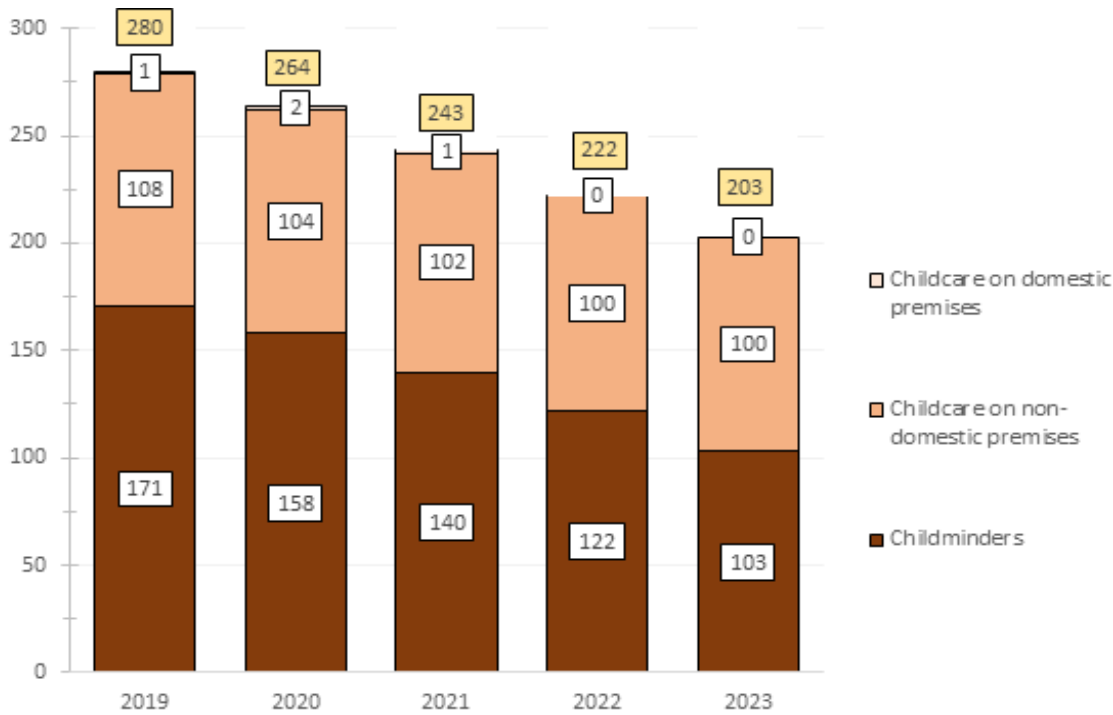
Source: [Ofsted - Childcare providers and inspections as at 31 August 2023](#)

The numbers of both providers and places in Northumberland County Council have been steadily decreasing over the last five years, losing around 20 providers per year. From a total of 280

¹ The figures in this table record 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.

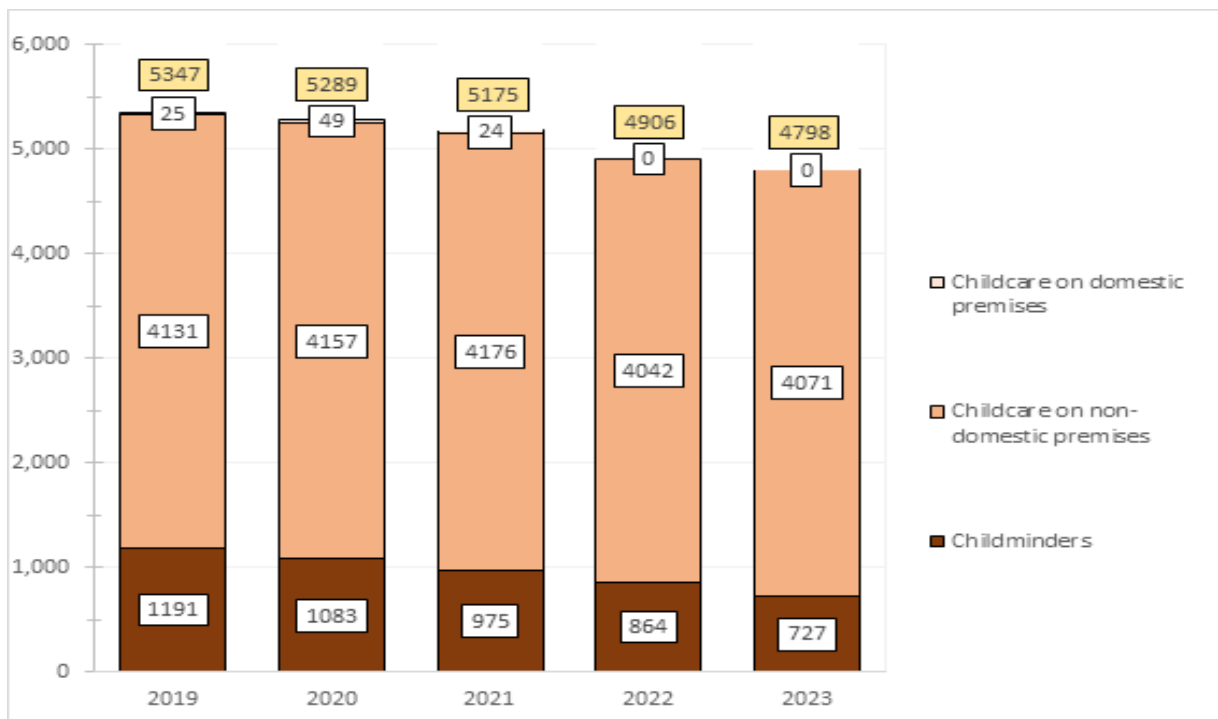
providers in 2019, Northumberland County Council now has only 203 providers. Most of the fall is due to decreasing numbers of childminders in Northumberland, from 171 in 2019 to 103 in 2023. This decrease has been seen nationally. Similarly, over the last five years, Northumberland has lost 549 places in total, falling from 5,347 places in 2019 to 4,798 places in 2023, again mainly attributable to a fall in registered places for childminders.

Table 2: Number of EYR-registered providers in Northumberland County Council, 2019-2023



Source: [Ofsted - Childcare providers and inspections as at 31 August 2023](#); [2022](#); [2021](#); [2020](#); [2019](#)

Table 3: Number of EYR-registered places in Northumberland County Council, 2019-2023



Source: [Ofsted - Childcare providers and inspections as at 31 August 2023](#); [2022](#); [2021](#); [2020](#); [2019](#)

2.2 What are the vacancy rates in Northumberland?

To assess the supply of childcare in Northumberland, Coram surveyed providers and calculated vacancy rates by looking at the number of vacancies as a percentage of the total number of places. This analysis provided an *estimation* of the total number of vacancies to support an assessment of sufficiency, not the actual number of vacancies for pre-school providers in Northumberland.

In total, 62 providers responded to questions regarding **pre-school** vacancy rates in Coram's survey of providers in Northumberland. Of those, only 37 of these providers had at least one vacancy. These 37 providers had 432 vacancies available, averaging 12 vacancies per provider. This equates to an estimated vacancy rate of 29 percent for pre-school providers.

Table 4: Vacancies by provider, for pre-school children

	Vacancies	Of which, how many are:			Year round
		Sessional	Full day	Term time	
Total number of vacancies	432	273	200	326	194
Average number of vacancies	7	6	5	7	5
Total responses (providers)	62	47	43	47	40
Providers with at least one vacancy	37	27	23	28	18
Average number of vacancies (only providers with at least one vacancy)	12	10	9	12	11
Question asked in survey: <i>As of today, how many vacancies do you have?</i>					

As shown in Table 5 (below), 56 providers responded to the question about **wraparound childcare** for school-age children. Of these, 18 providers had at least one vacancy. These 18 providers had 170 vacancies available, averaging 9 vacancies per provider, equating to an estimated vacancy rate of 32 percent.

Similarly, 55 providers responded to the question about **holiday childcare** for school-age children, but again, only 18 of these providers had at least one vacancy. Of these, 18 providers had 141 vacancies available, averaging 8 vacancies per provider, equating to a vacancy rate of 33 percent.

Table 5: Wraparound term-time and holiday childcare vacancies for school-age children

	Wraparound term-time childcare	Holiday childcare
Total	170	141
Average	3	3
Total responses	56	55
Responses with at least one vacancy	18	18
Average (responses with at least one vacancy)	9	8
Vacancy rate	32%	33%
Question asked in survey: <i>As of today, how many vacancies do you have for:</i>		

For the **15 hours funded childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds** offer, 54 providers responded to this question, with 25 of these 54 providers responding that they have at least one vacancy (Table 6). These 25 providers had 121 vacancies available, averaging 5 vacancies per provider.

For the **15 hours funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds** offer, 50 providers responded to this question, with 27 of these 50 providers responding that they have at least one vacancy. These 27 providers had 193 places available, averaging 7 vacancies per provider.

For the **30 hours funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds** offer, 51 providers responded to this question, with 27 of these 51 providers responding that they have at least one vacancy. These 27 providers had 175 places available, averaging 6 vacancies per provider.

Table 6: Vacancies for funded entitlements

	15 hours funded childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds	15 hours funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds	30 hours funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds
Total	121	193	175
Average	2	4	4
Total responses	54	50	51
Responses with at least one vacancy	25	27	27
Average (responses with at least one vacancy)	5	7	6
Question asked in survey: How many vacancies do you have for the following funded entitlements?			

Breaking down vacancies for pre-school children by postcode area, we see that there is a great deal of variation between postcode areas in terms of how many providers, and vacancies, are available. Many postcode areas have no vacancies at all (NE22, NE23, NE25, NE26, NE49, NE68, NE70, and NE71), while others have a high number of vacancies (NE65 – 127 vacancies; NE20 – 66 vacancies; NE24 and NE66 – 51 vacancies each). These four postcodes had 68 percent of the total number of pre-school vacancies.

Table 7: Vacancies by postcode area, for pre-school children

Postcode area	No. of vacancies, pre-school children	Of which, how many are...			
		Sessional	Full day	Term time	Year round
NE18 - Stamfordham	10	10	0	10	0
NE20 - Ponteland	66	60	17	60	6
NE22 - Bedlington	0	0	0	0	0
NE23 - Cramlington	0	0	0	0	0
NE24 - Blyth	51	5	23	5	23
NE25 - Whitley Bay	0	0	0	0	0
NE26 – Whitley Bay	0	0	0	0	0
NE42 - Prudhoe	16	16	0	16	0
NE43 - Stocksfield	6	0	6	0	6
NE45 - Corbridge	16	0	16	0	16

NE46 - Hexham	3	3	0	3	0
NE47 - Hexham	16	16	16	16	6
NE48 - Hexham	9	0	8	0	1
NE49 - Haltwhistle	0	0	0	0	0
NE61 - Morpeth	34	33	3	26	2
NE62 - Choppington	0	0	0	0	0
NE63 - Ashington	11	10	11	10	11
NE64 - Newbiggin- by- the- sea	3	0	3	3	3
NE65 - Morpeth	127	81	56	126	102
NE66 - Alnwick	51	26	38	41	15
NE67 - Chathill	3	3	3	0	3
NE68 - Seahouses	0	0	0	0	0
NE70 - Belford	0	0	0	0	0
NE71 - Wooler	0	0	0	0	0
TD15 - Tweed	10	10	0	10	0
TOTAL	432	273	200	326	194
Question asked in survey: <i>As of today, how many vacancies do you have?</i>					

As shown in Table 8 (below), there is also a significant range in the number of vacancy rates for school-age providers by postcode, with a higher proportion of areas where there are no vacancies compared to pre-school providers.

