

Early Years and Childcare Strategy



**“Society is
what happens when
babies grow up”**

(Sally Hogg, 1001 days campaign
quoted in 2020)

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Strategy at a glance

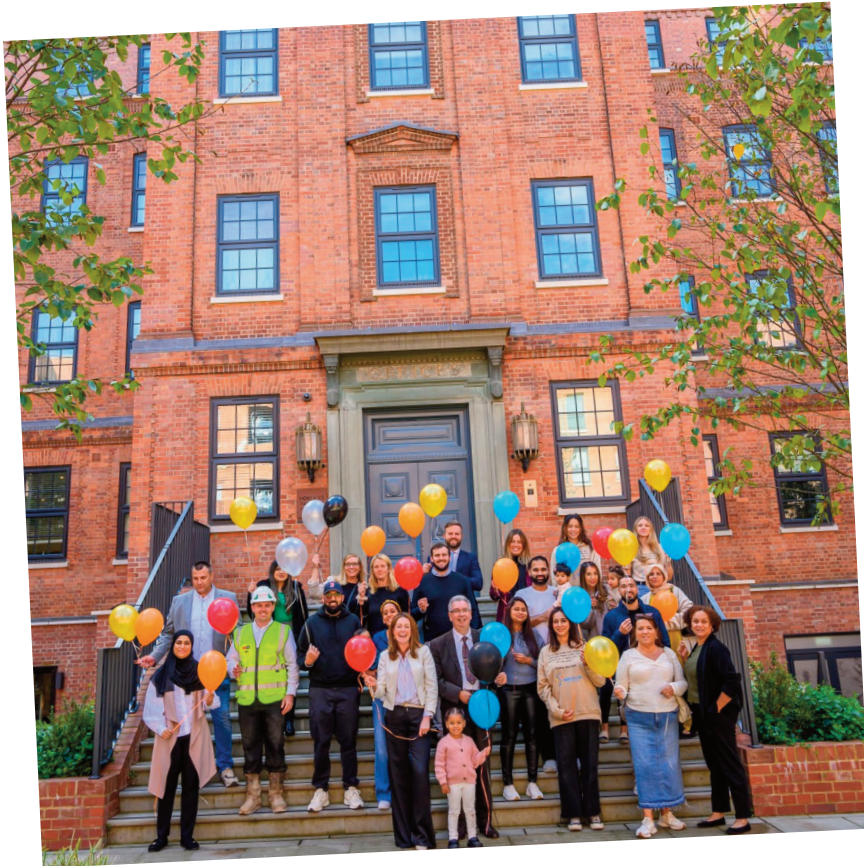
This is an essential time for Slough Borough Council to be considering its early years and childcare strategy. There has been a period of great change over the last four years; the national focus on the first 1000 days, (e.g. Best Start Programme), integrated working (Family Hubs Agenda) and the largest expansion of early years and childcare in a decade. In addition, Slough faces the additional challenges of turn over and movement at senior leader and director level, significant financial pressure (through the section 114), and an acute focus on SEND and Safeguarding.

The potential for early years and childcare to impact positively and support sustainability across all of the aforementioned agendas, through early intervention and prevention has yet to be realised.

The strategy will lift the current focus on individual department and agency service delivery, to a multi-agency approach led by and dictated by the Council duties. Moving the Council from operational, to strategic priorities across agencies will impact directly on a range of council priorities including employment, regeneration, safeguarding, school attainment and SEND.

Using the legal framework of the Childcare Act 2006 to support compliance, this strategy will aim to transform early years services from pre-birth to 5 and facilitate good quality childcare throughout the early years and beyond.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/notes/division/6/1>



The intended outcomes are to improve the wellbeing of young children and reduce inequalities, with a particular focus on young children with SEND whose families typically face multiple disadvantage through not being able to work as a result of a lack of early years provision. Wellbeing will be defined as:

Physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

Protection from harm and neglect

Education, training and recreation

The contribution made by them to society

Social and economic wellbeing

Early intervention and good early years provision has consistently evidenced a return on investment internationally, which is why we see continued investment in policy nationally.

Research has shown, time and again, that child development from conception to age two lays the foundation for our physical, emotional, social, educational and economic development.

The coordination of services, to enable a universal and targeted framework of support from pre-birth to aged five, is critical for improving the outcomes of children, families, communities and society. In short, there is no better stage in a child's life in which to invest, if we are committed to long-term change.

Welcome and introduction

Slough are on an exciting journey to realise the full potential of early intervention and getting it right from the start. There is a clear commitment and passion throughout all levels of the organisation and across partners to support, facilitate and enable Slough families to thrive. There is also clear commitment to supporting childcare beyond the early years which enables families to take up or remain in work and as a result reduce multiple disadvantage and support the local economy.

Slough Borough Council invited the Local Government Association to deliver a Mini Peer Review in June 2024, focusing on the gap between delivery and strategic priorities. The support formed the first part of a two-step LGA supported plan. Please refer to the report in Appendix 1 for a detailed account of the review process and outcomes.

The report highlighted key successes, findings and recommendations. The findings identified gaps, celebrated the successes achieved so far, developed recommendations to build on the strong foundations laid by an extremely experienced team and managers. The report created the content for this overarching strategy to hold and steer the work, moving forwards. Writing the strategy has formed the second part of the LGA support during the autumn 2024.



A total of 29 local authorities have been supported by the LGA in reviewing and developing an early years and childcare strategy to date. The methodology used in Slough has evolved from our previous experience and in scoping with managers in Slough.

Activities included:

- Initial scoping meetings to shape the support needed
- Presentation and discussion with the Lead Member and Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director
- Input at an appropriate Senior Management meeting
- Key stakeholder engagement sessions; e.g. staff who operationally manage services across the agenda, and early years and childcare sector representatives
- Engagement with parents and carers by joining activities already planned and offering space to share experiences
- An online search for support and information from a parent/carer's perspective (mystery shopping)
- A review of existing council plans and strategies
- A report with recommendations
- A feedback session for Senior Managers/staff
- In total 52 individuals were engaged in the process, 26 staff, 15 early years and childcare practitioners, and 11 parents.

