

Buckinghamshire Council Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)

April 2020 – March 2021

Contents

Introduction	<u>3</u>
Impact of Covid-19 on reporting and validity of data	3
Priorities identified in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2020	4
Map: Buckinghamshire Primary Planning Areas	5
Executive Summary	6
Number of Providers	8
Place availability across age ranges	11
Quality of Childcare	15
Outcomes for Early Years Children	16
Early Years and Childcare Workforce	17
SEND and Vulnerable Groups	19
Glossary	20
Appendix	21

Introduction

Buckinghamshire Council (BC) has a statutory duty under Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 to carry out an assessment of the sufficiency of childcare within their area. BC has a duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0 to 14 or up to 18 for children with a disability.

The assessment is a measure of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area. Buckinghamshire Council Early Years Service aims to work in partnership with childcare providers to influence childcare provision, as far as reasonably practicable

In carrying out this Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) LAs should assess:

- The state of the local childcare market, including the demand for specific types of providers in an identified locality, and the amount and type of supply that currently exists.
- The quality and capacity of childcare providers, (including full day care, pre-school term time only provision, maintained nursery schools, schools with nursery classes and governor managed provision, independent schools and childminders).
- The state of the labour market.
- The impact of planned housing development; and
- The impact of changes in demographics.

Impact of Covid-19 on reporting and validity of data

This impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been wide reaching and the pressure it has placed on certain sectors has been immense. A key data source for the CSA is the Early Years Audit (EYA) which historically takes place annually in the spring term. In 2021 the country entered another lockdown, in which the government guided childcare providers to remain open to all children. This presented the sector with considerable challenges. In order to support Buckinghamshire Early Years providers, the decision was made to delay the EYA until the summer term. As the lockdown continued for longer than anticipated it became clear that it would not be possible to undertake the EYA this year. This means some data is not available.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment provides details of patterns and trends of early years place take up year on year. However, comparisons are complex this year due to the changes made by the sector as they complied with government guidance. For example, providers were guided to close for the summer term 2020 to all but keyworker families, and then to operate in bubbles when they reopened to all families. This forced some providers to reduce their numbers or change the age ranges of the children they were able to accommodate. Take up figures are therefore not a true reflection of demand for early education and childcare.

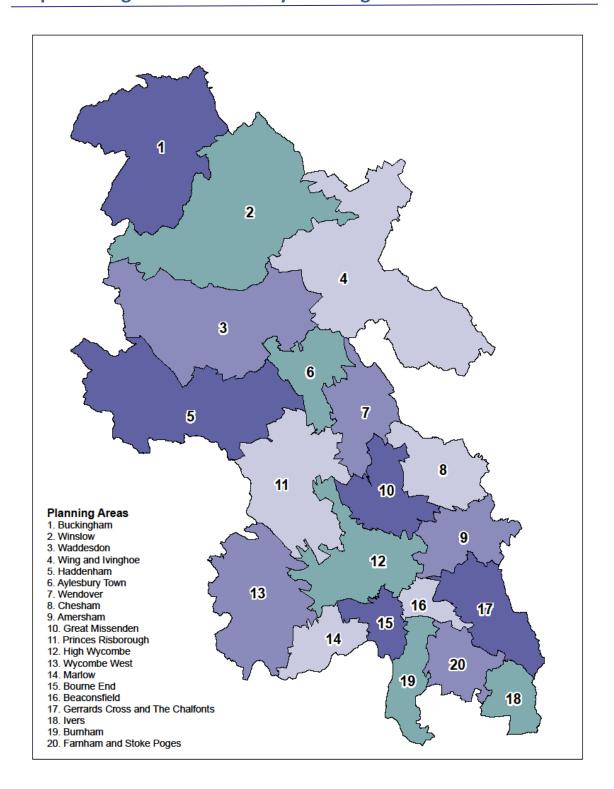
This report is published in line with government guidance and the data available this year. National and local in-depth quantitative and qualitative research into the impact of Covid-19 on the wider childcare market, will be carried out in 2021-22. This will enable new patterns in the sector to emerge and stabilise.

