

Worcestershire County Council

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2020

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Contact: Jenny Haines, Provision Planning Analyst: jhaines1@worschildrenfirst.org.uk

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Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006 outlines a number of duties of the local authorities in their role to ensure the childcare market can meet the needs of families and support parents back to work, education, or training.

The first of these duties is to secure, as far as is reasonably possible, early years education provision that is accessible, flexible, inclusive and provided through a range of settings to meet parental demand for childcare for children aged two, three and four.

The second is to ensure compliance with local and national nursery education funding requirements and support market development to allow eligible children to access their free entitlement in line with legislation.

The final duty is to ensure that there is enough information for families in accessing childcare, and that this is clear and easily available.

To meet these aims, the local authority must assess and map the supply of childcare against the anticipated demand in the market, which should then inform the strategic direction of the authority. In Worcestershire, this report is made public each year on the County Council website.

This assessment of early education and childcare provision in Worcestershire uses information at the end of the Summer term 2020 and reviews the likely sufficiency for children to access their entitlement to free early years provision during the following year using the following criteria: accessibility, flexibility, inclusivity, and type of setting. It also reviews the provision of childcare for 5-14 year olds to support working parents and the methods for families to be able to find information and apply for places. In Summer 2020, data on children who had registered for free early years provision was used rather than actual attendance, due to the COVID19 pandemic and new Government guidance restricting access to places for certain periods.

Demographics of Worcestershire

Worcestershire is a mix of rural and urban areas, divided into six district authorities: Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, Wychavon, and Wyre Forest. The demographics of these districts will impact on the demand for and accessibility of childcare places across the County.

Household income

The annual average household income in Worcestershire is just over £41,800 (2019), which is above the regional and national average as shown in Table 1 below. Annual household income at a district level is lowest in Wyre Forest and is similar to the national average in both Worcester City and Redditch. The highest average household income is in Bromsgrove.

District	2017	2019
Bromsgrove	£47,044	£47,383
Malvern Hills	£42,114	£42,723
Redditch	£37,695	£39,749
Worcester	£38,057	£39,963
Wychavon	£43,876	£43,443
Wyre Forest	£35,875	£37,569
Worcestershire	£40,809	£41,811
West Midlands Region	£35,050	£36,716
Great Britain	£38,858	£39,964

Table 1: Average (mean) annual household income by district (CACI Paycheck)

Annual data to March 2020 has not yet been released and is likely to be qualified by the unknown impact of the COVID19 pandemic. The furlough scheme continues to hold up household income until 31st October 2020, followed by a job support scheme for a further 6 months.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (or neighbourhoods) in England. It ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area) and is usually presented as deprivation 'deciles': bands of 10%. The small areas used are called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA). They are designed to be of a similar population size with an average of 1,500 residents each, or approximately 650 households.

It combines information from seven domain indices (which measure different types or dimensions of deprivation and include income, employment, education, skills and training, health and disability as well as crime, housing and living environment) to produce an overall relative measure of deprivation.

In 2019, Worcestershire had 18 LSOA's in the top 10% of most deprived areas in the Country, and a total of 48 in the top 20% of most deprived areas. These 48 areas are across all districts with 12 in Worcester, 14 in Redditch, 13 in Wyre Forest, 2 in Malvern Hills and 1 in Bromsgrove, as well as 4 in Wychavon. From April 2020, family support has been commissioned under the prevention and early intervention services for 0 to 19 years old. This contract with NHS, is known as Starting Well and will focus activities on the 2 lowest deciles to target support where most needed¹. This contract also includes the Family Information Service (FIS).

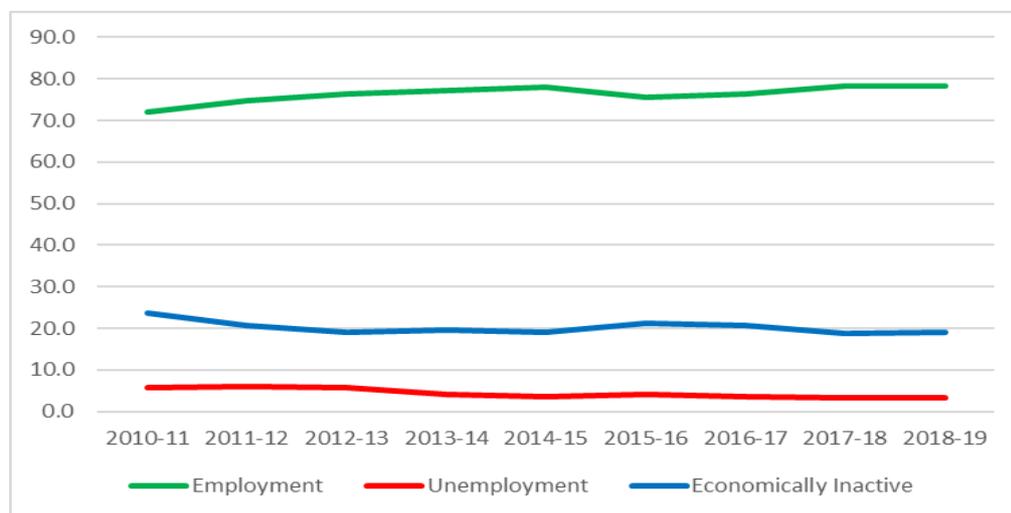
It is important to note that these statistics are a measure of relative deprivation, not affluence, and to recognise that not every person in a highly deprived area will themselves be deprived. Likewise, there will be some families lacking in resources and living in some of the least deprived areas.

This relative deprivation will reflect in the proportion of 2-year-olds eligible for a funded place, and those families likely to be entitled to 30-hours funding (extended offer) for their child, as well as the ability of residents to access a digital, on-line offer and take-up their entitlement. We recognise that the Family Information Service is vital to support families and maintain the high levels of engagement in Worcestershire.

Economic Activity

The dominant employment sectors in Worcestershire are Health, Manufacturing and Retail. Since 2010/11 the employment rate for Worcestershire has generally followed a slight increasing trend and unemployment and inactivity rates have fallen. This is shown in the graph below. The proportion of the population aged 16-64 in employment in Worcestershire is estimated to be 78.2%, which is slightly higher than the rate in the whole of England of 75.8%. The employment rate among males in Worcestershire is 82.0%, and among females is 71.2%.

Proportion of those aged 16-64 in employment, unemployment or inactive²



¹ [Starting Well](#)

² Annual Population Survey, year ending June 2019

In Worcestershire an estimated 67,000 people, or 19.1% of the population aged 16-64, are classed as economically inactive, in that they are neither employed nor looking for work, which is similar to the rate witnessed nationally. Approximately 15,500 people, or 23% of the economically inactive in Worcestershire, state looking after family as the reason for economic inactivity, whilst 16,200 people (24% of the economically active in the county) state that having a long-term illness was the reason for economic activity.

Proportion in employment aged 16-64 that are part time, by gender³



The proportion of people working full time in Worcestershire is estimated to be 73%, with the proportion of people working in part time jobs estimated to be 27%, which has remained relatively unchanged since 2010/11. This is similar to that seen across the West Midlands and England. This is shown in the graph above. An estimated 44% of working women are employed part-time compared with only 11% of working men, a similar pattern to that seen regionally and nationally. This is likely a result of families unable to manage both parents working full time, and a higher percentage of females working part-time to manage family life.

This information will be kept under close review as it has a major impact on the demand and eligibility for places for 2-year old as well as the extended entitlement to free early years provision for children aged 3 and 4.

The impact on the COVID19 pandemic on employment is already being seen in the data. The claimant count for unemployment-related benefit support increased by 755 in August 2020 to 19,590 in Worcestershire and the number of claimants aged 18-24 increased by 100. This is shown in Table 2. Enhancements to Universal Credit as part of the UK Government’s response to the pandemic means that an increasing number of people became eligible for unemployment-related benefit support, although still working. ⁴

³ Annual Population Survey, year ending June 2019

⁴ [Information on the Worcestershire economy](#)

	Claimant Count Unemployment		Claimants as a proportion of the 16-64 population	
	Aug-20	Aug -19	Aug-20	Aug-19
Bromsgrove	2,770	1,090	5%	2%
Malvern Hills	2,245	765	5%	2%
Redditch	3,355	1,500	6%	3%
Worcester	3,895	1,655	6%	3%
Wychavon	3,615	1,150	5%	2%
Wyre Forest	3,715	1,470	6%	3%
Worcestershire	19,590	7,635	6%	2%
West Midlands	271,905	131,620	7%	4%
England	2,314,695	965,275	7%	3%

Table 2: Claimant count, unemployment for August 2019 and August 2020

The economic impact seems to be across all districts and will be monitored closely to ensure any impact on families and the barriers for children to access their entitlement to free early years provision, can be addressed by Local Authority action, when possible.