This strategy has been developed using the three key areas of the Childcare Act as a framework for both strategic priorities, service design and delivery and to secure legal compliance. The act aims have been adopted to support the improved wellbeing of all children and to reduce inequalities.





The importance of Early Years

The early years are literally a foundational time for children and their families. Brain development happens faster than any other time in our lives and this creates the potential for setting families on the best path possible to support their own children's needs and identifying and alleviating issues early which could escalate over time. The early years are literally where we learn to learn, develop patterns of relating and learn how we interact with the people in our lives, our communities and society as a whole. Positive early years and childcare experiences lead to:

- Children having better relationships and attachments with the people around them;
- Children being healthier mentally and physically;
- Children being more resilient to negative things that may happen in their lives;
- Children becoming responsible for their actions;
- Children doing better in their education and being more likely to gain fulfilling jobs that enable them to be financially stable and resilient
- Children being kept safe from harm, including being less likely to engage in harmful and offending behaviour.

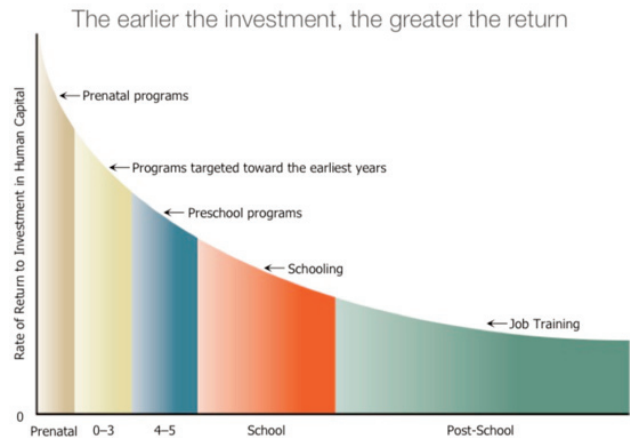
We also have a phenomenal opportunity to tackle multiple disadvantage by securing high quality early education and childcare which enables families to work and undertake work related activity. Families who are contributing to society are less likely to be drawing support from it, therefore alleviating pressure on social care and welfare systems, as well as supporting the economy locally.

In short, children are part of families, who are part of communities who are part of society. The return on investment of early intervention is not only felt immediately, but in the medium and long-term as getting it right in the early years improves the chances of the next generation of families too, as those children become parents themselves.

Early intervention and good early years provision has consistently evidenced a return on investment. The Early Intervention Foundation produced a report in 2017 (the Cost of Late Intervention) stating that:

“Nearly £17 billion per year - equivalent to £287 per person - is spent in England and Wales by the state on the cost of late intervention.”

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

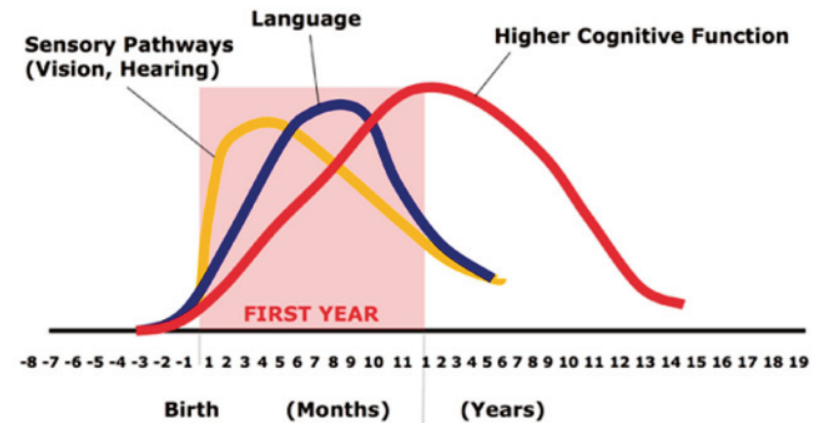


Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

<https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016>

The return on investment for individuals and services collectively is also well documented. The Heckman Curve is illustrated here and can be seen alongside recorded patterns of brain development from Harvard University for comparison:

Human Brain Development Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially



Source: In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

<https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>

"The importance of the early years in laying the building blocks for a child's physical development, social and emotional well-being, and cognitive and linguistic capabilities is evidenced by a large, interdisciplinary body of research. As such, early childhood and the dynamics and challenges of family life are fundamental to considering how we might build a more resilient, productive, and cohesive society."

The changing face of early childhood in the UK
The Nuffield Foundation July 22



"Science tells us that a child's experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next fifty. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today will reflect the kind of world we will live in tomorrow. It tells us that investing in the start of life is not an indulgence, but economically, socially, and psychologically vital to a prosperous society."

Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation, December 2020
Ipsos MORI | State of the Nation: Understanding Public Attitudes to the Early Years, November 2020

Evidence that supports investment in the early years continues to grow, however, we have witnessed a series of challenges within our public sector over recent years, which prevented a coordinated approach to make this impact.

The number of children with SEND support and EHCPs nationally has been rising since 2016 according to Government statistics, and research from Dingley's Promise in 2023 found that 95% of settings reported that the number of children with SEND had risen in the past year alone.

We know that disadvantage significantly impacts on child outcomes, and it is often a key factor in targeted approaches to support take up of early years provision. Where areas have layered the data sets for disadvantage and SEND together, we can see a direct correlation. In short, if you are unable to access the early years and childcare places, you are highly unlikely to be able to work which often leads to families accessing benefits and without income from employment.