Priorities identified in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2020

At the time of producing the CSA 2020 we anticipated significant impact on the Early Years and Childcare sector and agreed the following priorities:

- To maintain sufficiency of provision from within existing provider base rather than developing additional provision which may affect established providers viability.
- To provide advice and business support to ensure successful completion of planned place development.
- To actively support new place development only where there is robust evidence of need.
- To continually monitor the availability of and demand for early education places and childcare at a local level.
- To provide advice and financial planning to existing providers to support them to adapt to the new marketplace.

Map: Buckinghamshire Primary Planning Areas



Executive Summary

This Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) summarises and analyses the local childcare market in Buckinghamshire. In view of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the childcare market any findings, as at the 31st March 2021 are likely to change over the coming year, as the market responds to changes in demand, take up and parental preferences.

Key Highlights

- Parental demand for childcare and early education provision has fluctuated this
 year due to Covid-19. However, there are no significant gaps in provision within
 the county and places have been sourced for every child of a working parent who
 required one. Where parents reported initial difficulties in finding places, support
 has been available through the Early Years Brokerage Service to secure suitable
 childcare.
- Quality of provision is high with over 96% of early years provision judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- Take up of all early education funded offers has decreased. This mirrors the
 national trend. In part, this has been due to the restrictions placed on providers as
 the Government responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Data evidences that during
 this period parents have made different choices about when and where they
 access provision.
- The sector most impacted by the pandemic has been out of school care provision for children of statutory school age. Privately run out of school care provision was prevented from operating for much of the year, until government guidance relaxed for the sector on 21st January 2021. In addition, changes to parental working patterns has meant the need to use formal childcare has been reduced in line with their home to office commuting time.

<u>Childcare Market:</u>

- There are 27,341 childcare places as of 31st March 2021 available in Buckinghamshire, which is less than a 1% drop compared with 2020.
- There has been a loss of 92 providers (across all sectors), a reduction in the previous years' decrease in provider numbers.
- The out of school care sector has seen the most significant impact as a result of the government measures put in place to manage the pandemic, and changes in parental demand. Overall, there has been a loss of 10 providers between 2020 – 21.
- Place losses have also been significant amongst childminders and home child carers, reflecting changes in parental demand and government guidance over access to provision during the pandemic.

Funded Entitlement:

- Across the year 214 new places have been developed to deliver funded entitlement for 2, 3 & 4 year olds.
- Take up of 2-year-old funded entitlement (2FE) has dropped below national levels for the first time. We anticipate that this will be improved in the next reporting period.
- Take up of the universal funded entitlement (UFE) has dropped in line with national data.
- Across Buckinghamshire, data indicates there are sufficient 2FE, UFE and extended funded entitlement (EFE) places to meet parental demand.

Quality of Provision:

- Our data shows that the overall Ofsted judgement of the quality of provision on non-domestic premises (NDP) in Buckinghamshire is 98.5% good or better.
- The Ofsted judgement of the quality of provision on non-domestic premises for Buckinghamshire is higher than both our statistical neighbours and nationally. These stand at 97.3% and 97.6% respectively.
- The Ofsted judgement of quality of childminders in Buckinghamshire has increased from 95.1 to 96.5% good or better.
- The Ofsted judgement of quality of childminders for Buckinghamshire is lower than our statistical neighbours at 97.1% but is now higher than the national figures of 95.7%.

Identified priorities for Buckinghamshire Council:

- To maintain sufficiency of provision from within the existing provider base.
- To extend the existing Early Years Audit to gather data on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on providers in all sectors.
- To carry out further in-depth research into post Covid-19 parental childcare needs and preferences going forward.
- To offer high quality advice and financial planning to existing providers to adapt to the new marketplace.
- To provide robust advice to new providers to ensure timely completion of planned place development, which meets the needs of their community.
- To actively support new place development where there is strong evidence of need.
- To continually monitor the availability and demand for early education places and childcare at a local level.
- To promote vacant places within all sectors to working parents and support sector stability.

Key points:

- Little overall change in funded setting-based provision.
- Loss of places reported in **Table 1** include a significant number of vacant places not needed by working parents.
- No evidence of unmet demand; parents have been supported to find early education or childcare places.