New Housing and population changes

Live birth rate and general fertility rate analysis by Public Health using the linear trend function, predicts a slow increase in live births from 6,000 to 6,200 by 2022. This will be impacted by development of new homes and migration rates at wards on the borders with other Local Authorities, particularly Birmingham and Warwickshire.

Planning applications for new housing are identified and sites of more than 10 dwellings are subject to a full review of impact on education places, including early years places and mitigation from developers is sought where needed ⁵.

Inward migration from other Local Authorities is tracked but there is no data on children living within Worcestershire claiming their free early years provision outside of the County (outward migration). We therefore rely on local information from parents and providers to support our analysis of sufficiency.

⁵ [Worcestershire education planning obligations policy 2020](#)

Childcare for 5-14 year olds

The Early education and childcare statutory guidance states that local authorities are required by legislation to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment for children aged 0-14 (or up to 18 for children with special educational needs or disability)⁶.

This information is accessible to parents on the Worcestershire County Council website⁷. The data currently shows that there are many options, across all districts offering childcare for children. Some of these setting may offer a number of different types of childcare and therefore be counted more than once in the overall total.

Type of provider	Bromsgrove	Malvern Hills	Redditch	Worcester	Wychavon	Wyre Forest	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2019
Breakfast Club	27	28	28	25	43	28	179	185
Childcare on Non-Domestic Premises/New registrations	1		4	6	9	3	23	37
Creche			1				1	
Holiday Scheme	18	12	7	12	18	15	82	94
Home Childcarer	6	4	1	2	10	1	24	42
Lunch Club			4	1	5		10	
Out of School Care	30	27	22	19	40	26	164	171
Short Breaks/Special needs schemes	1		2	3	4	4	14	19
Tutors/ Other	2		2		2		6	49
Wrap Around Care	1				3	3	7	6
Total, by district	86	71	71	68	134	80	510	603

Table 3: Providers by District Summer 2020 Source: Synergy Sept 2020

Between 2019 and 2020 we saw a reduction in the number of registered providers from 603 across the County to 510. This fall in registrations across all types of provider since last year may be due to the falling demand from parents as many families were working from home during the summer term, or on furlough. It may also be as a result of the additional government requirements for managing children in a COVID safe environment. One provider in Worcestershire, using a school site, required support jointly by the Early Years' team and the Schools team, to resolve the issues identified in the risk assessment and enable the provision to continue operating. This individual support continues to be offered to all providers as schools

⁶ [Statutory guidance for early education and childcare](#)

⁷ [Worcestershire childcare](#)

reopen after the Summer but highlights the additional challenges now being faced by childcare providers.

Tax-free childcare has been promoted to settings and will continue to be so. All holiday clubs and out of school settings (OOSS) were sent a survey in July regarding their opening plans. 67 of the 95 settings contacted provided a response of which many planned to open to meet parental demand for places. This additional contact with the Local Authority was valued by the providers and identified their separate offer to parents, as distinct to early education.

Support during this time has also been given to any parents that contacted the Early Years team. Throughout this period, we have so far been able to match a provider to meet the needs for all parents requesting out of school places. This, along with continued strengthening of links with family support partners, including the FIS, will ensure that parents can continue to receive support to find childcare when needed.

We are continuing to support both providers and families to match supply with demand to ensure continued viability of these childcare businesses and ensure families can continue to work and access training wherever possible.

Sufficiency of Early Years Childcare

Background to Early Education Entitlement

Since the 2006 Childcare Act, families with three-and four-year-old children in England are entitled to 570 hours of free childcare per year, over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year, beginning in the term after their third birthday and until the child reaches compulsory school age. This universal offer was introduced to support child development and school readiness.

In 2013 this offer was extended to eligible families from the term following the child's second birthday. These families are principally from disadvantaged backgrounds and this offer has recently been extended to children whose families have no recourse to public funds, and those with Zambrano carers⁸.

From September 2017, the free early education entitlement was doubled for eligible families with three- and-four-year-olds to equal a total of 1,140 hours per year, over a minimum of 38 weeks of the year, known as '30 hours'. This extended offer was introduced to support working families as one of the eligibility criteria states that parent(s) must be working at least 16 hours per week on minimum wage. The maximum a parent can earn is £100,000 per annum. The implementation of this new offer across Worcestershire was supported by Childcare Works⁹, whose contract ran until January 2020, and enabled Worcestershire to effectively promote take-up of the entitlement.

⁸ [Free childcare for 2 year olds](#)

⁹ [Hempsall Childcare Works](#)

These funded hours can be used in any Ofsted registered setting with a funding agreement. This includes school nurseries, nursery classes, childminders and private, voluntary and independent sector settings.

Number of places

To meet the needs of families in Worcestershire, there are 1,164 settings across the County as at Summer 2020 (1,267 in Summer 2019) offering childcare for 2-,3- and 4-year-olds. Of these, 422 settings offer free early years provision to 2-year olds (434 in 2019) and 538 offer universal funded places for 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds (548 in 2019).

Provider Types	Total No. of settings	NEF registered for 2yr olds	NEF registered 3&4 yr olds	Registered for extended hours
Academy EY Language Class	2	0	1	0
Academy Nursery Class	23	11	23	20
Academy Nursery Class (special)	1	1	2	1
Breakfast club	179	0	0	0
Childminder	304	163	198	178
Day nursery	135	122	128	117
Free School Nursery Class	1	1	1	1
Governor Led Nursery	46	27	46	39
Holiday Scheme	82	0	2	2
Maintained EY Language Class	3	1	3	0
Maintained Nursery Class	28	9	28	21
Maintained Nursery Classes (Special)	3	2	6	3
Maintained Nursery Plus	1	0	1	0
Maintained Nursery School	1	1	1	1
Nursery Units of Independent Schools	3	1	3	1
Out of School Care	164	0	3	3
Pre-School Playgroup	90	81	90	79
Wraparound Care	7	2	2	1
Other	91	0	0	0
TOTAL	1,164	422	538	467

Table 4: Early Years settings, by type
source: Synergy July 2020

This variety of provider types creates a comprehensive, flexible, and adaptable supply of places to meet the changing needs of families for formal childcare. Academy and maintained nursery classes are part of a first or primary school and typically offer care to match the school day. This is also the case for pre-school playgroups. The day care offer can be extended with wrap

around care, breakfast club, or out of school care. Alternatively, day nurseries usually offer full day care from 8am to 6pm.

There has been no significant change in the number of settings operating within the County in the last 12 months, despite the fall in demand for places in formal childcare as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. This can be seen in the fall in the number of hours accessed in Summer term 2020 compared to Summer term 2019, despite similar attendance in the Autumn term.

Child attendance data for Summer 2020 is based on registered attendance. This headcount data remained the basis for funding providers. Details of actual attendance was collected weekly and reported separately to the DfE ¹⁰.

The number of funded hours needed at Early Years settings increases term by term over the academic year as the number of children old enough to be eligible increases. The number of children in a funded place is lowest in the Autumn term as all children who have turned 4 over the preceding year are admitted into school at this time. This is shown in the graph by the increasing number of funded weekly hours used every term across the year.

The difference this year between Autumn and Summer terms is 57,000 additional hours per week, or 3,800 15-hour-places. This amounts to a substantial variation in demand and has a huge impact on the termly revenue for Early Years providers throughout the year. This variation in the number of places that are created and absorbed during each year, is an on-going feature of the sector.

