



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

25TH MARCH 2021

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT UPDATE 2021

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

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2017-22 (CSA) report and subsequent annual action plan updates.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Agree for the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to discuss with Welsh Government the future role of RCTCBC in delivery of the Childcare Offer for Wales.
- 2.3 Agree to receive a further report and updated action plan in June 2021.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable officers to continue to develop and support childcare provision in RCT, as identified in the 2017-22 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. Officers are now starting to plan for the next full report, due in Spring 2022. The last action plan update was submitted to Welsh Government (WG) in August 2020. WG delayed submission due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the ongoing pressures on childcare teams, WG has informed the Council that this year's action plan update report is not due to be submitted until 1st June 2021.

5. UPDATE

- 5.1 Since the 2020 update report, the universal childcare development team has grown from 1.5 FTE posts, to 3 FTE posts and the additional posts are grant funded. This team transferred to Education & Inclusion Services from Children's Services in November 2018 and has joined officers who administer the WG Childcare Offer for Wales scheme.
- 5.2 Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the priority for the Council was to evaluate the needs of parents and children and those of the childcare sector in RCT. Great strides had been taken to finalise the 2020/21 delivery plan to address these priorities, before all plans were suspended due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic.

On 20th March 2020, Welsh Government instructed all childcare settings in Wales to close for all children other than those of critical workers or who were deemed vulnerable. WG introduced funding to support these children via the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS). This scheme provided funded childcare for children aged 0-4 years in those settings that had remained open. Approximately 21% of our CIW registered settings initially remained open to provide this critical service. More reopened as demand increased and by the end of the scheme in August 2020, 38% of our CIW registered settings were open and providing emergency care via C-CAS.

- 5.3 In order to manage the scheme officers worked closely with colleagues in Children's Services and the web team to create a process to administer C-CAS within a very short period. An online application form was created for critical workers to apply for the scheme. A separate online form was created for professionals and families to refer vulnerable children for placements. All staff in the childcare team were redeployed to administer C-CAS. They were supported

by officers from Resilient Families Service and 21st Century Schools. Applications for the Childcare Offer were suspended, although officers still had to process provider claims during this period.

- 5.4 For the duration of C-CAS, from April to the end of August 2020, a total of 747 children received funded childcare via the scheme, 95 of which were deemed vulnerable. 99 childcare settings in total participated in the scheme, delivering 223,115 hours of funded childcare. This equated to over £1.15 million of funded care in this 5-month period.
- 5.5 After the closure of the scheme, an evaluation of C-CAS in RCT was undertaken to gauge the feedback from parents and providers.

Parent evaluation

289 parents responded to the parent evaluation. Findings included:

- 98% found the online application process simple to use;
- 99% were happy with the service they received from officers;
- 100% were happy with the care the childcare provider gave to their child/ren;
- 99% confirmed it enabled them to continue performing their critical role in response to the pandemic;
- 79% were able to increase their work hours if required.

Comments received included:

“A really valuable option for us as both key workers and no grandparent support. Allowed us to continue working.”

“The whole RCT team that helped me during the emergency childcare were brilliant, explained everything to me and were really supportive, the nursery setting my daughter attended also told me how brilliant and easy to deal with they were. Many thanks for your help all.”

Provider evaluation

46 providers responded to the provider survey:

- 50% found it ‘Very Easy’ and 44% found it ‘Easy’ to find information about the scheme and sign up to deliver C-CAS;
- 100% of respondents found the expectations, administration and claim procedures easy to understand and follow;
- 91% confirmed that delivering C-CAS helped them financially during this period;
- 100% were happy with the service they received from RCT.

Comments received included:

“I really appreciate RCTChildcare team effort to communicate with us and support they given us was very good. I really enjoyed working alongside the team CCAS.”

“It was very helpful for my business during the pandemic, because I did not have much money coming in I was able to carry on working, the parents were very grateful for the financial help and knowing they could place their children with someone they already knew.”