For wraparound care in term time for school age children, the location of vacancies is even more concentrated, with 81 percent of vacancies found in just three postcodes (NE61 – 92 vacancies; NE66 – 24 vacancies; NE65 – 22 vacancies). Similarly, for holiday childcare for school age children, most postcode areas have no vacancies, with 72 percent of vacancies located in three postcode areas (NE61 – 47 vacancies; NE65 – 31 vacancies; and NE46 – 24 vacancies).

Table 8: Vacancies by postcode area, for school-age children

Postcode area	Wraparound, school age, term time	Holiday, school age
NE18 - Stamfordham	0	0
NE20 - Ponteland	10	12
NE22 - Bedlington	0	0
NE23 - Cramlington	1	0
NE24 - Blyth	0	0
NE25 - Whitley Bay	0	0
NE26 -Whitley Bay	0	0
NE42 - Prudhoe	0	0
NE43 - Stocksfield	0	0
NE45 - Corbridge	0	0
NE46 - Hexham	0	24

NE47 - Hexham	0	0
NE48 - Hexham	6	6
NE49 - Haltwhistle	0	0
NE61 - Morpeth	92	47
NE62 - Choppington	5	0
NE63 - Ashington	3	9
NE64 - Newbiggin- by- the- sea	0	0
NE65 - Morpeth	22	31
NE66 - Alnwick	24	7
NE67 - Chathill	1	1
NE68 - Seahouses	1	4
NE70 - Belford	5	0
NE71 - Wooler	0	0
TD15 - Tweed	0	0
Question asked in survey: <i>As of today, how many vacancies do you have?</i>		

Overall, estimated vacancy rates were around a third or less for childcare provision with average vacancies per provider ranging from 12 places for pre-school providers to 5 places for providers of the disadvantaged 2 year old funded entitlement. However, analysis of vacancy rates at the postcode level showed concentrations of vacancy rates, suggesting an uneven spread across Northumberland.

2.3 How is supply likely to change in the near future?

To assess future supply of childcare in Northumberland, providers were asked what changes they had made in the last 6 months and would be making in the next 6 months, as well as their views on their sustainability.

2.3.1 Provider changes to prices, places and opening hours

Of the providers surveyed, under half (46 percent) had not taken any actions around prices, opening hours, or the number of free early education places being offered in the 6 months prior to the survey, with under half (45 percent) not expecting to take any of these actions in the next six months. However, 39 percent of providers surveyed had increased **prices** charged to parents in the last six months, and 25 percent plan to do so in the next six months. In addition, 1 in 20 providers (5 percent) had increased **charges** to parents over and above regular fees (for things like nappies and food) and just under 1 in 10 (9 percent) were planning on increasing charges in the next 6 months.

In addition, just over 1 in 10 (11 percent) of providers had reduced their **opening hours**, but the same proportion had increased their opening hours. In the next six months, 14 percent of providers were planning to increase opening hours, and 14 percent were planning to increase the number of free early education entitlement places.

Table 9: Actions taken by providers in the last 6 months

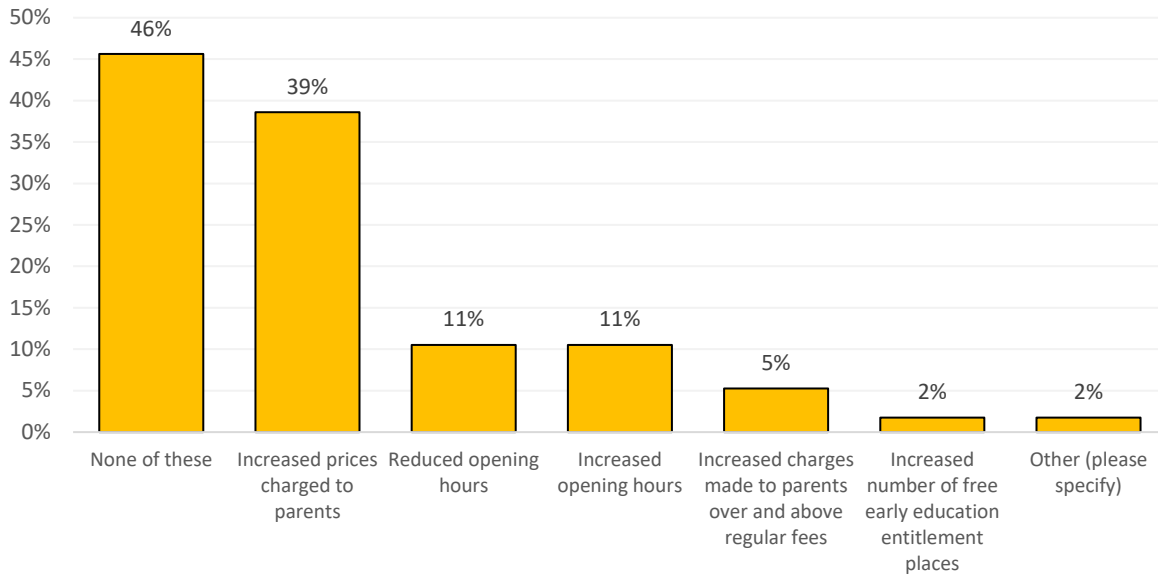
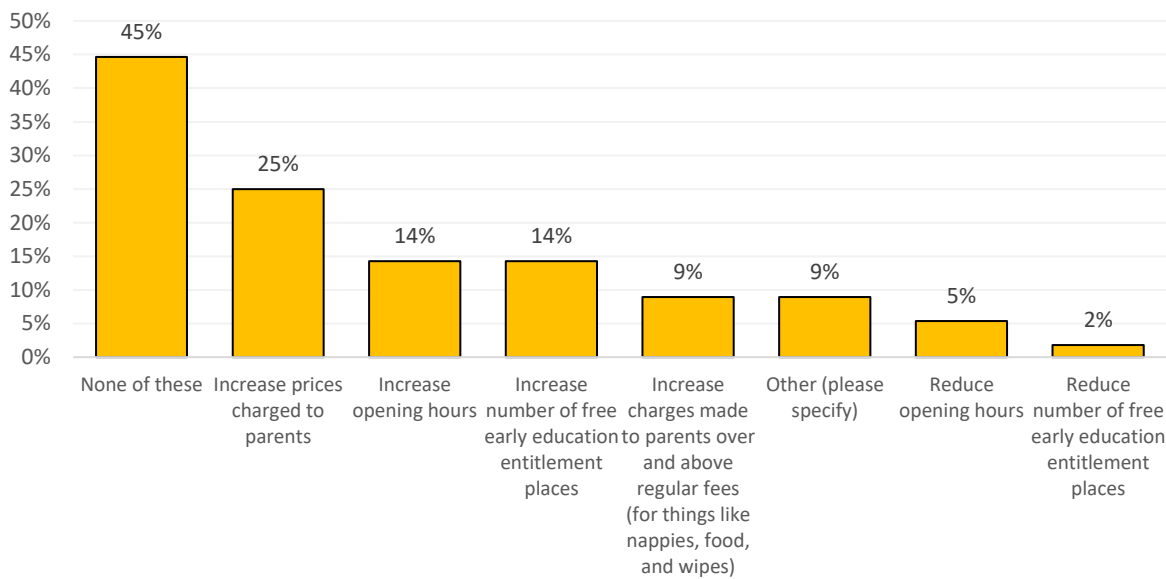


Table 10: Actions providers expect to take in the next 6 months



2.3.2 Provider changes to staffing

Over the next six months, a third (33 percent) of providers surveyed expected to **recruit staff** due to a rise in demand for places, while 22 percent were expecting to increase **staff hours** to cope with a rise in uptake of places. In the last six months, 32 percent of providers surveyed stated they had already recruited staff, and 29 percent have increased staff hours. This suggests that some providers are looking to increase their capacity.

Table 11: Staffing actions taken by providers in the last 6 months

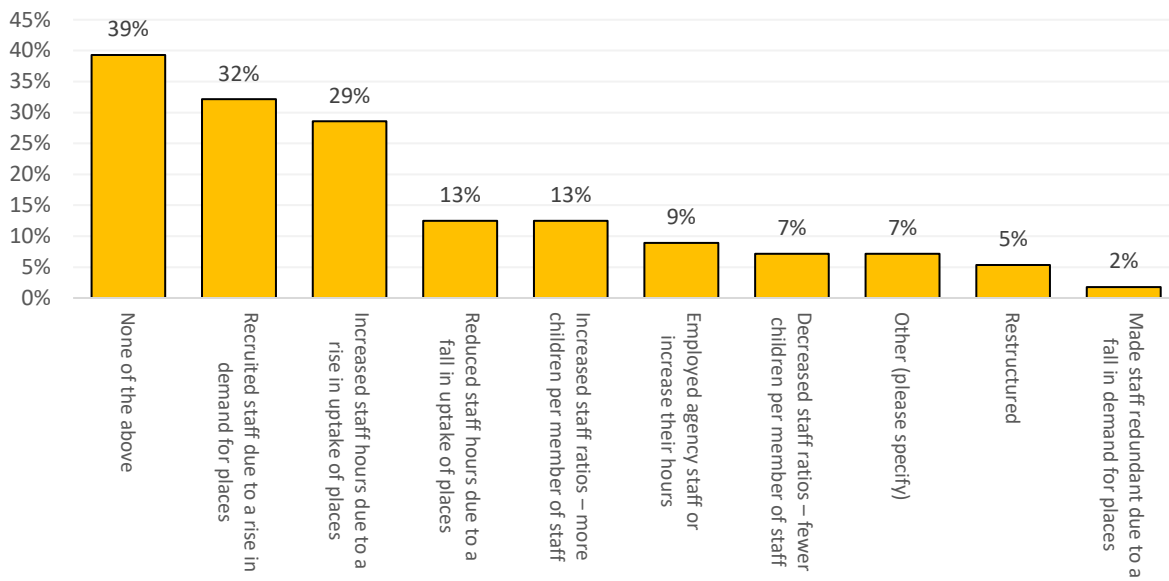
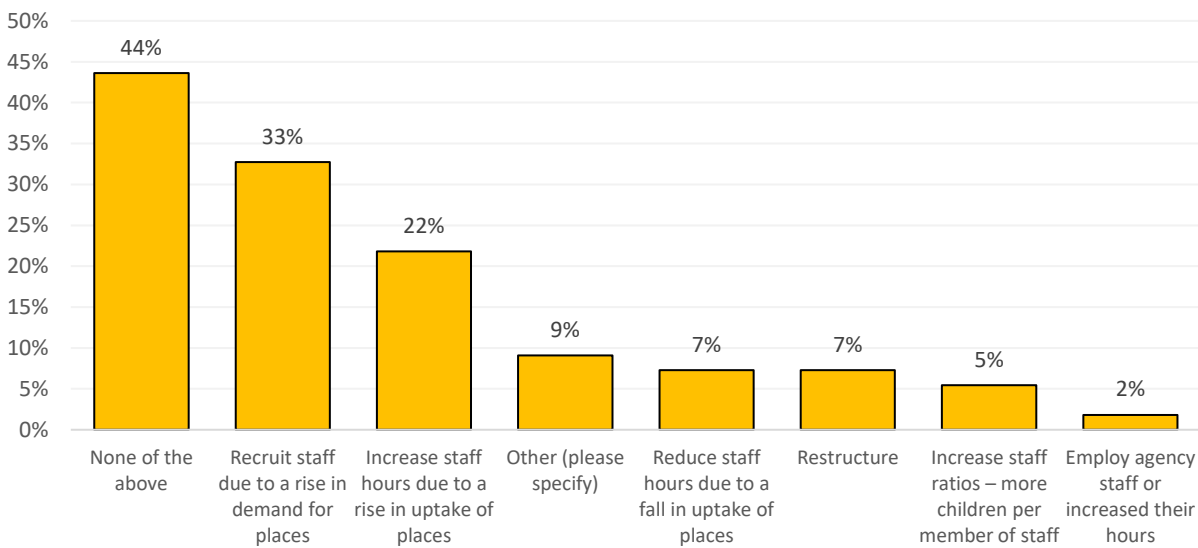


