

Early Years Update 24/25

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Summary

This paper details the updates that have taken place regarding early years provision and team structure in the past few months – highlighting how Shropshire is meeting its sufficiency duty. As well as updating Schools Forum on additional grant funding for 3 / 4-year-olds that will be passed on to settings.

Recommendation

Schools Forum are asked to consider, comment upon and approve the Local Authorities proposed plans for the use of the additional EY Budget Grant as set out below.

REPORT

1 Background

Over the past few months there have been some changes to the management structure of Early Years at Shropshire Council. These changes have allowed a greater focus to be put upon sufficiency and readiness in preparation for the expansion of the free child care offer to 30 hours for children of 9months+ for working families from September 2025.

2 Responsible officers:

The following officers have responsibility for sufficiency of places (including capital projects) and for the management of the Early Years Funding Budget:

1. Andy Nicholls – Education and Childcare Sufficiency Manager
2. Dan Steele – Senior Development Officer - Childcare and Sufficiency.



3 Readiness / Sufficiency

In order to meet our sufficiency duty, the Department for Education made capital grant payments to all local authorities – Shropshire was awarded £541 000. The approach that has been taken is that all settings (private, voluntary, independent and schools) who were interested in expanding their provision were asked to complete expressions of interest, these were then ranked according to identified need for spaces and value for money. Visits to settings have taken place and capital grants awarded – to date circa £400k has been awarded creating approximately 300 extra spaces. The latest information from the DfE suggests that there is a need in Shropshire to generate circa 400 new spaces by September 2025. We (and the DfE) are confident that our sufficiency duty will be met.

Current sufficiency data

When looking at current sufficiency data, Shropshire is better placed than most Local Authorities. We rank **first** in the West Midlands, **first** against our Statistical Neighbours and 3rd Nationally when examining the % of codes requested by parents compared to codes validated by providers. The latest figures are as follows (24.10.24):

All Ages

Shropshire - 92.56%
West Midlands – 88%
National -87%

Under 1s

Shropshire - 88.14%
West Midlands – 85%
National – 84%

1YOs

Shropshire - 93.06%
West Midlands – 89%
National – 88%

2YOs

Shropshire - 93.77%
West Midlands – 87%
National – 87%

This is an encouraging picture, however, as mentioned above there is a need to ensure that sufficient places are created and we are ready for the expansion of places – particularly the expansion of Under 1 and 1 year old provision.



Next Steps

Over the next few months, as well as continuing the capital expansion programme, officers will be examining ways of gathering local data in order to meet our sufficiency duty. There is a need to clearly understand the local provision picture by ward level as well as school place planning area level. This exercise will be undertaken alongside officers from other teams within the council as well as with officers from the DfE, Childcare Works and other LAs who have successfully completed this important piece of work.

4 Additional Early Years Budget Grant (EYBG)

It has recently been announced that Shropshire has been awarded an additional £1.4m to account for the uplift in the teachers pay award for 24/25. EYBG is to support early years providers who are delivering the government's early years entitlements with their costs, following the recent teachers pay award, for the period September 2024 to March 2025. It is expected that the full grant is passed onto providers – this equates to an additional 8p per hour for all 3 and 4 year olds – increasing the hourly rate to £5.03 per hour.

All other rates will stay the same as agreed at Schools Forum January 2024.

All rates will be reviewed, as current practice, once the new budget is announced for 25/26.

New Hourly Rates of Funding for 24/25

(Commencing September 2024- Paid retrospectively)

The new proposed funding rates are as follows:

Entitlement	Current 24/25 Rates	Increase	New 24/25 Rates
3&4 YO – both universal and extended	£4.95	+8p	£5.03
2YO – both disadvantaged and expanded	£6.90	No Change	£6.90
9 Month old from Sept 24	£9.05	No Change	£9.05

Schools Forum are asked to approve this increase and agree to backdating to September 2024.