- 5.6 Throughout this time, officers also continued to support the childcare sector via regular updates, emails, and phone calls. In June 2020, WG issued guidance for the sector – *“Protective measures in childcare settings: Keep Childcare Safe”*. Officers adapted this document to provide settings with RCT relevant information and additional resources. Version 1 of this local document was distributed in June 2020 and has been regularly updated since, as the situation and guidance has evolved. During this time, the Council also provided settings with resources packs containing items of PPE and cleaning materials. To date, we have undertaken three rounds of this resource support, issuing 185 packs to the sector in RCT.
- 5.7 With the relaxation of lockdown measures and the return to school in September 2020, the childcare team were able to refocus on the CSA action plan priorities and the reinstatement of the 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. We are currently a Delivery Authority, administering the Childcare Offer on behalf of Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councils. This arrangement works well, with close collaboration between RCT officers and colleagues in these authorities. Currently there are 1809 children eligible and receiving the Offer across the three LA's, with 1065 of these children residing in RCT.

WG are developing a new, national online portal that will take over from the individual systems currently being used by the Delivery Authorities. It is anticipated that this will be launched in 2022. As part of this, WG will look to change the delivery model and replace the current Delivery Authorities with Assessment Authorities. Further information about the exact nature of this is to be finalised, but it is anticipated that WG will seek expressions of interest from LA's to become an Assessment Authority. WG have already approached the Council and subject to Members approval, the Director of Education and Inclusion Services and officers from RCTCBC will meet with the WG Deputy Director Childcare, Play and Early Years Division to discuss this further.

- 5.8 Since September, the childcare development team have implemented the priorities that were planned for 2020/21. The rolling programme of statutory training courses was suspended in March and restarted in September, with COVID safety measures and most courses transferred to online delivery, with only the required practical elements conducted face to face. By the end of March 2021, the following courses were delivered:
- 8 x online Level 3 Safeguarding courses with a total of 80 participants;

- 9 x Level 3 Paediatric First Aid courses, with a total of 36 participants. Current courses are now a mixture of online and face to face practical elements;
- Funded 60 participants to attend online Level 2 Food Hygiene courses;
- 2 x Level 3 Transition to Play work courses, with a total of 10 participants;
- 1 x Childminder pre-registration course, with a total of 14 participants.

A programme of CPD training has also been developed which includes:

- Manual Handling;
- Managing Challenging Behaviour;
- Leadership & Management;
- The Four Purposes and Beyond;
- Developing Quality Outdoor Provision;
- Supporting Staff Well-Being and Emotional Resilience;
- The Curiosity Approach Pocket Size training.

An online survey to providers was disseminated in October 2020. This asked what training needs they would find require and how the Council childcare team can support them. Additional courses will be added to the training programme for 2021/22 based on feedback of the survey.

- 5.9 All planned face to face engagement activity with the sector was cancelled due to the pandemic and replaced by online engagement. A closed Facebook page has been established. This allows the team to keep providers in RCT up to date with COVID guidance, training, and other news. This has been well received by the sector and we currently have 107 members. A first online engagement event was held in February 2021. This offered participants an opportunity to hear up to date news from the childcare team. 23 providers logged onto the event and feedback has been positive. A programme of general online engagement and targeted sessions has been planned for 2021/22.

A joint conference was held in September 2019 with the Council's Childcare and Play Services teams working collaboratively. This was well received by childcare and play practitioners with 45 attendees on the day. Feedback was positive and a second conference was planned for October 2020. This was cancelled due to the ongoing pandemic. The date for the conference has been provisionally rearranged to 9th October 2021 and Officers are currently looking at contingency plans to deliver this conference virtually if we cannot meet providers face to face at that time.

- 5.10 A partnership group has been reinstated to improve collaborative working between Council departments and external organisations. The Early Years, Childcare and Play Development Partnership (EYCPDP) met virtually for the first time in January 2021. The group will meet each term. The aim of the group is to strengthen a multi-agency, integrated approach to support and improve early years, childcare and play work services in RCT. This will include information sharing, joint planning, and involvement in the development of the next full CSA and PSA (Play Sufficiency Assessment) reports. Both are due in 2022.

5.11 Childcare capital projects funded by WG capital funding are nearing completion. 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. It 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. Some projects have been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of the ten projects funded:

- YGG Evan James and Tonyrefail Community School are completed;
- New buildings for childcare settings at Ysgol Llanhari and next to YGG Ynyswen are occupied by the providers, with just minor external works to be completed;
- The other projects are all in development and due for completion by the end of 2022 (Treorchy Primary School, Gwauncelyn Primary School, YGG Aberdar, Cwmlai Primary, Dolau Primary School, YGG Abercynon).