Take-up rates - 2-year-old funded places

Funded places for 2-year olds were introduced to support families on low income and more vulnerable children such as those with EHC plans or entitled to disability living allowance. Children are assessed against the eligibility criteria by the Local Authority from an application process managed by the early years setting. The take-up rate of these places amongst eligible families is monitored by central Government and published annually as a percentage of those viewed as eligible in in November 2016. In 2019, eligibility expanded to include universal credit claimants too, making comparisons with prior years more complex

2-year-olds	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Worcestershire	75%	67%	63%	70%	73%
Statistical neighbours	73%	77%	77%	73%	75%
England	68%	71%	72%	68%	69%

Table 5: Take-up of 2 Year old funded places (national data) Source: LAIT tool 6.8.2020

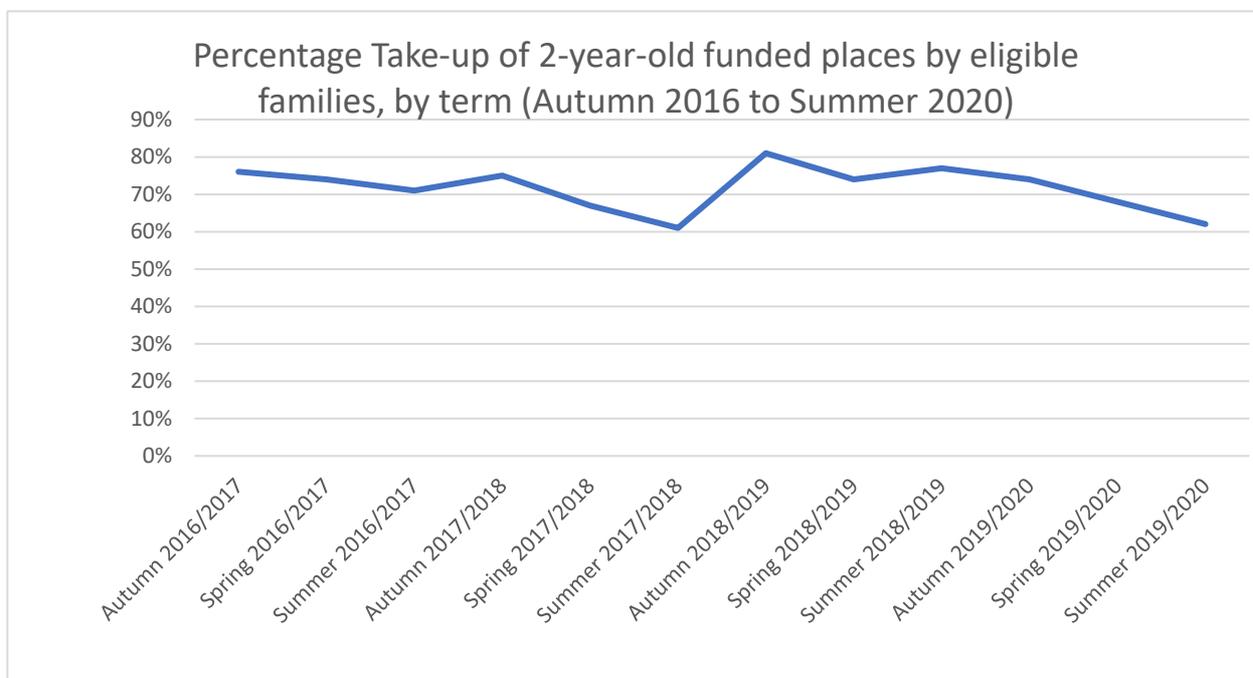
Worcestershire is currently above the national percentage for those claiming their entitlement at 73% Local data is also used to track the take-up rate for 2-year-olds. A list of potentially eligible families is shared by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 7 times per year which means Local Authorities have a far more detailed understanding of the number of eligible

¹⁰ [attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus](#)

families on a local level. Each family listed is sent a postcard to offer them the opportunity to confirm their eligibility for a free place and then the data is forwarded to the Family Information Service (FIS) to follow up. The list from the previous term is compared to the number of children currently claiming their free place and the take-up rate calculated. This information is summarised in table 6 which shows that take-up fluctuates year by year.

2YO take up (%age of eligible children)			
	Autumn	Spring	Summer
2016/2017	76%	74%	71%
2017/2018	75%	67%	61%
2018/2019	81%	74%	77%
2019/2020	74%	68%	62%

Table 6: Take-up of 2 year old funded places by term (local data)



This local take-up rate shows a higher percentage claiming each Autumn term compared to the corresponding Summer term. This may be due to the calculation of eligible children. It may also be due to advertising and marketing activities at the start of any academic year, or the increase in demand for 3 and 4-year-old places, reducing the number of places for 2-year-olds. However, year-on-year the percentage of take-up for the Autumn term for the local data across Worcestershire is higher than the nationally calculated take-up rate across England.

As we move into Autumn 2020, we are aware that the number of eligible 2-year-olds could increase dramatically due to falling family incomes and we will monitor this to ensure providers are focused on matching the anticipated demand.

Term	Number Eligible 2-yr-olds
Autumn 2018	1,884
Autumn 2019	1,634
Autumn 2020	1,653
Autumn 2021	1,749

Table 7: Families listed by DWP as potentially eligible for a free place (Source; DWP lists for June)

Table 8 below shows the take-up rate for funded places, by age, across each of the 6 Districts in Summer term 2020. This rate for each age group has been calculated by considering all children with a funded place at a provider in the district as a proportion of the known children. The engagement rate has also been calculated by considering children with a funded place and living in the district as a proportion of the known children. The difference in these rates reflects the migration of children into and out of the district where they live, and those children from outside of the Local Authority area (inward migration). It also indicates the outward migration of children to other local authority areas.

2-year-old Funded Hours, Summer 2020	County	Broms	Malvern	Redditch	Worcs	W'avon	Wyre Forest
Children in a funded place	998	140	114	174	198	161	211
Average % eligibility	27%	19%	26%	31%	31%	23%	32%
Average % take-up	62%	76%	75%	56%	57%	57%	65%
Average % engagement	59%	62%	68%	53%	58%	52%	64%

Table 8: Two-year-old take-up by District, Summer 2020

The Districts of Redditch, Worcester and Wychavon are below the average take-up rate and tend to have a larger proportion of the population eligible for the funded places. This may indicate that larger areas of deprivation are harder to reach and therefore do not engage fully with the offer of 2-year-old funded early years provision. Work is on-going with these families by the FIS

Take-up rates - Universal offer for 3- and 4-year-olds

From the term after a child turns 3, they are entitled to 570 hours per annum of free early years provision at an Ofsted registered setting. This is usually taken as 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year and is often referred to as '15 hours entitlement'.

Children born between 1st September and 31st December (4-month period) can only claim their free place from 1st January (the term after their 3rd birthday) so the number of 3-year olds on 1st September may not all be eligible for a free place. The below assessment is undertaken based on eligible 3-and 4-year-olds only.

National data on the percentage of 3-and 4-year-olds benefiting from some free early education shows Worcestershire ahead of the national rate and above our statistical neighbours in 2019 and 2020

3&4-year-olds	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Worcestershire	100%	98%	96%	99%	98%
Statistical neighbours	98%	99%	98%	98%	97%
England	95%	94%	94%	94%	93%

Table 9: Take up of some free childcare by 3 and 4 year olds (national data)
Source; LAIT 6.8.2020

Take-up is also monitored locally by comparing the number of children of non-statutory school age living within the County as per GP and NHS registrations (known children data), with the number of children being funded each term in a Worcestershire setting.

The rates can exceed 100% in this assessment as inward migration from other local authorities is also considered. In June 2019, 10% of children claiming funded places in Worcestershire lived outside of the County, with particular impact from children living in Birmingham and Warwickshire. The model is tracking trends, allowing like for like comparisons.

3YO universal take up			
	Autumn	Spring	Summer
2015/2016	97%	96%	90%
2016/2017	98%	98%	96%
2017/2018	101%	99%	94%
2018/2019	106%	103%	103%
2019/2020	102%	100%	100%

Table 10: Take up of Universal hours by 3 year olds (local data)

In Summer 2020, data relates to places reserved for children as well as those actually attending, due to new guidance as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. Next term, Autumn 2020, the data will be available for funded children actually attending

3-year-old Universal Hours, Summer 2020	County	Broms	Malvern	Redditch	Worcs	W'avon	Wyre Forest
Children in a funded place	5,479	905	605	896	980	1,143	950
Average % take up	100%	114%	105%	91%	90%	101%	101%
Average % engagement	85%	82%	88%	85%	88%	83%	88%

4-year-old Universal Hours, Summer 2020	County	Broms	Malvern	Redditch	Worcs	W'avon	Wyre Forest
Children in a funded place	3,589	556	366	564	693	772	638
Average % take up	105%	115%	120%	87%	100%	111%	106%
Average % engagement	95%	90%	98%	87%	100%	97%	99%

Table 11: Take-up of Universal offer, Summer 2020

The children moving to school in the follow term (Autumn 2020) will be in the 4-year-old cohort and the 3-year-old cohort that turns 4 from 1st April 2020 after the Summer funding term began.

The take-up rates for all District, except Redditch, for 4-year-olds exceeds 100% which means that there are more children in funded places than known children in Worcestershire. This is possible due to inward migration. This data from Redditch shows only 87% of 4-year-olds using their funded place in Worcestershire. This could mean families are not taking up the child's early education place, or that they attend a provider outside of the Local Authority area.

Take-up Rates – Extended offer for 3 and 4-year olds

Since September 2017, children aged 3 and 4-years old are entitled to an additional 15 hours per week of free childcare, subject to eligibility criteria, principally that both parents (or one parent in a single parent family) are earning above the minimum wage for at least 16 hours per week, up to £100,000 per annum. This is known as the extended entitlement, extended offer, or 30 hours. To claim this entitlement requires a code from HMRC and re-validation of this code every 3 months

Take-up rates for the extended offer are calculated from historic economic data of the population in the County giving a maximum number of likely eligible children and comparing this to actual take-up, per term as seen in table 12 below.