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

<https://dingley.org.uk/researchsurveyfindings2023>

National context and legal framework

Nationally there has been a clear commitment to and investment in continuing to expand early years provision. This continues with the largest expansion of childcare we have seen in over 10 years taking place at the time of writing. In short continuing to develop and invest in early years and childcare makes social, economic, and educational sense. However, the infrastructure for delivery has not kept pace and a national loss of inspections of early years services can sometimes result in the misconception that this area of work is “non-statutory”

The Childcare Act 2006 was a pioneering piece of legislation, as it was the first act to be exclusively concerned with early years and childcare and early childhood services. The 3 key drivers in this act are: to reduce child poverty; to reduce inequalities between children; and to improve well-being for young children. The Childcare Act enables a framework for delivery (and legal challenge) under **three key areas.**



Early Years and Childcare Strategy

1. The early years outcomes duties require joint working, pooled budgets and the provision of seamless services from pre-birth to 5 years of age. The legislation requires the local authority to facilitate and enable joint working with health, employment support agencies, and the voluntary and community sector. In short, where services are fragmented and operate in silos, opportunities for efficiencies and relationship building are missed by requiring families to negotiate unnecessary barriers to the services they need.
2. The childcare sufficiency duties require local authorities to secure early education and childcare places which enable families to work or undertake work related activity. This duty goes beyond securing the early education entitlements and requires the use of market facilitation levers to secure a provision for older children as well. These levers typically include recruiting new providers into the sector, working with housing departments to secure Section 106 funding, providing advice, guidance and training to the sector, and using parental demand to shape a high-quality inclusive market of provision. The duties require provision to be secured for children from 0 to 14 (and 18 for disabled children in accordance with the Equalities Act). It should be noted the needs of disabled children are specifically mentioned throughout the Act so particular attention has been paid to this group of families, who typically are least likely to access the full entitlements let alone a childcare offer which enables them to work. It should be noted that families of disabled children are overrepresented in groups of those least advantaged.
3. The information duties require the provision of information for families and for early years and childcare providers locally. Whilst securing the provision of early years and childcare, including information is a statutory requirement, there is no requirement on families to access any early years services. This therefore requires information to be delivered in far more than a directory style format. To reach and engage families to jointly improve outcomes, it is vital that information is delivered in a way which meets need, motivates, excites and engages families in taking up advice and support services in the early years.



Executive summary and vision

Our Slough Borough Council vision for all children is that they are happy, safe and loved, and thriving. Using the legal framework of the Childcare Act 2006 to support compliance, this strategy will aim to further those aims through transforming early years services from pre-birth to 5 and facilitating good quality childcare throughout the early years and beyond. Our intended outcomes are to improve the wellbeing of young children and reduce inequalities, with a particular focus on young children with SEND whose families typically face multiple disadvantage through not being able to work as a result of a lack of early years provision.

Wellbeing will be defined as;

- physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- protection from harm and neglect;
- education, training and recreation;
- the contribution made by them to society;
- social and economic well-being.

Early intervention and good early years provision has consistently evidenced a return on investment internationally, which is why we see continued investment in policy nationally.

The review process revealed a vast amount of experience and knowledge is held by operational managers and staff, which is converted into a solution focused positive culture of working which is evidently promoted and nurtured with all client groups (Children, families and early years practitioners including schools). These priorities have come directly from managers, commissioners, staff, early years and childcare providers, and parents and carers in Slough, with the advice and guidance of the LGA peer lead.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/notes/division/6/1>



In summary in order to achieve the strategies aims the following priorities were identified through the review process:

- Strategic Leadership for Early Years & Childcare
- Developing a Comprehensive Multi Agency Dataset
- Service Structure and Functions
- Focusing on Early Years Inclusion
- Securing Effective and Accessible Information
- Managing Childcare Sufficiency
- Celebrating Diversity and Tackling Discrimination

Early Years and Childcare Strategy

The early years and childcare duties require local authorities to work in partnership across a range of agencies and departments. These duties include a requirement to pool budgets where appropriate. They reflect the multigenerational impact that families, and indeed wider communities, can and should have on our youngest children; that our children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of a wider society.

The council's strategy 'A Fresh Start 2023-2027' has defined the overarching purpose as: *"Closing the healthy life expectancy gap, by focusing on children"* and 3 Strategic Priorities are identified:

1. A borough for children and young people to thrive
2. A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives
3. A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough

The Slough Wellbeing Strategy includes a priority around 'Starting Well' which focuses on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It is intended that The Starting Well theme is led by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board.

The SEND and inclusion Strategy 2021-24 vision states: *"Through inclusive practice all children and young people are happy, healthy, safe, take an active part in their community and have fulfilled lives."*



Slough Wellbeing Strategy

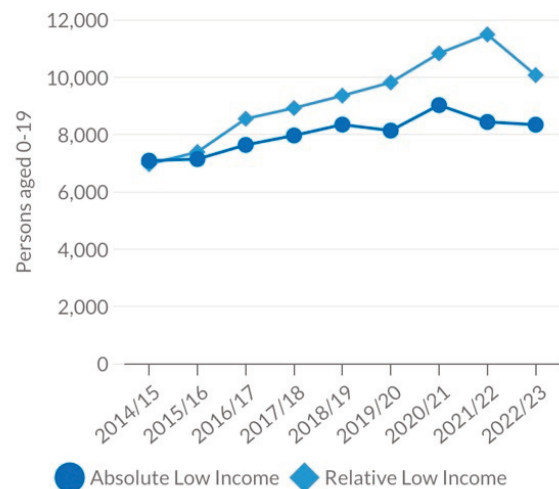


Our baselines and starting point

- Slough is an urban town in the east of Berkshire, approximately 20 miles west of central London. It is home to 50,100 children and young people, 11,700 of which are aged 0-4. Out of a total population of approximately 149,600, this equates to 33.5% being below the age of 19, making the population of Slough significantly younger than the average for south east local authorities which stands at 23.1%. The average for our Berkshire neighbours stands at 24.2%, still significantly lower than Slough.
- Our 0-4 year olds make up 7.4% of the population, higher than our Berkshire neighbours at 5.5% and south east local authorities at 5.1%.
- The borough also includes a higher proportion of young adults aged 25-44 of 6.7% against the south east average of 5.5%, suggesting a large number of young families are resident.
- The employment rate in Slough stands at 73.7%, which is an increase on last year. This is lower than the South East average of 78.5%. The unemployed claimant rate in 2023 is 4.5%, a reduction of 0.5% from last year. This is higher than the national average of 3.9% and is gradually improving, but still higher than the pre-pandemic level of 3.0%. (Source Annual Population Survey ONS). Disadvantage impacts directly on families as it is illustrated by the tables below.



