



London Borough
of Hounslow

Childcare Sufficiency Annual Report 2020

The Impact of Covid-19 on the Early Years and Childcare Sector in the London Borough of Hounslow

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Introduction

Regulations under the Childcare Act 2006 require local authorities to;-

- assess the local childcare market and work in partnership with childcare providers to influence the market place, in as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient childcare to enable parents to work, study or seek employment
- secure free early years provision for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds (570 hours a year over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year)
- secure the equivalent of 30 hours free childcare available for working parents
- report annually to elected Council members on how the duty to secure sufficient childcare is being met and make this report available and accessible to parents

For 2020 the statutory duties around childcare sufficiency need to be placed within the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic. This 2020 Childcare Sufficiency Report will necessarily take a different form from previous years as the impact of the pandemic is explored. The childcare market changed overnight in March 2020 when the first lockdown was announced and thereafter as the Government measures to manage the pandemic went through different phases.

This period was characterised by a significantly decreased demand for childcare being influenced and shaped by families changing needs and COVID anxieties. The desire for parents to keep their children safe, the increase in homeworking, part-time working, furlough and redundancies, all had an impact on the demand for childcare places.

The report reviews the impact of the pandemic on the demand for childcare during the various phases throughout the year. This includes the take up of the free childcare entitlements for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 3 & 4 year olds as well as fee paying places.

Critically the report describes the support provided for the most vulnerable children, which includes those with Special Educational Needs.

This report looks at the impact of the pandemic on the supply of childcare. The provision of childcare and early education was interrupted for many families during a period when early years settings were only allowed to open for vulnerable groups of children of key workers. Even when open for all children, places were restricted in some early years settings in order to comply with COVID risk assessments and the implementation of distancing between small groups of children. At other times settings had to temporarily close due to outbreaks of the virus impacting upon the availability of staff. Government Covid-19 restrictions were also put in place which limited access to childcare in out of school schemes such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday schemes. That there would have been an impact on working parents and outcomes for children is undeniable.

The report explores the significant financial impact upon private childcare providers and the threats to their future sustainability. This is inextricably linked to the future ability of the Council to meet the childcare sufficiency statutory duties.

The picture of future sufficiency of childcare cannot be divorced from the detrimental economic impact of the pandemic. Employment influences not only the need for childcare but also the ability to pay for childcare. In addition, increases in unemployment, or levels of income, can lead to greater eligibility for free entitlement childcare places for disadvantaged 2 year old children. In the context of the future sustainability of early years settings being fragile, securing sufficient places for this vulnerable group may lead to a challenge for the Council

This is a complex period on which to report. The impact of the pandemic is multi-faceted. This report spotlights the key issues that transpired throughout the year and highlights the future challenges for the Council.

Executive Summary

Childcare is important to the Council as:

- access to high quality early years provision improves educational and social outcomes for children, particularly for those in areas of deprivation and those with SEND
- early intervention in childcare settings not only supports children's outcomes and life chances, but also impacts positively on expenditure as costs increase to intervene as children get older.
- it is key in supporting the economy.

The Council is reliant on private childcare providers of early years provision to fully meet the statutory duties:

- to ensure there is sufficient childcare available to enable parents to take up or remain in work or to undertake education or training to assist them in obtaining work. This is also key in supporting economic recovery
- to secure early years provision free of charge (free entitlement places) for all eligible children:
 - 15 hours per week for all 3 & 4 year old children
 - 30 hours a week for 3 & 4 year old children in working households (within income thresholds)
 - 15 hours a week for disadvantaged 2 year olds.

Day nurseries, pre-schools and childminders typically offer 6312 childcare places for children aged 0 – 4 years old. Schools also play their part with approximately 2600 3 and 4 year old children accessing Nursery classes across the Borough

The annual childcare sufficiency report to Members has stated for a number of years that Hounslow has had sufficient childcare to meet demand and that statutory duties are being met. This position is threatened as a consequence of the pandemic.

The report reviews the impact of the pandemic on the supply and demand for childcare during the various phases throughout the year. This includes the take up of the free childcare entitlements for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 3 and 4 year olds as well as fee paying places.

The access to childcare changed overnight in March 2020 when the first lockdown was announced and continued thereafter as the Government measures to manage the pandemic went through different phases.

In the early stages, from March to May, all providers were asked to close, other than for vulnerable groups of children and those of key workers. From June to December early years providers were asked to open for all children and the majority of them did so.

Despite early years providers being open the year was characterised by a significantly decreased demand for childcare. This was influenced and shaped by families changing needs and COVID anxieties. The desire for parents to keep their children safe, the increase in homeworking, part-time working, furlough and redundancies, all had an impact on the demand for childcare places.

- From March to May providers were asked to close to all but vulnerable groups and children of key workers. Very few families sought a place. Throughout this period the maximum number of children taking up a place at any one time in a private early years setting was 100. The early years providers in Hounslow (not including school Nursery classes) offer approximately 6312 places.
- From 1 June 2020 schools and early years settings could open to all children and this remained the position until December 2020. However, the demand for places remained low. Just 643 children were reported to be attending early years provision. This number rose to 1702 by the end of July but, of the number of places typically available, this only equated to a 19% take up
- By the beginning of October, the number of children attending early years provision had increased to 4341. This was an increase of 2639 children from July but still only 48% take up of the 9000 typically available places for 0-4 year olds in day nurseries, pre-schools, school Nursery classes and with childminders.

A survey of day nurseries and pre-schools in October 2020 showed that although the number of children in early years private settings had increased since the summer the average occupancy, including fee paying and funded places, was 53% as opposed to 71% in 2019.

Despite providers clearly communicating their COVID safety measures, and a marketing campaign led by the Council, to encourage the take up of early years places take up remained lower than usual.

The reasons for parental reluctance to return to childcare were varied but included:

- parental confidence in the safety of their child and of the wider family
- the furlough scheme still being in place for parents negating the need for childcare or reduced salaries creating an inability to pay for childcare
- changes in employment status resulting in no need for childcare or inability to pay for childcare
- the proximity to the summer holidays when older children in the family would be off school resulting in parents preferring to wait until September to start their child in Nursery.

Impact on the take up of free entitlement places

In the initial stages the impact on the take up of free entitlement places was as marked as fee paying places. However, as time progressed, and most especially in the Autumn Term 2020, there was a notable increase in the take up of free entitlement places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds. The take up of fee paying places remained low.

Summary of ward analysis

A detailed analysis of take up of each free entitlement at ward level is provided below. The factors impacting on the changes in take up are complex due to the pandemic and in some way impact on all wards. However, there are 5 wards that the data highlights them as a cause for attention:

- Cranford
 - significant increase in families eligible for Universal Credit potentially leading to an increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places
 - significant decrease in take up of 15 and 30 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Feltham West
 - notable decreases in the take up of all three entitlements
- Heston Central
 - significant increase in families eligible for Universal Credit potentially leading to an increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places
 - notable decreases in the take up of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 15 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Hounslow Central
 - significant increase in families eligible for Universal Credit potentially leading to an increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places
 - notable decreases in the take up of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 15 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Isleworth
 - notable decreases in the take up of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 15 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds

Free entitlement places for disadvantaged 2 year olds

In December 2020 there were 83 children less accessing a disadvantaged 2 year old place than the previous Autumn Term in 2019. This total represented increased take up in some wards and decreased take up in other in wards. The wards with a decrease in take up over 10 children were:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| • Isleworth | -19 |
| • Hounslow Central | -17 |
| • Osterley and Spring Grove | -16 |
| • Syon | -14 |
| • Heston Central | -12 |
| • Feltham West | -10 |

The distribution of eligible children across wards had changed from Autumn 2019 to Autumn 2020, thus impacting on the percentage take up of places in each ward. This was most notable in Heston West and Hanworth with increases of 20 and 41 eligible children respectively. This impacted upon the percentage take up in each ward

which is illustrated on pages 29 and 30. In Autumn 2020 16 out of 20 wards had a take up figure below 70% This compares to only 7 wards having a take up of less than 70% in December 2019.

Data for December 2020 revealed a sharp increase in the number of families accessing Universal Credit. The largest increases were in Cranford and Hounslow Heath, as shown in the table on page 30. This is very likely to impact on the number of children eligible for the disadvantaged 2 year old free entitlement offer. Securing sufficient places could present a challenge for the Council.

There was a drop in the percentage of eligible disadvantaged 2 years olds accessing a free entitlement place from 74% in Autumn 19 to 65% in Autumn 2020. A November 2020 DfE survey shows that this was a national issue. Hounslow compared favourably with the take up in statistical neighbours and was ranked first with a take up at the time of 60%. The average National take up was 69%.

15 hour entitlement for all 3 and 4 year olds

In December 2019, the numbers of children accessing a 3 and 4 year old 15 hour place in a Hounslow setting represented 86% of those who were eligible. In December 2020, the take up of 15 hours places by 3 and 4 year olds decreased by 5% to 81%. Typically each year a number of children access their free entitlement in neighbouring Boroughs so the percentage take up is likely to be higher than 81%.

The number of eligible children stayed broadly the same but 517 less children were accessing a place. 12 wards had a decrease of 20 or more children accessing a place, as illustrated on page 32. Some wards had a decrease of over 40 children accessing a place. These are noted below with the overall percentage take up in brackets:

- Cranford (91%)
- Feltham West (83%)
- Heston Central (88%)
- Hounslow Central (92%)
- Isleworth (92%)
- Turnham Green (84%)

There were 4 wards that had a notably low take up. Historically these wards have a high take up of places in early years settings out of borough. The data for 2019 out of borough take up is noted in brackets.