Table 1: Total Childcare Places by Sector

Childcare Type	31 Marc	ch 2020	31 Marc	ch 2021	Ne compa March to Ma 202	rison 2020 rch
Cillideale Type	Number of Providers	Maximum Number of Places	Number of Providers	Maximum Number of Places	Providers	Places
0 - 4 Year olds						
Day Nursery	103	6,072	101	6,095	-2	23
Pre-School or Nursery School	142	4,200	135	4,127	-7	-73
Maintained Nursery School	3	446	3	446	0	0
School/Academy with Nursery Class	60	2,811	57	2,651	-3	-160
School Managed Pre-School	23	721	32	1,128	9	407
Childminder	526	3,180	488	2,939	-38	-241
Nursery Units of Independent Schools	17	882	16	860	-1	-22
Total 0 - 4 year olds	874	18,312	832	18,246	-42	-66
Out of School - 5 Years +						
After School Club	130	4,615	124	3,985	-6	-630
Breakfast Club	50	2,022	47	1,947	-3	-75
Holiday Club	43	2,110	42	2,666	-1	556
Total Out of school - 5 Years +	223	8,747	213	8,598	-10	-149
Other						
SEND	10	108	7	121	-3	13
Home Childcarer	272	272	241	246	-31	-26
Inactive Childminders	25	154	19	130	-6	-24
Total Other	307	534	267	497	-40	-37
TOTAL	1,404	27,593	1,312	27,341	-92	-252

Provider and place numbers have decreased in the last year. Place losses are significant amongst childminders and home childcarers with a 7% and 11% loss respectively. Childminders were affected significantly during the initial lockdown where they could only remain open for keyworker families and as a result some have taken on alternative employment to replace their lost income.

Government schemes for the self-employed provided financial support for some childminders, the support was not available to new childminders. For many childminders the potential risk of Covid-19 being brought into their home environment was a factor in them permanently closing. Data shows that in total 68 childminders left the sector, however we have supported 30 new childminders to register. In addition, the number of dormant childminders has reduced slightly as work has been carried out to engage with these childminders to support them back into active work within the sector.

The out of school childcare sector were impacted by the pandemic as they were prevented from opening for far longer than any other sector, restrictions were not lifted until January 2021. Government financial support was not available to a large percentage of this sector, and there was also reluctance on the part of some landlords to allow some providers to return to their accommodation. This has forced the permanent closure of a number of providers.

There has been a very small loss of Pre-school and Nursery providers; in some cases, these were businesses identified as vulnerable prior to the pandemic, and they would have ceased to be viable regardless of the impact of Covid-19. There has been a higher rate of change of setting ownership than in previous years. Several small nursery chains have changed hands during the last year or are in the process of transfer with completion dates in 2021/22.

Table 2: Setting Based Provider Closures by Sector Ownership

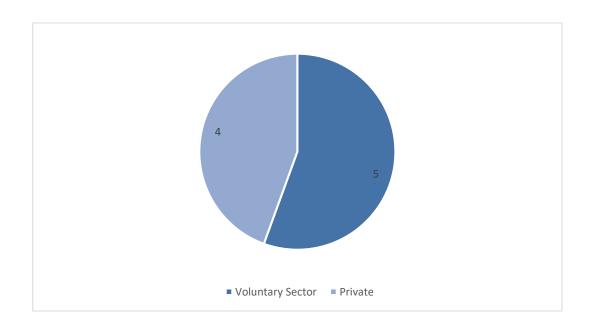


Table 3: Planned Place Development Completed

Places for funded 2 year olds	•	Places for non-funded childcare places 0 to 4 year olds
24	190	94

In addition to supporting the development of the 308 new places above, the Early Years' Service carried out the following activities in response to the priorities identified in the CSA 2020:

- Place availability monitored on a daily basis initially, moving to weekly in September 2020.
- Child attendance in early years settings monitored daily initially and then weekly.
- 14 providers were supported to transition to new ownership and places were retained.
- Financial Risk Assessment carried out to identify providers potentially at financial risk due to Covid-19.
- 12 providers were supported through Early Years Sustainability Grants.
- 29 providers were awarded Covid Recovery Grants.
- Funding was provided to support providers with the increased expenditure incurred due to Covid-19 measures.
- Covid Recovery Tool developed to support providers in identifying risks to their organisation, with additional support available from Early Years' Service Key Contacts.
- Information collated on all financial support which might be available to childcare businesses. This was disseminated through personal discussion with Early Years Service Key Contacts and made available widely through weekly communications to the sector, and through the Early Years Website.
- Early Years' Service worked with Buckinghamshire Council Colleagues in the Business Rates Team to ensure eligible childcare businesses received the rates holiday instigated by national Government.