Extended offer take-up rates for 3- & 4-yr-olds.			
	Autumn	Spring	Summer
2017/2018	72%	69%	69%
2018/2019	78%	78%	76%
2019/2020	79%	77%	70%

Table 12: Take-up of Extended Offer, Summer 2020

During Summer 2020, parents did not need to renew eligibility codes for their entitlement due to the COVID19 pandemic and the special exceptions permitted for the early education entitlements. It is thought that as many children were not able to take up their place at settings due to government guidance during lockdown, that the expected parents did not apply for the extended offer and hence the fall in take-up rate for Summer 2020.

Another way to monitor the ability of early years settings to meet the needs of families is to compare the percentage of families requesting confirmation codes from HMRC to claim their funded hours against actual take up. Table 13 shows that if a code is requested, then a place is usually taken, and the code validated.

National figures show that of those families living in Worcestershire requesting validity codes between Autumn 2017 and Summer 2019, an average of 98% eventually took up a place compared to 93% nationally.¹¹ Since Autumn term 2019, this data is no longer reported by HMRC as the extended entitlement is now part of normal business.

	Autumn 2017	Spring 2018	Summer 2018	Autumn 2018	Spring 2019	Summer 2019
Codes Issued	2,881	4,152	4,775	3,138	4,396	5,287
Codes Validated	2,837	4,081	4,677	3,079	4,274	5,098
% of Issued Codes validated	98%	98%	98%	98%	97%	96%
Children in a 30 hours place in a setting in the County	2,911	3,840	4,570	3,181	4,464	5,080
Children in a 30 hours place as a percentage of codes issued to families living in Worcestershire (%)	101.0%	92.5%	95.7%	101.4%	101.5%	96.1%

Table 13: Extended Offer codes requested and validated, by Term

Demand for these places are likely to be affected by the pandemic as working patterns over the last year have changed significantly. It is imperative that supply of places is maintained to support families to access work whatever their requirements for childcare.

Much like the 15 hour offer, there is a very strong termly pattern, with many more children taking up extended offer funded places in the Summer term. The use of free funded hours from 3 and

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/30-hours-free-childcare-eligibility-codes-issued-and-validated>

4-year olds children has increased from 4,570 children in Summer 2018 to 5,080 in Summer 2019 (increase of 510 children) as seen in table 13. This additional demand has been successfully matched by an increase in supply of places by the childcare market; a sign of a dynamic and successful early years market.

3-year-old Extended Hours, Summer 2020	County	Broms	Malvern	Redditch	Worcs	W'avon	Wyre Forest
Children in a funded place	2,746	495	286	473	463	564	465
Average % eligibility	68%	74%	68%	65%	66%	70%	65%
Average % take up	70%	80%	76%	67%	61%	67%	69%
Average % engagement	63%	60%	61%	70%	64%	59%	66%

4-year-old Extended Hours, Summer 2020	County	Broms	Malvern	Redditch	Worcs	W'avon	Wyre Forest
Children in a funded place	1,851	298	187	297	331	399	339
Average % eligibility	68%	74%	68%	65%	66%	70%	65%
Average % take up	80%	85%	97%	68%	74%	79%	84%
Average % engagement	72%	64%	74%	71%	75%	71%	80%

Table 14: Extended offer Take-up Rates, Summer 2020

There is a variation in take-up rate across the Districts in the Local Authority area. An average rate of 70% is comprised of rates from 80% in Bromsgrove to 61% in Worcester. This may be due to the impact of closure of nurseries for part of the Summer term, parents able to undertake childcare themselves due to furlough in various sectors of employment, or concern of infection within the setting.

Opening hours and availability

Funded childcare is provided to support parents back into work. Due to the variety of shift patterns and employment contracts, the childcare market needs to be flexible and adaptive which can only be facilitated by a marketplace that has many types of providers with a clear offer to parents, covering locations near work-places and homes as well as various opening times including at weekends and early mornings.

The universal offer available to all children the term after their third birthday is for 570 hours per annum. This is usually taken as 15 hours per week over 38 weeks, matching the school

calendar. However, families are able to stretch their entitlement over a longer period by reducing the number of hours taken each week, though it cannot be increased to over 15 hours per week. In the Summer term 2020, 24% of children accessing funded hours stretched their entitlement (beyond the 13 weeks of that term), compared to 20% in 2019.

Providers are asked each year to sign an agreement to accept Government funding for free early years provision. In September 2020, the new annual provider agreements show that 43% of those settings accepting early education funding offered stretched funding to 3 and 4-year olds (49% in June 2019) an indication that providers are providing a flexible offer to meet the needs of families. This information will continue to be monitored to assess if it meets the needs of parents.

There is a wide range of providers across the County which gives a good choice to parents, although due to the rural nature of large parts of Worcestershire, for some family's choice is limited. Only high-quality settings (those rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted) are supported to offer funded places, however funding is not removed from a provider following a low quality judgement if sufficient places, for similar age range, and hours, is not available elsewhere.

If the impact of the COVID19 pandemic results in a long-term change of employment patterns and occupations for families in Worcestershire, the Local Authority, through Worcestershire Children First, will work with providers to ensure suitable places are provided.

Greater consideration is also being given to ensure there is sufficient childcare available in settings across the County for babies and very young children as grandparents may be required to take on less childcare in the future due to shielding. In the Parental survey conducted in 2018, 37.9% of respondents across Worcestershire said that informal childcare from family and friends was a key source of support.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Under the Equalities Act 2010, Local Authorities must ensure they promote equality and inclusion by removing barriers of access to funded childcare. This is done by working with parents to know what is available to them and support them to find the right provision, and by working with providers to support and promote best practice. It is important to secure multi-agency focus on local partnerships between education, health and social care.

The Graduated Response approach to emerging educational needs is designed to support settings with appropriate additional funding for the level of targeted support needed for children with additional needs to be able to access the provision. The percentage of children for which settings in Worcestershire are currently receiving this funding for additional support is shown below. Only children in a funded early education place are considered so the number of 2-year olds is 988 while the number of 3&4-year olds is 9,560 in Summer 2020, a much larger cohort. While there have been slight changes from the previous 2 years, no trends are yet noted, and the rates continue to be monitored. The impact that this additional funding has on outcomes for children is to be assessed long term, as well as any changes to the graduated response level for a child.

SEND status - 2 year olds	Summer 2018	Summer 2019	Summer 2020
1.1 No special educational need & GR1	92.2%	91.7%	92.1%
1.3 Graduated Response 2 (GR2)	3.9%	3.7%	3.5%
1.4 Graduated Response 3 (GR3)	1.5%	1.2%	1.4%
1.5 Graduated Response 4 (GR4)	2.3%	2.7%	1.9%
1.6 Exceptional Early Years Funding / EHCP	0.2%	0.6%	1.0%

Table 15: SEND status for 2-year-olds 2020

SEND status - 3&4 year olds	Summer 2018	Summer 2019	Summer 2020
1.1 No special educational needs & GR1	89.9%	89.9%	89.5%
1.3 Graduated Response 2 (GR2)	5.1%	5.0%	4.8%
1.4 Graduated Response 3 (GR3)	1.8%	1.9%	1.8%
1.5 Graduated Response 4 (GR4)	2.6%	2.6%	2.7%
1.6 Exceptional Early Years Funding / EHCP	0.6%	0.7%	1.2%

Table 16: SEND status for 3-and 4-year-olds 2020

In some circumstances, specialist provision is required to allow young children to reach their full potential in an early education setting. Specialist early years language units have been commissioned in each district, two of which are being delivered by the NHS, and one by the nursery assessment unit at Batchley First school. A further unit is provided at Cranham Primary School by ICAN, a children's communication charity, alongside their nursery. This targeted intervention, provides children with specialist provision for typically 6 hours per week to support their speech, language and communication development.

Five nursery assessment units (NAU) across Worcestershire support in assessing the correct level of provision required by a child for when they start school. Four of these are attached to special schools (Chadsgrove, Fort Royal, Vale of Evesham and Wyre Forest) and a further unit is attached to a first school in Redditch (Batchley). Typically, children will attend for 6 or 9 hours per week which means each full-time place can support in the assessment of 5 young children. The child will ordinarily be attending another setting for the remaining hours. Access to the NAU is via the Pre-school Forum.

Families from minority backgrounds

Ensuring children from minority backgrounds are able to access funded early education places is key to reducing inequality and ensure all children receive the best start in life. Therefore, the monitoring of take-up amongst these groups and the active engagement by the Local Authority to ensuring the childcare market and available information meets the needs of these families is a crucial aspect of assessing childcare sufficiency.