- Brentford - 63% take up (2019 - an additional 6% take up out of borough)
- Chiswick Homefields - 50% take up (2019 - an additional 15% out of borough)
- Hanworth - 64% take up (2019 - an additional 23% take up out of borough)
- Hounslow South - 45% (2019 - an additional 14% take up out of borough)

30 hour free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds from some working families

There were from 819 children accessing a place in December 2020 compared to 712 in December 2019. This is an increase of 107 children. More children were

accessing a 30 hour place in 14 wards. In 3 wards there was a notable decrease in the number of children accessing a place which were:

- Cranford
- Feltham West
- Hounslow Heath

Decreases in the take up of places may be attributable to parental COVID anxiety but as eligibility for the 30 hour offer is linked to employment this may also be a contributory factor.

The December picture for the take up of free entitlement places in some respects was positive as the numbers had increased significantly compared to earlier stages of the pandemic.

However, there had undoubtedly been a large number of children not accessing vital early years education for periods of time throughout the year. The reason for non-attendance throughout the pandemic were complex and multi layered. Whatever the reasons, it is known that access to high quality early years provision impacts on outcomes at 5 years old and on future life chances, most significantly for children with Special Educational Needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ensuring appropriate support to prevent long term consequences for this group of children will be a key challenge for the Council.

Impact on working families

The provision of childcare and early education was interrupted for many families. In the early stages this was as a result of early years settings being only allowed to open for vulnerable groups of children of key workers.

However, this interruption continued for some families even when early years settings were open for all children. Sometimes places were restricted in some early years settings in order to comply with COVID risk assessments and the implementation of distancing between small groups of children. At other times settings had to temporarily close due to outbreaks of the virus which impacted upon the availability of staff. That there would have been an impact on working parents and outcomes for children is undeniable.

Government Covid-19 restrictions were also put in place which limited access to childcare in out of school settings such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday schemes. Pre-pandemic, many working parents were reliant on this type of provision to meet their childcare needs outside of the school day. It is difficult to predict whether the change to working patterns during the pandemic will become established new ways of working in the future. This in turn creates a challenge in assessing future demand for out of school settings and indeed the impact this may have on their sustainability.

Sustainability

The majority of private childcare providers are small businesses with limited cash flow and as such can withstand little financial turbulence

Private childcare providers secure income through charging fees for childcare places and through government funding for free entitlement places for 2, 3 and 4 year old children. With the initial enforced partial or total closure much of their income stream abruptly halted, and yet many costs remained constant. This created a significant financial challenge for providers with many reporting concerns about their future viability.

Despite access to government business support schemes and some protection for the payment for free entitlement places many providers reported financial fragility.

A survey of day nurseries and pre-schools revealed that as a consequence of the first lockdown:

- 60% of providers (40/67) had accrued debts
- 69% of providers (46 /67) expected to operate at a loss over the next 6 months
- 51% of providers (34/67) were considering redundancies

The impact was greater in some wards which is explored on pages 13. More early years providers in areas of deprivation predicted that they were vulnerable to closure than those in areas with lower levels of deprivation.

Income streams for providers continued to be detrimentally affected with take up being lower than usual through to December. This was especially so for fee paying places.

This significant financial impact on private early years providers and has undoubtedly created a threat to their future sustainability. This in turn threatens the ability of the Council to meet the statutory duties in relation to the provision of sufficient childcare and could become a key challenge for the Council

Vulnerable Groups

Children in the DfE category of being vulnerable, including those children with SEND were well supported by the Council. Hounslow Early Years Teams were agile in their response and ensured close monitoring of the children to support their continued learning and development and their safety. Parents were supported through regular contact and with practical support so that they could best support their child at home. This does not negate the impact for many of missing out on vital early years experiences.

January 2021 onwards

The future sustainability of early years settings is the key issue for the Council. This is inextricably linked to the delivery of the statutory duties of the Council in relation to securing sufficient childcare, including the free childcare entitlements.

This is particularly pertinent in relation to the likely increased eligibility for free entitlement childcare places for disadvantaged 2 year old children. As a result of the

pandemic the number of children living in low income or workless households has increased significantly which will impact on eligibility. This will be in areas of higher deprivation where early years providers are more vulnerable to closure. Sufficiency of childcare places in this context is likely to be a key challenge for the Council. The position is exacerbated by a future possible financial threat of cuts to the hourly rate for free entitlement places. This may transpire as a consequence of low take up figures on the January 2021 census informing the grant from central Government to the Council. If these cuts become reality this could have a devastating impact on the sustainability of the early years sector and potential closures.

With the need for economic recovery, there is also the need for the childcare opportunities for parents to be available. Ensuring sufficiency and supporting the childcare sector over the coming months and years will be challenging and there are many unknowns. It is complex to plan for demand when the impact of the pandemic on future working patterns and employment is yet to become clear.

There were undoubtedly a large number of children that did not access vital early years education for periods of time. The reason for non-attendance throughout the pandemic were complex and multi layered. This included parental COVID anxiety and employment related issues. Critically, whatever the reasons, it is known that access to high quality early years provision impacts on outcomes at 5 years old and on future life chances, most significantly for children with Special Educational Needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ensuring appropriate support to prevent long term consequences for this group of children will be a key challenge for the Council.

This is a national issue. The early years sector is lobbying central Government to address funding issues to support future sustainability.

Despite these pressures and challenges early years providers value the support that they receive from the Hounslow Early Years and Childcare Service. They do remain committed to working in partnership with the Council.

Impact of the pandemic on the future sustainability of early years providers

The Council is dependent on private early years providers to meet statutory duties to secure sufficient childcare including:

- to assess the local childcare market and work in partnership with childcare providers to influence the market place, in as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that there is sufficient childcare to enable parents to work, study or seek employment
- to secure free early years provision for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds (570 hours a year over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year)
- to secure the equivalent of 30 hours free childcare available for working parents.

Private early years providers include day nurseries, pre-schools and childminders. In Hounslow there are 99 day nurseries and pre-schools and 180 childminders. These early years providers offer approximately 6312 childcare places for children aged 0 – 4 years old. The number of providers and childcare places offered has been relatively stable for a number of years.

The pandemic had, and continues to have, a significant financial impact on private early years providers and has created a threat to their future sustainability, which could lead to closures. This in turn threatens the ability of the Council to meet the statutory duties in relation to the provision of sufficient childcare.

The majority of early years providers are small businesses with limited cash flow and as such can withstand little financial turbulence. The pandemic has created significant financial turbulence and has resulted in an early years sector that is extremely financially fragile. This is a local and National issue.

Early years providers source of income is from the childcare places that they offer. This income is either from fees determined by the provider and sourced directly from parents or through Government funded free entitlement childcare places. There is a fixed hourly rate payment for places for disadvantaged 2 year olds, all 3 and 4 year olds and additional free hours for 3 and 4 year olds from working families. Each free entitlement offers 15 hours of childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year.

Throughout the pandemic there has been a significant impact on the take up of childcare places. This was most significantly so during the early stages when all providers were asked to close, other than for vulnerable groups of children and those of key workers. Despite increasing demand since that initial period, over all the take up has remained lower than usual. This has created considerable financial pressures for early years providers.

There were four key periods of time during this reporting year in which the pandemic impacted upon the financial sustainability of early years providers.

- **23 March 2020 – 31 May 2020**
 - all providers were required to close other than to key groups of children
- **1 June 2020 – 31 August 2020**
 - all providers were asked to open, but the take up of places was very low
- **1 September 2020 – 31 December 2020**
 - all providers remained open. Take up was lower than usual
- **January 2021**
 - early years providers remained open during the second National lockdown

23 March – 31 May 2020

Take up of places

As part of the Government's ongoing response to Covid-19 it was announced that from Friday 20 March 2020, all schools and childcare providers would close until further notice except for children of key / critical workers and vulnerable children. Children who did not fall into those groups were asked to remain at home with appropriate care.

Very few key worker children or vulnerable children sought a place. The Council undertook weekly monitoring to ascertain how many children were taking up a childcare place. Not all providers responded each week but enough to gauge the impact on take up.

Throughout this period the maximum number of children taking up a place at any one time in a private early years setting was 100. The early years providers in Hounslow (not including school Nursery classes) offer approximately 6312 places.

For many early years settings just one or two children were seeking a place, or none at all. Consequently, despite the desire of early years providers to remain open, it was not financially viable for many to do so. 10 of the 99 day nurseries and pre-schools remained open and 47 of the 180 childminders remained open.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) made it clear that charges to parents for full fees or retainers during the closure period were not acceptable. This resulted in an income flow ceasing.

There was some income protection in relation to free entitlement funding for 2, 3 and 4 year old children. All providers received a payment for the Summer term (April to August) which was based on a 'normal' level of attendance. This gave early years providers some protection but this did not compensate for their biggest financial challenge, which was the reduction in income from parent paid fees.

