



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

18TH JULY 2022

2022 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE SERVICES, COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Members' approval to commence public consultation of the contents of the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) for the statutory period of 28 days prior to submitting to Welsh Government for formal approval.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of this report;
- 2.2 Give formal approval to commence consultation with relevant stakeholders on the contents of the 2022 CSA; and,
- 2.3 Following the consultation period, agree that the CSA be submitted to Welsh Government for final approval.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To fulfil the Council's statutory duty to complete a CSA every five years and make it available for public consultation prior to submission to Welsh Government.

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 report in Appendix 1 replaces the last full CSA report, published in 2017. It sets out the analysis of supply and demand of childcare in RCT and identifies key priorities for the next five years. An Executive Summary of the CSA report is included in Appendix 2 for ease of reference.

5. 2022 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This CSA will apply for five years from 2022 to 2027. Since the last CSA report was written in 2017, the childcare development team has moved from Children's Services to Education & Inclusion Services and has grown from 1.5 FTE posts to 3 FTE posts. The support offered to the childcare sector since 2017 has improved considerably, with a more focused training programme for universal childcare settings and an improved support package for prospective childminders. Engagement with the childcare sector has improved significantly with regular engagement events now taking place, termly newsletters distributed, and improved networking via a closed Facebook page.
- 5.2 The CSA assesses demand for childcare services. The main vehicle to gain parent views for the report was via an online parent survey, undertaken in October 2021. For the first time this was led by Welsh Government on behalf of all local authorities in Wales. Prior to this, each Council had been responsible for designing their own parent survey, but this resulted in a lack of uniformity of questions asked. The submission rate for RCT was 823 responses, which is considerably higher than the completion rate for the last CSA (534). Due to the continuing restrictions last autumn caused by the pandemic, officers were restricted with the level of consultation they could undertake, however, they were able to attend some parent and toddler groups to encourage parents to complete the survey and to gather additional feedback.
- 5.3 The principal source of supply data was via the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS). This was undertaken in summer 2021. Despite it being a legal requirement for CIW registered childcare providers to complete a SASS, the completion rate in 2021 for RCT was 87%. Officers contacted all non-responders to offer support to complete the return

and the final completion rate was 92.3%. This was an improvement on the 2017 report when 73.2% of providers submitted their SASS.

- 5.4 The two main sources of supply and demand data are supplemented by data from the Family Information Service, Cwlwm partners (consortium of five childcare and play umbrella organisations in Wales), and local officer knowledge.
- 5.5 For the purposes of the CSA, the electoral wards were divided into seven geographical areas. The Community Resilience Hub and Neighbourhood Network areas were used for the purpose of the report and maps illustrating these areas are contained within the body of the CSA report. These areas are as follows:
- North Cynon
 - South Cynon
 - North Rhondda
 - South Rhondda
 - North East Taf Ely
 - South East Taf Ely
 - South West Taf Ely.

All data contained within this report has been analysed and defined using these geographical areas.

- 5.6 It must be noted that the CSA findings may have been affected by the COVID pandemic. The data was collected at the height of the pandemic and may not be a completely accurate reflection of the current data that will inevitably change as restrictions continue to ease. It is likely that the 2023 action plan update report will reflect a more accurate picture of supply and demand in RCT.
- 5.7 Additionally, the COVID pandemic has had a detrimental effect on the childcare sector in RCT. Many settings remained open during the national lockdowns to offer care to children who were deemed vulnerable or to children of key workers. The settings operated under strict protective measures guidance, which initially reduced the number of children they were able to care for. However, throughout the pandemic many settings had to close for periods of time, with some having to close numerous times, due to positive cases and staff shortages.
- 5.8 As a result of the pressures faced by the sector over the last two years, we have seen a greater number of permanent closures, particularly of childminding settings. The 2022 CSA notes that in the period January 2020 to January 2022, 67 registered settings closed with the loss of 1102 childcare places. In contrast, 39 new settings were established with the creation of 1082 places. Whilst this is only a net reduction of 20 places, analysis in the CSA highlights that there was a net loss of 205 childminding places, with only 58 being created by new childminders. Childminders have been most adversely affected by the

pandemic, as they have been required to close their businesses if they, or any of their family members, tested positive for COVID, even after this requirement was removed from other businesses.