Table 12: Staffing actions providers expect to take in the next 6 months

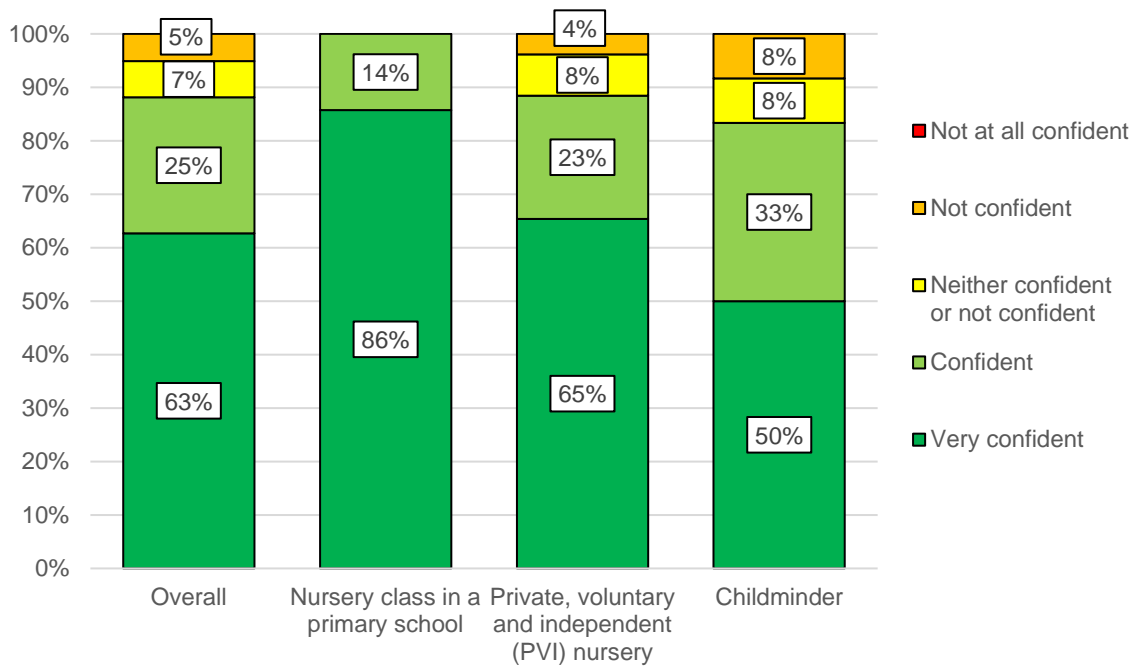


2.3.3 Provider sustainability

Despite the pressures facing childcare providers, almost 9 out of 10 providers surveyed (88 percent) were confident or very confident that their setting would still be operating in six months. Only 5 percent (1 in 20) said that they were not confident that their setting would be open in six months. However, as shown in

Table 13 (below), there were differences between provider types, with childminders overall less confident, with 16 percent not confident or not confident at all.

Table 13: Confidence that settings will still be operating in six months' time



Question asked in survey: *How confident are you that your childcare setting will be operating in six months' time? Please select one answer. (n=59)*

Overall, providers surveyed were confident in their sustainability in the next 6 months. Some had increased their prices and recruited more staff, or planned to do so in the next 6 months.

3 What is the current take up of childcare in Northumberland?

Our survey of parents suggests that around 78 percent of parents in Northumberland are currently using childcare, compared to 22 percent who do not (see Table 14, below).

Table 14: Number of parents currently using childcare

Type of childcare	Number of parents	Percent of parents
Yes – I use childcare for my child(ren) under the age of 14	596	77%
Yes – I use childcare for my child(ren) aged 14 to 18 with additional needs	7	1%
No – I do not use childcare	172	22%
TOTAL	775	100%
Question asked in survey: <i>Do you currently use childcare for your child or children (please select all that apply). By childcare we mean formal childcare such as nursery; childminder; nanny/ au pair; before and after school clubs and holiday clubs as well as informal childcare such as grandparents and friends.</i>		

Of the parents currently using childcare, the majority (56 percent) use informal childcare, such as with grandparents, friends, or family. Of the formal childcare options, the most frequently used provider type was nurseries not in a school (43 percent), with 23 percent using a nursery class in a primary school. Childminders are used by 16 percent of parents in Northumberland. Around a quarter of parents use wraparound care, with 26 percent using breakfast clubs, 28 percent using after school clubs, and 21 percent using after school activities such as sports or music classes that cannot be used five days a week (see Table 15, below).

Table 15: Number of parents currently using childcare, by provider types

Type of childcare	Number of parents	Percent of parents
Nursery class in a primary school	136	23%
Nursery not in a school	247	43%
Childminder	94	16%
Nanny or au pair	5	1%
Breakfast club	149	26%
After school club (can be used up to 5 days a week)	165	28%
After school activities e.g. sports, music (cannot be used 5 days a week)	123	21%
Holiday play scheme	64	11%
Informal childcare e.g. grandparents, friends, family	324	56%
Sessional childcare (runs for less than 6 hours for children under 5)	33	6%
Full day (e.g. 8am to 6pm) childcare for children under 5	153	26%
Childcare that only runs during term time for children under 5	89	15%
Childcare that runs through the whole year for children under 5	169	29%
Other (please describe)	7	1%
TOTAL (Any response)	581	100%
Question asked in survey: <i>What type of childcare do you use for your child(ren)? Please select all that apply</i>		

When comparing the types of childcare used by parents who have at least one child with SEND against those who do not, we see some substantial differences in the types of childcare being accessed. For example, parents with at least one child with SEND are 15 percentage points less likely to use a nursery not in a school, but are 5 percentage points more likely to use a nursery

class in a primary school, and 6 percentage points more likely to use a childminder. They are also 11 percentage points less likely to use an after school club and 4 percentage points less likely to use a holiday play scheme, although no less likely to use after school activities, and only 1 percentage point less likely to use a breakfast club.

When looking at the length of time that parents of at least one child with SEND use childcare, we see that they are 21 percentage points less likely to use childcare that runs through the whole year for children under 5, and 18 percentage points less likely to use full day childcare for children under 5.

Table 16: Number of parents using different provider types, by SEND

	Parents of child(ren) with SEND	Parents with no children with SEND	% point diff., SEND vs. no SEND
Nursery class in a primary school	28%	23%	5%
Nursery not in a school	30%	45%	-15%
Childminder	21%	15%	6%
Nanny or au pair	1%	1%	0%
Breakfast club	24%	26%	-1%
After school club (can be used up to 5 days a week)	19%	30%	-11%
After school activities e.g. sports, music (cannot be used 5 days a week)	21%	21%	0%
Holiday play scheme	8%	12%	-4%
Informal childcare e.g. grandparents, friends, family	56%	56%	0%
Sessional childcare – that is, childcare that runs for less than 6 hours for children under 5	4%	6%	-1%
Full day (e.g. 8am to 6pm) childcare for children under 5	11%	29%	-18%
Childcare that only runs during term time for children under 5	18%	15%	3%
Childcare that runs through the whole year for children under 5	11%	32%	-21%
Other (please describe)	1%	1%	0%
TOTAL (Any response)	90	491	-
Question asked in survey: <i>What type of childcare do you use for your child(ren)? Please select all that apply</i>			

3.1 Why do parents use childcare?

Parents who were using childcare at the time of a survey run by Coram were asked ‘Why do you use childcare for your children?’ Among the 580 parents in the survey who were using childcare, the vast majority (86 percent) were doing so in order for them to be able to go to work, with just over one in five (21 percent) also saying that they use childcare in order to be able to work more hours than they would otherwise be able to.

As shown in

Table 17, 42 percent stated they used childcare 'For my child(ren)'s educational development' with slightly less stating: 'So that my child(ren) can take part in different activities (38 percent), 'Because my child(ren) enjoy it' (37 percent), and 'So my child(ren) can make friends (36 percent). Although the survey was a small sample of the total population of parents in Northumberland, it does suggest that while most parents use childcare to facilitate them being able to work, many still use childcare for the developmental benefits to children.

Table 17: Reasons for childcare use

	Count	%
Work-related		
So that I can go to work	501	86%
So that I can work more hours	122	21%
So that I can study/train	30	5%
So that I can look for work	11	2%
Child development		
For my child(ren)'s educational development	243	42%
So that my child(ren) can take part in different activities	223	38%
Because my child(ren) enjoy it	216	37%
So my child(ren) can make friends	206	36%
Parental wellbeing		
So that I can look after the home or other children	52	9%
So that I can take a break from looking after my child(ren)	54	9%
So that I can socialise	25	4%
TOTAL (Any response)	580	-
Question asked in survey: <i>Why do you use childcare for your children? (select all that apply)</i>		

4 What is the take up and supply of government-funded childcare in Northumberland?

Part of the duty of local authorities is to ensure childcare sufficiency includes access to government-funded childcare places. In order to assess government-funded childcare, this section looks at the take up of government funded places and the future supply of these places.

4.1.1 Current eligibility for 2 year old funded places

At the time of writing, some parents of 2 year old children are eligible for 15 hours of free childcare per week if they claim certain benefits, including income support, Universal Credit, and income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance. In Northumberland County Council, 26 percent of 2 year olds are entitled to use this offer. This equates to around 778 children per year in 2022. This figure was calculated from the 2 year old population eligible for a 2 year old funded place as shown in [Education Provision: Children under 5 years of age](#), divided by the total 2 year old population² shown in section General population changes and projections 5.3.1.

4.1.2 Take up of 2, 3, and 4-year-old funded places

The proportion of eligible children taking up their funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Northumberland County Council is:

Table 18: Take up of 2, 3, and 4-year-old funded places

Age	No. of registered children	No. of eligible children	% of eligible children registered
Age 2	693	778	89.1%
Age 3 and 4	6,150	5,835	105.4%
3 year olds	3,017	2,809	107.4%
4 year olds	3,133	3,026	103.5%

Source: [Education Provision: Children under 5 years of age](#)

Note that some of the figures as shown in

² Please note that this population figure is from the 2021 census, and so does not exactly match the data from 2022.

Table 19 are over 100%. This is due to several factors including the number of eligible children being calculated using estimates, as well as children from other local authorities taking up childcare places in Northumberland.

Take up of the 2 year old entitlement for disadvantaged children has increased substantially from 74 percent in 2021 to 89 percent in 2023, although this is slightly lower than the 91 percent figure from 2022. Take up of the three and four year old funded entitlement has also increased steadily over the last three years.

Table 19: Take up of funded early education places over time

Age	2023	2022	2021
Age 2 – targeted	89%	91%	74%
Age 3 and 4	105%	103%	102%

Take up of funded places for the 2 year old entitlement for disadvantaged children in Northumberland is higher than in England and the North East region overall, and slightly lower than in nearby Cumbria. For 3 and 4 year olds, take up in Northumberland is higher than in England and the North East region overall, and is higher than in Cumbria.