Early years providers could access some Government financial support, and this included:

- The **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)** for employees who were not working the government contributed 80% of each worker's wages of up to £2,500, backdated to 1 March 2020.
- A **business rates holiday** for one year from 1 April 2020 (this did not apply to all childcare providers, only those that paid business rates) Hounslow Council ensured that all early years providers that were eligible accessed this financial support.
- Small Business Grant Fund - Small businesses in England that were in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief were told they could be eligible for a cash grant of £10,000 to help meet their ongoing business costs.
- The **Business Interruption Loan Scheme** became interest-free for 12 months (rather than 6).
- **The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs)** - enabled smaller businesses to access finance more quickly during the coronavirus outbreak.

Hounslow Council provided financial support to early years providers in relation to rent relief for those in Council owned buildings and included a:

- change in payment terms
- rent free period
- temporary rent reduction

This impacted upon 33 / 99 early years providers.

Financial position of early years providers

To support the Council in better understanding the financial impact of the forced partial closures, and total closure for many, day nurseries and pre-schools were asked to complete a survey. The response rate to the survey was 67 / 99 providers. These responses clearly demonstrated that the financial impact was significant.

The survey responses revealed that as a consequence of partial or full closure during lock down:

- 60% of providers (40/67) had accrued debts
- 69% of providers (46 /67) expected to operate at a loss over the next 6 months
- 51% of providers (34/67) were considering redundancies.

When asked to predict how likely they would still be operating by June 2021

- 45% of providers (30/67) thought it very likely
- 43% (29/67) thought it somewhat likely
- 12% (8/67) thought it unlikely.

The future financial vulnerability predicted by early years providers is captured in the table below. This shows the number of early years providers within each planning area that predicted that they were 'very likely' to still be in business in 12 months' time - June 2021.

Locality Area	No. of providers very likely to be open in June 2021
West	4 out of 14 providers (29%)
Osterley & Spring Grove	5 out of 16 providers (31%)
Central Hounslow	5 out of 10 providers (50%)
Chiswick	9 out 14 providers (64%)
Heston & Cranford	7 out of 9 providers (78%)

Ward level data revealed some links between the early years providers predictions about future sustainability and geographical locations. More providers in areas of deprivation predicted that they would not be operating in June 2021 than those in areas of less deprivation.

**(IDACI)
Indicator Value**

24.0 - 25.9%
20.0 - 23.9%
13.0 - 19.9%
10.1 - 12.9%
Less than 10%

Greatest number of children living in poverty



Lowest number of children living in poverty

Index of Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI)	Number of providers predicting 'very likely' to be still being in operation by June 2021
20% - 26%	4 / 15 (27%)
13% - 19.9%	12 / 23 (52%)
0% - 12.9%	14 / 25 (56%)

These predictions are captured in more detail in the table below. This represents 67 of the 99 day nurseries and pre-schools that responded. The Council does not have access to the early years providers business accounts so these predications are not moderated. However, they do give insight into the vulnerability of the sufficiency of childcare at ward level and highlights:

- the level of impact on financial sustainability
- the mixed picture across the Borough
- the links between financial vulnerability and deprivation.

None of the early years providers that responded in Hanworth, Isleworth and Hanworth Park predicted that they would be open in June 2021.

		Likelihood of still being in operation by 2021									
		Very likely									
		Somewhat likely									
		Somewhat unlikely									
		Very unlikely									
Level of Deprivation IDACI 2019	Ward area	Total no. of day nurseries & pre-schools in each ward	Response from each setting in the ward								Very likely to be operating in June 2021
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
25.5%	Hanworth	4									0%
20%	Bedfont	5									50%
19.4%	Feltham West	4									67%
17.4%	Feltham North	1	No response								
16.6%	Hanworth Park	6									0%
25.6%	Brentford	8									50%
22.2%	Isleworth	7									0%
17.8%	Syon	9									25%
11.4%	Osterley & Spring Gr.	6									50%
16.2%	Hounslow Heath	3									67%
14.6%	Hounslow West	1									100%
12.6%	Hounslow Central	6									20%
7.2%	Hounslow South	1	No response								
12.8%	Turnham Green	9									72%
10.2%	Chiswick Riverside	5									66%
9.8%	Chiswick Homefields	7									50%
22.2%	Heston West	2	No response								
19%	Cranford	4									100%
17%	Heston East	7									50%
15.8%	Heston Central	4									67%

Re-opening of provision to all children from 1 June 2020

On 12 May, the Government announced that schools and early years settings could open to all children from 1 June 2020 and they were encouraged to welcome back as many children as possible.

This was welcomed by childcare providers. However, there were cost implications of implementing a COVID secure risk assessment which was a requirement for their opening. These included costs for enhanced cleaning, purchasing PPE and cover for staff COVID related absences. This added another financial burden at a time when financial pressures were already in existence.

The Council continued weekly monitoring to ascertain how many children were taking up a childcare place. Not all providers responded each week but enough to gauge the impact on take up. Throughout this period the maximum number of children taking up a place in a private early years setting at any one time was 1515. Whilst a significant increase since the first lockdown period this still represents very low take up. The early years providers in Hounslow (not including school Nursery classes), offer approximately 6312 places.

Income streams for providers continued to be detrimentally affected. Despite providers clearly communicating their COVID safety measures, and a marketing campaign led by the Council to encourage the take up of early years places, the demand for places was very low.

The reasons for parental reluctance to return to childcare were varied but included:

- parental confidence in the safety of their child and of the wider family
- the furlough scheme still being in place for parents negating the need for childcare or reduced salaries creating an inability to pay for childcare
- changes in employment status resulting in no need for childcare or inability to pay for childcare
- the proximity to the summer holidays when older children in the family would be off school resulting in parents preferring to wait until September to start their child in Nursery.

Early years providers were reporting the continuation of financial pressures because of continued low take up of places, and therefore low income.

1 September – 31 December 2020

Many providers were anxious about sustainability during the Autumn term. Their business models are based on full occupancy during the Summer term which enables a profit to cover lower occupancy in the Autumn. Low occupancy in Autumn is due to many children transferring to school in September. Occupancy takes time to build up again throughout the Autumn term. Occupancy had, of course, been extremely low in the summer leading to no reserves to pay for maintaining staffing levels and to cover other costs which remained constant.

It was recognised by the DfE that the childcare market was extremely vulnerable, and it was apparent that the 2020 Autumn term was highly likely to continue with a low take up of childcare places. To offer a level of financial protection to early years providers it was determined by the DfE that funding for free entitlement childcare places would match their previous 2019 Autumn term funding claims, as a minimum.

Early years providers were asked to submit their funding claims for the Autumn 2020 which were compared to their Autumn 2019 claim. Additional payments were made to those providers who had lower numbers than they would have claimed for in 'normal' times.

The Autumn term funding claims gave an insight into the actual number of children accessing childcare places. It revealed a continued low take up of places for 52% of providers who had a lower take up than the previous Autumn.

Without the financial protection many early years providers would have faced a reduction in income, for many a substantial amount. Early years providers fed back to the Council that without this protection that they would have had to permanently close their setting.

The impact on income for free entitlement places would have varied as demonstrated by the figures below:

- **3 and 4 year olds**

50 / 95 providers claimed for less take up hours. The reduction in the funding claims for individual providers, without financial protection, would have ranged from £1,071 to £36,139

- **2 year olds**

43 / 89 providers claimed for less take up hours. The reduction in the funding claims for individual providers, without financial protection, would have ranged from £119 to £24,312.

The position across the Borough was varied with 48% of providers having a take up of places that was in line with what would have been expected pre-pandemic or indeed higher.

Financial position of early years providers at the end of October 2020

To support the Council in better understanding the financial position of providers, in October 2020 pre-schools and day nurseries were asked to complete a survey. 88 out of 99 early years providers responded to the survey.

Early years providers were asked to predict the balance of income versus outgoings over the next 6 months. This was before the second lock down in January 2021 was announced and therefore their responses were likely to be more positive than if they had asked the same question after the announcement had been made.

	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan-Mar 2021
Income will be more than outgoings	9%	10%	20%
Income will be about the same as outgoings	24%	26%	49%
Income will be less than outgoings	67%	63%	30%

Day nursery and pre-school providers were also asked in the event of another local or National Lockdown, if they were required to close to all but key worker and vulnerable children, the likelihood that they could remain financially viable, and reopen again afterwards. Whilst this enforced partial closure did not transpire in

Lockdown 2 the responses did reveal a high level of vulnerability. In addition, whilst not required to close during the second lockdown there was a detrimental impact on the take up of places.

Locality Area	Number of providers likely or somewhat likely to remain open following a further lockdown
West	1 out of 17 providers (6%)
Osterley & Spring Grove	1 out of 11 providers (9%)
Central Hounslow	0 out of 10 providers (0%)
Chiswick	1 out of 28 providers (4%)
Heston & Cranford	1 out of 20 providers (5%)

Out of 87 early years providers who responded 34 (39%) said it was 'very unlikely' that they would remain financially viable, and reopen again afterwards, if they were required to close to all but key worker and vulnerable children. The impact in relation to areas of deprivation are in the table below.

Index of Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI)	Number of providers predicting 'very unlikely' to remain financially viable and re-open again afterwards if there was another lockdown
20% – 26%	7 / 22 (32%)
13% – 19.9%	15 / 33 (45%)
0% - 12.9%	12 / 32 (38%)

The predicted impact of a further lockdown was varied across the Borough.