Page: 10

Key points:

- Across Buckinghamshire, data indicates that there are sufficient 2-year-old funded entitlement (2FE) places to meet parental demand.
- Take up of 2FE has dropped below national levels for the first time in many years, however significant work has been undertaken to improve take up and this is anticipated to have a strong effect.

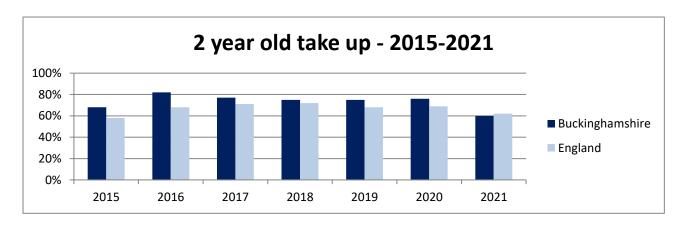
There are sufficient universal funded entitlement places (UFE) and extended funded entitlement (EFE) places across Buckinghamshire. We recognise that these figures fluctuate throughout the year.

Table 4: Total Early Education Funded Places

	3 & 4 year olds UFE			3 & 4	Year Old	s EFE	2 Year Olds			
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	
Eligible Population	9,044	9,693	9,382	4,034	4,323	5,117	1,196	1,315	1,272	
Places*	15,309	15,645	15,645 ***	15,309	15,645	15,645 ***	2,638	2,687	2,687 ***	
Surplus at County level	6,265	5,952	6,263	2,231**	1,629**	1,146	1,442	1,372	1,415	

^{*}Places for UFE and EFE are combined as it is the parent not the provider who determines whether they are accessed for UFE or EFE.

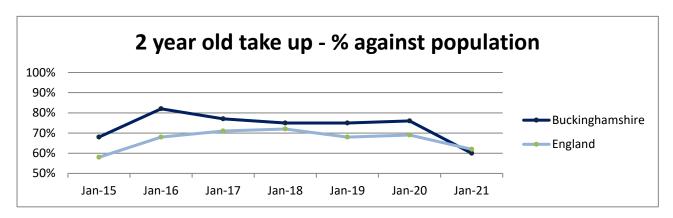
<u>Table 5: 2 year old Funded Entitlement - Take up in Buckinghamshire Compared</u> with National



^{**}Assumes UFE places have already been fully utilised.

^{***}in the absence of audit data place numbers assumed to be at 2020 levels

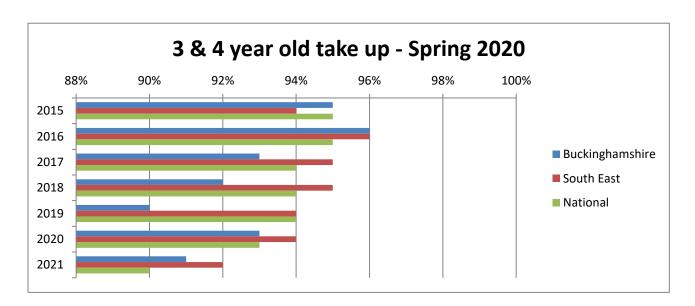
<u>Table 6: 2 year old Funded Entitlement - Trend in Take Up in</u>
<u>Buckinghamshire Compared with National</u>