A new sessional childcare service will open at Dolau Primary School in September 2021 when building works are completed. This provision will increase access for parents to funded childcare via the Childcare Offer and increase Welsh language provision in the South of the County Borough. The new provisions that will be created at YGG Aberdar and YGG Abercynon shortly also provide additional capacity where identified need of growth has been recognised.

5.12 In addition to the above funding was also secured from WG 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, 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. A few projects were withdrawn and came under budget so the final figure spent in round 1 was £72,752.

The second round of funding was delayed due to COVID and opened for applications in September 2020. WG allocated the Council an additional £122,000 specifically to support settings implement COVID safety measures. Many of the successful applications were to develop outdoor facilities to enable providers to increase their use of the outdoors, in line with current COVID safety advice. These included requests for awnings, canopies, safety play surfaces, garden works, outdoor play equipment and outdoor storage. In addition, a number of providers were awarded funding to undertake internal refurbishment to enable them to develop additional childcare space/rooms, to refurbish and extend toilet facilities, and to replace carpets with hygienic washable flooring, enabling them to comply with strict cleaning guidelines. A total of 39 applications were received, totalling

£222,186. Of these, 31 were wholly, or partly, approved and a total of £165,965 in grant funding was awarded.

- 5.13 Due to the difficulties that the pandemic has caused the childcare sector, WG has been keen to support their sustainability. In the Autumn of 2020, WG made available funding via the Childcare Provider Grant. The scheme was designed to cover losses experienced at the beginning of the pandemic. However, the grant conditions were prescriptive, and some providers were not able to submit the evidence required. The Council was awarded £197,015.00 but the Council were only able to approve 7 applications totalling £26,997.00 in line with the grant conditions.

In response to feedback from LA's and the sector, WG made available further funding in November 2020 via the Children and Communities Grant. LA's were given more freedom to design their own grant schemes to enable this funding to support sustainability of the sector. RCT was initially allocated an additional £165,312.00. This was followed by a further £215,000 in January 2021. A new grant scheme was developed with three distinct sections:

- Support for settings that have full or partial closures due to positive COVID-19 cases;
- Increased costs as a direct result of COVID-19, such as increased heating and cleaning costs. This section also supports settings that have been unable to open or run at full capacity due to issues with their venues (i.e. running from a community building and not having permission from the building committee to reopen);
- Severe financial hardship due to reasons not covered in the first two sections and where no other public funding is available.

This grant scheme has been open for applications since December 2020 and to date, we have received 46 applications. 22 have been successful and a total of £76,593.48 has been awarded. Seven have been unsuccessful and 17 are awaiting further information.

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 are no consultation implications aligned to this report.
- 7.2 The next statutory consultation with parents, childcare providers and other stakeholders will start in Autumn 2021 in preparation for the next full CSA report which is due to be published in 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'.
- 8.2 This funding supports officers to implement the priorities identified in the CSA action plan updates and respond to changing priorities facing the childcare sector in RCT.
- 8.3 Funding has been supplemented during 2020/21 by additional WG funding to support sustainability of the childcare sector due to the challenges created by the pandemic as highlighted in the report.

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 The Council's Corporate Plan 2020–2024 highlights the Council's commitment to delivering three main priorities, namely:
- Ensuring People: *are independent, healthy and successful;*
 - Creating Places: *where people are proud to live, work and play;*
 - Enabling Prosperity: *creating the opportunity for people and businesses to be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper.*
- 10.2 This report supports the childcare sector in RCT to remain prosperous and fulfil its potential. It also supports children and their families to be independent, healthy, and successful by ensuring children can access quality childcare provision and allows their parents to enter employment, training, or volunteer opportunities.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the childcare sector across Wales has been significant. The Council is incredibly proud of all childcare providers in RCT who have continued to deliver safe, quality care for children and their families throughout the last year in a professional and compassionate manner.

- 11.2 The pandemic has required the Council childcare team to find new ways of engaging and supporting the sector. These have been well received and have ensured that the Council is well placed to continue this support in the future, regardless of any ongoing or future pressures.
- 11.3 Despite the challenges of the last 12 months, the Council 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.
- 11.4 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

Background Papers

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & LIFELONG
LEARNING (COUNCILLOR MRS J ROSSER)**

Item: CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT UPDATE 2021

Background Papers

The background paper included as an appendix to this report is: n/a

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