

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

24th MARCH 2020

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT UPDATE 2020

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & INCLUSION SERVICES (COUNCILLOR MRS J ROSSER)

Author(s): ANDREA RICHARDS, SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS AND TRANSFORMATION (Tel No: 01443 744001)

DENISE HUMPHRIES, SENIOR 21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROJECT MANAGER (CHILDCARE AND SPECIAL PROJECTS) (Tel No: 01443 744026)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) report for 2017 and action plans.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Agree to receive a further report and action plan at the end of May 2020.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable officers to continue to develop and support childcare provision in RCT, as identified in the 2017 CSA report and subsequent annual action plans.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) places a duty on the Council to secure '*as far as is reasonably practicable*' sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in its area who require childcare to enable them to take up, or remain in, work, or to undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

- 4.2 Section 26 of the 2006 Act requires the Council to undertake a CSA every five years, with annual reviews of the assessment and accompanying action plan. This assessment forms an important stage in local planning, allowing the Council to work effectively with local partners, including the private and voluntary sectors, to fill gaps in the market and to develop a realistic and robust picture of parents' current and future needs for childcare.
- 4.3 The last full CSA report was published in 2017, with the next full report due in 2022. The last action plan update was published in March 2019. Welsh Government (WG) has informed the Council that this year's action plan update report will not be due until the end of May 2020.

5. UPDATE

- 5.1 The universal childcare development team currently consists of 1.5 FTE posts. These posts transferred from Children's Services to Education in November 2018, joining officers who are implementing the WG Childcare Offer. This has enabled the Council to create a unified RCT universal childcare development team. The priority since that time has been to evaluate the needs of parents and children and those of the childcare sector in RCT and to plan our delivery plan to take account of these priorities.
- 5.2 A key focus of the childcare team is the implementation of the WG Childcare Offer. The Childcare Offer provides working parents of 3 and 4 year olds with 30 hours per week of combined Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN) education and additional funded childcare for 48 weeks per year. RCT is a Delivery Authority administering the scheme on behalf of Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil CBCs. The scheme is proving popular with working parents. Since its launch in September 2017, over 2000 applications have been submitted by RCT families, with 1242 currently eligible and receiving the additional funded childcare.
- 5.3 One of the key aims of the Council has been to ensure that eligible families can access funded childcare where, and when, they need it. Childcare providers have worked closely with the Council to develop wraparound care facilities where there has been an identified need. This has consisted of a mixture of new settings on, or near, school sites, and providers offering 'pick up' services to transport children either to or from their FPN education setting. Several providers have also expanded their services to offer holiday childcare to cater for the increased demand that this offer has generated.
- 5.4 When the childcare team become aware of gaps in the market, they work proactively with the childcare sector, schools and other agencies to explore all possible solutions. Following parental calls for after school care in two of our schools in 2019, the team consulted with parents to establish the extent of demand for new childcare services. In one school there was insufficient demand to make a new service financially viable. Therefore, this will be reviewed periodically to ensure that the Council can react and provide support for any increase in demand. In the other school, there was clear demand from parents for the development of a new after school provision. Due to a lack of space in the school, the team worked with a local childcare provider to establish a new service, based in a church hall, approximately 1 mile from the school. However,

despite the original call from parents for this service, the level of bookings, once open, was disappointing and the provider had no choice but to close the service within a few months of opening. The team are now working with other providers in the area to fulfil the need that does exist and are also supporting a prospective childminder in this area to become Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registered. This demonstrates the difficulties that the Council and childcare providers have in determining exactly what childcare is needed, and where, and ensuring that any new developments are financially sustainable.

5.5 During the last year, the team has focused on recruiting more childminders, particularly in areas of identified demand as mentioned in point 5.4. The Council held a number of briefing sessions for prospective childminders and also funded 7 places on the childminder pre-registration course run by external training agencies. The Council have now commissioned a pre-registration course to be delivered in RCT. Twelve prospective childminders are enrolled on this. The Council has also put together a structured package of support for new childminders. This includes funding to pay for the pre-registration course, Safeguarding, Food Hygiene and Paediatric First Aid courses, PACEY membership and insurance for one year and a small start-up grant. This package is available to prospective childminders in areas where there is an identified lack of current childminding provision, and also where we have received calls for additional childcare to cater for the Childcare Offer.

5.6 Developing a rolling programme of statutory training courses has been a priority in 2019/20. Over the last 12 months we have commissioned:

- 2 x Level 3 Safeguarding courses, with a total of 70 participants
- 3 x Level 3 Paediatric First Aid courses, with a total of 36 participants
- 2 x Level 2 Food Hygiene courses, with a total of 24 participants

The Council have also delivered one Level 3 Transition to Playwork training course during 2019/20, with a total of 12 learners attending. This course is for practitioners who are working in playwork/after school/holiday care settings and already hold a recognised Level 3 Early Years qualification. To cater for additional demand from childcare settings, we intend to commission three of these courses during 2020/21.

The Council will also continue to support childcare practitioners during 2020/21 with a programme of statutory and CPD training opportunities.