Number of children living in families with low income for Slough - trend



Source: DWP

Absolute low-income is defined as a family whose equivalised income is below 60 per cent of the 2010/11 median income adjusted for inflation. Gross income measure is Before Housing Costs (BHC) and includes contributions from earnings, state support and pensions.

Relative low-income is defined as a family in low income before housing costs (BHC) in the reference year. A family must have claimed one or more of Universal Credit, Tax Credits or Housing Benefit at any point in the year to be classed as low income in these statistics (source: DWP).

Slough unitary authority area was ranked 73rd out of the 317 English local authorities for deprivation in the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, significantly more deprived than other Berkshire and surrounding areas: Reading (141st), Hillingdon (151st) Bracknell Forest (284th), South Bucks (292nd), Windsor and Maidenhead (304th) and Wokingham (316th). (Source: MHCLG English Indices of Deprivation 2019)

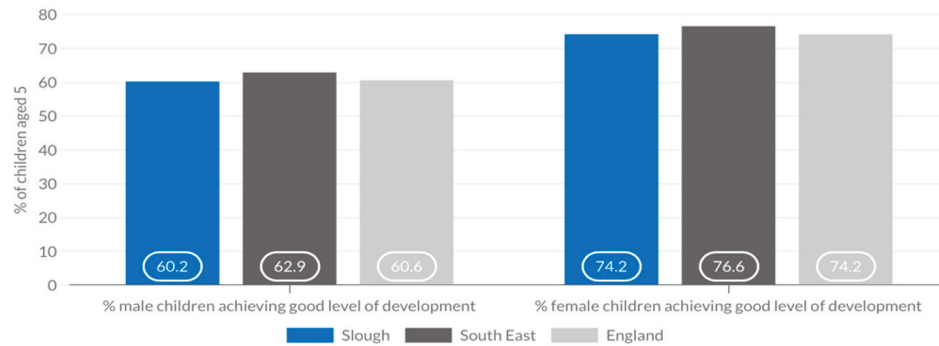
Slough is one of the most ethnically diverse towns in the UK, with 32% of Slough residents born outside the UK and the EU, and 15.8% having been resident in the UK for less than 10 years. (Source: ONS Census 2021).

Slough is the third-most densely populated local authority area across the South East (after Portsmouth and Southampton). It is the fifth most densely populated Local Authority outside of London. 15.8% of Slough’s households are overcrowded, much higher than the England average of 4.4%.

Population, demographic and disadvantaged data is essential for understanding the populations we serving and in particular the factors which create the conditions for our aims of improving outcomes for all children and narrowing the gap.

We can specifically see our early years data as demonstrating success despite the challenges for families previously outlined in this section.

Percentage of children achieving a good level of development (2023)



Source: DfE



	Slough	South East	England
Percentage of male children achieving a good level of development	60.2	62.9	60.6
Percentage of female children achieving a good level of development	74.2	76.6	74.2

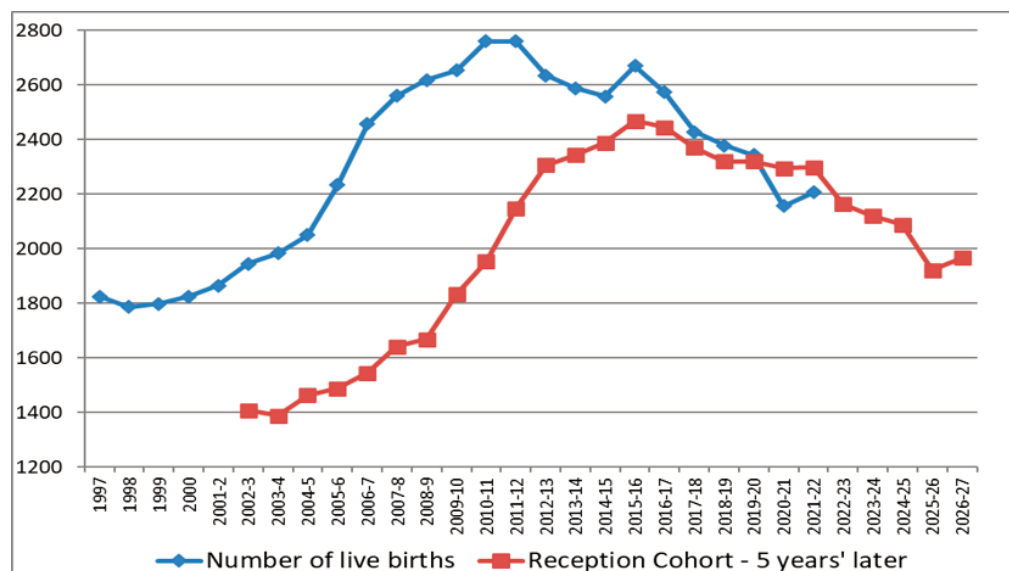
Date: 2023 Source: DfE



The early years foundation stage (EYFS) sets standards for the learning, development and care of your child from birth to 5 years old. Children are defined as having reached a good level of development if they achieve at least the expected level in the early learning goals in the prime areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development; physical development; and communication and language) and the early learning goals in the specific areas of mathematics and literacy.