Table 20: Take up of funded early education entitlements, compared to other local authorities

Age	Northumberland	England	North East	Cumbria
Age 2 – targeted	89%	74%	85%	90%
Age 3 and 4	105%	94%	99%	100%

4.1.3 Supply of government-funded childcare

Providers are paid directly by government for delivering funded early education. They are not required to offer funded places to parents. Some providers offer a restricted number of funded places.

According to Northumberland’s return for Coram’s 2024 Childcare Survey, 100 percent of primary schools with nursery classes, PVI nurseries, and childminders in Northumberland offer the 30 hour extended entitlement for at least some children.³ This is compared to the national averages of 71 percent for maintained nurseries, 92 percent of primary schools with nurseries, 91 percent of PVI settings, and 80 percent of childminders.

Responses to the provider survey suggest that most childcare providers in Northumberland would be willing to increase the number of children attending their setting who receive the current government-funded childcare entitlements. This was highest for the disadvantaged 2 year old offer (80 percent) and the universal 3 and 4 year old 15 hour offer (79 percent), with only slightly less for the 30 hours for working parents (75 percent).

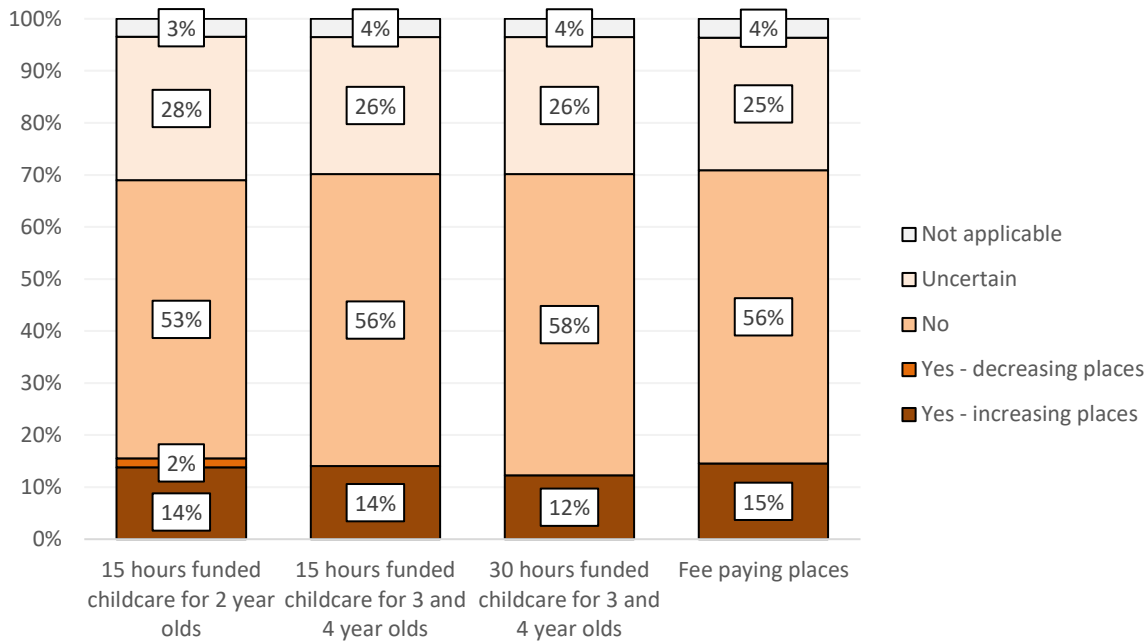
Table 21: Providers willing to increase places for children using government-funded childcare

	Yes	No	TOTAL
Disadvantaged 2 year olds using 15 hours funded childcare	80%	20%	54
3 and 4 year olds using 15 hours funded childcare	79%	21%	53
3 and 4 year olds using 30 hours funded childcare	75%	25%	52
Question asked in survey: <i>Would you be willing to increase the number of children attending your setting who use the following kinds of government-funded childcare?</i>			

The majority of providers surveyed stated they would not be changing how they offer government-funded childcare in the next six months for any of the existing entitlements, as shown in Table 22. For all types of government-funded childcare, more than a quarter of providers were uncertain if they would be changing how they offered such care in the next six months, with a smaller proportion (between 12 and 15 percent) stating they would be increasing places across the entitlements.

³ No data were provided for standalone (maintained) nurseries.

Table 22: Will providers be changing how they offer government-funded childcare in the next six months?



Question asked in survey: Will you be changing how you offer government-funded childcare in the next six months? (n=58)

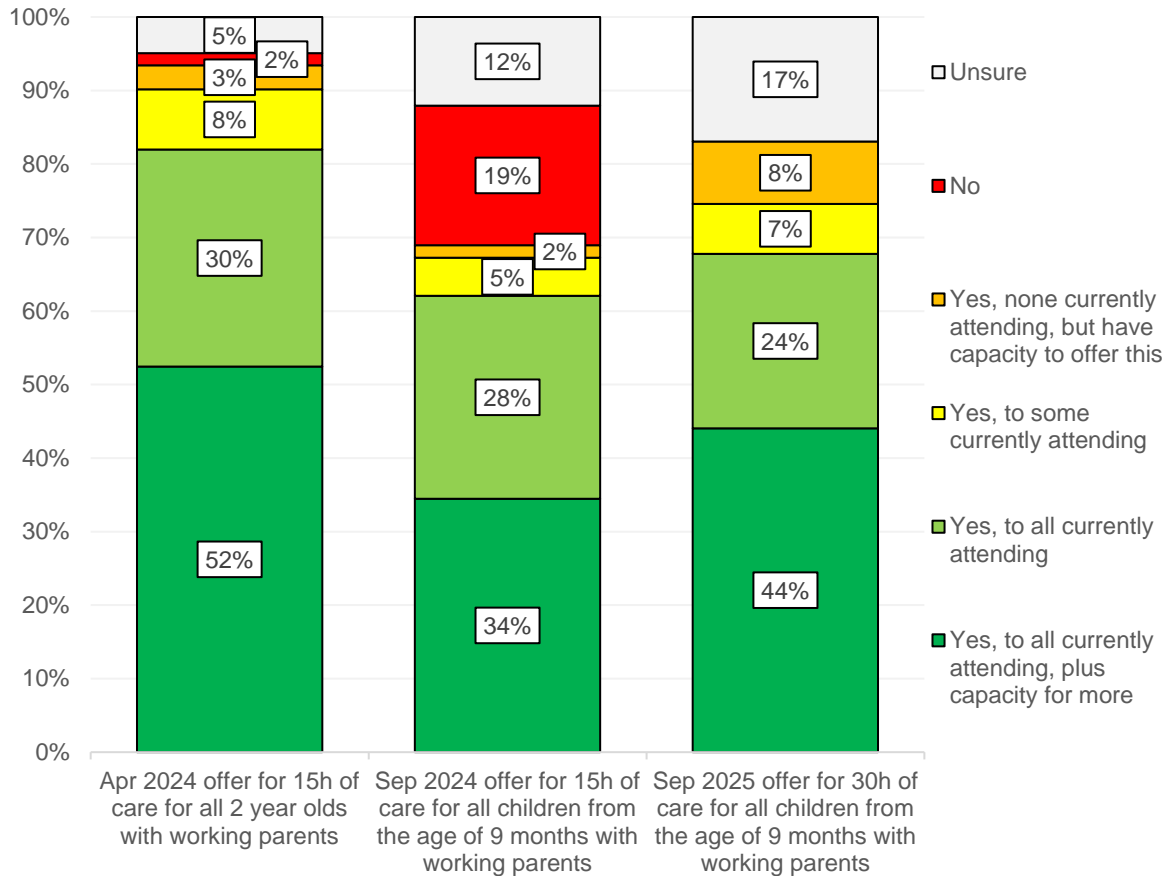
4.1.4 Future expansions of government-funded childcare

Since April 2024, the government has been funding 15 hours of childcare for all two year olds with working parents. At the time of the survey (in October 2023), 93 percent of providers (as shown in Table 23) were planning to offer this entitlement to at least some children, with just over half (52 percent) of providers planning to offer it to all eligible children currently attending their setting, as well as expanding their capacity to offer it to more children.

In September 2024, the government will be funding 15 hours of childcare for children with working parents from the age of 9 months. By contrast to the April 2024 expansion, only 69 percent of providers surveyed stated they were planning to offer the expansion to at least some children, with only a third (34 percent) saying that they will be offering the expansion to all eligible children current attending their setting, as well as expanding their capacity to offer it to more children.

In September 2025, the government will be funding 30 hours of childcare for children with working parents from the age of 9 months. 83 percent of providers surveyed stated they were planning to offer this expansion to at least some children, with 44 percent saying that they will be offering the expansion to all eligible children currently attending their setting, as well as expanding their capacity to offer it to more children. This is a marked increase from the planned September 2024 expansion, and may indicate that providers may not feel ready for the September 2024 expansion, but are willing to expand and expect to be able to do so by September 2025.

Table 23: Providers planning to offer new government-funded expansions



Questions asked in survey: (1) From April 2024, Government will be funding 15 hours of childcare for all two year olds with working parent(s). Are you planning on offering these places? (2) From Sept 2024, Government will be funding 15 hours of childcare to children with working parent(s) from the age of 9 months. Are you planning on offering these places? (3) From September 2025, Government will be funding 30 hours of childcare for all children with working parent(s) from the age of 9 months. Are you planning on offering these places? (Question 1 – n=61; Question 2 – n=58; Question 3 – n=59)

5 What is the current and future demand for childcare in Northumberland?

This section looks at whether parents currently want to use more childcare and what possible future demand will look like.

5.1 Do parents want to use more childcare than they currently do?

There is the possibility for a considerable increase in demand for childcare in Northumberland given that the upcoming expansions to funded early education entitlements are all aimed at working parents.

Almost half of parents (48 percent) surveyed said that they want to use more childcare, and almost a quarter more said that they may want to. The main reason parents gave for wanting to use childcare was so that they could go to work (or work more). A higher proportion (53 percent) of parents of children with SEND wanted to use more childcare than they currently do.

Table 24: Do parents want to use more childcare?

	Count	%
Yes	316	48%
No	161	24%
Maybe	153	23%
Don't know	32	5%
TOTAL	662	100%
Question asked in survey: <i>Would you like to use more childcare than you currently do?</i>		

By far the biggest driver of parents not using as much childcare as they would like to is cost. When asked 'Why are you not using as much childcare as you would like to?', almost two-thirds of parents said 'It's too expensive/I can't afford it'. A quarter stated 'Sessions are not available at the times I want', and 16 percent said that they could not find an available place.

A small number of all parents surveyed (15 percent) were using childcare at extended times. Of that 15 percent, 70 percent were using childcare before 7:30 am on weekdays, 21 percent after 6:30pm on weekdays, and 36 percent on weekends.

However, 26 percent of all parents surveyed said that they would like to use childcare at these times. Among these parents, the most desired time for using more childcare was before 7:30am on weekdays (57 percent), followed by weekends (47 percent) and after 6:30pm on weekdays (35 percent).

Coram's survey findings suggest that there is a demand among parents in Northumberland for more childcare, especially if that childcare is affordable, and available during extended hours. It is therefore possible that the upcoming expansion of funded childcare for working parents of two-year-olds from April 2024 and working parents of children aged 9 months and above from September 2024 (for 15 hours of care; 30 hours expansion in September 2025) will increase demand from working parents.

