

## **Solihull Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Refresh (2010)**

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Refresh (2010) brings together the key data impacting on changes in childcare sufficiency in Solihull since the first Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) which was undertaken in 2007.

The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty upon Local Authorities to undertake a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment every three years and review or refresh this document annually. The Act also places a duty on Local Authorities to take the strategic role in facilitation of the childcare market, in working with all local partners and working towards the Every Child Matters agenda. Solihull is committed to securing high quality sufficient childcare provision for all working parents and parents wishing to train for work as far as reasonably practicable.

The purpose of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Refresh is to ensure that any changes that may impact on parental demand or changes to the supply of childcare are reported and published. The Draft Sufficiency Guidance 2010 notes that: The local authority will need to review the assessment when new data become available and – as a minimum – at least every year. The full assessment process will need to be repeated at least every three years.

The CSA Refresh provides comprehensive sets of figures focusing on each of Solihull's 17 wards, looking at childcare provision and highlighting population trends, turnover and changes in the number of childcare places since the 2007 Childcare CSA. Information for this refresh has been gathered from a variety of sources. An effort has been made to go beyond the statutory duties and to provide an update of progress made to date.

These sets of figures are prefaced by a detailed exploration of factors impacting on demand such as demographic and employment trends, as well as an identification of progress made in a wide range of key areas ranging from childcare affordability to improvements in quality of childcare. A consideration of the implications that are likely to impact on Solihull's statutory responsibilities in the management of the childcare market is outlined in the final section of the document.

A key area of concern nationally and locally has been to ensure that disabled children and their families are able to access childcare where and when they require it. This refresh is able to report that following Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's (SMBC) receipt of pilot funding since 2008 to support the provision of childcare for disabled children (Disabled Children's Access to Childcare or DCATCH funding) Solihull has been able to develop mechanisms to make positive progress in this area.

Overall Solihull can be proud of its achievements since the last CSA in developing and supporting the very best in childcare for its young residents and their families. In addition, the members of the Childcare Sufficiency Steering Group have made significant progress in working together to develop the frameworks that can support the ongoing drive for improvements in quality and sustainability through childcare sufficiency with its well-evidenced impacts on child outcomes and child poverty.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Whilst it is not possible to comment on whether or not *parental demand* for childcare is currently met in Solihull as no Parental Demand survey has been undertaken as part of this Refresh, it is clear that the changes in employment patterns and demography (key factors influencing the demand for childcare) outlined below indicate that it is likely that the demand for childcare in particular wards may have changed since the CSA was undertaken in 2007. SMBC will need to take account of these changes in the discharging of their responsibilities regarding the management of the local childcare market.

There has been an overall decline in employment in Solihull (at an average of 11%), particularly in the two wards Silhill (at 51%) and Shirley East (19%).

There has been little overall population change for children and young people in Solihull. However this masks considerable changes at ward level, for example St Alphege, Bickenhill and Elmdon have seen dramatic rises at all age groupings 0-19 years. Conversely, three wards: Shirley South, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Sillhill have seen large falls in these populations.

These changes will have considerable impact on the sufficiency - and sustainability – of locally based childcare provision. Wards of particular concern are: St Alphege which has seen its 0-19 population more than double and yet the number of childcare places has fallen by 427 since the last Childcare Sufficiency Assessment in 2007. This fall was predominantly due to the closure of the Summer College holiday scheme at Solihull College Blossomfield with a loss of 300 places and the closure of Bumble Bees Nursery at Sharmans Cross with a loss of 43 places.

Silhill has experienced a drop in 0-19 population of more than a third, and yet has 143 additional childcare places since the last CSA. Childminders are currently reporting a vacancy level of 27% and day nurseries 19%. This ward has also seen a sharp rise in unemployment (51% fall from 2007 to 2008).

Shirley South's 0-19 population has fallen to a third of its 2008 level, yet has 192 additional childcare places since the last CSA. Childminders are currently reporting a vacancy level of 53%.

Meriden's population 0-19 population is likewise falling, by just under 20%, but there are an additional 313 places. Childminders are currently reporting vacancy levels of 29% and day nurseries 9%.

Kingshurst & Fordbridge is seeing a significant fall in population (by just under a third) but has seen a significant rise in the number of childcare places – 212. The vacancy rate for childminders stands at 24% with preschools at 17%.

In Chelmsley Wood the 0-19 population is increasing with very few additional childcare places (7), although the 0-4 and 5-9 five yearly groups are rising much less than the 10-14 and 15-19 five yearly groups. However, there are vacancies in childminder places (33%), day nurseries, out of school and preschool care which indicates that there is not necessarily unmet demand for this rising population.

In Blythe the 0-19 population is also increasing but here there are additional childcare places (170) and also vacancies, likewise indicating that there is not necessarily unmet demand for this rising population.

In Bickenhill the 0-19 population increased by over two thirds between 2008 and 2009 and yet there were 5 less childcare places since the 2007 CSA. However, childminders report vacancy levels of 24% which indicates that there are issues around marketing or suitability of existing childcare in this area.

It has not been possible to report on progress towards the provision of sufficient childcare for disabled children and young people due to a lack of accurate statistics of the number of disabled children and young people in Solihull by Ward, Cluster or type of disability.

It is expected that the wide-ranging recommendations will be clarified (and more detail added where necessary), shared and discussed with relevant colleagues in order for appropriate action to take place at strategic level. It is hoped that further progress will be reflected in the full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment due to be completed by March 2011 and that gaps in workforce training are addressed in the Early Years and Childcare Workforce Strategy.

The process for development of this 2010 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Refresh has highlighted the number of key strategic partners such as Housing and Planning services whose specialist areas impact on the overall level of childcare sufficiency in SMBC. Long-term mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that these partners are able to input into the CSA cycle in a meaningful way. This in turn is expected to demonstrate to these strategic partners the importance of the CSA as a planning and strategic tool to support their delivery of their own priorities and objectives.

### **Definition of Childcare**

In relation to the Local Authority's duty to secure sufficient childcare the steering group agrees the following definition for childcare:

"Any form of care for a child aged 0-13 years including education up to Key Stage 1 (nursery and reception classes) and any other supervised positive activity for young people aged 13 – 18 year olds (25 for those with additional needs) but *excluding*:

- Education or activities provided by a school for a pupil in Key Stage 1 or above during school hours
- Care provided for a child by a parent, step-parent or person with parental responsibility; or any relative\*;
- Care provided by a children's home, a care home, a hospital or a residential family centre, a young offenders' institution, a secure training centre, or a secure care home within any of those establishments"

Relatives providing childcare – A grandparent may register with Ofsted as a registered childminder to care for their grandchild.