

Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Early Years and Childcare Expansion Update

Wards All

Service: Admissions & Education Sufficiency, Children's Services

Portfolio: Councillor Statham

1. Aim

The aim of this report is to provide the Education Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on the Early Years and Childcare Expansion programme including the activities which have been undertaken and future planned activities.

2. Recommendations

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- are supportive of the programme and in agreement with all activities and proposals.
- decides whether any further information or updates are required.

3. Report detail

3.1 Early Years Expansion Programme

In the March 2023 Spring Budget, the government announced a scheme to deliver the largest ever investment in childcare at a cost of £204m. These plans are designed to remove significant barriers to support parents to return to work and help to grow the economy by making childcare more accessible.

All children who meet the eligibility criteria should be able to access a funded place if their parents require one.

Councils have a statutory duty to ensure sufficient childcare for working parents, as far as is practicable, and sufficient children's centres to promote integrated health, early education, and childcare. They must also secure free early education for all three- and four-year-olds, as well as disadvantaged two-year-olds.

- Currently, eligible 2-year-olds and all 3–4-year-olds can access universal hours (15 hours per week for 38 weeks per year) with working parents of 3–4-year-olds being entitled for extended hours (30 hours per week for 38 weeks per year).
- From 1st April 2024, working parents will be able to access 15 hours of funded childcare for 38 weeks per year for all 2-year-olds.

- From 1st September 2024, working parents will be able to access 15 hours of funded childcare for 38 weeks per year from the term after the child turns 9 months old.
- From 1st September 2025, working parents will be able to access 30 hours of funded childcare for 38 weeks per year from the term after the child turns 9 months old until they start school.

This is summarised in the table below.

	9 months – 2 years	2 years	3 to 4 years
Current Offer up to 31/3/2024	N/A	•Eligible children - 15 hours	•All Children - 15 hours •Working parents - 30 hours
From April 2024	N/A	•Eligible children - 15 hours •Working parents - 15 hours	•All Children - 15 hours •Working parents - 30 hours
September 2024	•Working parents - 15 hours	•Eligible children - 15 hours •Working parents - 15 hours	•All Children - 15 hours •Working parents - 30 hours
September 2025	•Working parents - 30 hours	•Eligible children - 15 hours •Working parents - 30 hours	•All Children - 15 hours •Working parents - 30 hours

15 hours = universal offer / 30 hours = extended offer - both 38 weeks per year

We have received a section 31, non-ringfenced revenue grant (LA Delivery support funding) of £60,534.27 which is to be used to support LAs to meet programme and delivery costs associated with rolling out the expanded Early Years entitlements. The grant will be used to support the costs of additional resources to aid with project planning for the expansion and the recruitment of an Early Years/Wraparound project lead to ensure that the expansion is delivered effectively.

3.2 Wraparound Childcare Programme

In the March 2023 Spring Budget, the government announced an investment of £289m for a national wraparound childcare programme, to support all families who need to access wraparound childcare from 8am to 6pm.

Parents should expect to see an expansion in the availability of wraparound care from September 2024, with every parent who needs it able to access term-time wraparound childcare by September 2026.

It is important to note that wraparound childcare does not include after school clubs such as art club or football club.

We have received a section 31, non-ringfenced capital grant (Childcare expansion capital grant funding) of £430,887. This is intended to be split between the Early Years and Wraparound programme and can be used to enable and/or increase access to childcare places for eligible children which includes expansion of existing childcare provisions, including expanding existing provisions to a different or additional site and the creation of new childcare places, whether via the creation of new settings, or expanding provision in existing providers.

We will also receive another section 31, non-ringfenced revenue grant (Wraparound Childcare Programme funding) of £1,699,316 which is to be used to be used to increase the supply of wraparound places and to ensure or guarantee provision for all parents who may need it, meeting current demand and building further demand. The first grant payment of £17662.98 was received on 13th December 2023. The second and third payments (£1,146,837.32 and £534,815.70 respectively) will be paid to LAs once the updated delivery plans have been submitted and agreed by the DfE in May 2024 and May 2025.