Data source; 2023 DfE

Early Years and Childcare Strategy



Childcare sufficiency is measured through an analysis of both demand and supply using formal dataset and engagements with parents and early years and childcare providers.

Sources: ONS live birth data and School Census

The most significant factor affecting demand for places is the number of births in Slough. The graph below shows the number of births each year since 1997. Numbers rose steadily from 1999 until 2010-11 and 2011-12 when numbers were at their peak. Since then, the trend for birth numbers has been reducing and are forecasted to continue to decline.

In Slough there is a mixed economy of providers who each offer a range of services, and this can be somewhat directed by the different demographics within the town. The trends in participation can vary from one Area to another, for instance the East Area has a much higher proportion of families accessing fee paying childcare provision compared to the Central and West Areas. This area therefore has a higher degree of 'childcare providers' offering full day care all year round. The settings in this area also tend to have higher numbers of children on their waiting lists, and this is expected to rise dramatically when the Working Parent entitlements for 2 year olds and babies from 9 months old comes into effect. The Central Area has the highest number of under 5 year olds living in the area, yet the take up of funded early education for 2 year olds is relatively low and there is little demand for childcare.

It has been historically difficult for the early years sector to provide a large number of places for children aged under 2 years due to the high staff to child ratio (1 to 3) and affordability. Predicting the take up of childcare for this age group is also difficult to assess as some families opt to access informal childcare with family and friends and this can vary from year to year.

Since 2019/20 Slough had seen places decreasing for under 2-year-olds but the picture this year shows an increase of 149 places (44.74%) from last year's 333 places.

Slough is working closely with the sector to ensure that places increase in time for the rollout of 30 hour funding for 2 year olds and under 2s. There will continue to be close monitoring of places for children under 2, particularly in line with national changes such as government policy relating to maternity/paternity, funded early education and help with childcare costs.

Demand for childcare and in particular 2, 3 and 4 year old and 30 hours places are highly dynamic and is likely to fluctuate as we continue go through this recovery phase and the implementation of the new entitlements. It is highly likely that there will be a significant increase in demand for places for babies from 9 months as we see new norms of more families returning to work after maternity leave.

There has also been a decline in provision for school age children which is hoped to be reversed with the national expansion.

The trends in take up of Early Years and Childcare are still unstable and the scale of this impact continues to develop, especially in conjunction with Brexit, the war in Ukraine, and rising inflation.

The number of claimants of Universal Credit is falling and therefore the number of claimants eligible for 2 year old funding is on the decline. (Source: DWP Universal Credit official statistics)

At the time of writing the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment noted the following gaps in provision.



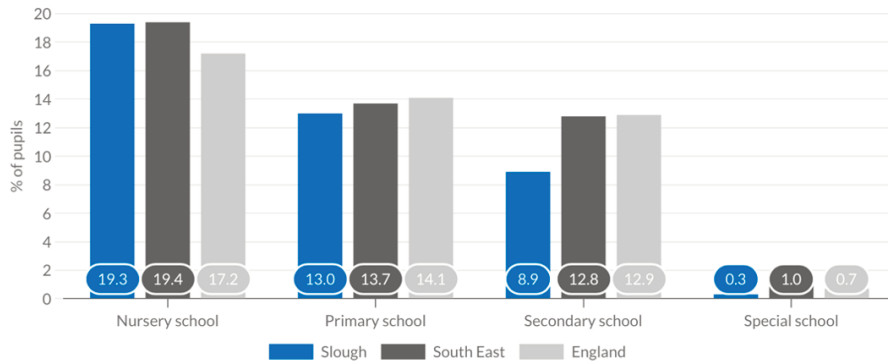
Gaps in provision

- Registered childcare is available in every ward in Slough.
- The highest number of settings is in the Britwell and Cippenham Green wards, with 15 and 17 respectively
- The number of providers has decreased by five, taking the number of settings from 190 to 185. The main loss was in the Childminder sector, where numbers dropped from 86 to 82, a loss of 4, and Children's Centres, dropping from eight to five. One Pre-School opened.
- Of the remaining 82 Childminders. Nine are inactive (not offering any care), and 30 have been providing Funded Early Education.
- Every other setting bar one nursery class of a maintained school provided Funded Early Education in the Autumn term 2023.
- Bright Horizons in Northborough & Lynch Hill Valley ward and the West area closed in December 2023 (after this snapshot was taken), with a loss of 62 places
- Slough has seen an increase in early years and childcare places of 733 to 5,469 from the previous assessment, an increase of 15.48%. However, the CSA previous to 2022 showed 5,705 places, so Slough's number of places is still lower than pre-pandemic levels
- Based on population size and local knowledge we are identifying insufficient places in eight wards in the town: Cippenham Manor, Cippenham Village, Elliman, Farnham, Haymill, Langley Foxborough, Slough Central and Upton. However, as previously stated, parents in Slough appear to be happy to travel to take up their Funded Early Learning entitlement.
- There appears to be a shortfall of 2-year-old places in the Central and West areas, however there is a surplus of places in the east, leaving a net surplus figure of 89.
- There is a shortfall of places in the East, but surplus in the Central and West areas gives us a surplus of 263 places for 3&4 year olds
- The difference between registered places and places currently being offered is 1,110. This could mean that there is existing capacity in the market should demand increase, especially in relation to the new entitlements for 2 year olds and under 2s.

Special educational needs

Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan details the education, health and social care support that is to be provided to a child or young person who has Special Educational Needs (SEN) or a disability.

Percentage of pupils getting SEN Support (2024)



Source: DfE



The number of young children with SEN has steadily increased over the last few years and now exceeds the number of children in primary and secondary school.

