

Herefordshire Council

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023 – summary report

All English local authorities should report annually to elected council members on how they are securing sufficient childcare to meet the duties outlined in The Childcare Act (2006)¹. This report summarises the main findings from Herefordshire’s Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023.

There were sufficient childcare places across Herefordshire to meet demand in spring term 2023 despite a decrease in the number of settings and places since the previous Childcare Sufficiency Assessment in 2019. Demand may exceed capacity in the summer term (when demand for childcare is highest) and sufficiency needs to be monitored termly to ensure demand does not outstrip supply.

90% of all registered settings are judged by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding.

Take-up of the funded early years entitlements in Herefordshire is good – with the percentage of three- and four-year-olds accessing the universal early years entitlement in line with England as a whole (at 92%) and take-up of the two-year-old early years funded entitlement much higher, at 86% compared to 72% nationally.

The early years and childcare market faces a number of challenges and opportunities nationally, and locally.

- The financial sustainability of childcare provision and parent’s ability to afford childcare has been negatively affected by the current economic climate.

¹ Statutory Guidance from the Department for Education relating to Early Education and Childcare:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718179/Early_education_and_childcare-statutory_guidance.pdf

- Nationally, workforce recruitment and retention to the sector is a concern and this is reflected locally, impacting on the number of places childcare providers are able to offer.
- In the March 2023 Budget, the Government announced a phased expansion of the funded early years entitlements (starting in April 2024) and the development of wrap-around care in schools (autumn 2024), offering opportunities for growth in the sector, with associated market management challenges for the local authority.
- The Government also announced significant financial investment including funding to set up wrap-around care and an uplift in the early years funding rate.
- Government Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) funding has supported Herefordshire to work with childcare settings during the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays, offering provision to children and young people who may not have otherwise had access.
- The child population in Herefordshire is forecast to decrease by 1.3% between 2023 and 2026, however, offset against this are plans for significant new homes developments across the county which will impact on childcare need and demand.

These challenges and opportunities will need to be taken into account when developing market management strategies to ensure Herefordshire Council can continue to meet its statutory childcare duty, and support the successful roll-out of the Government's ambitious plans to expand the early years funded entitlements, and provide wrap-around care in schools.