*Level of deprivation	Ward area	Likelihood of remaining open following a further lockdown									Very likely or somewhat likely to remain open following a further lockdown
		Response from each setting in the ward									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
25.5	Hanworth										25%
20	Bedfont										75%
19.4	Feltham West										50%
17.4	Feltham North	No response									
16.6	Hanworth Park										17%
25.6	Brentford										50%

The impact of this on individual providers was not known at the time of this report being written as the January 2021 funding claims had not been processed

There was a continuation of Government financial support that could be accessed by early years providers. Many reported that while grateful for this support they were still operating at a loss.

The Government financial support included:

- the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) which was extended until the end of April 2021 (up to 80% of current salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500).
- the Business Interruption Loan Scheme would be interest-free for 12 months, an increase from 6 months
- an extension of the self-employment Income Support Scheme for those (including childminders) who were self-employed or members of a partnership and have lost profits due to coronavirus (Covid-19)
- for the self-employed (including childminders), the minimum income floor was also temporarily relaxed, meaning Universal Credit could be accessed at a rate to match statutory sick pay (SSP)

In January 2021, both locally and nationally, the early years sector continued to report extreme financial vulnerability.

Increases in deprivation and the future impact on childcare sufficiency

In Hounslow the pandemic led to a significant detrimental impact on employment. This is reflected in the increased number of families claiming Universal Credit for which the eligibility relates to unemployment or low income.

This will undoubtedly impact on the childcare market. It is extremely likely to lead to a decrease in the demand for fee paying childcare places as families enter worklessness or lower income leads to an inability to pay for childcare. The risk is that this will lead to closure of childcare businesses.

Conversely, as accessing Universal Credit can give eligibility for the disadvantaged 2 year old free entitlement, there is likely to be an increase in the number of eligible children. There is a risk in relation to the survival of childcare businesses to offer these places. As illustrated earlier in this section of the report, early years providers in areas of deprivation report a higher degree of financial vulnerability than those in less deprived areas of the Borough. This is further exacerbated in the context of 68 / 81 providers reporting that the 2 year old funding rate for a free entitlement place does not cover costs.

This impact will be more significant in some wards as the increases in the percentage of children living in low income households is not consistent across the Borough.

IDACI measures the proportion of children living in income deprived families. The table below shows the current published IDACI figures using 2019 data and also the estimated increases for 2020.

The wards with the highest estimated increase in the percentage of children living in low income households are:

- Hounslow West – a 20% point increase
- Hounslow Heath – a 19% point increase
- Cranford – an 18% point increase
- Hounslow Central – an 18% point increase
- Heston Central – a 17% point increase

The wards with the estimated highest percentage of children living in low income households are:

- Cranford 37%
- Hounslow Heath 35%
- Hounslow West 35%
- Brentford 34%
- Hounslow Central 34%

IDACI represents the percentage of children in an area living in low income households and therefore represents a scale of deprivation within an area.

Ward	IDACI 2019	Ward	Estimated IDACI 2020	Estimated % point increase
Brentford	26%	Cranford	37%	18%
Hanworth	26%	Hounslow Heath	35%	19%
Heston West	22%	Hounslow West	35%	20%
Isleworth	22%	Brentford	34%	8%
Bedfont	20%	Hounslow Central	34%	18%
Cranford	19%	Hanworth	33%	7%
Feltham West	19%	Heston Central	33%	17%
Syon	18%	Heston East	33%	16%
Heston East	17%	Bedfont	31%	11%
Feltham North	17%	Feltham North	31%	14%
Hanworth Park	17%	Heston West	31%	9%
Hounslow Heath	16%	Isleworth	30%	8%
Hounslow Central	16%	Syon	30%	12%
Heston Central	16%	Hanworth Park	30%	13%
Hounslow West	15%	Feltham West	26%	7%
Turnham Green	13%	Osterley & Spr. Gr.	21%	10%
Osterley & Spring Gr.	11%	Hounslow South	20%	13%
Chiswick Riverside	10%	Turnham Green	13%	0%
Chiswick Homefields	10%	Chiswick R.side	12%	2%
Hounslow South	7%	Chiswick H.fields	10%	0%

National Picture

The low take up of childcare places throughout the pandemic was both a local and national issue.

The data in the table below is published by the DfE and sourced from weekly surveys completed by each Local Authority and represents the take up of places in school Nursery classes and in early years settings. It is known that the data for Hounslow is not robust as not all providers responded each week. However, it does serve to demonstrate that the low take up of childcare places was a national issue but lower in Hounslow.

Date	Take up of places national average %	Hounslow % take up of places	Hounslow attendance number of children
23 April 2020	5%	1%	121
16 July 2020	25%	19%	1702
8 October 2020	58%	48%	4341

There is no comparative data for the percentage take up of places at a local authority level so it is not possible to compare take up with statistical neighbours or London Boroughs. The table below does demonstrate that the number of settings open in Hounslow compares favourably to other west London boroughs. This indicates that overall the low take up of places was due to demand for places rather than the supply of places.

The data also shows the increase of the take up of places in Hounslow from April 2020 to October 2020, although still low overall as the total number of places available is approximately 9000.

23-Apr-20	Total no. of settings in LA	No. of settings open	% of settings open	Total no. of children in settings	Total no. of vulnerable children in settings
Hillingdon	420	173	41%	408	26
Hounslow	318	100	31%	121	12
H&F	194	55	28%	105	19
Brent	384	94	24%	175	10
Richmond	333	43	13%	135	9
Ealing	821	27	3%	51	11

16-Jul-20	Total no. of settings in LA	No. of settings open	% of settings open	Total no. of children in settings	Total no. of vulnerable children in settings
Hillingdon	416	274	66%	2006	97
Hounslow	329	197	60%	1702	62
Brent	384	210	55%	1270	73
H&F	198	100	51%	986	53
Richmond	333	105	32%	1652	32
Ealing	592	183	31%	916	89

08-Oct-20	Total no. of settings in LA	No. of settings open	% of settings open	Total no. of children in settings	Total no. of vulnerable children in settings
Hounslow	332	319	96%	4341	74
Brent	322	271	84%	2293	72
Hillingdon	416	326	78%	4689	138
H&F	189	142	75%	2276	141
Ealing	369	272	74%	1127	40
Richmond	326	113	35%	2284	44

Lobbying Government for financial support

The financial fragility of the early years sector is a national issue.

Early years organisations, childcare providers and local authorities are all lobbying Government on the financial issues early years providers have faced and are continuing to face due to the impact of the COVID pandemic. In January 2021, leading early years organisations issued a joint call for urgent steps to be taken to protect the financial sustainability of early years settings. The Early Years Alliance, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) and the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) called on the government to:

- reinstate early entitlement funding support for settings who have been forced to close or have seen a fall in the demand for funded places
- introduce targeted funding for providers reliant on private income who have suffered from falls in parental demand.

Early years organisations and providers also regularly call for the early years entitlement funding rates to be reviewed. For many early years providers, the funding rate they receive for children eligible to receive a free entitlement place, is less than their private hourly rate. This has been a major concern for many years. Providers also assert that any increase in the funding rate is not aligned with increases in costs such as rises in the national living and minimum wages, business

rates and utilities costs. This leads to the funding gap increasing year on year. These concerns have been exacerbated as a consequence of the pandemic and the extra costs incurred in order to implement necessary protective measures.

Early years organisations and providers are asking the Government to invest more funding in the early years sector to ensure it covers the cost of delivery and include a year on year uplift in funding to support nurseries sustainability.

Potential future financial threat to early years providers sustainability

A future financial threat to the early years providers relates to the Council's income grant that funds the free entitlement childcare places in early years settings and could lead to reduced hourly rates for free entitlement places in 2022 / 2023.

In 2020/21 provision for 3 and 4 year olds was funded at £5.53 per hour and £6.00 per hour for disadvantaged 2 year olds. The Council pays a deprivation supplement of £0.27 per hour. An SEN Inclusion Fund is available to fund additional support for children with SEN attending early years provision.

For 2021/22 the Council has received a funding allocation of £22.6M for the Early Years DSG block. This is based on DfE assumptions about the demand for provision in Hounslow in 2021/22. This has enabled the Council to increase its hourly rates to be paid to providers to £5.59 for 3 and 4 year olds and £6.08 for disadvantaged 2 year olds. The deprivation supplement of £0.27 per hour and the SEN Inclusion Fund have been maintained at the same levels for 2021/22.

However, it is important to note that the current 2021/22 Early Years DSG funding allocation is based on the January 2020 schools census data and this is due to be revised by the DfE in July 2021 using the January 2021 census data. It is considered likely that the January 2021 census numbers will be lower than the January 2020 census numbers, due to the impact of the pandemic and in particular the high number of coronavirus cases at the time of the January 2021 census. If this is the case, this could lead to a significant claw back of funding which could in turn force the Council into reducing its hourly rates for free entitlement places in 2022/2023.

In the current context, cuts to the hourly rate for free entitlement places could have a devastating impact on the early years sector and the sufficiency of childcare places.

Key issues and challenges for 2021

1. The Council is dependent on private early years providers to meet the statutory duties to secure sufficient childcare, including access to free entitlement places for 2, 3 & 4 year old children.
2. The pandemic resulted in a significant reduction in the number of childcare places taken up by families. This had a significant financial impact on private early years providers and has created a threat to their future sustainability. This in turn threatens the ability of the Council to meet the statutory duties in relation to the provision of sufficient childcare.