4. Background

4.1 Early Years Expansion Programme

A sufficiency review of all PVI and schools who provide Early Years Childcare was completed in December 2023 and this has been used, alongside the DfE data, to help project the supply and demand of places for 2-Year-olds in April 2024.

- 981 of 2-year-olds who currently attend an early year's setting are eligible, and it has been calculated that there are a further 635 children who are fee paying, and subsequently children of parents who are not currently eligible for a funded place.
- The impact for April 2024 is more significant for the children switching from being fee paying to funded. It is estimated that these children are currently using on average 24 hours per week and that once the funded hours are available, this will increase to 26 hours per week. These children are already accessing places and additional places are not needed to accommodate them.
- With that in mind, we have calculated that there will be 301 surplus 26-hour places available in April 2024 for any new working parents who wish to access a place for their 2-year-old which should be sufficient.

Children aged 2 years (@ December 2023)							
Locality	Number of PVI/MNSs who offer places	Number of Schools who offer places	Total Number of providers who offer 2-year-old places	Total 15-hour places (Dec 23)	15-hour places taken up by disadvantaged children (Summer 23)	24-hour places taken up by funded children (Dec 23)	26-hour places Available for new parents
West	9	5	14	516	266	118	35
North	9	4	13	496	286	115	15
South	17	3	20	747	249	143	156
East	18	2	20	766	188	259	95
TOTAL	53	14	67	2525	989	635	301

The table above includes data collected directly from providers (PVI and Schools) by the School Organisation Team in December 2023. The 'places taken up by disadvantaged children' figure is slightly higher than the actual figures due to rounding when including out of borough.

4.1.1 Proposed future activities for the Early Years Expansion Programme

- A survey has been communicated with childminders to establish exactly what provision they offer for early years so that these places can be factored into the sufficiency document, and this will be analysed and added to the supply figures.
- Initial conversations will be held with providers/schools who have expressed an interest in expansion work.
- Shortfalls to be re-assessed across the localities by completing another provider and school data collection exercise. This will be completed termly going forward.
- Work closely with our bordering Local Authorities to assess what their availability of childcare is within the provisions which border Walsall and how many Walsall children access these provisions.
- Continue to be proactive and share all literature received from the DfE with the right stakeholders.
- Communication and engagement with providers to continue via social media and other forums. The first face-to-face provider meeting is arranged for 13.03.24 where literature will be shared for providers to distribute to parents and advertise in their premises. Frontline services will also be provided with literature to display in their settings.
- Complete a review of the Family Information Service webpage to improve parent and providers journey and enable them to access critical information which will be linked to the local offer page and ensure all forementioned literature is readily available via this platform.
- Continue to attend webinars and development days where the DfE, Corum Hemsalls and Dingley's Promise all offering support and continue to work closely with neighbouring authorities to share best practise.
- SEND workstream being developed with Health colleagues to assess need and impact on delivery to meet children with SEND and Health needs.
- The draft 2024/25 Early Years Funding rates was communicated with all providers on 09/02/2024. This will be shared with schools forum on 05/03/24 and cabinet on 20/03/2024. The final Early Years funding rates for 2024-25 will be communicated to providers on 31/03/24.

4.2

Wraparound Childcare Programme

In December 2023 we completed a full review of the wraparound provisions which were offered by PVI's and schools to establish what the supply of wraparound provision looked like across the borough.

- In January 2024, a survey was published for parents and carers to complete which was communicated via the schools own internal communication method. 1,222 responses to this survey were received. This information is essential to map the demand for wraparound amongst parents. These survey results have been shared with schools to ensure 2-way communication and transparency.
- Out of 86 primary schools, 65.1% offer both before and after school provision, 19.8% offer a breakfast provision only and 15.1% offer no wraparound provision.
- 9 schools have reported that they have a waiting list whilst a good proportion of the other schools stated that they struggle to fill their existing provision.
- There is no provision for any children attending a special school.