Data from the 2011 census shows that across Worcestershire 92.4% of residents classified themselves as White British, with a further 2.6% classified as 'White, other'. The next largest ethnic group were those classifying as 'Pakistani' at 0.9% of the population, with all other ethnic

groups at less than 1%. This represents a far lower population of minority ethnic groups than the West Midlands, where 79.2% of residents were recorded as 'White British', 2.5% 'White, other', 4.1% as 'Pakistani', 3.9% as 'Indian' and all other groups at or below 1.5%¹². Comparing the ethnic make-up of Worcestershire to the take-up of 3 and 4-year old funded hours places in Summer term 2020, we can see from table 17 that access to funded places is fairly in line with demographics of the County as a whole. However, 12.2% do not record any ethnic original, a significant percentage of the cohort.

White British/Welsh/English/Cornish	75.4%
Eastern European	1.4%
European	1.4%
Pakistani	1.2%
54 other ethnic groups, each less than 1%	8.4%
Information not obtained	12.2%

Table 17: Ethnic make-up of Children accessing the Universal offer, Summer 2020
Source: Synergy July 2020

This suggests that efforts to ensure the engagement of families across different ethnic backgrounds and the provision of places that meets a range of needs is being met, although further assessment will be needed.

Affordability

Government funded places is intended to ensure the delivery of 15 or 30 hours a week of free childcare but is not intended to cover the costs of meals, other consumable or additional services. For many providers, these additional costs are crucial to delivering sustainable high-quality flexible childcare, but they should not restrict a family's ability to take-up their child's free place. Providers must therefore be clear and transparent at the point of offering a place of any additional costs for the family, and that these are additional costs must be voluntary.

Parents returning to work may also incur costs for childcare commitments for younger children and wrap-around care for school age children. Availability of these providers is shown at the start of this section and all schools are encouraged to offer breakfast and after-school clubs.

The cost of a place to families is reported annually by the Coram, Childcare Survey and shows an annual increase from 2018. Information is collected locally, and providers are asked to keep it updated as information for parents¹³. Another research body for early years, CEEDA have undertaken a more current report published in June 2020 about sustainability in the early years market.¹⁴

¹² [ONS population datasets 2011 census](#)

¹³ [Coram childcare survey 2019](#)

¹⁴ [CEEDA about early years report 2020](#)

This highlights the role that childcare will place in economic recovery after the pandemic and the cross-subsidy of the various provider types.

Worcestershire continue to offer business support to all providers and encourage one-to-one meetings to consider business sustainability in a confidential environment.

Finding information and accessing funded hours

Since April 2020, the Family Information Service (FIS) is commissioned by Worcestershire as part of the Starting Well contract. This service supports families with access to the early education childcare offer as well as parenting support, community engagement and volunteering.¹⁵

An enhanced digital offer is being developed to support access to services as well as the development of the community health connector role.

Information is also available on the Worcestershire Children First website including a search facility of all local Ofsted registered childcare providers.

We will continue to engage with parents wherever possible via all professional partners including GPs, DWP job coaches, as well as Health Visitors.

¹⁵ [Starting Well Worcestershire](#)

Sufficiency of Early Years Childcare at District and Ward level

Methodology

Worcestershire is a two tier authority with 6 District Councils. Each District Council area is divided into wards. A ward is the primary unit of English electoral geography for civil parishes and borough and District Councils. This allows sufficiency of places to be considered at a local level and allows comparison with other parts of the local authority area. A data review is undertaken each term, to review those children eligible for a free early education place, demand from families, and supply of places from Early Years providers registered with Ofsted. This review considers the details in each ward within the County and is presented by District, in the following sections.

A place has been defined as 15 hours per week so that 1 child eligible for early education is entitled to 1 place. Three- and four-year-olds eligible for the extended entitlement of 30 hours are therefore entitled to 2 places under this metric. Only providers with an Ofsted rating of Good or Outstanding, or new providers who are yet to be assessed, have been considered in this sufficiency assessment under the directive to ensure a sufficiency of good places. The forecast model assumes 1 funded early education place can be used by either 2-,3- or 4-year-olds where a provider offers places across this age range.

The available hours are calculated by opening times multiplied by the maximum number of children that can be cared for at any one time, with consideration of a realistic occupancy rate. These hours are then recalculated to give the number of places, and this is considered against the number of known children living in the same ward for the next 12 months (3 terms) due to be eligible for a place, to give a level of sufficiency which has been RAG rated.

As we have considered through this report thus far, locality is only one indicator of sufficiency and factors such as availability of places for siblings and flexibility are also crucial in understanding how well the childcare and early education market is meeting the needs of families in each area.

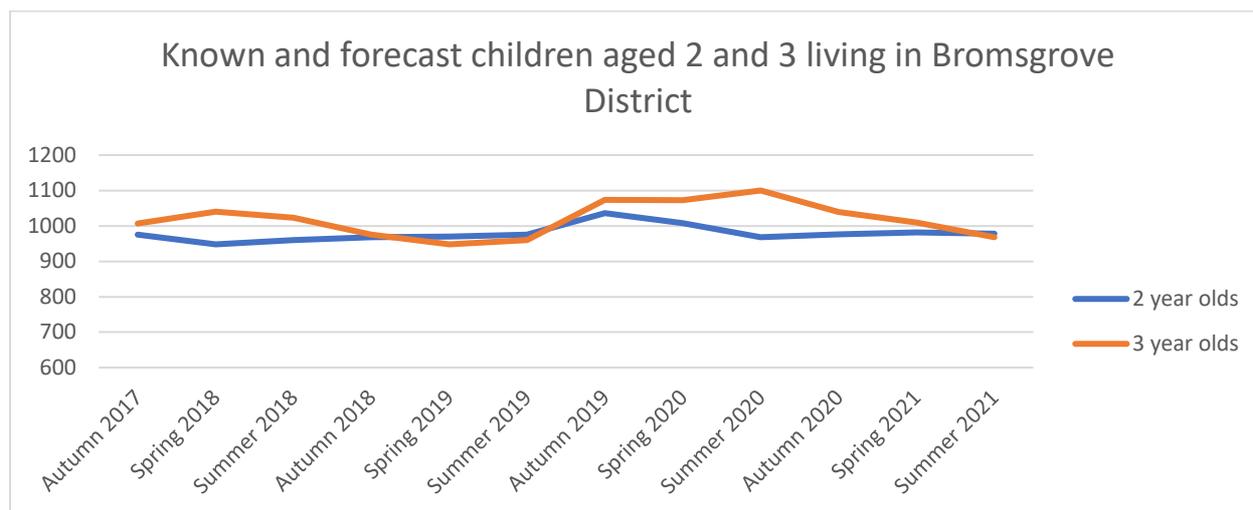
The number of 4-year-olds in early education provision changes dramatically each term. In Autumn, all 4-year-olds should be registered to a school. As there is often a phased start to Reception, some places may be claimed for a very short amount of time, in that term. Summer born children will be in school as soon as they turn 4 and so only claim 3 terms of early education funding while still 3-years-old. For these reasons, no comment is made on the number of 4-year-olds. The planned numbers are included in the take-up rates by wards.

Bromsgrove

The district of Bromsgrove lies in the North-East of the county and is comprised primarily of the town of Bromsgrove and surrounding villages. The district has strong transport links to both Worcester City and Birmingham, which borders the district to the North.

The area has 99,900 residents¹⁶ within the 84 square miles. In Summer 2020 there were 998 2-year-olds and 1,100 3-year-olds; a total of 2,068.

By Summer 2021, this is expected to fall by 122 to 1,946, as the reduced number of 2-year-olds follow through to a reduction in 3-year-olds.



The average annual household income of families living in Bromsgrove is one of the highest in the County, resulting in the lowest average percentage of eligibility for 2-year-old funded entitlement at 19% in Summer 2020 compared to the County Level of 27%. Engagement by 2-year-old children living in Bromsgrove District is only 62% of those potentially eligible. However, it is likely that a number of families choose to access their funded entitlement with providers outside of Worcestershire as the area has strong transport links with Birmingham.

The universal offer of funded early education places is accessed by 82% of those children living in the District. This is not considered a sufficiency issues as setting in the district claim funding for 114% of this age group and so are providing spaces for more than the number of know children, evidencing inward migration to the District.

Bromsgrove has the highest estimated percentage of children eligible for 30-hours (extended offer) at 74% of families,

¹⁶ NOMIS 2019

Bromsgrove Wards

A map for Bromsgrove showing the 30 wards, is available in appendix 1.