3. More early years providers in areas of deprivation predicted that they were vulnerable to closure than those in areas with lower levels of deprivation.
4. As a result of the pandemic the number of children living in low income or workless households has increased significantly. This is likely to lead to increased eligibility for free entitlement childcare places for disadvantaged 2 year old children. This will be in areas of higher deprivation where early years providers are more vulnerable to closure. Sufficiency of childcare places in this context is likely to be a key challenge for the Council.
5. A future financial threat to the early years providers relates to the Council's income grant that funds the free entitlement childcare places in early years settings. Due to a low take up of childcare places recorded on the January 2021 census the grant may be reduced. This could lead to reduced hourly rates for free entitlement places in 2022 / 2023. In the current context, cuts to the hourly rate for free entitlement places could have a devastating impact on the sustainability of the early years sector and potential closures. This in turn will threaten the Council's ability to secure sufficient childcare places.
6. Closure of childcare settings may come at a time when childcare is critical to economic recovery.
7. If closures of early years providers becomes widespread a return to being sufficient should demand increase to pre pandemic levels will not be swift.
8. This is a national issue. The early years sector is lobbying central Government to address funding issues to support future sustainability.

Sufficiency of childcare places

The 2019 Childcare Sufficiency Report noted that childcare sufficiency had been maintained throughout the Borough and this remained so for the first 3 months of 2020.

In March 2020 the childcare market changed overnight with the announcement of the partial closure of all early years settings as the first lockdown began. The Government measures to manage the pandemic went through various phases with each change impacting on both the supply and demand of childcare. The 2020 Childcare Sufficiency Report therefore necessarily takes a different form from previous years as the impact of the pandemic upon supply and demand of childcare is reviewed.

Throughout the year the supply of childcare places was dominated by Government directives to manage the pandemic which required either the partial opening or full opening of early years settings. When allowed to open for all children, mandatory protective measures to offer a COVID secure environment sometimes impacted upon the number of places that could be offered. The requirement, for example, to work in small 'bubbles' of children impacted on the number of places offered by some as this was dependent on the layout and size of their premises to accommodate the distancing of the small groups.

The demand for childcare places throughout the pandemic was consistently lower than usual. The lack of demand was characterised by COVID related parental anxiety as well as changes to employment patterns, such as working at home, or employment changes such as furlough or redundancies.

There were three key periods during the year which impacted upon supply and demand.

23 March 2020 – 31 May 2020

During this period of time all early years providers were required to close except for children of key / critical workers and vulnerable children.

Very few key worker children or vulnerable children sought a place. The Council undertook weekly monitoring to ascertain how many children were taking up a childcare place. Not all providers responded each week but enough to gauge the impact on take up.

The maximum number of children reported to have taken up a place at an early years setting at any one time during this period was 121. This included in school nursery classes. Early years providers and schools in Hounslow typically offer approximately 9000 places for 0-4 year olds.

1 June 2020 – August 2021

The Government announced that schools and early years settings could open to all children from 1 June 2020 and they were encouraged to welcome back as many children as possible.

All schools opened. 96 of the 99 pre-schools and day nurseries opened. Childminders started to re-open gradually but did not always respond to the weekly survey to inform the Council. The highest number who informed the Council they were open during this period was 101 out of 177.

Despite providers clearly communicating their COVID safety measures, and a marketing campaign led by the Council to encourage the take up of early years places, the demand for places was very low.

The Council continued weekly monitoring to ascertain how many children were taking up a childcare place and although not all providers responded each week there was sufficient to gauge the impact on take up. Just 643 children were reported to be attending early years provision at the beginning of June. This number rose to 1702 by the end of the Summer term but, of the number of places typically available, this only equated to a 19% take up.

The reasons for parental reluctance to return their child to childcare included:

- parental confidence in the safety of their child and of the wider family
- the furlough scheme still being in place for parents negating the need for childcare or reduced salaries creating an inability to pay for childcare
- changes in employment status resulting in no need for childcare or inability to pay for childcare
- the proximity to the summer holidays when older children in the family would be off school resulting in parents preferring to wait until September to start their child in Nursery.

September 2020 - December 2020

During this period all school and early years setting were still allowed to open for all children.

All schools opened. 96 of the 99 pre-schools and day nurseries opened. Childminders did not always respond to the weekly survey to inform the Council. The highest number who informed the Council they were open during this period was 174 out of 181.

By the beginning of October, the number of children attending schools and early years settings had increased to 4341. This was an increase of 2639 children from July but still only 48% take up of the 9000 typically available places for 0-4 year olds.

A survey of day nurseries and pre-schools in October 2020 showed that although the number of children in early years private settings had increased since the summer the average occupancy, including fee paying and funded places, was 53% as

opposed to 71% in 2019. The Autumn term occupancy is always low, as many children transfer to school Nursery classes in September and occupancy builds up during the term but take up in October 2020 was significantly lower than usual.

The level of occupancy levels reported by early years providers through the survey varied:

Number of Providers	Full
12	less than 30% full
20	less than 50% full
19	less than 60% full
11	less than 70% full
11	less than 80% full

Whilst occupancy overall remained low there was a notable increase the take up of free entitlement places. The take up of the free entitlements was increasing faster than the take up of fee paying places.

By December 2020 the difference in the take up of free entitlement places compared to the pre-pandemic Autumn 2019 take up was no longer so marked.

Disadvantaged 2 year olds

83 less children were accessing a place in Autumn 2020 compared to Autumn 2019. This is a decrease of 9% in the take up rate which reduced from 74% to 65%.

3 & 4 year old universal 15 hour entitlement

517 less children were accessing a place in Autumn 2020 compared to Autumn 2019. This is a decrease of 5% in the take up rate which reduced from 86% to 81%.

3 & 4 year old additional 15 hour entitlement for some working families (30 hours in total)

819 children were accessing a place in Autumn 2020 which is a 107 increase compared to Autumn 2019. We do not have access to eligibility numbers.

Summary of ward analysis

A detailed analysis of take up of each free entitlement at ward level is provided below. The factors impacting on the changes in take up are complex due to the pandemic and in some way impact on all wards. However, there are 5 wards that the data highlights them as a cause for attention:

- Cranford
 - significant increase in families eligible for Universal Credit potentially leading to an increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places

- significant decrease in take up of 15 and 30 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Feltham West
 - notable decreases in the take up of all three entitlements
- Heston Central
 - significant increase in families eligible for Universal Credit potentially leading to an increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places
 - notable decreases in the take up of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 15 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Hounslow Central
 - significant increase in families eligible for Universal Credit potentially leading to an increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places
 - notable decreases in the take up of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 15 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Isleworth
 - notable decreases in the take up of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds and 15 hour places for 3 and 4 year olds

Ward analysis of the take up of free entitlement places for disadvantaged 2 year olds in December 2020 compared to December 2019

By December 2020 there 83 children less accessing a disadvantaged 2 year old place than the previous Autumn Term. This total represented increased take up in some wards and decreased take up in other in wards.

The wards with a decrease in take up over 10 children, as shown in the table below were:

- Isleworth -19
- Hounslow Central -17
- Osterley and Spring Grove -16
- Syon -14
- Heston Central -12
- Feltham West -10

Ward	No. of dis 2YOs who took up a place Autumn 2019	No. of dis 2YOs who took up a place Autumn 2020	+/-
Bedfont	64	57	-7
Brentford	60	53	-7
Chiswick Homefields	10	7	-3

Chiswick Riverside	12	20	8
Cranford	42	43	1
Feltham North	38	40	2
Feltham West	58	48	-10
Hanworth	47	50	3
Hanworth Park	38	42	4
Heston Central	45	33	-12
Heston East	36	47	11
Heston West	59	55	-4
Hounslow Central	69	52	-17
Hounslow Heath	65	62	-3
Hounslow South	12	13	1
Hounslow West	45	39	-6
Isleworth	56	37	-19
Osterley & Spr. Gr.	34	18	-16
Syon	62	48	-14
Turnham Green	14	19	5
Totals	866	783	-83

It is important to note that the distribution of eligible children across wards had changed from Autumn 2019 to Autumn 2020, thus impacting on the percentage take up of places in each ward. This was most notable in Heston West and Hanworth with increases of 20 and 41 eligible children respectively. This impacted upon the percentage take up in each ward which is illustrated in the table below. In Autumn 2020 16 out of 20 wards had a take up figure below 70%. This compares to only 7 wards having a take up of less than 70% in December 2019.