5.2 SEND provision

Difficulties in accessing childcare for parents of children with SEND was a recurring theme in the parent survey and focus groups which suggested issues of *adequate*, *affordable* and *available* provision. When asked about their reasons for not using childcare, 15 percent of parents not currently using childcare said that they did not use childcare because their child has SEND and they cannot find a provider to meet their child’s additional needs.

Among parents of children with SEND who are not using childcare, this figure rises to almost half, with 46 percent of parents of at least one child with SEND who do not use childcare saying that this is because they could not find provision to meet their child’s additional needs (*adequate provision*). Parents of children with SEND were 16 percentage points less likely than parents who did not have a children with SEND to say that they were not using childcare because it is too expensive (35 percent versus 50 percent) (*affordability*); and 6 percentage points more likely to say that they cannot find an available place (17 percent versus 11 percent) (*availability*).

Table 25: Reasons for not using childcare, for parents of children with SEND

	No children with SEND	At least one child with SEND	Diff. – SEND vs No SEND
My child has SEND I cannot find a childcare provider to meet my child’s additional needs	N/A	46%	N/A
It’s too expensive/ I can’t afford it	50%	35%	-16%
I do not need childcare	35%	25%	-10%
I cannot find an available place	11%	17%	+6%
Sessions are not available at the times I want	16%	15%	-1%
I am not happy with the type of childcare available	8%	13%	+5%
I cannot find a place in childcare which is nearby	11%	12%	+1%
My child(ren) do not want to go	7%	8%	+0%
I am not happy with the quality available	5%	8%	+3%
I don’t know how to find out about getting help with the cost of childcare	8%	6%	-2%
It is difficult to travel to available childcare	6%	4%	-2%
My child is too young	8%	2%	-6%
Total (any response)	111	52	-

Focus groups run by Coram (including one who only included parents of children with SEND) supported survey findings that parents of children with SEND often struggled more than parents with children without SEND to find provision, and often had to rely on informal childcare with family, or else give up paid employment altogether.

“My child needs one to one care and needs someone to use a communication book and I have emailed loads of childminders and no one can offer one to one support.” (Parent with a child with SEND).

School transport also meant that parents with a child with SEND found it harder to access childcare after school, as organised school transport was rigid in the times at which children could be dropped off after school.

Problems with accessing SEND provision appeared to be exacerbated in school holidays.

5.3 What could future demand look like?

This section of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment looks at a number of indicators to assess what future demand could look like using previous trends and future estimates in relation to population, SEND ethnicity and deprivation.

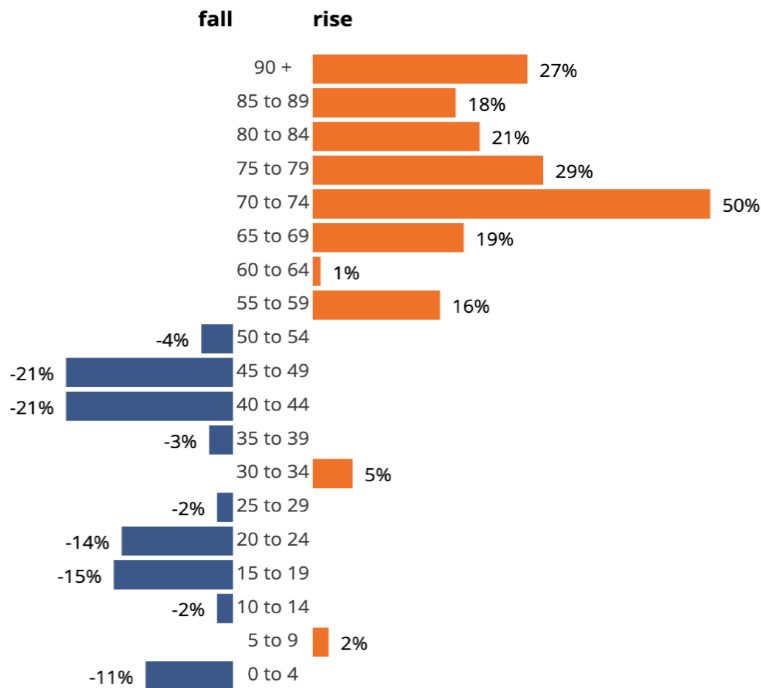
5.3.1 General population changes and projections

In Northumberland, while the population size has increased by 1.4%, from around 316,000 in 2011 to 320,600 in 2021, the increases have been lower than the increase for the North East (1.9%) and substantially lower than nearby areas such as Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside – who have seen their populations increase by around 7.1% and 4.1%, respectively. However, this slight increase in the population of Northumberland has mainly been in the older population. Between 2011 and 2021 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 under 15 years.

According to the [2021 Census](#), there were 23,136 couple family households with dependent children, making up 15.7% of all households in Northumberland. There were an additional 9,513 single parent households with dependent children in Northumberland, making up 6.5% of all households in Northumberland.

Table 26: Population change by age group in Northumberland, 2011 to 2021

Population change (%) by age group in Northumberland, 2011 to 2021



Source: [ONS 2021](#)

In addition, according to ONS, the general population of Northumberland is expected to rise by 3 percent from the 2011 figure, to 325,700 by 2031. However, the population of children under 16 years old is expected to fall by 4.7 percent, from 53,700 to 51,200, between 2011 and 2031.

Looking at pre-school children specifically, according to census data, as of 2021, there are 14,235 children under five living in Northumberland County Council who many require childcare, lower than the total number in 2017. In addition, there are more 'older pre-school' children than 'younger pre-school' children living in the area, which suggests a decreasing number of children in the pre-school population over the coming years.

Table 27: Early years population, by age

Age	Number of children (2017)	Number of children (2021)
Age 0	2,834	2,575
Age 1	2,986	2,631
Age 2	2,851	2,905
Age 3	3,072	2,985
Age 4*	3,227	3,139

* Some four-year-olds will have started reception

[Source: Census 2021](#)

According to 2021 Census data, there were 23,748 children aged 5 to 11, and 10,347 children aged 12-14 living in Northumberland. Overall, there were more 5-7 year olds in 2017 compared to 2021, but overall more 8-14 year olds in 2021.

Table 28: School age population, by age

Age	Number of children (2017)	Number of children (2021)
Age 5	3,346	3,231
Age 6	3,387	3,191
Age 7	3,387	3,280
Age 8	3,295	3,550
Age 9	3,493	3,434
Age 10	3,254	3,607
Age 11	3,416	3,455
Age 12	3,321	3,480
Age 13	3,394	3,469
Age 14	3,296	3,398

[Source: Census 2021](#)

However, it should be noted that while there does appear to be decreases in the number of children in Northumberland in the coming years, the new early entitlement expansions for children from 9 months to three years and National Wraparound Programme for primary school ages children will likely increase demand for childcare in these age ranges.

5.3.2 Number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can receive:

- SEN support - support given in school, such as additional targeted help from teachers or a learning support assistant
- An education, health and care (EHC) plan - a plan of care for children and young people aged up to 25 who have more complex needs
- Disability Access Fund (DAF) – support accessed through a child’s childcare provider, which aims to help give children who are disabled access to childcare, by making reasonable adjustments to their settings or helping with building capacity.

Children with 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). In Northumberland, 9.3% of all children receive SEN, lower than the national average of 13%. Additionally, 4.4% of all children have EHCP plans, similar to the national average of 4.3%.

Table 29 (below) shows an increase in children receiving SEN support year on year since 2021 for all age ranges, with 5,971 children overall in Northumberland receiving SEN support in 2023 compared to 5,710 in 2022 and 5,204 in 2021.

Table 29: Children receiving SEN support

Age	Number of children (2023)	Number of children (2022)	Number of children (2021)
0-5 years	1,010	958	838
6-12 years	3,793	3,624	3,316
13- 18 years	1,168	1,128	1,050

Source: [Statistics: Special Educational Needs, GOV.UK, 2023](#)

Table 30 (below) shows an increase in the number of children across all age ranges with an EHCP in Northumberland County Council. There has been a year on year rise in the number of children with an EHCP with 2,834 in 2023 compared to 2,613 in 2022 and 2,357 in 2021.

Table 30: Number of children with SEND who have an EHCP

Age	Number of children (2023)	Number of children (2022)	Number of children (2021)
0-4 years	169	111	98
5- 10 years	1,006	917	816
11-15 years	1,101	1,017	934
16- 19 years	558	568	509

Source: [Statistics: Special Educational Needs, GOV.UK, 2023](#)

5.3.3 Child ethnicity, 2021 census

According to 2021 census data, Northumberland’s youth population (children aged 0-17) is predominantly White British/Irish, with 95.2% of its population of 0-17 year olds falling into this

category. This figure generally does not differ much by age categories, with 94% of 0-4 year olds being White British compared to 95% of 5-11 year olds. The largest non-White British ethnic group is 'Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh', with 1.7 % of 0–17-year-olds, followed by 'White: Other White', at 1.6%. There have not been substantial changes to the child population by ethnicity since the 2011 census.

Table 31: Child population by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Number of children	Percent of children
White	55,855	97.2%
Mixed/ Multiple	1,265	2.2%
Asian/Asian British	255	0.4%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	10	0.0%
Other ethnic groups: Total	95	0.2%

[Source: Census 2021](#)

5.3.4 Deprivation

Looking at the [Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index 2019 \(IDACI\)](#)⁵ Northumberland had a higher than average score with, Northumberland’s most deprived areas including Blyth, Ashington, Newbiggin, Bedlington Station and Sleekburn.

In the year 2021-2022, on average 22% of children across all schools were eligible for the pupil premium which was lower than the average across the whole NTCA area, where on average, 29% of students per school were eligible for the pupil premium. In addition, as of January 2023 10,111 children in Northumberland are entitled to Free School Meals.

6 What is the cost and affordability of childcare in Northumberland?

6.1 How much does childcare in Northumberland cost?

According to findings from Coram’s provider survey, the average price that parents pay for childcare in Northumberland varies substantially across age groups and provider types. On average, across all provider types, parents pay £6.25 per hour for 0-1 year olds, £5.86 per hour for 2 year olds, and £5.30 per hour for 3-4 year olds.

Group-based providers are, on average, more expensive than childminders, although this gap narrows as age increases. Within group-based providers, nursery classes in primary schools are more expensive than PVI nurseries, although again, this gap is much narrower for 3-4 year olds than it is for 2 year olds.

Table 32: Childcare prices, by provider type



Question asked in survey: *Early years providers – group based and childminders - Please tell us the hourly price (£) that parents pay for childcare for the following age groups.*

Comparing to national and regional averages, childcare in Northumberland for **children under two years old** is generally more expensive. According to figures from Coram’s 2024 Childcare Survey⁴, the average cost of an hour of childcare for a child aged 0-1 years old in a nursery⁵ is £6.28 in England, and £5.95 in the North East, compared to £6.51 in Northumberland. Prices for children under two years of age with childminders in Northumberland are generally cheaper than average; average prices are £5.29 in Great Britain, £5.31 in England, and £5.05 in the North East, compared to £4.90 in Northumberland.

For **children aged two**, the average cost of an hour of care in a nursery is £6.15 in England, and £5.46 in the North East. In Northumberland, the average cost for a nursery class in a primary

⁴ Please note that while these figures are included for broad comparisons, data collection methods will differ slightly between those used for this CSA, and those used by other local authorities for the Childcare Survey, and so comparisons should be used with care.

⁵ Based on 25 hours of childcare

school was £5.78⁶, making Northumberland cheaper than the national average, but more expensive than the North East average. Prices for children aged two years old with childminders in Northumberland are generally cheaper than average; average prices are £5.26 in England, and £5.05 in the North East, compared to £4.88 in Northumberland.

