Childcare Sufficiency Report 2022

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1. Introduction and Executive Summary

The Childcare Act 2006 places duties on all local authorities to secure sufficient, accessible and high-quality childcare for children aged 0-14 years, so far as is reasonably practicable for working parents, parents/carers who are studying or training for employment. Therefore, Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to work with early years and childcare providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sector to create sustainable, accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare sufficient to meet the needs of all parents and carers. There is a further duty to secure funded childcare for qualifying working parents following the introduction of the 30 hours extended entitlement.

This 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) summarises the assessment of sufficiency using data about the demand for childcare - including now aligned to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic - and the amount of childcare available in Central Bedfordshire in autumn 2022. Essentially, it also provides an overview of the childcare market in spring 2022, within the context of the cost of living crisis.
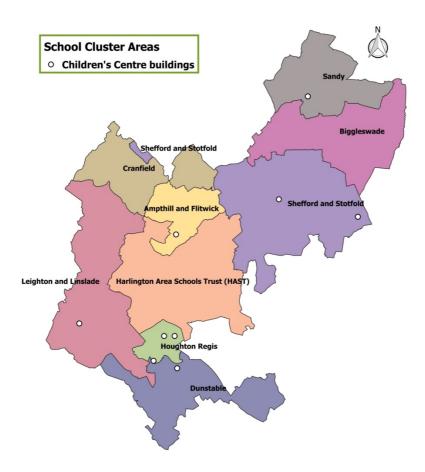
The information within this document will - as with previous CSAs - help Central Bedfordshire Council plan and support the local childcare economy.

Indeed, at the time of the finalisation of this CSA, in late 2022, the UK's early years and childcare sector was continuing to witness an ongoing recruitment and retention crisis effecting the sector.

Evidence attained as part of the research undertaken for this 2022 Central Bedfordshire Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has demonstrated that this is also a theme which is effecting setting-based childcare providers across the locality. It is effecting their sustainability, as is an issue of increasing operating costs - recurrently energy costs - plus incidences of a change in how parents/carers are accessing childcare due to an ongoing factor of employers offering more flexible work practices - including working from home.

Therefore, for the 2022 Central Bedfordshire Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, a key conclusion would be that **sustainability is the key theme moving in to 2023** and the middle of the decade - as the early years and childcare market/sector has to address multi-faceted challenges which all are creating concerns which the local authority should - and will - continue to offer support to address. Encouragingly, all of the locality's early years and childcare providers envisage that they will still be operating in autumn 2024 and the recommendations of this 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment will intend to give added direction to ensure that this remains the case.

2. Central Bedfordshire Map and Cluster areas

3. Demographic Summary and Housing Growth

Basic Demographic Characteristics of Central Bedfordshire in 2022

Central Bedfordshire is a unitary authority serving a growing population of around 294,300, as reported in the 2021 ONS census. Indeed, the locality population had increased by 15.7% compared to the 2011 Census. This is above the average rate for England (6.6%) and among the fastest-growing areas in the country.

Central Bedfordshire remains a largely rural area with over half the population living in the countryside and the remainder in a number of market towns. The largest of these are still Leighton Linslade, Dunstable, Biggleswade, Houghton Regis, Flitwick, Sandy and Ampthill.

Additional statistics and information that is contextually important with regard to the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment includes:

- Central Bedfordshire is ethnically diverse with approximately 10.3% of people living in the area from black or ethnic minority communities. The biggest ethnic minority groups in Central Bedfordshire are White Other (not White British, White Irish or Gypsy or Irish Traveller) and Indian (source ONS 2021).

