



<b>Schools Forum</b> Date: 1 December 2022 Time: 8.30 am to 10.30 am Venue: Virtual via Microsoft (MS) Teams	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
	Public	<b>E</b>

## EARLY YEARS PROVISION IN SHROPSHIRE

**Responsible Officer** Neville Ward  
e-mail: Neville.ward@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: (01743) 254552

### Decision Required

None – Information only.

### Summary

- 1.1 This paper is for information and discussion and summarises the current position in relation to Early Years provision in Shropshire.

### Background

- 2.1 Summary of statutory duties relating to early years:
- childcare duty to secure prescribed early years provision free of charge
  - to require local authorities to ensure there is childcare available to enable parents to take up or remain in work or to undertake education or training to assist them in obtaining work
  - to ensure local authorities undertake an assessment to childcare provision in their area to enable them to meet their duty to secure sufficient childcare for working parents
  - to provide information, advice and training to childcare providers, and prospective providers to ensure that local authorities give local childcare providers and would-be providers in their area the necessary support to help deliver sustainable affordable and high-quality childcare
  - general duty to improve the well-being of children under five and reduce inequalities, placing a duty on local authorities to improve the outcomes of all children under 5 and close the gaps between groups with the poorest outcomes and the rest by ensuring early years' services are accessible to all families.

- 2.2 A summary of the current early years provision in Shropshire is as follows:
- 106 group based childcare providers – nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools
  - 130 childminders
  - 20 registered out of school clubs
  - 75 primary and infant schools offering some form of nursery/childcare provision.

Compared to other local authority areas we have a higher proportion of private and voluntary provision than most areas.

The number of childminders has reduced significantly in the past 10 years – this is in line with national trends.

The number of group-based providers remains fairly constant, and we have seen the opening of a number of large (in Shropshire terms) new settings in recent years. The pandemic has had little impact on the overall number of childcare places across the county as a whole.

- 2.3 The current free entitlements for parents are:
- 570 hours of free early years provision each year for disadvantaged 2 year olds
  - 570 hours of free early years provision each year for all 3 and 4 year olds
  - an ‘extended’ 570 hours of free provision each year for 3 and 4 year olds from ‘working families’
  - EYPP for those children meeting FSM eligibility criteria
  - Disability Access Fund for those children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

The universal entitlement was increased from 475 hours to 570 hours around 15 years ago and, at the same time, providers were encouraged to offer parents as much flexibility as possible in terms of how they access the entitlement.

The 2 year old offer began around 10 years ago and the ‘extended’ three and four year old offer is now in its fourth year.

## **Report**

- 3.1 Current funding rates to providers:
- 2 year old provision funded at £5.23 per hour per child
  - 3 and 4 year old provision funded at £4.19 per hour per child
  - additional 60p per hour per child for those children eligible for EY pupil premium
  - Disability Access Fund of £900 per academic year
  - Additional funding agreed for those SEN children in need of extra support to access their entitlement.

We remain in the group of lowest funded local authority areas in the country. Indications are that rates will increase by only around 2% to 3% in 2022/23.

### 3.2 Current pressures on providers:

- recruitment and retention
- funding – hourly rates are not in line with increasing costs etc
- growing numbers of children presenting with developmental delay
- increase in thresholds and demand for access to specialist support services.

Providers across the country are highlighting recruitment as a major concern. High numbers of practitioners have left the sector over the past three years and rates of new people looking to begin a career in the sector have not picked up since the pandemic. Poor rates of pay and working conditions are generally the factors mentioned. It is clear that childcare is not a fashionable career choice for young people.

The majority of professional services are seeing increased demand and/or issues with recruitment which affects access to services at the moment. As a result childcare providers are having to take on a greater role in supporting children with higher levels of developmental delay until such time as they can be referred in to specialist services. This role also extends to offering higher levels of family support in relation to other areas affecting children and families at the moment.

### 3.3 Our main areas of work:

- CPD provision
- safeguarding training, advice and guidance
- 'business support'
- emergency intervention for those settings failing Ofsted inspection
- assessment of need for SEN children and provision of support to settings
- close working with colleagues in health to offer support to children and families.

We continue to offer a wide range of CPD across familiar and emerging areas of work. We charge for some provision now and are also no longer offering free or subsidised courses in area such as First Aid and Food Hygiene

We are also offering higher levels of support to settings to help meet the needs of those children with SEN which again reflects the pressures on specialist services.

We work closer than ever with health to offer support around areas such as oral hygiene and completion of 2 year old developmental checks for children.

#### 3.4 Current quality of settings:

- 97% of group based settings are good or outstanding
- 95% of childminders good or outstanding
- 90% of eligible 2 year olds accessing some part of their free entitlement

Despite the challenges the overall quality of provision in the county is good and compares well to other local authority areas.