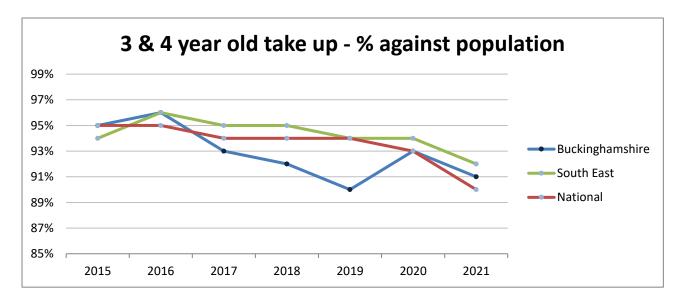
In Buckinghamshire, as part of our Education and Skills Strategy, priority is given to support eligible families into a 2FE place, as research suggests these children are more likely to under achieve. This would normally be made via direct face to face contact with families identified as potentially eligible for 2FE, who do not appear to have taken up the offer. Activity has been curtailed during the pandemic with contact being limited to direct mailing and follow up direct phone calls wherever possible. It appears that in some areas of the county the lack of personal interaction has impacted on take up. Some providers also limited place numbers due to staffing issues and the changes they needed to make to remain Covid compliant.

Analysis would suggest that at county level there are sufficient places to meet demand for 2FE. As the country moves out of lockdown and take-up increases, it is likely there will be local areas with insufficient provision or limited choice for parents. The Early Years Access and Inclusion Officers support parents/ carers who are struggling to find suitable provision and report all cases daily to the Early Years Manager. This enables a rapid response in investigating the potential need for additional provision at a local level.

<u>Table 7: Universal Funded Entitlement take up in Buckinghamshire</u> <u>Compared with National and Regional</u>



<u>Table 8: Universal Funded Entitlement Trend in Take Up in Buckinghamshire</u>
<u>Compared with National and Regional</u>



The Department of Education (DfE) data is showing Buckinghamshire has a take up rate for UFE of 91%. Across Buckinghamshire the take up of UFE is marginally above the national average but is lower than that for the South East, although by only 1%.

Analysis would suggest that, as for 2FE, at a county level we have sufficient places to meet demand for both UFE and EFE. There has been a slight drop of just over 3% of childminders delivering funded places. In order to meet the statutory duty, it is required that the council do all that is 'reasonably practicable' to ensure a place is found for a child. This may mean however, that parents do not get their first choice of provider, or a provider in the exact location they might wish. Additional support is given to parents who are looking for atypical hours to be fully funded, or who are seeking provision in rural areas where the range of provision is more limited. In most cases provision for

their child has been found. The Brokerage Team identify any changes in parental take up patterns to prevent possible sufficiency issues later in the year.

Across the county there has been an increase in new housing developments. While these developments are being built, data is showing pressure for places on providers adjacent to the new build areas. Early years and childcare places are planned for as part of these developments, and work is carried out with the developers to assess the potential demand and how best to meet it. However, there is often a delay between families taking up occupancy of the new houses and the development of the new services, this can cause sufficiency issues in the short term. In managing these it is important to ensure any temporary solution does not put at risk planned new provision. In most cases early years provision is planned for within new schools however, there is still a need to ensure sufficient childcare for younger children, with choice and flexibility of hours to meet parental need. The plans for this vary according to the demographics of the area in which the development is located.

Development of new provision can destabilise the market. In the current climate, the Early Years Service is proactive in supporting the development of new provision where there is evidence of parental need or sufficiency concerns in the area. Although other new providers cannot be prevented from joining the sector if they chose to do so.

To ensure there is robust data going forward there will be an annual Early Years Audit in January 2022, alongside further in-depth parental research into families' needs and preferences post Covid-19. This will take account of changes to work patterns and families life choices going forward.

Ministry of Defence (MOD) Pilot scheme

- Buckinghamshire was chosen to be the first Local Authority to pilot a scheme for eligible military families to access free out of school childcare during term time.
- Although many of these families will already be using out of school childcare, it was envisaged that others may take up the opportunity or increase their hours as a result of this scheme.
- The restrictions placed on out of school providers means many were not able to operate for most of the year covered by this report.

Page: 14

Quality of Childcare

Key Points:

- In Buckinghamshire, 98.5% of non-domestic provision (NDP) registered with Ofsted is either good or outstanding. This is higher than both our statistical neighbours (97.3%), and nationally (97.6%).
- 96.5% of childminders in Buckinghamshire have been judged to be good or outstanding. This is slightly lower than our statistical neighbours (97.1%) but better than the national figure (95.7%).

