

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

London Borough of Hillingdon

December 2021

The Childcare Act 2006 placed a legal duty on all local authorities to ensure that there is sufficient childcare in their area. In particular, the local authority has a duty to: "Secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 - 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children)."

The local authority is required to report annually on how it is meeting its duty to secure sufficient childcare.

In this report, we have assessed the sufficiency of childcare by using data about the need for childcare and the amount of childcare available, and feedback from local parents about how easy or difficult it has been for them to find suitable childcare.

Assessment of childcare sufficiency

When assessing whether there is enough childcare in the borough, four issues are considered:

- The current level of supply of childcare
- The current level of demand for childcare
- The factors that have influenced the take up of childcare and could have an impact on both supply and demand
- Using this information to measure sufficiency

The childcare sufficiency assessment would normally look at the current situation in relation to take up in childcare and there would be reference to how sufficiency compared to previous years. Drawing conclusions for this year is more problematic than usual, given the uncertainties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Main findings

The use of childcare by parents this year has been affected significantly by Covid-19, both in terms of temporary reductions in the number of childcare places available and lower take up of childcare places.

With the announcement of the national lockdown that took effect on 5 January 2021, childcare settings were expected to close for all children except for vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers. These restrictions lasted until 8 March 2021, when childcare settings could open for more children. However through this lockdown, the majority of childcare settings remained open, which contrasted with the first lockdown in March 2020

when most childcare settings had closed (as shown in chart ‘**Open and closed childcare settings April 2020 – December 2021**’). Though most settings stayed open, occupancy levels were low. For example in February 2021, when assessing take up of childcare places in settings by the Ward in which they are located, the % of places that were not being used varied from 7% in Uxbridge North to 60% in Heathrow Villages.

Sustainability of childcare provision

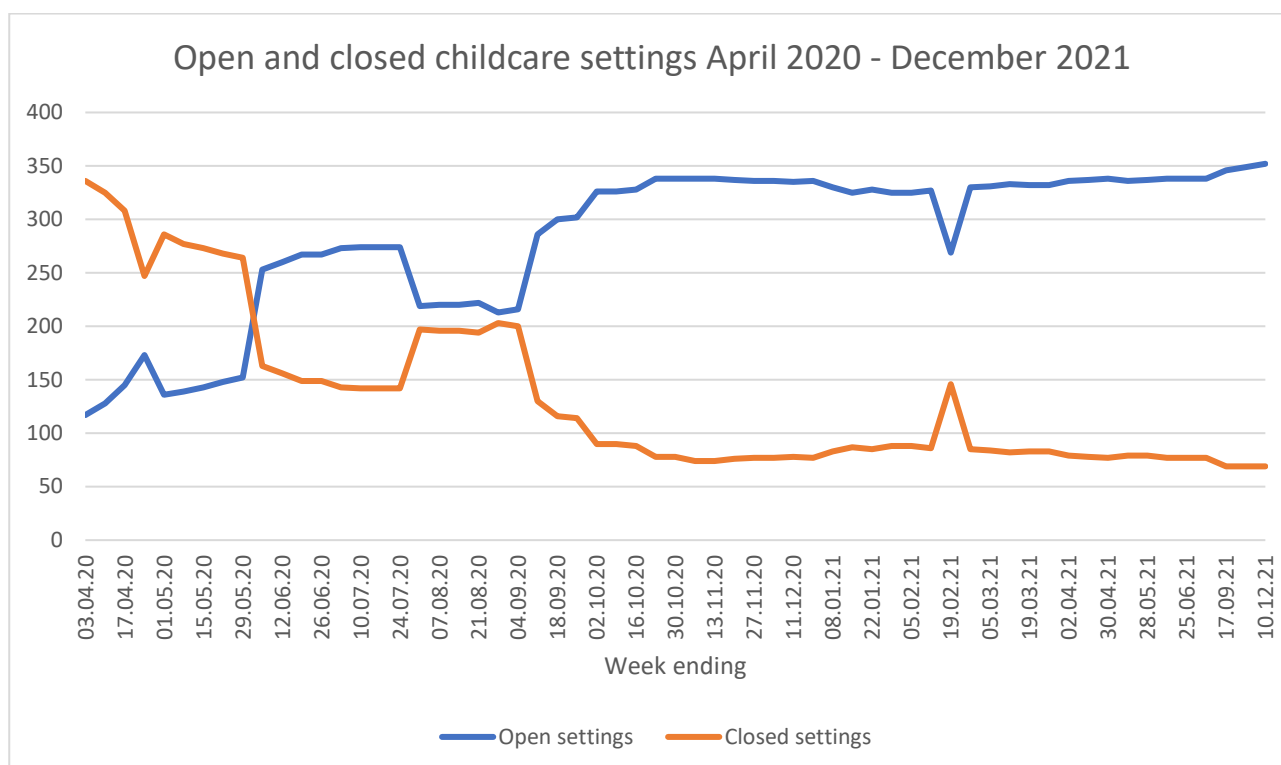
With the challenges facing childcare provision this year, the concern was that childcare settings would become unsustainable. To help with these issues, childcare settings could access government support schemes to assist with the implications that the Covid-19 measures may have for their business eg furloughing staff.