Ward	Number of eligible dis 2YOs Autumn 2020	% of those eligible taking up a place 2019	% of those eligible taking up a place 2020	+/-
Bedfont	82	86%	70%	-16%
Brentford	85	77%	62%	-15%
Chiswick Homefields	14	67%	50%	-17%
Chiswick Riverside	29	55%	69%	14%
Cranford	72	63%	60%	-3%
Feltham North	62	75%	65%	-10%
Feltham West	70	83%	69%	-14%
Hanworth	100	80%	50%	-30%
Hanworth Park	52	67%	81%	14%
Heston Central	53	63%	62%	-1%
Heston East	78	55%	60%	5%

Heston West	90	84%	61%	-23%
Hounslow Central	99	76%	53%	-23%
Hounslow Heath	95	63%	65%	2%
Hounslow South	24	63%	54%	-9%
Hounslow West	63	79%	62%	-17%
Isleworth	57	88%	65%	-23%
Osterley & Spr. Gr.	27	89%	67%	-22%
Syon	64	78%	75%	-3%
Turnham Green	18	82%	106%	24%
Totals	1234	74%	65%	-9%

Data for December 2020 revealed a sharp increase in the number of families accessing Universal Credit. This is very likely to impact on the number of children eligible for the disadvantaged 2 year old free entitlement offer. The largest increases were in Cranford and Hounslow Heath, as shown in the table below. Securing sufficient places is likely to present a challenge for the Council

	Total UC claims as % working age pop December 2020	Total additional UC claims as % working age population December 2020
Bedfont	23.47%	10.97%
Brentford	22.28%	9.54%
Chiswick Homefields	9.06%	5.81%
Chiswick Riverside	11.18%	6.55%
Cranford	30.88%	16.88%
Feltham North	22.91%	11.46%
Feltham West	20.23%	9.13%
Hanworth	25.71%	10.01%
Hanworth Park	20.88%	9.73%
Heston Central	26.50%	13.16%
Heston East	24.75%	12.43%
Heston West	27.09%	12.85%
Hounslow Central	25.48%	11.77%
Hounslow Heath	28.78%	12.54%
Hounslow South	16.92%	9.67%
Hounslow West	25.75%	13.27%
Isleworth	22.70%	9.82%
Osterley & Spring Gr.	16.17%	8.51%

Syon	21.97%	10.32%
Turnham Green	13.07%	8.11%
Grand Total	22.17%	10.74%

Comparisons to National take up and statistical neighbours

Whilst there was a drop in the percentage of eligible disadvantaged 2 years olds accessing a free entitlement place, in November 2020 a DfE survey shows that Hounslow compared favourably with the take up in statistical neighbours.



The average National take up was 69% and in Hounslow it was 60 % at the time of the survey from which these figures are taken. This is a snapshot in time compared to the take up figures in the previous table which represents all children taking up a place over the whole Autumn term.

Ward analysis of the take up of 15 hour free entitlement places by 3 and 4 year olds in December 2020 compared to December 2019

In December 2019, the numbers of children accessing a 3 and 4 year old 15 hour place in a Hounslow setting represented 86% of those who were eligible.

In December 2020, the take up of 15 hours places by 3 and 4 year olds decreased by 5% to 81%.

The number of eligible children stayed broadly the same but 517 less children were accessing a place.

Twelve wards had a decrease of 20 or more children accessing a place, as illustrated in the table below.

Wards with a decrease of over 40 children accessing a place were:

- Cranford
- Feltham West
- Heston Central
- Hounslow Central
- Isleworth

Ward	No. of 3 & 4YOs who took up a 15 hour place Autumn 2019	No. of 3 & 4YOs who took up a 15 hour place Autumn 2020	+/-	% of eligible children taking up a place 2019	% of eligible children taking up a place 2020	+/-
Bedfont	415	401	-14	100%	99%	-1%
Brentford	374	350	-24	69%	63%	-6%
Chiswick Homefields	156	156	0	49%	50%	1%
Chiswick Riverside	250	218	-32	82%	75%	-7%
Cranford	446	389	-57	104%	91%	-13%
Feltham North	328	310	-18	106%	98%	-8%
Feltham West	487	431	-56	89%	83%	-6%
Hanworth	233	223	-10	66%	64%	-2%
Hanworth Park	288	285	-3	73%	72%	-1%
Heston Central	375	333	-42	99%	88%	-11%
Heston East	327	314	-13	82%	78%	-4%
Heston West	368	362	-6	83%	84%	1%
Hounslow Central	591	533	-58	106%	92%	-14%
Hounslow Heath	475	441	-34	98%	90%	-8%
Hounslow South	178	158	-20	50%	45%	-5%
Hounslow West	454	415	-39	113%	103%	-10%
Isleworth	341	292	-49	104%	92%	-12%
Osterley & Spring Gr.	307	315	8	80%	83%	3%
Syon	388	365	-23	81%	75%	-6%
Turnham Green	228	201	-27	95%	84%	-11%
Totals	7009	6492	-517	86%	81%	-5%

The December take up picture in some respects was positive as the numbers had increased significantly compared to earlier stages of the pandemic. Typically each year a number of children access their free entitlement in neighbouring Boroughs so the percentage take up is likely to be higher than 81%.

However, there were undoubtedly a large number of children not accessing vital early years education. The reason for non-attendance throughout the pandemic were complex and multi layered. This included parental COVID anxiety and employment related issues. Critically, whatever the reasons, it is known that access to high quality early years provision impacts on outcomes at 5 years old and on future life chances, most significantly for children with Special Educational Needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ensuring appropriate support to prevent become long term consequences for this group of children will be a key challenge for the Council.

Ward analysis of the take up of 30 hour free entitlement places by 3 and 4 year olds in December 2020 compared to December 2019

There were 819 children accessing a 30 hour place in December 2020 compared to 712 children in December 2019. This was an increase of 107 children.

More children were accessing a 30 hour place in 14 wards.

In three wards there was a notable decrease in the number of children accessing a place which were:

- Cranford
- Feltham West
- Hounslow Heath

Decreases in the take up of places may be attributable to parental COVID anxiety but as eligibility for the 30 hour offer is linked to employment this may also be a contributory factor.

Ward	No. of 3 & 4YOs who took up a 30 hour place Autumn 2019	No. of 3 & 4YOs who took up a 30 hour place Autumn 2020	+/-
Bedfont	49	54	5
Brentford	39	67	28
Chiswick Homefields	17	14	-3
Chiswick Riverside	23	25	2
Cranford	50	35	-15
Feltham North	31	45	14
Feltham West	72	54	-18
Hanworth	24	24	0
Hanworth Park	50	48	-2
Heston Central	22	42	20
Heston East	28	34	6
Heston West	22	36	14
Hounslow Central	40	48	8
Hounslow Heath	48	34	-14
Hounslow South	20	30	10
Hounslow West	23	30	7
Isleworth	45	47	2
Osterley & Spring Grove	46	68	22
Syon	50	67	17
Turnham Green	13	17	4
Totals	712	819	107

Supply of places Autumn 2020

A termly audit of vacancies in the borough is usually carried out with day nurseries, pre-schools and childminders each term. Due to the pandemic these audits did not take place in the Spring and Summer terms 2020 but did resume in the Autumn term.

The October audit showed there were a significant number of vacancies for all age ranges and all free entitlements in all wards.

The number of vacancies is unsurprising given the low demand for childcare. Given that there had not been significant population increases in any ward and the number of places being offered has not decreased, it is fair to assume that supply would have met demand had it not been influenced by the pandemic.

There was one ward in which the supply of places for disadvantaged 2 year olds was low, Chiswick Homefields. Although there is a number of providers in this area there is a reluctance to offer places as the hourly rate is significantly below that for fee paying places.

The sufficiency of places for disadvantaged 2 year old free entitlement places may become an issue. This is due to significant increases in families accessing Universal Credit which may lead an increase in the number of eligible children.

Whilst there were a significant number of vacant places, access to childcare was sometimes interrupted for families as a result of temporary closure of settings due to coronavirus related reasons. Closures occurred due to the number of staff isolating, testing positive or following other self-isolating procedures.

In January 2021, 24 settings (19 day nurseries/pre-schools and 5 childminders) had to temporarily close for one week or more due to reasons related to coronavirus.

Ward	No. of settings that had to close temporarily in January 2021
Bedfont	1
Brentford	2
Chiswick Homefields	1
Chiswick Riverside	1
Cranford	0
Feltham North	0
Feltham West	2
Hanworth	2
Hanworth Park	1
Heston Central	1
Heston East	2

Heston West	1
Hounslow Central	2
Hounslow Heath	2
Hounslow South	1
Hounslow West	0
Isleworth	1
Osterley & Spring Grove	2
Syon	2
Turnham Green	0

Key issues and challenges for 2021

1. Many children did not access early education and childcare for a significant period of time due to settings having to close other than for vulnerable groups or children of key workers.
2. Even when early years setting were open for all children many parents chose not to access a place. The predominant reasons being COVID related anxiety, changes to employment arrangements such as working at home, furlough or unemployment. The need or ability to pay for childcare changed.
3. Whilst there were a significant number of vacant places, access to childcare was sometimes interrupted for families as a result of temporary closure of settings due to coronavirus related reasons. Closures occurred due to the number of staff isolating, testing positive or following other self-isolating procedures.
4. Throughout the year there were a significant number of vacancies for all age ranges and all free entitlements in all wards. This was due to a constant low demand for places.
5. Take up of early education and childcare places was low throughout the year. During the first lockdown the take up was as little as 1% of the number of places offered. This rose to 19% during the summer and then to 48% in October.
6. The take up of free entitlement places increased more than the take up of fee paying places. By December 2020 the take up of the disadvantaged 2 year old offer was 9% below the previous year. The 3 and 4 year old take up being 5% below the previous the year. More children were accessing the 30 hour offer than in the previous year.
7. Due to increase in the number of children eligible for the 2 year old free entitlement the take up was below 70% in 16 wards.
8. The profile of children eligible children for the disadvantaged 2 year old free entitlement places changed, the most notable increases being in Hanworth and Heston West.