<u>Table 9: Ofsted Published Results for Providers on Non-domestic Premises</u>
(NDP)

ALL NDP PROVIDERS WITH JUDGEMENTS AS AT 31st March 2021	Total number of providers	Number of providers with a judgement	Outstanding		рооб		Requires Improvement		Inadequate		% Good or Better
Buckinghamshire	321	202	34	16.8%	165	81.7%	3	1.5%	0	0.0%	98.5%
National	23,518	15,723	3,489	22.2%	11,851	75.4%	271	1.7%	112	0.7%	97.6%
SE Statistical Neighbours	3,225	1,984	491	24.7%	1,439	72.5%	39	2.0%	15	0.8%	97.3%

Table 10: Ofsted Published Results for Childminders

ALL CHILDMINDERS WITH JUDGEMENTS AS AT 31st March 2020	Total number of providers	Number of providers with a judgement	Outstanding		Good		Requires Improvement		Inadequate		% Good or Better
Buckinghamshire	469	342	52	15.2%	278	81.3%	11	3.2%	1	0.3%	96.5%
National	33,004	25,452	3,709	14.6%	20,659	81.2%	870	3.4%	214	0.8%	95.7%
SE Statistical Neighbours	4,971	3,738	662	17.7%	2,969	79.4%	77	2.1%	30	0.8%	97.1%

The quality of provision across Buckinghamshire has improved for both providers on non-domestic premises (NDP) and childminders at 98.5% and 96.5% respectively. These figures are better than the national picture. Childminders compare favourably to national quality data, however; they are performing slightly lower than our statistical neighbours. Ofsted have not followed their normal inspection cycle due to the pandemic and until the beginning of 2021 inspections have been limited to those where significant concerns have been raised. Once restrictions were lifted inspections were undertaken to providers who were previously judged to be inadequate or requires improvement.

Outcomes for Early Years Children

Having sufficient good quality early years childcare in Buckinghamshire has a strong positive impact upon outcomes for young children. Closing the attainment gap for children in Buckinghamshire remains a high priority, there is a greater focus on offering support to providers in the county with higher numbers of vulnerable children in order to achieve this.

The Government has sought the views of the sector and revised the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the curriculum for children from birth to the end of their reception year under which early years, childcare providers and schools operate. Some Buckinghamshire providers volunteered to be 'early adopters' and as such have operated in accordance with the draft revised EYFS before it's formal implementation scheduled for 1st September 2021. This has supported the Government in ensuring the changes are workable. The aim of the revised EYFS is to strengthen early years curriculum, assessment, and practice to improve outcomes for all children and close the gap for disadvantaged children. There is also a greater emphasis on improving outcomes for all children particularly in early language.

In 2020 due to Covid -19 the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) was cancelled. In 2021 schools were instructed to 'use their best endeavours,' to complete the EYFSP at the end of a child's reception year. No national data set will be produced for either years. The last data available is from 2019 evidencing children's attainment from Sept 2018 – July 2019 therefore it is not replicated in this report.

The EYFSP remains statutory in the revised EYFS, in summer 2022 the EYFS Profile must be completed for each child at the end of the reception year. Schools will be required to submit EYFSP data to their local authority and this will be collected nationally.

The RBA is an age-appropriate assessment of early mathematics and literacy, communication and language. It is delivered in English and is administered within the first six weeks of a pupil starting reception. The RBA will be used to create school-level progress measures for primary schools which will show the progress pupils make from reception until the end of key stage 2.

Early Years and Childcare Workforce

The early years workforce is key to high quality provision and sustainable businesses. The sector has been impacted by the pandemic in different ways, including but not limited to:

- Staff leaving the sector.
- Staff sickness at higher levels than might normally occur.
- Shortage of qualified staff resulting in higher than usual staff turnover.
- Ageing demographic within the workforce.
- Temporary cessation of qualification training due to lockdown.
- Delay in the introduction of the Early Years Educator qualification.
- Lack of clarity nationally in arrangements for apprenticeship training as a result of changing Government initiatives.

The reasons people are leaving the sector are diverse. The pandemic has caused some staff to re-think their career options. Providers have reported the major reasons for staff leaving the sector are as follows:

- Low levels of pay.
- Expectations placed on staff to work throughout the various lockdowns to educate and care for all children,
- Fear of the risks of Covid-19 to themselves or a family member.