5.7 Improving engagement with childcare providers has been a key priority for the childcare team this year. Five events have been held in soft play centres and community venues to engage with childminders and to give them the opportunity to discuss issues with the childcare team and receive information regarding the Childcare Offer and from representatives from the umbrella organisation, PACEY, who were also in attendance. 31 childminders attended these sessions. More events are planned for 2020/21 and it is hoped that they can be expanded to include sessional care providers, such as playgroups and Cylchoedd Meithrin.

Officers have also attended leisure centres, libraries and job centres to offer information and advice to parents regarding any childcare related queries.

5.8 Improved collaborative work has also been a priority. A joint conference was held in September 2019 with the Council play services team. This was very well received by childcare and play practitioners with 45 attendees on the day. Feedback was positive and has helped shape priorities for the team with regards to training and business support needed by the sector. Another joint childcare and play conference is planned for October 2020.

Joint working has also been undertaken with the Communities for Work plus (CFW+) team in RCT and childcare/CFW+ colleagues in Merthyr Tydfil CBC to offer joint briefing sessions and training events for prospective childminders. Links have also been made with Business Wales to offer specific business related training and workshops for childcare settings in RCT. A programme of events is planned for 2020/21.

5.9 Alongside this work, WG has made available significant capital funding to support the growth and quality of childcare provision throughout Wales.

5.10 Since 2018, the Council has been successful in securing funding for ten childcare related projects, totalling £6 million. These projects are to develop, or expand, childcare facilities on school site. This will support an increase in the availability of Welsh medium childcare provision, thereby creating a seamless transition for children to enter Welsh medium education, and will also support the implementation of the WG Childcare Offer, by allowing parents to access the FPN education and additional funded childcare elements in one location.

Of the ten projects:

- YGG Evan James and Tonyrefail Community School are completed
- YGG Ynyswen and Ysgol Llanhari are due to be completed in the next quarter
- Treorchy Primary School, Gwauncelyn Primary School, YG Aberdar are in progress
- Cwmlai Primary School, Dolau Primary School, YGG Aberdar are being planned and are in development.

5.11 Funding was also secured to offer a small capital grants scheme to childcare providers who are delivering the Childcare Offer. This grant scheme is to enable them to increase the number of Childcare Offer places they offer and/or to improve the quality of their facilities. In the first round of applications, 30 applications were received, totalling £197,000. Of these, 19 were wholly, or partly, approved and a total of £76,000 in grant funding was awarded. Grants included items such as replacement boilers, new flooring, improving outdoor areas and replacing broken or dangerous equipment. The grant scheme will reopen for applications in April/May 2020.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed at this time as the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 There has been consultation with parents in specific areas of RCT during 2019/20. These have been in response to localised calls for additional childcare and to investigate and determine the actual levels of demand in these areas.
- 7.2 The next statutory consultation with parents, childcare providers and other stakeholders will be during 2021 in preparation for the next full CSA report which is due to be published in March 2022.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 All childcare development in RCT is supported by Welsh Government grant funding. Previously known as the 'Out of School Childcare Grant', this funding has now been amalgamated with other grants and forms part of the 'Children and Communities Grant'. Responsibility for this grant sits with Children's Services.
- 8.2 Officers have received an indicative figure for 2020/21 from Children's Services of £82,000.
- 8.3 This funding will aid officers to implement the priorities identified in the current action plan.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The Council has duties under section 22(1) of the Childcare Act 2006 to "secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the provision of childcare (whether or not by it) is sufficient to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare in order to enable them (a) to take up, or remain in work; or (b) to undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work".
- 9.2 Section 26 of the Childcare Act 2006 requires the Council to prepare assessments of the sufficiency of childcare provision and to keep this under review.

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 10.1 This report will support priorities set out in the RCT Corporate Plan – The Way Ahead, particularly the objectives of '*building a strong economy*' by supporting parents to access childcare provision so that they are able to enter employment, training or volunteer opportunities.
- 10.2 It will also support the Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015, particularly:
- Goal one – *A prosperous Wales*, by ensuring that there is quality, flexible, affordable childcare available, allowing parents to access employment, training and education opportunities.

- Goal three – *A healthier Wales*, by supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of families by enabling parents to stay in, or enter, employment whilst their children are cared for in high quality childcare settings.
- Goal four – *A more equal Wales*, by ensuring that children can access childcare in settings that suit their, and their parents, needs

11. **CONCLUSION**

- 11.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf continues to be well placed with its existing childcare provision to meet the current needs of most working parents. Development work continues to be undertaken in response to parental demand and in areas where there is an identified need.
- 11.2 It is considered that implementation of the 2017 CSA report, and the subsequent annual action plans, will help to address the identified priorities, subject to available resources.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee –

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers –

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
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**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSION
WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR J ROSSER**

Author: Denise Humphries, Senior 21st Century Schools Project Manager
(Childcare & Special Projects)

Background papers – None

Officer to contact: Denise Humphries – 01443 744026