9. Due to significant increases in families accessing Universal Credit it is likely that the number of eligible children will increase. The sufficiency of places for disadvantaged 2 year old free entitlement places may become a challenge for the Council.
10. There were undoubtedly a large number of children not accessing vital early years education. The reason for non-attendance throughout the pandemic were complex and multi layered. This included parental COVID anxiety and employment related issues. Critically, whatever the reasons, it is known that access to high quality early years provision impacts on outcomes at 5 years old and on future life chances, most significantly for children with Special Educational Needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ensuring appropriate support to prevent become long term consequences for this group of children will be a key challenge for the Council

11. The provision of childcare and early education was interrupted for many families and it is undeniable that there would have been an impact on working parents. This does not just relate to the period when early years settings were only allowed to open for vulnerable groups of children of key workers but after when settings open for all children. Places were restricted in some early years settings in order to comply with COVID risk assessments and the implementation of distancing between small groups of children. At other times settings had to temporarily close due to outbreaks of the virus impacting upon the availability of staff.
12. Government Covid-19 restrictions were also put in place which limited access to childcare in out of school settings such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday schemes. Pre-pandemic, many working parents were reliant on this type of provision to meet their childcare needs outside of the school day. It is difficult to predict whether the change to working patterns during the pandemic will become established new ways of working in the future. This in turn creates a challenge in assessing future demand for out of school settings and indeed the impact this may have on their sustainability.

Special Educational Needs

This section of the report sets out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic at various stages throughout the 2020 Annual Report period for children with special educational needs (SEN). It also includes the Council's planning and response to ensure continued support for this group within each given phase. Consideration will then be given to the key issues and challenges for 2021.

There have been three key phases during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- **23 March 2020 – 31 May 2020**
- **1 June 2020 – December 2020**
- **January 2021 onwards**

Throughout the year the Hounslow Early Years SEN Team worked closely with early years settings, school Nursery classes and parents to ensure that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were well supported. This included those that continued to attend early years settings and critically those that did not. The support provided was impactful. Evidence of feedback to this effect is noted throughout this section.

23 March 2020 – 31 May 2020

All providers were required to close except for children of critical key workers and those that were classed within a vulnerable category. Children with an education, health and care (EHC) plan were included in one of these categories.

During this phase, the number of early years providers remaining open reduced with high numbers of staff being furloughed.

Large numbers of children with SEND remained at home either because they did not have an EHC plan and therefore did not meet the above criteria to enable attendance. Or, if they did, parents chose to keep their child at home due to anxieties about the coronavirus.

The Hounslow Early Years SEN Team provided ongoing virtual contact to early years providers that remained open during this period. This provided support for children with SEND who continued to attend their settings due to meeting the requirements of either being in the vulnerable group category and/or having a parent as a critical key worker.

Guidance and templates were produced for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in early years settings to ensure compliance with government guidance and directives on EHCP Risk Assessments and EHCP 'Reasonable Endeavours' to meet the actions contained within the EHCP.

The Early Years SEN Team liaised with early years settings and/or contacted parents to support with the completion of risk assessments for all children with EHC

plans, or who were undergoing an EHC needs assessment and also those children that were assessed by the setting as needing SEN Support. Ongoing, regular contacts took place to monitor the risk for these children in terms of accessing the support that they needed. Comprehensive reporting systems were put in place to allow monitoring of all groups attending and to ensure the safety of those that were not.

SEN Inclusion Funding was provided to those settings that still required funding either to continue to support children with SEND attending their provision, or to cover additional staffing costs and/or purchase Home Activity Kits for children that remained at home. Home Activity Kits were developed by the Hounslow Early Years SEN Team to provide parents/carers with toys and resources to support with carrying out interventions and working on current targets (77 children received Home Activity Kits).

- *'It was a great initiative to provide a tailored Home Activity Kit based on child's targeted plan. Parents could see the level of commitment from the setting, EY SEN Team, and how the funding was being used (e.g. to purchase the resources).'* (Feedback from SENCO July 2020)

Direct support was offered and provided to parents/carers of children with SEND on the Early Years SEN Team caseload when settings were closed (36% of parents/carers took up on this offer – 89/248).

- *'The support and communication received... was first class. We had a number of scheduled conversations to discuss... development, which were then followed up with emails with suggested targets and activities.'* (Parent feedback November 2020)
- *'It was fantastic... went above and beyond...'* (Parent feedback November 2020)

Supporting Home Activity Sheets were produced and made available on the Hounslow Local Offer for parents/carers were promoted through the Early Years and Childcare Bulletin.

- *'The Home Activity Sheets were very useful, and I would recommend them to other families.'* (Parent feedback November 2020)
- *'Really visual and easy to understand.'* (Parent feedback November 2020)

Surveys to early years provider confirmed the effectiveness of the support provided to ensure that the needs of children with SEND were met during these challenging times:

- *83% of early years setting's SENCOs rated this support as Excellent or Good in survey responses from 47/97 returned surveys. (Early years setting's Survey return July 2020)*
- *'During Covid-19, our EY SEN Advisory Teacher responded promptly to our SENCO to any queries and made suggestions regarding support for parents, sending documents etc.'* (Early years setting's SENCO feedback July 2020)

1 June 2020 – December 2020

In June 2020, all providers were asked to open for the return of all children. The number of children with SEND that returned to settings during this period was variable with some parents/carers welcoming the opportunity for their child to return to their setting, whilst others remained anxious about the pandemic and chose to keep their child at home.

Two key transition periods needed to be considered during this phase. Plans needed to be in place for children with SEND returning to their provision after a gap in attendance as well as arrangements for transition for children who were due to move on to school placements in September 2021.

In Autumn Term 2020, there was a reduction in the number of children with SEND accessing early years settings, comparable for the same period this time last year.

- *22% reduction in numbers (Early years settings SEND Support Register figures– Autumn Term 2019: 376 compared to Autumn Term 2020: 292).*

In preparation for settings re-opening, the Early Years SEN Team made an offer to make resources for children with SEND returning to provision, e.g. transition books, social stories and posters for managing hand washing. This offer was made directly to providers and promoted through the Early Years and Childcare Bulletin.

During this phase, the Early Years SEN Team's model of support was adapted to ensure that ongoing support and engagement with settings was tailored to their current needs. In September 2020, planning meetings were arranged for each setting and bitesize training sessions to meet the needs of children with SEND were made available via a virtual platform.

Direct support from the Early Years SEN Team continued for parents/carers of children with SEND on the EY SEN Team caseload if they did not return to settings in June 2020 (36% of parents/carers took up on this offer – 89/248).

Getting Ready for School Information Sheets were produced specifically targeted for parents/carers of children with SEND designed to provide them with advice and information on supporting their child in preparation for school. These were made available on the Hounslow Local Offer on the Hounslow Family Services Directory and promoted through the Early Years and Childcare Bulletin.

Purchase and delivery of Getting Ready for School Boxes were arranged for all children on the Early Years SEN Team caseload who were moving to new placement in a school Nursery and/or Reception Class (84 children received this resource).

- *'To be honest we were overwhelmed with the amount and quality of resources provided. The attached leaflet gave me some really useful ideas for how to extend my child's learning and development. After a couple of weeks of use it seems like all early learning skills bases are covered by the resources. This*

means that I have been able to develop some of my child's core skills prior to nursery in a fun way.' (Parent feedback November 2020)

Also, in September 2020, all mainstream schools were offered free support from the Early Years SEN Team to support with transitions for children with SEND moving from an early years setting to a school. (40/48 schools took up on this offer).

- *'Thank you to the EY SEN Team for providing us with invaluable support this term. It has been incredibly helpful to have support to navigate our way through the challenges that come with individual children. It has been amazing for our support staff... giving them confidence to try out interventions that will be of enormous benefit to our children.'* (School SENCO Survey feedback December 2020)
- *'The support we have received from the Early Years SEN Advisory Teacher has been invaluable. They have been quick to respond to the needs of staff and pupils and the training and advice provided has been of a very high quality.'* (School SENCO Survey feedback December 2020)

SEN Inclusion Fund money is available for children with SEND in early years settings and school Nursery classes. Some funding had not been claimed for many children during the summer term as they had been at home due to the pandemic. To support those children with SEND who had not received additional support during their Nursery summer term, these funds were made available for their first term of Reception. This supported with the transition and settling of new children into Reception classes (48 children received this funding).

- *'Thank you for making this funding available, we have a large number of high needs children this year and this additional funding has made a big impact on the provision.'* (School SENCO email feedback December 2020)

January 2021 onwards

Early years providers remained open, but the National lockdown had led to an even lower take up of places.

Updates from settings suggest a pattern emerging of a decline in children with SEND accessing provision. This is contributed to parental anxiety about the virus, particularly where there had been an outbreak in a setting.

Some settings reported that staffing issues meant that arrangements for support for children with SEND attending the provision, balanced with trying to offer support to those that had remained at home for extended periods was proving a challenge.

The Early Years SEN Team's model of support, once again, had to be adapted to ensure frequent contacts with SENCOs so that an accurate picture of current issues and needs could be ascertained and any barriers for children with SEND identified and supported.

Changes to the model were communicated at the SENCO Forum which took place in January 2021. This was delivered via a virtual platform with 74% of setting SENCOs joining the session.

Early Intervention Bitesize sessions continued to be offered to all early years providers via a virtual platform.