- 5.9 The CSA notes that informal childcare and use of family and friends continues to be a popular source of childcare for parents in RCT. It was reported as the reason for not using formal childcare by 37.7% of parents who responded to this question. This is similar to the findings in the 2017 report. The cost of childcare was also highlighted as prohibitive, with 43.4% of parents stating this is why they do not currently access childcare. No childcare available during atypical hours (particularly before 8am, after 6pm and weekends) was also noted as a difficulty for parents. Again, this is similar to findings in the 2017 report.
- 5.10 For providers, the difficulties to remain financially viable were evident with 22.9% of those who completed the SASS stating that they did not know if they would continue to operate for another year or longer. Whilst 65.6% reported that they were fairly confident of this, the fact that nearly a quarter were unsure signifies the uncertainty that was felt amongst the childcare sector at the time the SASS was collected. During the COVID pandemic, Welsh Government has made significant funding available to support the sustainability of the childcare sector and the Council has made available several grant schemes since 2020. These are noted in Section Eight of the CSA report.
- 5.11 The principal findings in the 2022 CSA show that there are some geographical areas that require further examination in order to establish if additional childcare is required, particularly areas of North East Taf Ely and South Rhondda. Parents reported that there was limited out of school and holiday care for school aged children, however many out of school clubs use shared community venues and some were affected by restrictions imposed in response to COVID, so this feedback may have been a consequence of that. That said, developing more holiday care is an identified priority within the action plan for this CSA. Supporting the expansion of Welsh medium childcare is another key theme, particularly investigating demand for Welsh medium care in the South Rhondda area. Childminder recruitment also continues to be an ongoing priority and will continue to be for the duration of this CSA. Further priorities that have been identified are contained within the action plan at the end of the attached CSA report.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1 The Council must satisfy its public sector duties under the Equalities Act 2010 (including specific Welsh public sector duties). Pursuant to these legal duties Councils must in making decisions have due regard to the need to (1) eliminate unlawful discrimination, (2) advance equality of opportunity and (3) foster good relations on the basis of protected characteristics.

6.2 In addition, Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) places a duty on the local authority to determine whether the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet certain requirements and must have regard to the needs of parents in their area for *(ii) the provision of childcare which is suitable for disabled children*.

6.3 This duty has been captured within the CSA report and any projects, policies or initiatives that are developed and delivered as a result of this assessment, where appropriate, will have an Equality Impact Assessment completed which will be shared with the relevant parties.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) places a duty on the Local Authority to determine whether the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet certain requirements and must have regard to the needs of parents in their area for *'(iii) the provision of childcare involving the use of the Welsh language'*.

7.2 This duty has been captured within the CSA report and any projects, policies or initiatives that are developed and delivered as a result of this assessment, where appropriate, will have a Welsh Language Assessment completed which will be shared with the relevant parties.

8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

8.1 Consultation with key stakeholders has already been conducted in the preparation of the 2022 CSA report. However, a statutory 28 day consultation must now take place in which all stakeholders and members of the public will have the opportunity to comment on the draft report before submission of the final report to Welsh Government.

8.2 The consultation documentation will be disseminated to all key stakeholders and will be available to view on the Council website.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Childcare development and support activities are 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. Overall responsibility for this grant sits with Children's Services.

9.2 This funding will support implementation of the priorities identified in the 2022 CSA action plan. It also enables the Council to respond to changing priorities concerning the childcare sector in RCT.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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.

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

- 11.1 The 2022 CSA identifies the way in which developments to the childcare sector in RCT have supported the three main priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan 2020–2024:

- **Ensuring People: *are independent, healthy and successful***
The CSA action plan identifies priorities to enable the continued development of high quality childcare services that will support children with their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.
- **Creating Places: *where people are proud to live, work and play***
The CSA notes the improvements to childcare premises over the last four years due to significant capital investment. This has enhanced working conditions for staff and play and learning opportunities for children.
- **Enabling Prosperity: *creating the opportunity for people and businesses to be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper.***
The CSA notes the development of childcare provision on school sites, resulting in economic benefits to both the childcare setting and parents.

- 11.2 There are clear links to RCTCBC's Education and Inclusion Services Strategic Plan for 2022 to 2025 and its mission: 'To deliver equity and excellence in Education and enhanced well-being for all'.

- 11.3 The CSA contributes to achieving the wellbeing goals, as contained in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by:

- **Cultural Wellbeing**
Supporting the promotion and expansion of Welsh medium childcare services is a key priority in the CSA.
- **Economic Wellbeing**

Supporting the development of childcare businesses to increase their workforce and enable parents to gain, or continue in, employment.

- ***Environmental Wellbeing***
Supporting the development of improvement projects to outdoor play spaces in childcare settings.
- ***Social Wellbeing***
Supporting opportunities for children to have quality learning and play experiences.

12. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS (please specify)

12.1 The Council has a statutory duty to complete a CSA every five years and make it available for public consultation prior to submission to Welsh Government, which is relevant to all electoral wards.

13. CONCLUSION

13.1 The Council has a statutory duty to complete a CSA every five years and make it available for public consultation prior to submission to Welsh Government. As a result of this it is recommended that Members agree to commence the statutory consultation on the contents of the 2022 CSA and once complete, agree that the CSA be submitted to the Welsh Government.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer

Denise Humphries,
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background papers

2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

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