- The main challenge for provisions to expand is space restrictions and the inability to recruit staff.
- Communication and engagement started with school leaders via bulletin, forums, and heads meetings.

4.2.1 Proposed future activities for the Wraparound Childcare Expansion Programme

- Recirculate the parent/carer survey to a wider audience to try and capture more results to enable the LA to map demand more effectively.
- Complete a survey for providers to establish the exact demand for wraparound and also investigate the barriers for providing wraparound care for SEN children.
- Run locality sessions for schools to discuss provision and demand.
- Investigate mainstream provisions who have waiting lists and discuss what support they need to expand.
- Investigate further with mainstream schools who do not offer wraparound childcare to understand barriers.
- Engage with Head Teachers of Special Schools to learn more about the challenges and restrictions of providing wraparound childcare.
- Develop an application process for settings to apply for funding.
- A review of the Family Information Service webpage is underway to improve parent and providers journey and enable them to access critical information which will be linked to the local offer page.
- Further develop the engagement and communications strategy plan.
- Continue to attend webinars and development days where the DfE, Corum Hemsalls and Dingley's Promise all offering support and continue to work closely with neighbouring authorities to share best practise.
- Work with HAF and Family Hubs Colleagues to align programmes.
- SEND workstream being developed with Health colleagues to assess need and impact on delivery to meet children with SEND and Health needs.
- Potential impact of transport highlighted as possible barrier to access - to be further investigated.

4.3 Risk Management

Following the DfE guidance, as detailed above, a strategic Early Years and Wraparound Assurance Group has been setup, which consists of key workflows and internal members.

The assurance group meet every three weeks to discuss the Early Years and wraparound requirements. Within this group, detailed highlight reports are shared which include information regarding key achievements of the last period, key activities planned for the next period, upcoming key milestones and any relevant risk factors to the projects. Deadlines are allocated to all planned tasks in line with the DfE timelines provided with sufficient time for review and approval and to allow internal governance procedures to be completed as the project progresses.

The group has developed various workstreams dedicated to specific areas such as communication and engagement, which help to ensure the efficient and effective progress of the project.

Governance has also been agreed including updates to DMT, Portfolio Holder and Childrens Capital Board for example.

Early Years and Wraparound expansion project plans have been developed and shared. Appendices 1 and 2 provide the overview of the project plans. Detailed action plans and data analysis underpin both documents.

Any items that require Capital funding are referred to the Capital & Asset Board Meetings.

Any items that require Revenue funding are managed through Walsall Councils internal governance processes for sign off, including as appropriate, SMT, DMT and CMT.

4.4 Financial Governance

The below table shows funding which has been allocated to Walsall as part of the Early Years and Childcare Expansion Programme.

Workstream	Revenue/ Capital	Grant Name	Amount	Received
EY	Revenue	LA Delivery support funding	£60,534.27	13/11/2023
EY & Wrap	Capital	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant	£430,887	01/02/2024
Wraparound	Revenue	Wraparound Childcare Programme funding	£1,699,316	17662.98 received 13/12/2023
EY	Revenue	Financial incentives pilot funding	Approx. £251,935	

To note, the £1.7m wraparound grant in the table above will only be received following the full completion and submission of a costed delivery plan.

The below tables show the governance which is required throughout the Early Years and Childcare Expansion Programmes.