Ward Name	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Alvechurch South	Green	Green	Green
Alvechurch Village	Red	Red	Red
Aston Fields	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Avoncroft	Green	Green	Green
Barnt Green & Hopwood	Green	Green	Green
Belbroughton & Romsley	Green	Green	Green
Bromsgrove Central	Green	Green	Green
Catshill North	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Catshill South	Yellow	Red	Red
Charford	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Cofton	Red	Red	Red
Drakes Cross	Green	Green	Green
Hagley East	Green	Green	Green
Hagley West	Green	Green	Yellow
Hill Top	Green	Green	Green
Hollywood	Yellow	Red	Red
Lickey Hills	Yellow	Red	Red
Lowes Hill	Green	Green	Yellow
Marlbrook	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Norton	Green	Green	Green
Perryfields	Green	Green	Green
Rock Hill	Red	Red	Red
Rubery North	Green	Green	Green
Rubery South	Green	Green	Green
Sanders Park	Green	Green	Green
Sidemoor	Green	Green	Green
Slideslow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Tardebigge	Green	Green	Green
Wythall East	Green	Green	Green
Wythall West	Green	Green	Green

Across the district, there should be sufficient places for eligible children to claim their funded place. Some wards show a stronger supply of places than others, and so some families may need to look in neighbouring wards to access their child's entitlement.

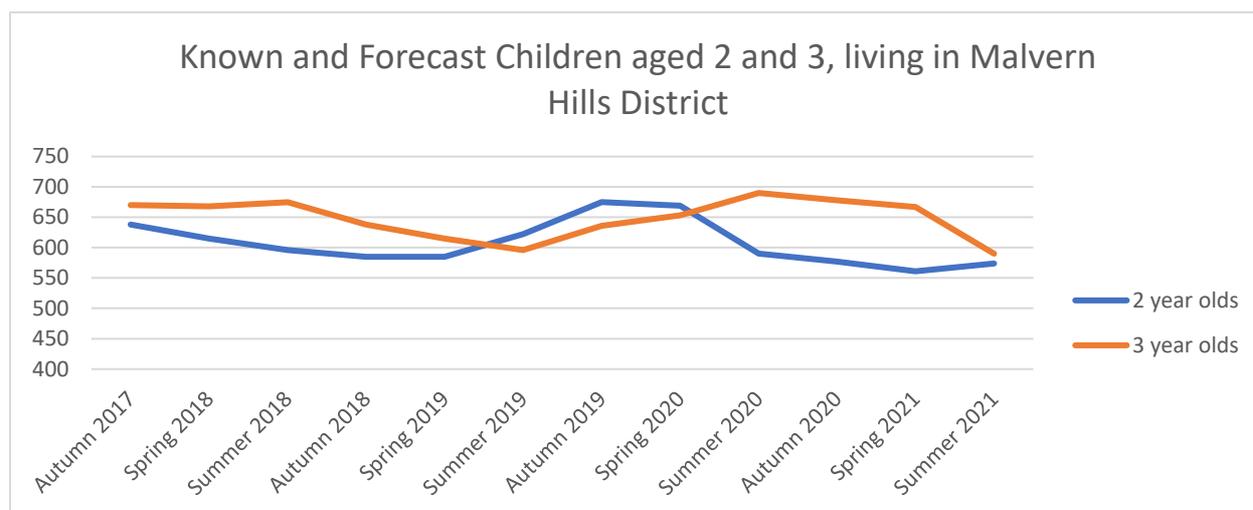
Local information will be continually gathered to confirm this analysis. This will include an understanding of inward and outward migration from the District.

Work to sustain any private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group based setting in those red RAG rated wards, across all terms, will be prioritised. This will include building strong relationships around business modelling and awareness of likely parental demand during the pandemic.

Malvern Hills

The district council of Malvern Hills covers the entirety of the west side of Worcestershire. The area has an estimated 78,700 residents¹⁷ and covers a total of 223 square miles of predominantly rural areas, but does encompass the towns of Malvern, Upton-upon-Severn, and Tenbury Wells. The majority of the district is made up of small rural villages and borders Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire.

There is approximately 1,280 children aged 2 and 3 living in the district making it the smallest early years population in Worcestershire by some distance, but one of the largest geographically.



The eligibility for 2-year-old funded entitlement is calculated at 26%, and engagement is 68%. This equates to 114, 2-year-olds claiming their entitlement to a funded place during the Summer Term. The number of known 2-year-olds in the District is not expected to change substantially during the year ahead and so there is not expected to be a growth in those entitled to a funded early years provision.

Engagement in the universal offer by 3-year-olds was slightly above the County average at 88% while engagement in the 30 hour (extended offer) was calculated as 61%.

¹⁷ NOMIS 2019

Malvern Wards

A map for Malvern showing the 22 wards, is available in appendix 2 to this report

Ward Name	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Alfrick and Leigh	Green	Green	Green
Baldwin	Green	Green	Green
Broadheath	Green	Green	Green
Chase	Green	Green	Green
Dyson Perrins	Green	Green	Green
Hallow	Red	Red	Red
Kempsey	Red	Red	Red
Lindridge	Green	Green	Green
Link	Green	Green	Green
Longdon	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Martley	Green	Green	Green
Morton	Green	Yellow	Yellow
Pickersleigh	Red	Red	Red
Powick	Green	Green	Green
Priory	Green	Yellow	Yellow
Ripple	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Teme Valley	Green	Green	Green
Tenbury	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Upton and Hanley	Green	Green	Green
Wells	Red	Red	Red
West - Malvern Hills	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Woodbury	Green	Green	Green

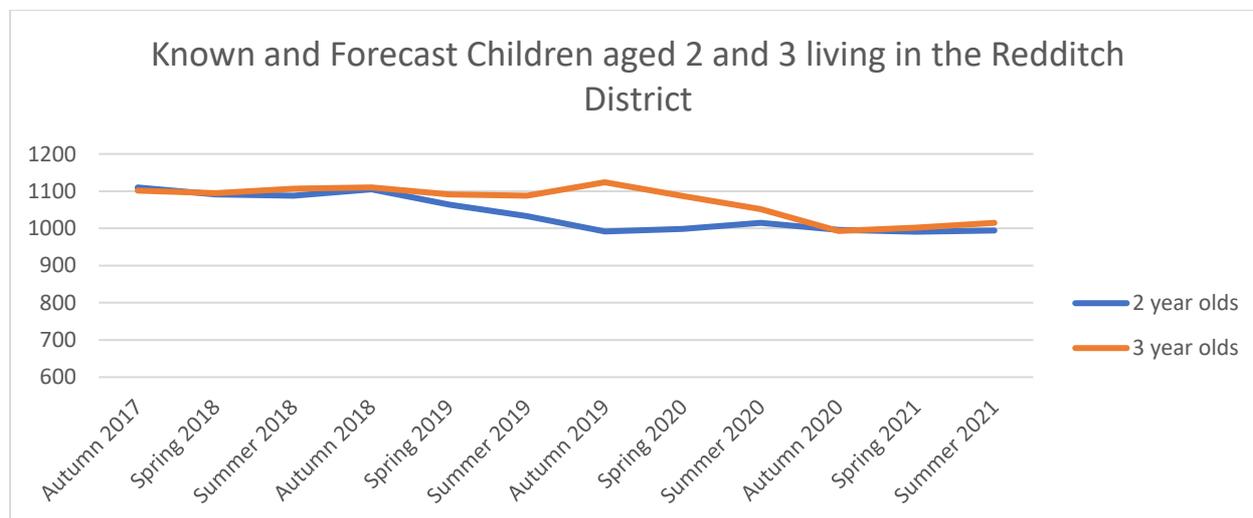
In the Autumn term, there are 4 wards in this district where children live and where they may have to look outside of the ward to find a place. However, there are 14 wards with an estimated over supply in the district.

This is a similar situation in the Summer term which shows that providers can increase places to meet the typical changes in demand over the year.

However, due to the rural nature of this District, and the likely longer traveling distances to alternative provision, emphasis will be placed on work to ensure local provision can meet local demand, in those wards RAG rated red over the 3 terms.

Redditch

The district council of Redditch predominantly includes the urban town of Redditch and immediate surrounding area. The area encompasses approximately 85,300 residents¹⁸ over an area of just 30 square miles. In Summer 2020, there are 2,067 two- and three-year-olds living in the district. This is anticipated to fall to 2,009 by September 2021.



The percentage eligibility for 2-year-old funded entitlement for Summer 2020 was 31%, higher than the average for the County of 27% which is indicative of lower household incomes. Engagement is Calculated at 53%. Some children may be accessing their entitlement in other local authority areas, but it is thought that low engagement may be due to the guidance introduced by the DfE as a result of the national lockdown from 23rd March 2020

Engagement of 3- year olds with the universal offer, and the extended offer was 91% and 70% respectively in Summer 2020.