Towards the end of the last lockdown it was identified that a particular area in the north of the county, centred around Buckingham, had a significant issue with recruiting qualified staff. As a result an in depth study into the circumstances affecting our providers in this area will be carried out.

The Early Years' Service continue to offer a comprehensive professional development and training programme to support providers to meet statutory requirements, improve the quality of provision, and support individual staff to achieve relevant qualifications. In some cases, this is provided at a subsidised cost. The training and professional development on offer has a strong focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable children and safeguarding. The pandemic impacted the training offer and providers' ability to take up the opportunities available. During the Summer term 2020 all face to face training was cancelled following government guidelines. The service worked quickly to re-design training, wherever possible, to be delivered via on-line sessions and these have proved very popular and effective. Moving forward the programme will provide a mixed package of face to face, virtual and on-line training to best meet the sector's needs.

Bursaries are available to support childcare practitioners to undertake further relevant qualifications, as research has proven that for children aged 3 and above the qualifications of the workforce impact to a high degree on children's future outcomes. After consultation with the sector through the Buckinghamshire Early Years Forum it was agreed that financial

support should be concentrated on Apprenticeships, Level 2 and 3 qualifications. Previous support for degree level qualifications has been suspended, except for those students who have already commenced their course of study. This will be reviewed in future years.

Buckinghamshire offers bursaries to support participation in the level 3 award for SENCOs. Take up of this qualification has remained high since it was introduced in 2018 and evaluations demonstrate SENCOs' increased knowledge, confidence and understanding of supporting children with SEND.

SEND and Vulnerable Groups

Key points:

- In Buckinghamshire, there has been a reduction of less than 0.5% in the number of early years children with Special Education Need (SEN) support in early years provision.
- There has been a 5.5% decrease in the number of children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in early years settings.

<u>Table 11: Number of Early Years Children without EHCP Supported (excluding those in Special Schools)</u>

Type of municipal	No. of children with SEN Support									
Type of provider	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Schools and Pre-Schools	268	244	271	290	283	342	388			
Day Nursery	98	93	139	144	144	120	72			
Funded Childminder	14	10	18	14	27	4	8			
Nursery Unit of Independent School	53	14	16	0	0	5	1			
Total	433	361	444	448	454	471	469			

<u>Table 12: Number of Early Years Children with EHCP (excluding those in Special Schools)</u>

Type of provider	No. of children with EHC Plan									
Type of provider	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Schools and Pre-Schools	115	78	54	42	91	51	44			
Day Nursery	35	20	34	22	23	20	24			
Funded Childminder	19	0	13	6	12	1	0			
Nursery Unit of Independent School	2	1	4	0	0	0	0			
Total	171	99	105	70	126	72	68			

Some of the children who might meet the threshold for additional support have remained at home this year due to parental choice, particularly where they have health needs in addition to educational needs. Evidence suggests requests for children to be educated out of their cohort, that is to delay entry to school for a year, have remained static when compared with previous years. The Early Years' Service made direct contact with all settings to ensure that those children identified as having SEND were supported to attend, within the government restrictions at the time. In some cases, with parental agreement, Early Years SEND Advisors made direct contact with parents and their children to support them to take up their early education places.

Glossary

BC Buckinghamshire Council

CIN Child in Need

CLA Children Looked After

CSA Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

DfE Department for Education

DLA Disability Living Allowance

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

EEF Early Education Funding

EFE Extended Funding Entitlement

EHCP Education Health and Care Plan

EYA Early Years Audit

EYFSP Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

FE Funded Entitlement

LA Local Authority

MOD Ministry of Defence

NDP Non-Domestic Premises

PPA Primary Planning Area

PVI Private, Voluntary and Independent

RBA Reception Baseline Assessment

SEND Special Education Needs and Disability

SN Statistical Neighbour (See Appendix)

UFE Universal Funded Entitlement

2FE 2 Year Old Funded Entitlement

Appendix

Current Statistical Neighbours:

Surrey

West Berkshire

Windsor and Maidenhead

Hertfordshire

Oxfordshire

Hampshire

Bracknell Forest

Cambridgeshire

Central Bedfordshire

Trafford