Childcare settings who provide free childcare hours for two, three and four year olds were also given an assurance that they would not lose out on the free childcare funding in the Spring 2021 term as a result of Covid-19 if they had to close temporarily or if they were providing funded places for fewer children. This helped to support the sustainability of childcare, ensuring that provision was available when all parents could use childcare again.

Use of childcare

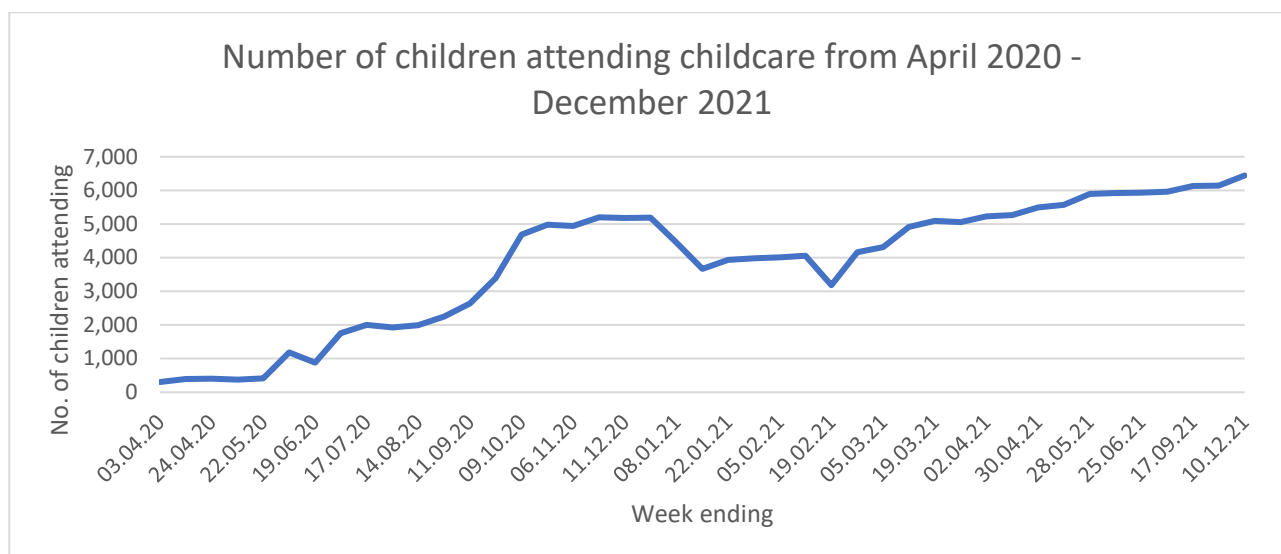
From 8 March, childcare settings could reopen for all children. The use of childcare increased gradually from that point. Some childcare settings chose to delay reopening for a variety of reasons and there were fewer parents sending their children to attend a childcare place than normal.

The following chart shows the number of open and closed childcare settings since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020.



This chart shows the unpredictability of the childcare market, in the light of Covid-19.

This chart shows the number of children attending childcare from April 2020 – December 2021.



This chart shows that once lockdowns are lifted, demand for childcare increases but it takes time for this to happen.

Part of the childcare sufficiency duty is to ensure there are enough places for two, three or four year old children who are eligible for free childcare.

1. Demand for and supply of childcare

Number of early years providers and places

In total, there are 385 childcare providers in our local authority.

Type of provision	Number of providers
Childminders	216
State school nurseries	58
Maintained nursery schools	1
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	96

For childminders, day nurseries, nursery classes in independent schools and pre-school playgroups, 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.

Children may attend childcare full time or part time. This table records 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.

2. Funded early education

Introduction to funded early education

Some children are entitled to free childcare, funded by the government. These entitlements are for 38 weeks per year.

- All children aged 3 and 4 are entitled to 15 hours per week until they start reception class in school
- Children aged 3 and 4 where both parents are working, or from lone parent families where that parent is working, are entitled to 30 hours per week until they start reception class in school
- Children aged 2 whose families receive certain benefits (including in-work benefits with an income of less than £16,190), or who have a disability, or who are looked after by the local authority, are entitled to 15 hours per week. Nationally, about 40% of 2 year olds are entitled to this offer, but the proportion varies by area

Parents do not have to use all the hours of their funded entitlement. They may choose to split them between providers. With the agreement of their provider, parents may also spread them across the year – for example, rather than taking 15 hours for 38 weeks a year they could take just under 12 hours for 48 weeks a year.