¹⁸ NOMIS 2019

Redditch Wards

A map for Redditch showing the 12 wards, is available in appendix 3.

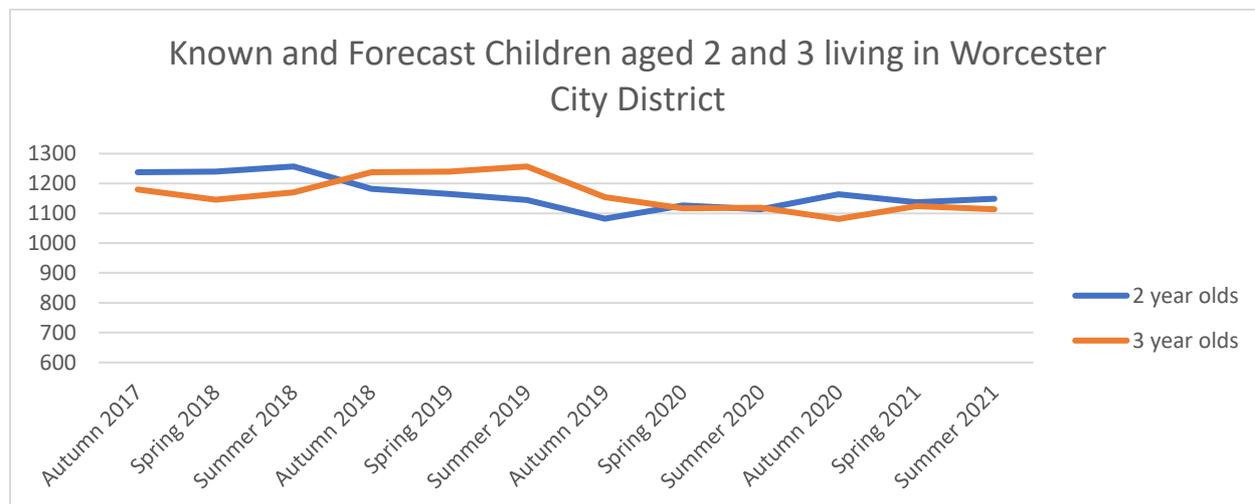
Ward Name	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Abbey			
Astwood Bank and Feckenham			
Batchley & Brockhill			
Central			
Church Hill			
Crabbs Cross			
Greenlands			
Headless Cross and Oakenshaw			
Lodge Park			
Matchborough			
West - Redditch			
Winyates			

There is only one ward where there is a potential sufficiency issue for the next 12 months and children may have to look to other wards for places.

Based on the close geographic nature of wards in this urban district and strong transport links, this should not restrict families from accessing places.

Worcester City

Worcester City is the predominant urban area of Worcestershire, located in the centre of the county, bordered by Wychavon and Malvern Hills. The City is by far the most densely populated in Worcestershire with approximately 101,200 residents¹⁹ living within 13 square miles. There were 2,233 two- and three-year-olds living in the area in Summer 2020. This is expected to increase slightly to 2,263 by Summer 2021.



The percentage eligibility for 2-year-old funded places is 31% reflecting the higher deprivation in the area than other districts of the County. Engagement is 58% of those eligible.

The universal offer engagement is 88% of known children, and engagement with the extended offer within the district is 64%. This may reflect an over-stating of those families eligible for the extended offer, or a lack of demand for these places. We have not identified any shortfall in supply of places. Indeed, take-up, by 3-year-olds living in the district is 90% which could mean that children and their families have chosen to travel to other Districts.

¹⁹ NOMIS 2019

Worcester Wards

A map for Worcester showing the 15 wards, is available in appendix 4.

Ward Name	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Arboretum	Green	Green	Green
Battenhall	Yellow	Red	Red
Bedwardine	Green	Green	Green
Cathedral	Green	Green	Green
Claines	Green	Green	Green
Gorse Hill	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Nunnery	Green	Green	Green
Rainbow Hill	Green	Green	Green
St Clement	Green	Green	Green
St John	Green	Green	Green
St Peter's Parish	Green	Green	Green
St Stephen	Green	Green	Green
Warndon	Red	Red	Red
Warndon Parish North	Green	Green	Green
Warndon Parish South	Green	Yellow	Red

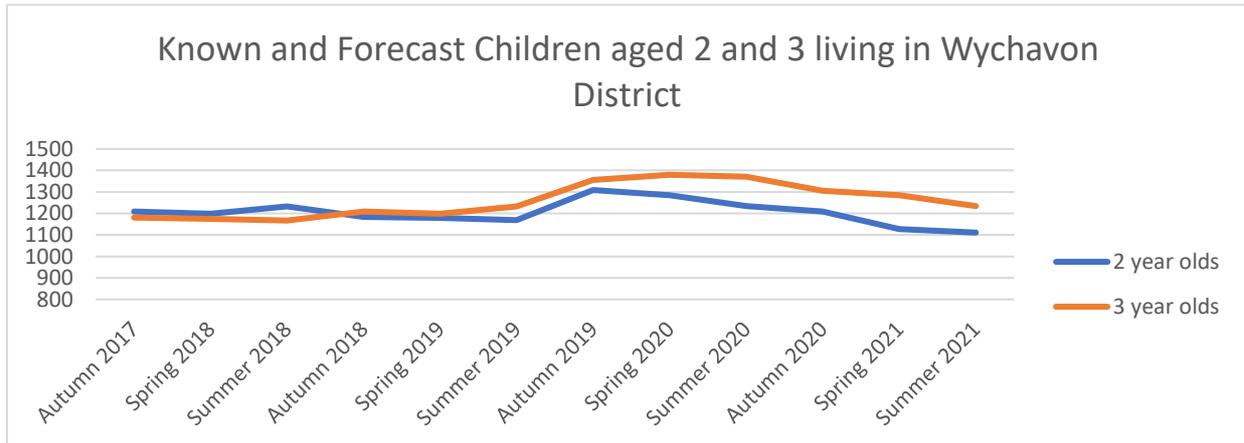
The distribution of places is not ideally matched to the known children and therefore wards are RAG rated highlighting potential issues around local sufficiency.

An academy school in the ward of Warndon was awarded funding under the School Nursery Capital Fund grant to increase the size of it's pre-school. They have recently applied for planning permission and the places are due to be delivered by Autumn 2021.

Wychavon

The district of Wychavon spans an area of 256 square miles on the east side of Worcestershire with an estimated population of 129,400²⁰. The district is made up predominantly of the urban areas of Droitwich, Evesham, and Pershore and the surrounding villages and rural areas. It is bordered by the counties of Warwickshire and Gloucestershire.

In Summer 2020, there were 2,605 two- and three-year-olds living in the District. The last academic year represented a high increase in the number of pre-school children living in the district which is now anticipated to decrease to 2,345 by Summer 2021.



The percentage eligibility for 2-year-old funded entitlement in Wychavon is 23% with engagement at 52% which is below the rate in the County of 59%.

The level of engagement in 3-year-old funded places is 83% and take-up 101%, as a result of net inward migration to the district. Childcare providers do not operate catchment areas and therefore children can come from other districts of the local authority, and other Local Authority areas too, such as Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire.

²⁰ NOMIS 2019

Wychavon wards

A map for Wychavon showing the 32 wards, is available as appendix 5.

Ward Name	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Badsey	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Bengeworth	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Bowbrook	Green	Green	Green
Bredon	Green	Green	Yellow
Bretforton and Offenham	Red	Red	Red
Broadway and Wickhamford	Green	Green	Green
Dodderhill	Red	Red	Red
Drakes Broughton	Red	Red	Red
Droitwich Central	Green	Green	Green
Droitwich East	Green	Yellow	Yellow
Droitwich South East	Green	Green	Green
Droitwich South West	Red	Red	Red
Droitwich West	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Eckington	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Elmley Castle and Somerville	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Evesham North	Red	Red	Red
Evesham South	Red	Red	Red
Fladbury	Green	Green	Green
Great Hampton	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Hartlebury	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Harvington and Norton	Green	Green	Yellow
Honeybourne and Pebworth	Green	Yellow	Yellow
Inkberrow	Green	Green	Green
Little Hampton	Green	Green	Green
Lovett and North Claines	Green	Green	Green
Norton and Whittington	Green	Green	Green
Ombersley	Green	Green	Green
Pershore	Red	Red	Red
Pinvin	Green	Green	Green
South Bredon Hill	Green	Green	Green
The Littletons	Green	Green	Green
Upton Snodsbury	Red	Red	Red

This district continues to show the most pressure for early education places of all districts in the Local Authority area.