- *'We are absolutely loving the bitesize training as it is empowering our new members of the team. It is also supporting training in a more responsive and accessible way. A request from us to keep the online bitesize training moving forward.'* (Setting Manager/SENCO email feedback January 2021)

A named point of contact from the Early Years SEN Team was offered to all childminders to encourage engagement and to ensure an accurate picture of their current needs and issues for children accessing childcare with these providers.

There is ongoing commitment from the Council to provide SEN Inclusion Funds to all providers that require this funding with acknowledgement that each setting's circumstances at this time will be different. The only requirement being made is that funds are used appropriately to ensure each child's needs are met within their current situation.

Key issues and challenges for 2021

1. Meeting the ongoing needs of providers and families of children with SEND in an everchanging landscape.
2. To ensure that the Council's model of support to providers is responsive and supportive to their current needs but still ensuring that high quality, inclusive practice is maintained.
3. Promoting the benefits of early childcare, increasing confidence in safety of provision / reducing anxiety of parents/carers of children with SEND to encourage return to provision and/or take up of places in the future.
4. Re-engage partners to promote government funding entitlements to eligible children with SEND.
5. Planning and preparing transitions to ensure quality information sharing for the cohort of children with SEND that may have had significant gaps in their pre-school experience and/or no pre-school experience moving to school placements in September 2021.
6. Supporting early years providers to adapt to the new 'normal', whatever this may be.

Vulnerable children

Throughout the pandemic early years settings have been required to remain open for vulnerable children.

The DfE definition with regards to Vulnerable children was expressed as follows:

Vulnerable children and young people include those who:

- *are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child*
- *have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance, this might include:*
 - *children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services or in the process of being referred to children's services*
 - *adopted children or children on a special guardianship order*
 - *others at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils and students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health*
- *have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. (There is a separate section in the report that reviews provision for these children).*

Hounslow Council's Early Years and Childcare Service worked in close partnership with Social Care colleagues and early years providers to ensure that vulnerable children registered in early years were well supported throughout the pandemic.

Early Years Advisors within the Early Years and Childcare Service identified and had oversight of the 58 children identified as vulnerable across 29 different early years providers.

The Early Years Advisors contacted all relevant childcare providers and associated social workers on a weekly basis to ensure that the children's needs were being met.

Early Help Hub practitioners were contacted to offer guidance and support when a family's needs were below the threshold for safeguarding or if there was uncertainty around the threshold of need.

A small allocation of 13 laptops were secured for this vulnerable group of children through the DfE mechanism.

The Early Years Advisors provided information, support and guidance to all providers on how to implement virtual learning and provided links to resources. These were included in regular Early Years and Childcare Bulletins to providers.

Many vulnerable children did not attend a setting during partial closure of settings due to parental anxiety about the virus. The Hounslow Early Years and Childcare Service were especially mindful of those that would be transitioning to maintained school provision (either a Nursery or Reception class) in September 2020.

The Early Years Advisors provided transition bags to all 51 vulnerable children moving from an early years setting into a maintained school. These were designed, purchased, compiled and delivered by the Early Years Advisory Team. The resources included objects that would promote school readiness, such as stories, mark making, self-help skills, physical activities and oral health promotion. Feedback from families included:

“This helped during lockdown as we didn’t really have much else in the house. The children particularly loved the chalk and paint, thank you.”

“Thank you so much for the lovely things given, there was so much it was like Christmas. We loved going through it and seeing what was in it and have been really helpful for my child to use. The child safe knife is helping with his cutting skills and the white board is helping him with his writing practice”

“My child particularly enjoyed the threading activity and this helped him learn his colours. He does cutting and sticking with my help - a big thank you”

In January 2021, despite the second national lockdown, early years providers were required to remain open for all children. The take up of childcare places was low.

It continues to be an integral part of the Early Years Advisors regular monitoring procedures to ensure a comprehensive knowledge with regards to the most vulnerable children and whether they are accessing early years provision. This is designed to ensure that their needs are met, that they are being supported with their learning and development and that they are safe.

Out of school settings

This section of the report sets out the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic at various stages throughout the 2020 Annual Report period for out of school settings. Many working parents are dependent upon out of school settings which provide childcare beyond the school day and during school holiday periods.

Out of school settings are defined as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday schemes. This type of provision is usually attended by school age children but can implement the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) if caring for children of 5 years or younger (i.e. children in the reception year). In Hounslow there are currently 38 breakfast clubs, 34 after school clubs and 18 holiday schemes.

There was significant disruption to this provision throughout 2020 as a consequence of the pandemic. It is difficult to measure the impact on working parents as working patterns changed due to Government Covid-19 restrictions. However, it is highly unlikely that restricted access to this type of childcare would not have affected some working parents.

23 March 2020

All schools and childcare settings, including out of school settings, were told to close as of Monday 23 March, except for those providing care for the children of key workers or for children who were designated as vulnerable.

1 June 2020

On 10 May it was announced that schools and childcare settings would be allowed to open with protective measures in place from 1 June. However, guidance from the DfE regarding in what form out of school settings could open was not published until 2 June. The guidance stated that out of school settings could:

- operate on school premises (non-school premises were allowed to open from 4 July)
- only take children from that school
- maintain the same health protection measures as the school (e.g. keep children in the same 'bubbles' as the school).

Many providers found these restrictions difficult to implement due to the size and layouts of their premises. This coupled with very little demand for places led to the majority of out of school settings staying closed until September.

Holiday playschemes were able to operate in the summer 2020 holidays and some schemes informed the Council they intended to open. However due to lack of demand it was not financially viable to do so.

Autumn 2020

The requirements for out of school settings from September 2020 onwards were very similar to the earlier guidance:

- providers were advised to keep children in small groups of no more than 15 children, and that these groups should remain the same, wherever possible. The groups should not be mixed unless absolutely necessary.
- multiple groups of 15 children, plus a member of staff, could use the same shared space, as long as they maintained appropriate distancing between the groups.
- where it was not possible to keep the children in the same bubbles as they were in during the school day, OOSS should seek to keep children in consistent groups, as far as possible, and to frequently review these groups to minimise the amount of mixing.
- Out of school settings could take children from different schools but should aim to keep them in separate groups wherever possible.
- Before and after-school clubs were no longer restricted to only opening on school sites

The majority of breakfast clubs and after school care schemes did re-open in September 2020. However, only 1 out of 18 holiday playschemes managed to re-open in the October 2020 half term. Demand for places remained low as per the table below:

Type of out of school setting	Total no. of clubs / schemes	Typical no. of places available	No. of clubs / schemes open Autumn 2020	No. of children attending in Autumn 2020
Breakfast club	38	997	27	382
After school club	34	1189	27	524
Holiday scheme	18	509	1	7

In a survey sent to out of school settings in Autumn 2020, providers were asked if their provision would continue in the next 12 months:

- Before schools clubs: out of 20 responses, 19 said yes (95%) and 1 was not sure
- After school clubs: out of 16 responses, 14 said yes (88%) and 2 were not sure
- Holiday schemes: out of 10 responses, 9 said yes (90%) and 1 was not sure.

This presented a positive picture for those that responded to the survey. However, providers also noted that future viability would be threatened if demand did not increase. These concerns are captured in the two comments noted in the survey:

“ We are committed to offering this service to our parents/carers. However, this needs to be self-funding and due to the low numbers of children currently attending this will need to be kept under review. If it becomes financially unviable we may need to close it.”

“Whilst we very much hope to continue with the breakfast club it is not financially viable with the current numbers. If numbers do not increase significantly we will have no choice but to close the provision.”

In January 2021, out of schools settings were forced to close again except for children of key workers and vulnerable children. This would undoubtedly have impacted on future financial viability.

Pre-pandemic, many working parents were reliant on out of school provision to meet their childcare needs outside of the school day. It is difficult to predict whether the change to working patterns during the pandemic will become established new ways of working in the future. This in turn creates a challenge in assessing future demand for out of school settings and indeed the impact this may have on their sustainability.

Actions for 2021

1. Support early years providers to encourage families “back to childcare” and promote the take up of childcare as a choice that benefits the child’s development. Continue to work with Corporate Communications to develop Marketing Strategy and Social Media posts.
2. Provide additional and targeted support for providers who need to change their operating models to accommodate changing parents’ needs, such as more parents working from home, in order to remain viable.
3. Support with the sustainability of childcare providers including:
 - a. Signposting to business support
 - b. Targeted business support for providers around financial sustainability.
4. Monitor increased eligibility for disadvantaged 2 year old places as a result of a higher number of families accessing Universal Credit.
5. Continued termly sufficiency tracking – keeping abreast with what supply and demand looks like:
 - a. data collection and continued sufficiency reporting via DfE returns analysis and keeping local leadership and elected members informed
 - b. ongoing provider/parent surveys and audits. Encouraging providers to obtain parent feedback
 - c. identifying areas where sufficiency may be at risk from closures and focus on disadvantaged children.
6. Continued regular contact with providers to offer support and information. Open dialogue to inform recovery plans.
7. Supporting attendance of vulnerable children – maintain established relationships with partners developed during lockdown as part of future strategies to ensure vulnerable children are supported appropriately.
8. Planning for future Government measures to manage the pandemic:
 - a. keeping informed of local virus outbreaks, and local/national measures
 - b. use established strategies for ensuring key worker and vulnerable children have access to childcare provision
 - c. sharing and deciphering government, DfE and Public Health England communications with childcare providers in a timely manner
 - d. facilitating the market and new provision.