For **children aged three and four**, the average cost of an hour of care in a nursery (before entitlements are taken into account) is £6.35 in England, and £6.32 in the North East, compared to £5.35 in Northumberland, making Northumberland considerably cheaper than both the national and regional averages. Prices for children aged three and four years old with childminders in Northumberland are generally cheaper than average; average prices are £5.22 for England, and £5.00 in the North East, compared to £4.93 in Northumberland.

On average, the price per day for **wraparound childcare** for school-age children in group-based providers was £4.77 for before school care, and £9.60 for after school care. This is based on an assumption of one hour of before-school care, and 2.5 hours of after school care. This could include breakfast clubs provided by the school, after-school clubs provided by the school (or by an external provider operating on school premises), or after school activities such as sports or music clubs.

The prices of wraparound and holiday care with a childminder for school age children were consistent, the price being £4.54 for wraparound care and £4.53 for holiday care. This is cheaper than the price childminders charge for care of younger children, with an hour of care for 3-4 year olds costing £4.93.

6.2 Is this affordable for parents?

Affordability was a key issue found in both Coram's parent survey and focus groups. When parents who do not use childcare were asked why they did not do so, 45 percent said that this is because 'It's too expensive/I can't afford it'. In another question, parents were asked how much they agree with the statement 'Childcare is affordable for me', almost two thirds (65 percent) of parents said that they disagree (34 percent) or strongly disagree (31 percent), compared with just 27 percent saying they agree (22 percent) or strongly agree (5 percent)

Parents in the focus groups ran by Coram talked about the high cost of childcare and not being able to afford any more care than they were currently accessing, with a number of parents questioning the economic benefits of work. Some talked about being better off financially when on Universal Credit.

"I was financially better off before I started working. You get council tax discounts and free prescriptions, and you don't pay for childcare. I would have been better off just not bothering going back to work so it does not incentivise people." (Parent with pre-school aged child).

While some parents spoke positively about the upcoming expansions to government-funded childcare for working parents of children from the age of 9 months, some parents felt that this was not going to make a difference until there was more childcare provision. This is in contrast to findings from the provider's survey which suggest that there are sufficient places, and available vacancies, to meet parents' needs in Northumberland.

⁶ Based on a weighted average of the cost in PVI nurseries and nursery classes in primary schools (weighted by number of places)

Affordability should be seen in the context of 39 percent of providers who responded to Coram’s survey reporting increased charges in the last six months, with 25 percent intending to do so in the next six months.

6.3 How aware are parents of support for childcare costs and entitlements?

Accessible information is a crucial component of parents knowing what support for childcare is available to them. There are large differences in awareness levels for the different types of help with childcare costs between the government funded entitlements and other support.

More than two-thirds (69 percent) of parents of pre-school children were aware of the **government funded entitlement** to 30 hours of childcare for 3 and 4 year old children of working parents. Over half of parents (57 percent) stated they knew about the 15 hours of childcare for 3 and 4 year olds entitlement, while just under half (48 percent) were aware of the 15 hours of childcare for eligible disadvantaged 2 year olds entitlement. This could be due to only those on certain benefits being eligible for the 2 year old offer.

Table 33: Awareness of help with childcare costs for pre-school children

	Count	%
30 Hours Free Childcare for eligible working parents of 3 and 4 year olds	319	69%
15 Hours Free Childcare for all 3 and 4 years olds	263	57%
15 Hours Free Childcare for eligible disadvantaged 2 year olds	223	48%
TOTAL (any response)	464	-
Question asked in survey: <i>Before today, which types of help with childcare costs were you aware of, if any? (Please select all that apply)</i>		

Looking at awareness of **other schemes** (besides the offers for two-year olds and three and four-year olds and therefore also includes parents with school-aged children) to help with the cost of children, the Tax Free Childcare entitlement was also relatively well known, with 58 percent of parents saying that they were aware of this entitlement. However, no other entitlement was known of by more than a quarter of parents, including Universal Credit for childcare, childcare vouchers from employers⁷, tax credits for childcare. Almost 1 in 10 (9 percent) of parents were not aware of any of these other entitlements.

Table 34: Awareness of help with childcare costs for all children

	Count	%
Tax Free Childcare (20% discount on childcare fees)	377	58%
Universal Credit for childcare	164	25%
Childcare vouchers from your employer (closed to new applicants)	144	22%
Tax Credits for childcare	123	19%
None of the above	60	9%
Support while you study	44	7%
TOTAL (any response)	652	-
Question asked in survey: <i>Before today, which types of help with childcare costs were you aware of, if any? (Please select all that apply)</i>		

⁷ This scheme has been closed to new applicants since October 2018, which helps to explain why only a small proportion of parents are aware of it. Parents who joined the scheme before this date may still be able to continue to get vouchers.

Breaking down the data by whether children are of pre-school age or school age reveals that parents of school age children are almost universally less aware of help with childcare costs they were potentially eligible for, with the only exception being that they are 10 percentage points more likely to be aware of childcare vouchers from employers. This is explained by this scheme closing in October 2018; while those already enrolled at that time may be able to still get vouchers, no new applicants have been accepted since then.

Table 35: Awareness of help with childcare costs, by age of child

	Pre-school	School age	Diff. - school age vs. pre-school
Childcare vouchers from your employer (closed to new applicants)	19%	28%	+10%
None of the above	5%	13%	+8%
Tax Credits for childcare	16%	20%	+4%
Universal Credits for childcare	25%	26%	+1%
Support while you study	7%	6%	-1%
Tax Free Childcare (20% discount on childcare fees)	66%	50%	-16%
TOTAL	XX	XX	-
<i>Question asked in survey: Before today, which types of help with childcare costs were you aware of, if any? (Please select all that apply)</i>			

In general, parents of at least one child with SEND were more aware of help with childcare costs, with the biggest difference seen in awareness of 15 hours free childcare for eligible 2 year olds, which parents of children with SEND were 8 percentage points more likely to be aware of. However, the two entitlements that showed the biggest difference were both known by far more parents without any children with SEND. Parents without any children with SEND were 13 percentage points more likely to know about 30 Hours Free Childcare for eligible working parents of 3 and 4 year olds, and 18 percentage points more likely to know about Tax Free Childcare.

Table 36: Awareness of help with childcare costs, by SEND

	No SEND	SEND	Diff SEND vs. no SEND
15 Hours Free Childcare for eligible disadvantaged 2 year olds	45%	53%	+8%
Universal Credits for childcare	24%	30%	+6%
None of the above	8%	13%	+5%
Tax Credits for childcare	18%	22%	+4%
15 Hours Free Childcare for all 3 and 4 years olds	54%	55%	+2%
Support while you study	6%	9%	+2%
Childcare vouchers from your employer	22%	22%	-0%
30 Hours Free Childcare for eligible working parents of 3 and 4 year olds	67%	53%	-13%
Tax Free Childcare (20% discount on childcare fees)	61%	43%	-18%
TOTAL	128	524	-
<i>Question asked in survey: Before today, which types of help with childcare costs were you aware of, if any? (Please select all that apply)</i>			

Despite relatively high awareness for some entitlements, such as Tax Free Childcare, a lack of easy to understand information and complicated calculations meant that many parents found it

difficult to access entitlements they were aware of. For example, one parent in Coram’s focus groups stated:

“Tax free childcare is an absolute nightmare trying to do it for two kids because each account is separate for each child. It is also hard to work out especially when you might get a discount if you have say two children at the same setting.” (Parent with pre-school aged child)

6.4 Sources of information about childcare

In terms of the sources parents use to find out about childcare, word of mouth was identified as the key source of information (63 percent of parents in Coram’s survey). Other regularly used methods include internet searches (61 percent), the Northumberland County Council website (47 percent), visiting local childcare providers (31 percent) and schools (25 percent), and social media (26 percent).

Table 37: Sources of information about childcare

	Count	%
Family or friends/word of mouth	380	63%
Internet search	368	61%
Northumberland County Council Website	284	47%
Visiting local childcare providers	189	31%
Social media	158	26%
Visiting local schools	153	25%
Ofsted website	122	20%
Family Hub/ Children's Centre	111	18%
Childcare Choices	60	10%
Not applicable/I haven't gone to find out about childcare	29	5%
Other (please specify)	22	4%
Northumberland Local Offer website	17	3%
Children's information and advice service	15	2%
Library	13	2%
Parent support officer	6	1%
Job Centre Plus	5	1%
TOTAL (any response)	606	-
Question asked in survey: <i>Where would you go to find out about childcare? Please select all that apply (up to 5).</i>		

In focus groups run by Coram, parents talked about a lack of information, and in particular, pointed to there being no single source of information about childcare, and no way to compare information about different childcare settings. While almost half (47 percent) of parents surveyed use the Northumberland County Council website, many in the focus group found the site difficult to navigate, with information unnecessarily dispersed across many pages. Additionally, multiple parents mentioned that parts of the site are out of date:

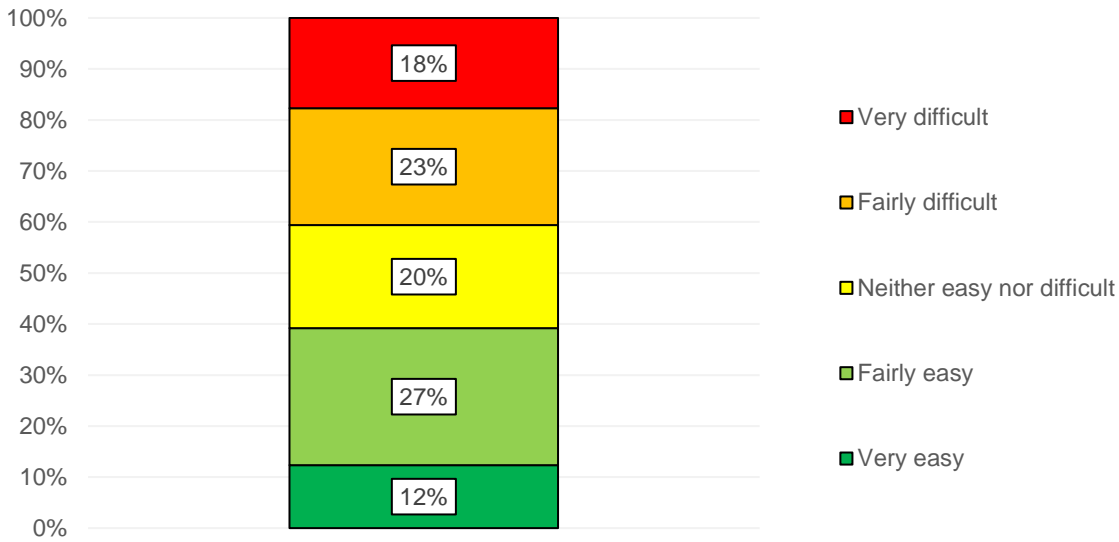
“I think what I have found with the Northumberland website is that is quite big and everything seems dotted around or out of date. It would be great to have a one stop shop about childcare and childcare support and for it to be up to date. That would be really useful.” (Parent with a school-aged child)

“The information on the local authority website is outdated, which when you are already struggling to find care for a child with extra needs is the last thing you need.” (Parent with a child with SEND)

7 How easy is it for families to access suitable childcare?

As part of Coram’s parent survey, parents were asked how easy it is for them to find suitable childcare for their child(ren). Overall, there is a reasonably even split between parents in how difficult it was for them to find suitable childcare, with 39 percent answering that it was ‘Very easy’ or ‘Fairly easy’ to do so, compared to 41 percent answering ‘Fairly difficult’ or ‘Very difficult’.