There are a number of wards in Wychavon that show demand for more funded places than will be available. Wychavon shares a border with Warwickshire, and as our data shows, some of this demand will be as a result of children from out of area seeking a place at a Worcestershire settings. It is assumed that some eligible children will claim a funded early education place in another local authority areas.

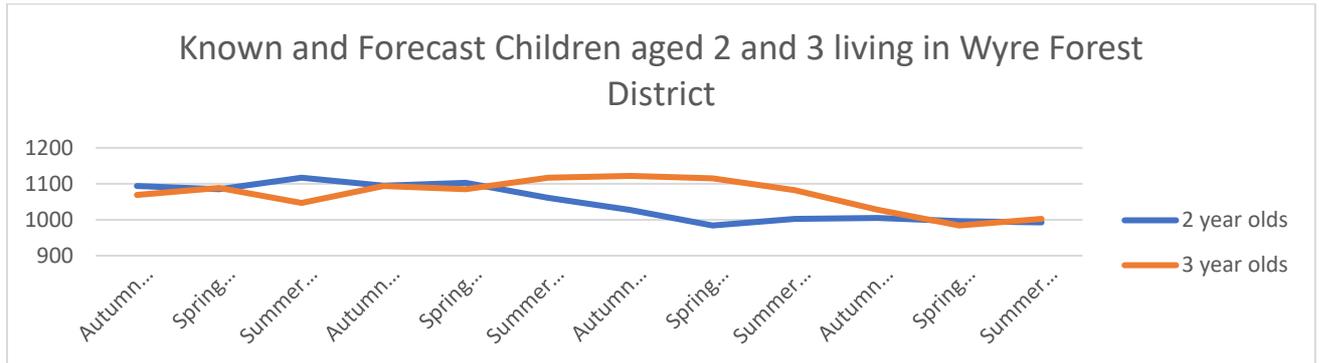
A school in The Littletons has recently expanded its Governor-Led provision, holiday scheme and wraparound care provision.

The number of known children in the area is not increasing over the next 12 months and so this will also ease the pressure on places.

Work will continue to monitor and track local demand, as well as work with providers of all types to investigate new opportunities to increase the number of places, particularly in Droitwich, Evesham and Pershore wards.

Wyre Forest

The district of Wyre Forest spans an area of 75 square miles in the North of Worcestershire and is made up predominantly of the urban area of Kidderminster and surrounding areas, with an estimated population of 101,300 ²¹. The area is bordered by the districts of Malvern Hills, Wychavon and Bromsgrove, and by the Counties of Staffordshire and Shropshire. There are currently 2,084 children aged 2 and 3 living in the District. This is expected to fall slightly to 1,995 by Summer 2021.



The percentage eligible to a funded 2-year-old places is 32%, the highest in the County and engagement is 64%.

The level of engagement with the universal offer by 3-year-olds is 88%. Engagement in the extended 30 hour offer is 66% of the children calculated to be eligible.

²¹ NOMIS 2019

Wyre Forest Wards

A map for Wyre Forest showing the 12 wards, is available in as appendix 6.

Ward Name	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Aggborough & Spennells	Green	Green	Green
Areley Kings & Riverside	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Bewdley & Rock	Green	Green	Green
Blakebrook & Habberley South	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Broadwaters	Green	Green	Green
Foley Park & Hoobrook	Red	Red	Red
Franche & Habberley North	Green	Green	Green
Lickhill	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Mitton	Green	Green	Yellow
Offmore & Comberton	Green	Green	Green
Wribbenhall & Arley	Red	Red	Red
Wyre Forest Rural	Green	Green	Green

There are 2 of the 12 wards in this district that are forecast to potentially have less places than needed by children living in the ward. However, there are 6 wards where the opposite is predicted.

Two schools in Broadwaters have recently expanded their nursery buildings due to grant funding from the DfE funding under the School Nursery Capital Fund which will expand the total provision from Autumn 2020 and support sufficiency in the ward and surrounding areas

Conclusion

The scope of this Childcare Sufficiency Report is to map and assess the available information on supply of early education places for children, along with the demand for those places, to form an assessment of the sufficiency of places within Worcestershire. It also examines any barriers to the supply of, and demand for, that provision to support the Local Authority in its market management duty.

It also examines the availability of provision for childcare for older children in OFSTED registered provision, to support working parents outside of school times.

At the present time, Worcestershire as a whole has sufficient childcare and high-quality early education places for funded children in each of its 6 districts, although this is not evenly available across all wards.

However, ensuring the flexibility to match families' needs for childcare due to working times, and the additional care for younger children can still cause barriers for some working families. Worcestershire will continue to explore all opportunities to ensure that provision is local, flexible, affordable and inclusive.

Take-up rates have fallen during the Summer term when compared to last year and this is felt to be an impact from the timing of the pandemic. Promotion of the universal offer to those children and their families that would be eligible from 1st April (Start of the Summer term), could not happen in March due to the escalating infection rates. Then, from 23rd March eligibility to a place at an early years setting was not possible except for children of key workers or vulnerable children. This will also have impacted on registering 2-year-old children, as well as raising awareness to those families that were eligible to the funded offer. Raising awareness of these entitlements, and parental confidence in settings will be a focus for activity going forward.

While early years provision does not have catchment areas and families are free to access any setting they wish in the County, even in neighbouring counties, it is considered that local provision will reduce the barriers to accessibility as travel is easier with shorter distances. The wards identified with a potential insufficiency of places across all three terms will be the focus of the Early Years team in their business support to providers. There is a focus on 19 wards, varying from 8 in Wychavon to 1 in Redditch. Sufficiency data and information on likely local demand changes in the number of local children (including those aged 0-and 1-year old) will inform support to providers.

This will support a growing understanding of the impact of the pandemic on business models that are experiencing reduced income as a result of lower parental fees for additional hours and decreased demand from parents for places. The funding of early years provision has continued to be paid to providers during lockdown in the Summer term 2020 and there is a compensation payment being made to providers in the Autumn term where demand is lower than the average demand of Autumn 2019 and Autumn 2018. However, this income stream is also likely to fall for some settings in the Spring of 2021, subject to a further guidance from the Department for Education. It is likely that some businesses will need to reduce their potential financial losses by shrinking the number of places in the short term, a situation that will become clearer through on-going closer working relationships with providers.

There have been a few settings across Worcestershire that have closed since the national lockdown on 23rd March 2020 but equally some new settings have opened too, particularly within schools which have set up Governor-Led nurseries to support families during the summer term following some temporary closures. This provided positive transition for pre-reception age children. However, the space is no longer available in the school building as the school children have returned to school and the nurseries places have reverted to the previous setting. These short-term responsive measures of the early education market demonstrate a successful and adaptive market that is able to respond to demand directing supply, and a measure of the support for the early education universal offer for pre-school age children.

The demand for take-up was also lower in the Summer term 2020 than previous Summers and the key to keeping provision is to increase demand from parents. Unlike schools, attendance is not compulsory, and work will be done to increase parental confidence. Settings will be invited to work with the Local Authority to ensure that high quality environments are created to support child development, where parents request both their funded entitlement and paid for places. It is recognised that the economic impacts of the pandemic, will reduce demand in the short term from parents and that a medium- or longer-term plan is also needed. In addition, the number of working parents may change as the impact of the pandemic are felt and this will affect the number of 2-year-olds entitled to funded places as well as children aged 3 and 4 that are entitled to the extended offer. To be able to adapt to these changing needs, a large, dynamic market is needed with nursery classes in schools, pre-school playgroups as well as private day nurseries and childminders, accessible across the County, with flexible sessions and charges.

Childminders were able to continue to work from their own home and many managed to remain open. They continue to add places to Worcestershire's provision for both early education places and childcare for children aged 5 to 14 years old, forming a significant part of the childcare market in Worcestershire which we will continue to monitor, support and train.

The out of school childcare market is also susceptible to the same changes in supply and demand. Many providers are unknown to the Local Authority as they comprise activity clubs, hobbies, and may not always be for sufficient length to support working parents, i.e. finish prior to 6pm, or unreliable due to illness of activity leader. More robust options are provided both on and off school premises by either schools or private providers. The costs vary and can be prohibitive if childcare is only needed for a short while. These barriers will be investigated by developing closer links with out of school providers identified by the Local Authority through their registration with Ofsted. Demand for such services will also be monitored to ensure that supply can meet the needs of working parents.

Business planning is the focus of a sustainability survey of all providers which is adding to our knowledge of the current issues for providers and will further support the subsequent action plan from this report.

Worcestershire Children First, as a wholly owned subsidiary of Worcestershire County Council will strive to ensure continued access to sufficient high-quality childcare for all, meeting the changing needs of families across the County and offer young children the best start in life.