Early Years Expansion Programme Governance		
Date Due	Document	Action
Feb 2024	Financial incentives pilot grant determination letters are published and issued to the local authorities with the memorandum of understanding.	N/A – Received by LA 08.02.24
21/02/2024	Local authorities sign and return the Financial incentives pilot MoU and the completed delivery plan to DfE.	MOU returned 8/2/24 DP returned 21.2.24
w/c 26/02/2024	DfE notify LAs if their Financial incentives delivery plans have been approved.	Agreed by DfE 26.2.24
Mar 2024	Financial incentives grant payment 1 FY 2023-24 – the first instalment of the S31 grant funding paid when MoU is signed and delivery plan is approved.	
29/04/2024	Financial incentives - End of FY 2023-24 Statement of Grant Usage	Return to DfE
Apr/May 2024	Financial incentives evaluation activity and reporting	Return/Report to DfE
Jun 2024	LAs submit their financial incentives progress reports to DfE	Reports to DfE
14/06/2024	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant - Assurance data	Return template to DfE
28/06/2024	DfE agree financial incentives progress reports with LAs	N/A
Jul 2024	Financial incentives grant payment 2 FY 2024-25 – the second instalment of the S31 grant funding paid when DfE agrees progress report	N/A
Jul/Aug 2024	Financial incentives evaluation activity and reporting	Return/Report to DfE
Sep 2024	LAs submit their financial incentives progress reports to DfE	Reports to DfE

30/09/2024	DfE agree financial incentives progress reports with LAs	N/A
Oct/Nov 2024	Financial incentives evaluation activity and reporting	Return/Report to DfE
Dec 2024	LAs submit their financial incentives progress reports to DfE	Reports to DfE
02/01/2025	DfE agree financial incentives progress reports with LAs	N/A
Jan/Feb 2025	Financial incentives evaluation activity and reporting	Return/Report to DfE
28/04/2025	Financial incentives End of FY 2024-25 Statement of Grant Usage	Return to DfE
Apr/May 2025	Financial incentives evaluation activity and reporting	Return/Report to DfE
17/06/2025	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant - Updated assurance data	Return updated template to DfE
31/03/2026	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant – Final expenditure	Provide details to DfE

RAG Rate: Red – Overdue / Amber - risk to non-compliance / Green - on track

Wraparound Childcare Programme Governance		
Date Due	Document	Action
14/12/2023	Local authority capacity funding – Grant Payment 1	Received at LA 13.02.2024
01/02/2024	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant	Received at LA 01.02.2024
23/02/2024	Submit Local authority capacity plan	Returned 22.2.24
29/04/2024	Submit Statement of Grant Usage (End of FY 2023-24)	Return via portal to DfE
May 2024	Grant payment 2 FY 2024-25 (once LA capacity plan approved)	N/A
14/06/2024	Local authority programme delivery plan	Return template to DfE
14/06/2024	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant - Assurance data	Return template to DfE
31/07/2024	Grant payment 3 FY 2024-25 (once LA programme delivery plan approved)	N/A
21/02/2025	Local authority programme delivery plan update 1	Return template to DfE
28/04/2025	Submit Statement of Grant Usage (End of FY 2024-25)	Return via portal to DfE
May 2025	Grant payment 4 FY 2025-26 (once delivery plan update approved)	N/A
17/06/2025	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant - Updated assurance data	Return template to DfE
Nov 2025	Local authority delivery plan update 2	Return template to DfE
31/03/2026	Childcare Expansion Capital Grant - Final expenditure	Provide details to DfE
Apr 2026	Grant payment 5 FY 2025-26 (paid in arrears upon completion of final reporting requirements)	N/A
28/04/2026	Statement of Grant Usage (End of FY 2025-26)	Return via portal to DfE

5. Decide

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee are supportive of the Early Years and Childcare Expansion programme and agree with the proposed activities and the approach to the programme. We also ask for the boards support in rolling out this programme for Walsall.

The Committee may decide to note the current position and request further information or assurance in respect of the progress of the programme.

6. Respond

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be assessed against the Assurance Groups planned work and added to the programmes highlight reports to monitor.

7. Review

The work of the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team is subject to constant monitoring and assessment. The Early Years and Wraparound Assurance Group monitors all risks and milestones associated with the expansion programme.

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