Source: DfE

At the time of writing steps have been taken to specifically measure the supply and demand for provision for children with SEND in the early years and for childcare beyond. Initial findings show that compared to 2021/22.

- Drop of 18% in the number of children requiring low level Support
- Increase of 33% of children presenting with emerging SEND needs
- Modest rise of 6% of settings identifying children on SEND support
- A rise of 10% of children identifying as requiring Specialist Education Support (EHCNA or EHCP)

Since April 2024 there have been 12 DAF applications approved this is an average of 2.4 per month compared to 1.25 per month for 2023/24.



Our overarching aims and next steps

Our starting point is excellent, we have a vast amount of experience and knowledge delivering services that have developed and evolved over the last 20 years at least. Evidence based practice can be seen all over the borough, and a will to continually improve through learning is evident. The review processes highlighted a series of successes and reasons to celebrate, this section aims to describe the agreed actions that will build on successes to achieve the strategies aims.

1. Strategic leadership for Early Years and Childcare

Aims

- We want to realise the potential impact the good early years and childcare services can have on wider council agenda's such as education, employment, housing, regeneration, community cohesion, and safeguarding.

Vision

- Children are part of families, who are part of communities, who are part of society. We want to ensure that we never assume we can support any child, without seeing them in the context of the whole family. As a council we want to coordinate and provide information on a range of services which impact on families for example housing, employment, mental health, safety, and education.

Next Steps

- A performance management data set, along with regular reporting at a strategic level will drive a more preventative and 'invest to save' approach to a range of council services. Ownership and accountability at the most strategic level and across agencies will be developed to ensure the greatest impact for children, families and communities in Slough.



2. Developing a comprehensive multi agency dataset

Aims

- We want to understand the needs of our populations of families locally, in order to improve the well-being of young children and reduce inequalities. We also want to know that our 'invest to save' agenda is delivering return on that investment, and that our services are delivering the best value possible and improving outcomes for children.
- Whilst a great deal of data is collected, it is not yet coordinated to evidence needs and target resources as effectively as it could be. A series of national strategies have resulted in service fragmentation and silo working at times. In short, we are data rich, but not data coordinated.

Vision

- A data dashboard will be developed, to look at both the needs analysis and performance measures which can then be analysed annually and quarterly to inform service planning. The dashboard will be peppered with the experience of children and families to bring it to life and "keep it real".

Next Steps

- Work has already started to coordinate a comprehensive needs analysis to support shared understanding of the early years and childcare needs of children and families across Slough, and clear performance management across the Childcare Act aims.
- We will bring together different datasets currently held by departments and agencies who create the pathway of services from previous to 5, and childcare sufficiency beyond to create a single data set linked to the Childcare Act.
- This work will be of particular importance in evidencing the current outcome and pathways for children with SEND and ethnic minority groups (who are also typically overrepresented by our least advantaged families). It will also support a commissioning approach and more targeted approach to reaching and engaging families who typically do not engage in services in the early years.

3. Service structure and functions

Aims

- We want our services to reflect our strategic priorities, family needs and enable excellent seamless services. We want our services to be coordinated and structured in a way that offer ease of access as opposed to barriers to getting the right support at the right time.

Vision

- A data dashboard will be developed, to look at both the needs analysis and performance measures which can then be analysed annually and quarterly to inform service planning. The dashboard will be peppered with the experience of children and families to bring it to life and “keep it real”.

Next Steps

- The current structure will be developed to ensure that delivery is supported by clear roles and functions, in order to maintain good relationships, (as opposed to being dependent on them).
- Strategic leadership will be dedicated to a strategic market management function, given the diverse and multi-agency nature of the full market of early years provision. The functions require a commissioning cycle of data analysis, commissioning, the development of services (as opposed to delivery), the proactive management of multi-agency working across a range of services including health employment support, community services etc.

Next Steps continued

- Not only will we streamline our structure we will review the way we work too. The council has already started to work on an outreach model for the Children’s Centres. This will be essential to move from a delivery point for services being focussed on the families who come into the centre, as opposed to enabling full reach across the area. Again, this model will be designed with clear targets based on data, reach, narrowing the gap and clarity of role across all early years functions.
- Again, linked to commissioning, the council will continue to move to a development and coordination role in the leadership of children’s centres as opposed to direct delivery, considering targets to reach families across the whole area. This work will include identifying community spaces, supporting parent led activities, setting up (but not delivering) stay and play sessions etc to create community led universal services.
- Further enhancing the work with libraries and community led services will also be explored. The centre staff will also act as a key coordination point for proactive joint working to enable seamless services for families.
- Another aim of this coordination is to maximise resources and work towards a more level playing field of providers, and ultimately greater choice of high-quality provision for families. Children should receive the same high quality inclusive provision whether they access a childminder, pre-school, day nursery, children centre nursery or school nursery. That choice should also be consistent wherever in the borough they live.
- The council will also continue its focus and further support children with SEND with transitions from early years to schools (in particular if support is offered until the end of year one).

4. Focusing on Early Years Inclusion

Aims

- We will aim to narrow the current gap in terms of access to services and outcomes as well for our youngest children with SEND and those requiring childcare at school age.

Vision

- We want ALL our children to grow up in inclusive, diverse and welcoming communities that value individuals and celebrate difference. We believe this ethos must start in the early years and that all our settings and services should reflect this aim.
- Our early years and childcare sector are brilliantly creative and child focused, but we know that resources, recruitment and retention are huge challenges. We want to support the sector to include all children to ensure that wherever children are in the borough, and whatever their needs they are able to access high quality, inclusive, diverse early years and childcare provision.