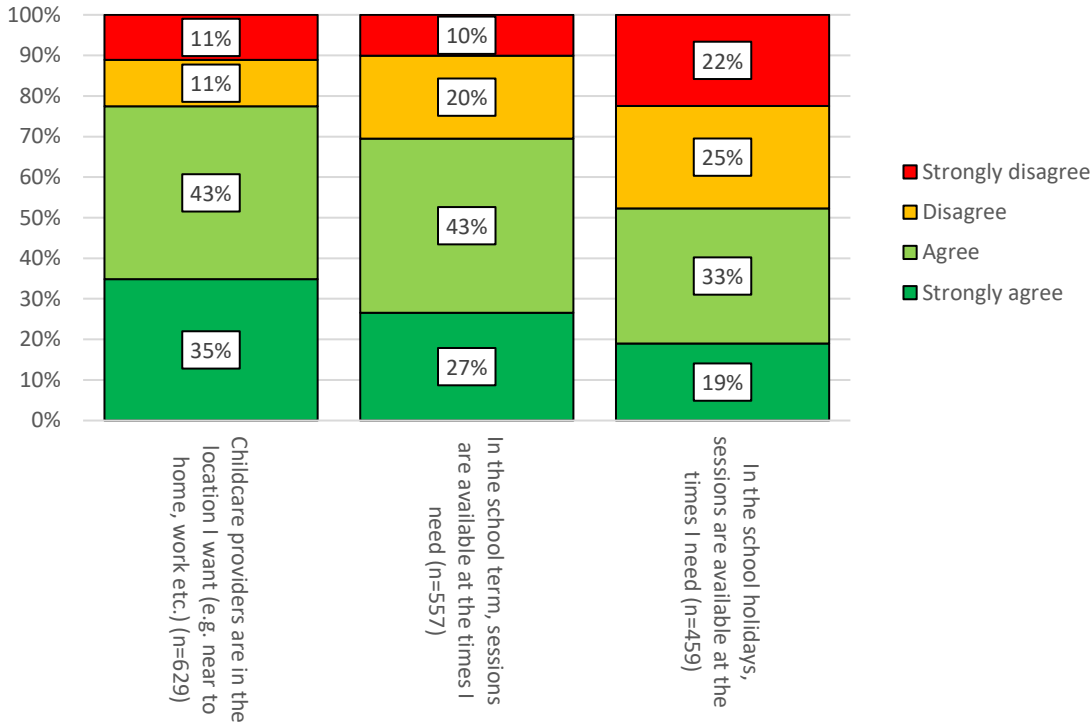
Table 38: How easy is it to find suitable childcare for your child or children? (n=559)



Source: Parent survey. ‘Not applicable or not needed’ and ‘Other (please specify)’ answers removed.

Findings from the survey of parents suggested that families are more likely to struggle with finding childcare at the **right time** than in the **right places**, especially in school holidays. As Table 39 (below) shows, 78 percent of parents strongly agree or agree that childcare providers are in the locations they want compared to 70 percent who say that childcare sessions are available at the times they need in the school term, and 52 percent who say that they are available at the times they need in the school holidays.

Table 39: Ease of accessing childcare, location and time



Question asked in survey: *How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*
'Don't know' and 'NA' answers removed.

7.1 Are there enough childcare places at the right times for families?

There seems to be very little childcare available for those needing them during **extended hours**. Only 15 percent of providers responding to Coram's survey stated that they offered childcare before 7:30am on weekdays, with only 6 percent offering childcare after 6:30pm on weekdays. No providers stated they regularly offered childcare on weekends.

Table 40: Providers offering childcare for extended hours

	Before 7.30am weekdays		After 6.30pm weekdays		Weekends	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	10	15%	4	6%	0	0%
No	55	85%	61	94%	64	100%
TOTAL	65	100%	65	100%	64	100%

Question asked in survey: *Do you regularly offer childcare at the following times?*

Of the parents surveyed, 86 percent stated they are not using childcare at extended times. However, as shown in Table 41, the survey suggested **demand for more extended hours places:**

- 15 percent of parents said they would like to use childcare **before 7:30am on weekdays**, compared to 10 percent doing so at the time of the survey;
- 9 percent of parents would like to use childcare **after 6:30pm on weekdays**, compared to 3 percent doing so at the time of the survey;

- 12 percent of parents said that they would like to use childcare on **weekends**, compared to 5 percent doing so at the time of the survey.

In addition, a quarter (25 percent) of parents said ‘sessions are not available at the times I want’ when asked ‘why are you not currently using as much childcare as you would like to’.

Table 41: Current and desired use of extended hours childcare

	Do you use childcare at the following times?	Would you like to use childcare at the following times?
No or N/A	86%	74%
Before 7:30am on weekdays	10%	15%
After 6:30pm on weekdays	3%	9%
Weekends	5%	12%
TOTAL (any response)	538	686

Alongside the survey information, the Coram run parent focus groups found that parents who worked extended hours had a great deal of difficulty in finding the childcare that they wanted or needed. Some parents talked about there being less childcare after the COVID-19 pandemic, and childcare being less flexible. One parent said:

“I have an absolute nightmare with childcare with working shifts and not a set pattern every week. I am a key worker and the nursery were more flexible during Covid but they have just said that they cannot keep being flexible and I will have to pay for five days a week even though I will not use all these every week. That equates to £2400 a month and it might not be feasible for me to carry on working.” (Parent with a pre-school aged child)

7.2 Are there enough childcare places in the right locations for families?

Of the parents surveyed, 73 percent said that they agree or strongly agree with the statement ‘childcare providers are in the location I want (e.g. near to home, work etc.)’. Furthermore, when asked about their reasons for not using childcare, only 11 percent of parents said that ‘I cannot find a place in childcare which is nearby’, and only 6 percent of parents said that ‘it is difficult to travel to available childcare’.

Findings from the focus group suggest that gaps in provision were particularly acute in rural areas, where the closure of even one provider can seriously complicate a family’s access to childcare. One parent said:

“A nursery recently closed and that has put a lot of pressure on other nurseries near to us. Also, that nursery used to do wraparound care for children at the local primary school and so that has ended.” (Parent with a child with SEND)

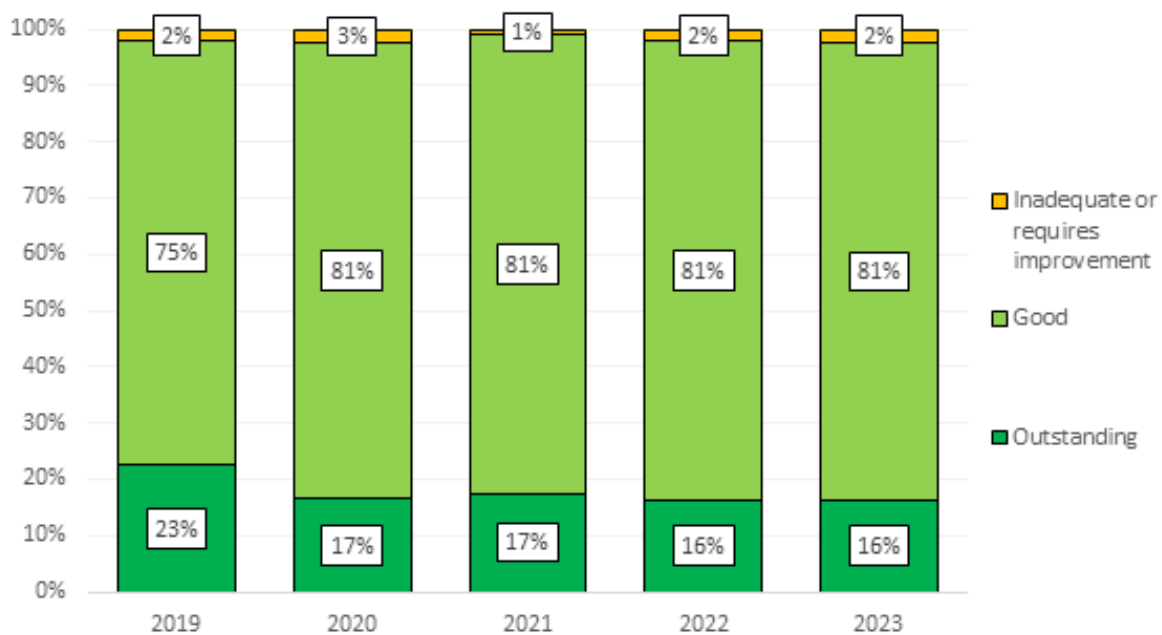
7.3 Is childcare of a high enough quality?

According to Ofsted data, 98 percent of providers in Northumberland were rated ‘Outstanding’ or ‘Good’, with 16 percent of these rated ‘Outstanding’. Only two percent of providers were rated ‘Inadequate’ or ‘Requires improvement’.

One slight concern may be that while the percentage of providers rated good or outstanding has remained largely static over the last five years, the number of providers rated 'outstanding' has steadily dropped over the same period. In 2019, 23 percent of providers were rated as outstanding, which fell to 17 percent in 2020 and 2021, and down to 16 percent for 2022 and 2023.

As Table 44 (below) shows, parents are reasonably happy about the quality of childcare available in Northumberland, with almost two-thirds (63 percent) saying that they agree or strongly agree that they are happy with the quality of childcare in Northumberland.

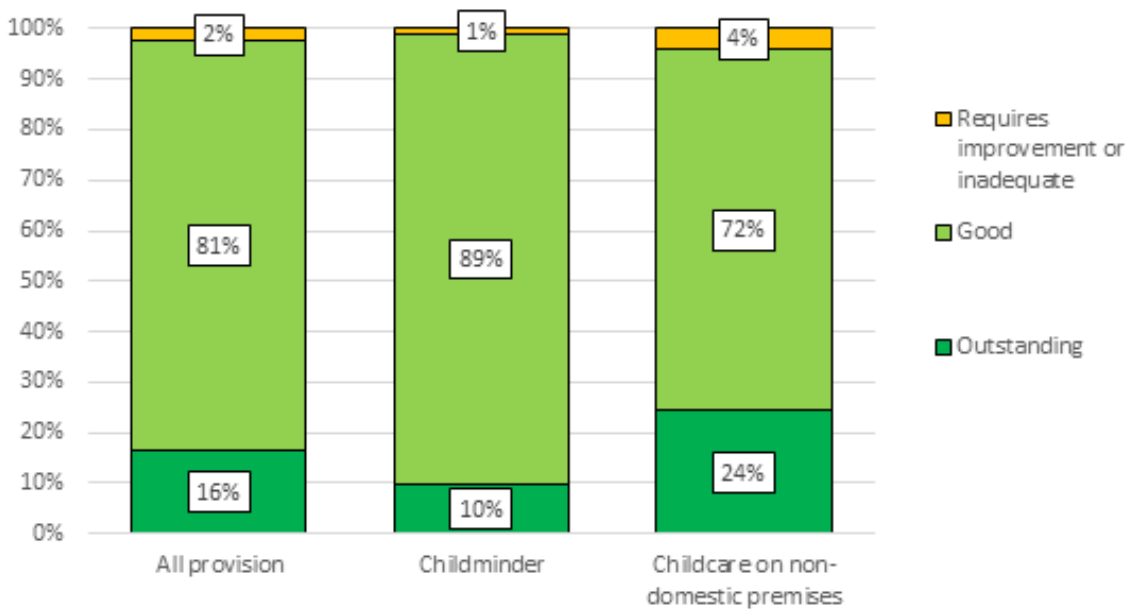
Table 42: Ofsted ratings for childcare providers in Northumberland, 2019-2023