Providers offering funded early education places

Providers are paid by government via local authorities for delivering funded early education. They are not required to offer them to parents, but of course parents may choose to use a different provider if they do not. Some providers offer a restricted number of funded places.

The table below shows the proportion of providers who offer free childcare

<i>Type of provision</i>	<i>No. of providers for 2 year olds</i>	<i>% of providers offering free childcare for 2 year olds</i>	<i>No. of providers offering up to 15 hours of free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds</i>	<i>% of providers who offer up to 15 hours of free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds</i>	<i>No. of providers for 3 and 4 year olds extended hours</i>	<i>% of providers who offer up to 30 hours of free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds</i>
Childminders	102	47%	138	64%	134	62%
State school nurseries	1	2%	57	98%	39	67%

Maintained nursery schools	1	100%	1	100%	1	100%
Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	87	91%	94	98%	94	98%

Take up of funded early education

The proportion of eligible children taking up their funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in our local authority is:

Age	% of eligible children
Age 2	56%
Age 3 and 4	89%

The data in this table for two year olds is based on take up from Autumn 2021, three and four year olds is Spring 2021.

Comparing take up of funded early education over time

Age	Spring 2021	Spring 2020	Spring 2019	Spring 2018
Age 2 – targeted	35%	62%	59%	61%
Age 3 and 4	83%	89%	89%	89%

Comparing take up of funded early education in Hillingdon to other local authorities (Spring 2021)

Age	Hillingdon	London	England
Age 2 – targeted	35%	50%	62%
Age 3 and 4	83%	80%	88%

Take up across the country dropped in the Spring term 2021, due to settings closing to all children except vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers. However by Autumn 2021, take up for two year olds in Hillingdon had increased to 56%. Take up by three and four year olds is measured in January each year.

3 and 4-year-old funded entitlement applications

Parents who think they are entitled to a 30 hour extended hours place apply for this online through the Government's Childcare Support website. The same website is used to apply

for tax free childcare and parents can apply for either or both. If a parent is eligible, the system creates a code which they can use with their chosen childcare provider. If they are ineligible, they will still be entitled to the universal 15 hours of childcare.

Step	Number of families	% of families applying
Eligible for a place	2,167	60%
Accessing a place	1,292	

The data in this table is based on Department for Education data from October 2021

3. Quality of childcare in our area

The quality of childcare provision can be assessed by looking both at Ofsted inspection judgements and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) results.

Ofsted inspection grades

All childcare providers must register with and be inspected by Ofsted, who give them an overall grade for the quality of their provision. Childminders, day nurseries and pre-school playgroups are on the Early Years Register, and schools and standalone maintained nursery schools are on the Schools register. The grades for both registers are equivalent. Schools with nurseries have an overall inspection grade for the whole school and some also have a separate early years grade.

Both schools and early years providers have four possible Ofsted grades: 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement', and 'inadequate'. Some providers are still awaiting their first full inspection. These providers are excluded from our calculation.

Nursery classes in independent schools do not generally have an Ofsted grade.

Ofsted judgements of childcare provision

Judgements are made as follows:-

Grade 1 is "Outstanding"	This aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Grade 2 is "Good"	This aspect of the provision is strong
Grade 3 is "Requires Improvement"	This aspect of the provision is sound
Grade 4 is Inadequate	This aspect of the provision is not good enough

The following percentage of early years providers were recognised as being good or better during an Ofsted inspection:

	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
All provision	13%	83%	3%	0%
Childminders	11%	84%	5%	0%
Day care	20%	80%	0%	0%

Source: (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-august-2021>)

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) data

In addition, **good achievement across the EYFS is measured.** The results for the last 4 years that data is available are as follows:-

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Percentage of 5 year olds achieving a good level of attainment	69.6%	72.6%	73.6%	74.7%

Hillingdon performs well in terms of its provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) when compared to the whole of London and England.

Year	2019		
	Hillingdon	London	England
Percentage of 5 year olds achieving a good level of attainment	74.7%	74.1%	71.8%

4. Conclusion

The childcare market in the London Borough of Hillingdon has historically been stable, with as many providers opening as closing. The exceptions have been the declining number of childminders and playgroups, though this is in line with national trends.

Covid-19 has disrupted the childcare market in the following ways:

- Parental demand for childcare is more unpredictable, both in the short term (due to concerns about the virus) and in the long term (potential changing working patterns)
- The sustainability of childcare provision is unclear – childcare settings have had a degree of financial protection for most of this year. Feedback from settings is that there is anxiety about what will happen now that this financial support has been withdrawn.

For the year ahead, it will be important for childcare settings to review their business in the light of changes to the childcare market, as a result of Covid-19, including the need to be more flexible in what they offer to parents, adapting to parental need. For the local authority, it will be important to keep an up to date overview of childcare provision, in particular identifying areas where there may be insufficient provision to meet parental need.