Next Steps

- A great deal of work has already been achieved and the concept of creating development centres should be continued. The centres would support the continued development of expertise, enable assessment and support at the earliest stage, whilst retaining the key aim of supporting inclusion in mainstream early years provision.
- This will be particularly important in the context of the local increase in the number of children requiring high-needs/high-cost statutory support. Children with SEND are also more likely to come from least advantaged families.
- The council have a significant opportunity to realise in being selected to work with the charity Dingley's Promise on the Comic Relief funded Inclusion Project. This project brings significant resource to transform the entire early years workforce over the next two years. Nationally the project currently has over 17,000 practitioners taking part, with 96% consistently reporting they can take more children with SEND as a result.
- We will continue our focus on creating development centres, alongside upskilling the wider mainstream workforce through the Dingley's offer. We know this could significantly impact on inclusion rates as well as outcomes for children and later costs to families, the council and the local economy.
- We want to see a cultural shift from segregating or excluding children and families to inclusion, supported by good information for families as well as training and support for settings.

5. Securing effective and accessible information

Aims

- Having a baby and becoming a family is one of the biggest life changing events anyone can go through. We want to secure the provision of high quality, accessible and effective information at the right time as we know it can have a lasting impact on how parents' parent, what services they access, and the trajectory for both them and their child.
- We also want to ensure that the information service remit drives change through managing parental demand for high quality services. It will also support positive and confident parenting to help alleviate the rise in social and emotional, and speech, language and communication needs.

Vision

- We want our Family Information Service to be the first and only information families seek out even from pre-birth. Registering births in our children centres should also open a gateway to high-quality information services which enable parents to choose the highest quality provision, know what children need and the best ways to meet those needs.
- Families tell us that if they have the choice of 9, 10 or even 11 different platforms when they are under pressure, they are less likely to use any. A single point of reference is critical to supporting families when they need it most.

Next Steps

- We will explore opportunities to pool resources and create a single information service for all things family related. This would simplify and improve access to information and self-help for families and potentially create income generation opportunities from the sector and related services.
- The Family Information Service will then become the single point of contact for families, with early introductions to the service happening as births are registered in the children centres.
- We will take a strategic approach to delivery of the Family Information Service, considering how best we support families (who they are and what their needs are, understanding what their potential motivators are to engage, and how we influence them). We will develop a service which will help us deliver information which motivates change and promotes self-help.
- We also commit to fully exploring the use of technology including artificial intelligence. We want to ensure high quality information is available 24 hours a day.

6. Securing childcare sufficiency

Aims

- We will secure a high-quality, accessible, diverse market of providers who work in partnership, for children entitled to early education and families needing childcare to work.

Vision

- Children and families should be able to access a rich and diverse range of early years provision which is of equal high quality regardless of where they live, or what type of provision they are accessing. Childminders, day nurseries, preschool playgroups and school-based provision should all be equally valued and deliver high-quality inclusive provision.

Next Steps

- We know that take up of early years and childcare directly impacts on child outcomes at the end of the foundation stage, throughout school and even impacts on income levels at 26 years of age. We also know that childcare removes a barrier to employment and therefore can alleviate multiple disadvantage for families. (poverty, mental health, housing etc)
- Slough Borough Council plays a strategic commissioning role in securing sufficient early education and childcare for families with children from 0 to 16 years (18 for children with disabilities).

Next Steps continued

- In light of the current national childcare expansion, a key priority around managing childcare sufficiency, and in particular market expansion and development, will be essential to achieving new government priorities and legal compliance. Market management will be critical to supporting the planned extension of 30 hours of free childcare for children from 9 months and improving wraparound childcare for school-age children. Again, focusing on the least advantaged families and children with SEND (who are often the same children) will be critical to narrowing, as opposed to widening, the attainment gap. Work to support new providers, and in particular childminders will be key.
- We will integrate services currently supporting the early years and childcare sectors and schools, alongside services provided directly for families of children with SEND. We will utilise a series of market management levers to secure sufficient provision including;
 - Measuring supply and demand (Childcare Sufficiency Assessment - with specific reference to children with SEND and their families)
 - Funding the hours of entitlement
 - Recruitment and start up support
 - Training
 - Business support
 - Information (about support and other sources of funding)
 - Parental demand

7. Celebrating diversity and tackling discrimination

Aims

- We are committed to ensuring we welcome diversity and celebrate difference. We will systematically and consistently measure and counter inequality, developing practical strategies throughout the organisation and in our communities.

Vision

- All children are unique and come from unique families and communities. We want all of our services to celebrate difference, value individuals, and acknowledge the different starting points that some communities and groups of families will come from and the challenges they will face. We will support all our services and providers to not just be accessible but directly address disadvantage some of our communities and groups face.

Next Steps

- Slough have already begun to measure the extent to which ethnic minority groups are impacted by disadvantage. There is an acknowledgement that persistent inequalities exist for these groups and should be addressed as a priority across agencies
- This work will include a systemic review and plan for example looking at representation of groups within the service itself, as well as culturally sensitive ways of working, representative and pro-active marketing and promotion, identifying and celebrating community champions, and meeting, getting to know, listening and celebrating the diverse communities within our borough.

Measuring success

Creating a data dashboard for early years and childcare is a priority in its own right, and conversations have begun to forward this aim. The following table has been developed to support the pooling of existing data sets, matched against the childcare act aims to ensure compliance and local priorities are worked towards. This work is very much in development and Slough are leading the way in creating an overarching data dashboard which pools existing measures and enables an overview of performance against our legal requirements.



Priority and legislative requirement and summary (numbering relates to the Childcare Act legal section heading)

1. Improve the well-being of young children.

Reducing inequalities between young children in the area. Well-being includes:

- Physical, mental health, emotional
- Protection from harm and neglect
- Education, training and recreation
- Social and economic well-being

2. The Requirements to deliver Children's Centre Services

Requirement for agencies to work together and start to integrate services; this requirement was strengthened in 2009 by the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act. Section 5A of this Act brought in the requirement that English Local Authorities must *'so far as is reasonably practicable, include arrangements for sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need.'* Local need was defined as the need of parents, prospective parents and children.