Additionally, as

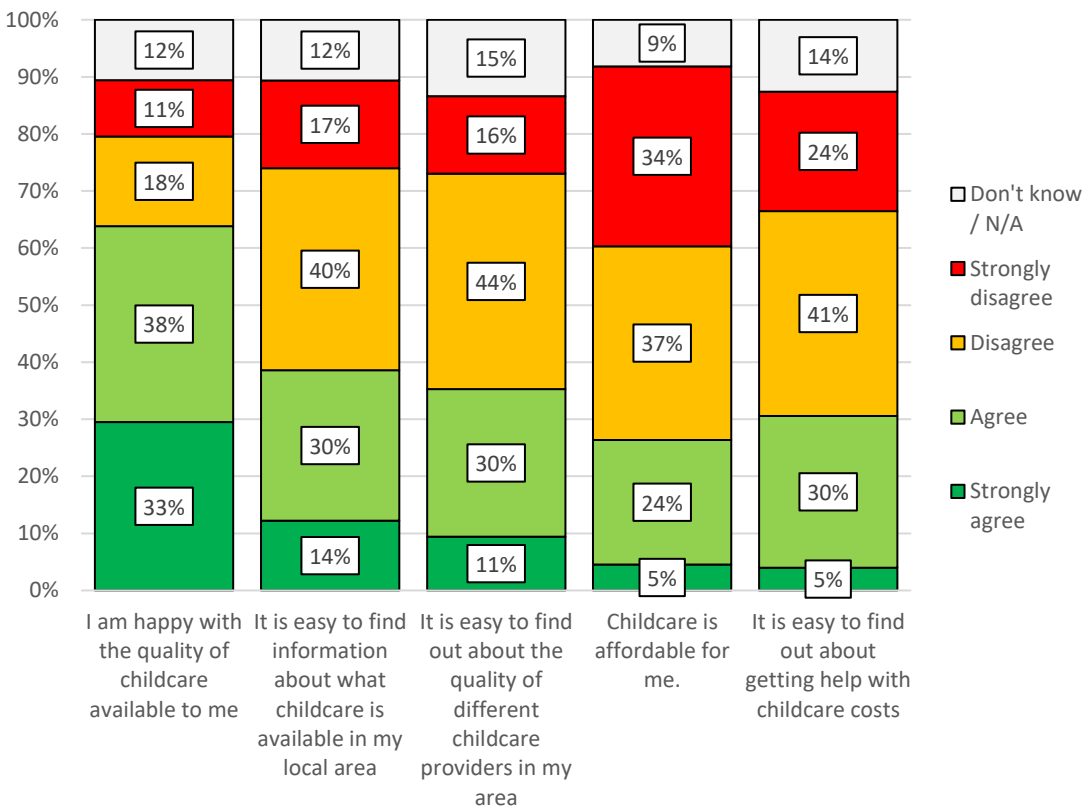
Table 43 (below) shows, there is a difference between ratings for childcare providers on non-domestic premises and childminders; while 99 percent of childminders were rated good or outstanding, compared to 96 percent of providers on non-domestic premises, only 10 percent of childminders were rated outstanding, compared to 24 percent of providers on non-domestic premises.

Table 43: Ofsted ratings for childcare providers in Northumberland, by provider type



Comparing parents' views on childcare, as shown in Table 44, parents generally find it difficult to find out about childcare, with only 38 percent agreeing that it is easy to find information about what childcare is available, 34 percent agreeing that it is easy to find out about the quality of providers, and 30 percent agreeing that it is easy to find out about getting help with childcare costs.

Table 44: Parent's views on childcare



8 What can be done to improve sufficiency of childcare in Northumberland?

This section sets out a number of issues which have been highlighted throughout this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and includes a list of recommendations for improving the sufficiency of childcare in Northumberland based on the evidence gathered as part of this CSA.

8.1 Government expansions to childcare

The early years entitlement expansion for children aged 9 months to three years and the National Wraparound Programme for school aged children is likely to substantially increase expectations around childcare and demand by parents. While providers in Northumberland are generally planning to offer the early years entitlements, there is still a considerable gap between potential demand and potential supply. For example, only one third of providers say that they have the capacity to provide spaces for the September 2024 offer (for 15 hours of care for all children from the age of 9 months with working parents) to more children, although this figure does rise for the 30 hour offer due to come into effect in September 2025. In addition, there is limited information available on the likely demand for wraparound care for school age children as the programme is rolled out nationally from September 2024.

Responses to a survey of parents highlight that many in Northumberland want to use more childcare, and cost is the biggest factor in them not being able to do so. The new entitlements will reduce costs for many families and present an incentive to take up childcare, or to take more.

8.1.1 Recommendations

There are a number of actions that Northumberland County Council could consider taking to support the expansion of government support for childcare, including:

- Establishing a steering group made up of key stakeholders from within the council (including finance, business support and education) and external (including PVIs, schools, childminders and parents) to provide governance and implementation oversight to assist with the roll out of both the early years expansions and wraparound funding.
- Providing adequate council capacity to support the expansions, considering establishing a team to support the expansions and temporary secondments to help resource.
- Continuing to review supply and demand, including the rollout of the April 2024 expansion, and collect data and feedback from providers and parents to inform the September 2024 and September 2025 expansions and wraparound programme.
- Developing a communications campaign specifically targeting providers who are not considering providing places for the expansions or providers who do not currently provide for those age ranges. Including specific communication to schools and current (and potential) wraparound providers.
- Developing the delivery model and funding mechanism for providers to allocate wraparound funding to providers and communicate this to providers, along with guidance (and where possible business support) to enable providers to access funding
- Reviewing the support and resources currently available to providers to assist them with delivering the new entitlements, and alter resources where applicable

8.2 Sustainability

This Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has highlighted there has been a decrease in the number of Ofsted registered providers and number of places, mainly due to decreases in childminders. While almost 9 out of 10 providers surveyed were confident or very confident that their setting will still be operating in six months, childminders were overall less confident. This presents a sufficiency risk not only for the expanded entitlements, but also for the current entitlements and childcare more generally. This is particularly an issue given that this CSA highlighted many areas where there were very low to no vacancies.

8.2.1 Recommendations

There are a number of actions that Northumberland County Council could consider taking to support the expansion of government support for childcare, including:

- Supporting the recent national [‘Be Part of Something Big’ campaign](#) to support the recruitment of early years workers and the capacity of providers. With specific promotion of the £1,000 bonus for new childcare workers trial which Northumberland are a part of.⁸ This could work with local careers organisations and providers on campaigns to attract people into the childcare industry, such as information stalls at careers fairs, promotions with recruitment agencies and other job finding services, and social media.
- Work closely with providers and staff to continually assess the best way to support providers and the childcare workforce, for example running a survey to understand current training gaps and needs.
- Reviewing the support and resources currently available to providers to assist them with business planning and sustainability, including developing further resources where needed – for childminders for example.
- Provide more training opportunities for existing workers, and do so in a way that allows providers to free up staff to attend. This could include facilitating staff-sharing arrangements between providers, helping providers cover training with agency staff, or running training sessions outside of typical provider opening hours. This would be in addition to training for managers to support staff in their demanding roles.

8.3 Accessibility of information

This CSA has highlighted significant gaps in knowledge of government support for childcare, including Universal Credit for childcare, Tax Credits for childcare, and to a lesser extent, Tax Free Childcare and the early years entitlements. Generally, parents of school-age children are less likely than parents of pre-school children to be aware of the help available to them for entitlements they could be eligible for.

In addition, parents said that they struggle to access good quality information about the childcare and financial help available to them, despite almost half of parents surveyed using the council’s website as a source of information.

⁸ <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/02/recruit-early-years-workers-trial-bonus/>

8.3.1 Recommendations

One change that could increase awareness and use of the financial support available to support affordability would be to improve the childcare section of the Northumberland County Council website.

There are three main recommendations to improve the website, based on parents' feedback:

- Perform a general quality check on the available information, making sure that everything is up to date, consistent, and clearly explained.
- Provide parents with a searchable database of childcare providers in Northumberland County Council, including number of places, SEND provision, Ofsted rating, prices etc. Ideally, this list should be optimized to help parents compare between providers and make the best choices for them and their families.
- A searchable list of all providers in the County, including vacancies, fees, and other headline information.
- Provide parents with an easy-to-use entitlement calculator that enables them to quickly and easily see what help they could get with the costs of childcare, and how they can access this help.
 - There is an entitlement calculator at <https://www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator>, but this could be coupled with a resource to show parents where to access the entitlements in their local area.

Aside from ensuring that all information on the Northumberland County Council website is accurate and up-to-date, the council could help parents by:

- Social media could be utilised to encourage parents to check their eligibility for help with childcare, and to signpost them towards relevant information on the Northumberland County Council website.
- Sending emails and/or text messages to parents encouraging them to check their eligibility for all entitlements. Flyers and leaflets could be printed detailing each entitlement and who might be eligible for them. These flyers could be distributed to providers, schools, the FIS, play schemes, and any other schemes or settings that may be frequented by parents and children.

8.4 Support providers to consider operating extended hours

The parent survey highlighted that many parents wanted to use childcare outside of 9-5 hours, but could not find the provision for this. Northumberland County Council could aim to support providers in operating extended hours, especially in light of the upcoming expansions to early years entitlements and the national wraparound programme.

8.4.1 Recommendations

There are a number of actions that Northumberland County Council could consider taking to support the expansion of government support for childcare, including the development of a toolkit for providers to support making changes which could include:

- A business planning template, which would take providers through the steps needed to develop a full strategy for delivering extended hours care.

- Financial modelling and guidance, which could include pre-made spreadsheets and calculators to help providers undertake financial planning, calculate staff ratios etc.
- Guidance for providers on how to deliver the early education entitlements.
- Help with assessing parental demand.
- Help with marketing for providers.

Annex 1 – Methodology

The methodology used to undertake this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment are set out below. Coram Family and Childcare undertook each element and wrote the report which had input from Northumberland County Council.

8.5 Desktop review

A desktop review of key figures and statistics about Northumberland's population and childcare market was carried out using data from sources such as the census, ONS, Ofsted, and Coram's Childcare Survey.

8.6 Parent and provider surveys

Coram Family and Childcare ran a survey of parents and childcare providers in Northumberland in October 2023. The survey of providers included 101 providers. The survey of parents included 778 parents, 19 percent of whom reported at least one child with SEND requirements.

Price calculations were weighted by the number of places per provider. This was done to ensure that, for example, providers with a low number of places but a very high price did not disproportionately affect the overall figures.

8.7 Parent focus groups

We delivered three focus groups in late November, with a total of sixteen parents attending online. Parents had completed the Northumberland parent survey and put themselves forward to participate in one of the focus groups. The three focus groups were divided up depending on the ages or needs of children:

- a) Parents who had at least one pre-school aged child
- b) Parents who had at least one child with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)
- c) Parents who had at least one school aged child

The majority of the parents at the focus groups had more than one child and so there was some crossover between the findings from the different groups depending on the needs of their children and their ages.

The majority of parents we spoke to were using formal childcare as well as informal (family and/or friends). All except two of the parents attending the focus groups were mothers who were working full or part-time.

Data was gathered using a semi-structured topic guide to allow us to find out about parents' views and experiences of local childcare. However, the focus groups also allowed other broader childcare issues to be discussed such as suggestions as to how childcare might be improved in Northumberland including in the context of the government's plans for expansion of free childcare and expanded wraparound provision. Feedback was analysed thematically to draw out key issues and ideas for areas of improvement.