3. To secure integrated early childhood services

Duty to facilitate and work together with partners to ensure children, parents, (including prospective parents) and families have access to services from the partners. Partners include:

- Early Years provision
- Social services
- Health
- Employment and training
- Information and assistance (Section 12 FIS).

Within this section, the LA has a duty also to identify those parents who could benefit from the services, but may not access them, (for whatever reason) and encourage parents to access services.

Strategic Objective

How will we meet this legal requirement?

Our objective will be to improve the well-being of young children through good quality services that are well understood, easy to access and support families' needs;

To secure integrated early childhood services with seamless transition from universal, to preventive, to targeted services, meeting needs in the most efficient and cost-effective way;

We will demonstrate this by:

- Reducing the inequality in life expectancy at birth (PHE)
- Reducing the number of children in absolute low-income families (PHE)
- Increasing the number of children achieving a good level of development aged 2-2.5 years (PHE)
- Measuring school readiness - children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception year (PHE)
- Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest of the cohort (DfE)

Priority and legislative requirement and summary *(numbering relates to the Childcare Act legal section heading)*

6. To secure sufficient childcare for working parents

Ensuring that there are sufficient childcare places, including for children with SEN and disabilities for working parents and those parents who wish to access education or training as a way into work

7. Secure free of charge early years provision

This is around ensuring sufficient places for those children in receipt of the funding.

Sections 8-10 describe the discharging of the sufficiency duties and section 11 the repeal of the childcare sufficiency assessment duties.

13. To provide information, advice and training to childcare providers

Providing advice and training to persons providing, and those who intend to provide, childcare in their area and who are registered)

12. To provide information, advice and assistance to parents or prospective parents

Must establish and maintain a service providing information, advice and assistance to parents, prospective parents, children and young people.

Strategic Objective

How will we meet this legal requirement?

We secure sufficient high-quality childcare and early years provision, working with providers from all sectors.

We will demonstrate this by:

- Monitoring the number of childcare places on the Early Years Register (Ofsted) and any changes
- Monitoring the number of non Early Years registered settings and change in last 12 months (Ofsted)
- Increasing the number of childcare settings with a good or outstanding Ofsted rating
- Increasing the percentage of eligible 2-year-olds accessing early education entitlement
- Increasing the percentage of 3 and 4 year-olds accessing early education
- Ensuring robust sufficiency planning for children with SEND

We will provide information, advice and assistance that is clear, easy to find and easy to understand.

Once performance management indicators are agreed, 'dashboard' indicators will be available here (e.g. annual mystery shop? Parent feedback loop?)

Priority and legislative requirement and summary *(numbering relates to the Childcare Act legal section heading)*

Inclusion is a cross cutting theme in the Childcare Act, specifically:

Section 1 requires Local Authorities to improve well-being and reduce inequalities between young children in their area, so work done on planning and commissioning childcare must all be aimed at these goals.

Section 3 requires Local Authorities to promote childcare to parents who may not otherwise access it, which will clearly include parents of disabled children.

Section 6 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient childcare in their area for parents who wish to work or study in relation to work, so far as is 'reasonably practicable'. Section 6(2) states that, in deciding whether childcare is sufficient, Local Authorities must have regard to the needs of parents for 'the provision of childcare which is suitable for disabled children'.

Section 8 gives Local Authorities a power to assist any person who provides childcare. This includes providing financial assistance. So, if an adjustment needed by a particular childcare provider to allow a disabled child to access its services goes beyond what is reasonable, then section 8 will allow the Local Authority to meet some or all of the cost.

Strategic Objective

How will we meet this legal requirement?

We will be inclusive in everything we do.

We will measure this by:

- Increasing the percentage of Education, Health and Care Assessments completed in the 20 Week Statutory timescale
- Improving the performance of Children with SEND support outcomes in EYFSP
- Narrowing the EYFS attainment gap for children eligible for FSM, those with SEND and those from minority ethnic groups
- Specifically; measuring sufficiency for children with SEND, as a distinct part of the sufficiency assessment, e.g. through identifying take up in this group compared with the overall population, provider surveys and consultation, family engagement and feedback from partners.

Priority and legislative requirement and summary *(numbering relates to the Childcare Act legal section heading)*

Workforce development

- Section 13 places a duty on local authorities to secure the provision of information, advice, and training to childcare providers and childcare workers

Transitions

Strategic Objective

How will we meet this legal requirement?

Our objective will be to enable, celebrate and support our staff, to continuously improve, and to ensure we continually recruit and develop new staff and those wishing to progress.

We will measure this by:

- Staff surveys (which consider satisfaction but also turnover and progression)
- CPD opportunities
- Feedback from families
- Monitor the degree to which the workforce make-up is representative of the diverse populations of Slough
- Monitor the number of apprenticeships and volunteers who are actively recruited into the service and then become employees

Our objective will be to ensure that our pathways into, out of and across different services promote good life skills and the ability to manage change.

We will measure this by:

- Reducing placement movement (setting/school/service)
- Reducing exclusions
- Reducing complaints
- Parent surveys

Appendices

Appendix 1.
**Local Government Association Mini Review Developing
and Early Years and Childcare Strategy**

Glossary

Abbreviation	Meaning
LA	Local Authority
LGA	Local Government Association
CSA	Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Early Years	The period of a child's life from conception to 5 years
Early years services	The range of services delivered for children in the early years for example midwifery, health visiting, GP, children centres, parenting support, family support and early years and childcare provision
Early Years and Childcare Provision	Provision which delivers OFSTED registered facilities which enable early education for children and a childcare solution for families. For example, self-employed childminders, private and voluntary sector day nurseries, preschool playgroups, school nurseries, nursery schools, and early years and childcare provision delivered by independent schools