- Approximately, 11% of children aged 0-19 years are in relative low-income families in Central Bedfordshire compared with 19% across England.
- (The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 combines 39 indicators to produce a single overall deprivation score for every Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in England). Central Bedfordshire is divided into 157 LSOAs, each containing around 1,600 people. Subsequently, three Central Bedfordshire LSOAs are in the 10 to 20% most deprived in England (down from 5 in 2015):

  - Dunstable Manshead ranked: 594
  - Parkside ranked: 602
  - Flitwick ranked: 400

  Ten, Central Bedfordshire LSOAs are in the 20-30% most deprived in England (up from 8 in 2015):

  - Houghton Hall / Tithe Farm ranked: 618
  - Parkside ranked: 601
  - Sandy ranked: 433
  - Leighton Buzzard North ranked: 609
  - Caddington ranked: 562
  - Leighton Buzzard North ranked: 605
  - Dunstable Northfields ranked: 595
  - Dunstable Central / Dunstable Northfields ranked: 568
  - Houghton Hall ranked: 580
  - Tithe Farm ranked: 619

- 44% people aged 16-74 are in full-time employment in Central Bedfordshire compared with 39% across England

Housing Growth

Central Bedfordshire is an area that will continue to grow in people/population in forthcoming years. **43,000 new homes are expected to have been built and occupied by 2035.**
The identification of new housing developments continue to be a fundamental element of the contemporary Childcare Sufficiency Assessment process. Table 1, below, outlines the new dwellings expected to be constructed and occupied up to the school year 2026-2027 in each of Central Bedfordshire's eight Cluster Areas.

Table 1 - New dwellings expected to be constructed and occupied by 2024-2025 in Central Bedfordshire's eight Cluster Areas

Cluster Area	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	Total 2023 ➔ 2026	Potential new *funded* childcare places required by 2027 aligned to Central Bedfordshire Council Pupil Yield Formula (of 0.06 pupils/year group)
Ampthill & Flitwick	127	26	72	63	288	51
Biggleswade	233	219	271	319	1,042	187
Cranfield	437	353	406	490	1,686	303
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	497	299	601	468	1,865	335
Harlington	500	644	649	647	2,440	439
Leighton & Linslade	187	215	259	407	1,068	192
Sandy	67	16	26	56	165	30
Shefford & Stotfold	453	291	535	778	2,057	370
Central Bedfordshire	**2,500**	**2,065**	**2,818**	**3,228**	**10,611**	**1,907**

Table 1 indicates that the Cluster Area(s) that accounts for the highest number of new dwellings - and therefore potential highest need for additional/new funded childcare places – is Harlington, followed in frequency by Shefford and Stotfold.
In terms of *both* Cluster Areas, if the Central Bedfordshire Council planning yield formula - assessed as 0.06 pupils per dwelling, per year group - was applied, this could lead to an additional *approximate* 810 resident children aged 2-4 years being resident in those two Cluster Areas at the completion of all of the developments and their phasing - with that figure being aggregated for three age cohorts for this particular methodology.

4. Population and Childcare – aligned to Cluster Areas

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Ampthill and Flitwick Cluster Area

Table 2 – Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Amptill and Flitwick Cluster area
(source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	817	512	906	1,339	1,023

Table 3 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Ampthill and Flitwick Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	273	283	276
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↓262	↑286	↑286

Table 4 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Amptill and Flitwick Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Amptill & Flitwick	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	5	16	3	5	9	7
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	381	90	119	138	386	311

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Biggleswade Cluster Area

Table 5 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Biggleswade Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	1,102	749	1,056	1,326	883

Table 6 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Biggleswade Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	445	462	449
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↑477	↑493	↑489

Table 7 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Biggleswade Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Biggleswade	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	3	23	3	4	10	5
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	288	147	139	266	461	192

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Cranfield Cluster Area

Table 8 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Cranfield Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	799	577	774	905	591

Table 9 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Cranfield Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	293	326	304
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↑313	↑345	↑344

Table 10 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Cranfield Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Cranfield	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	2	19	2	5	6	2
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	196	109	56	200	158	58

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Dunstable & Houghton Regis Area

Table 11 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Dunstable and Houghton Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	2,775	1,988	2,967	3,847	2,783

Table 12 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Dunstable and Houghton Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	1,085	1,148	1,113
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↓1,035	↓1,113	↑1,136

Table 13 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Dunstable and Houghton Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Dunstable and Houghton Regis	Number of providers by childcare type						
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes	Specialist Holiday schemes
	4	80	5	23	23	6	2
	Places by childcare type						
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes	Specialist Holiday schemes
	235	519	162	1,209	653	301	75

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Harlington Cluster Area

Table 14 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Harlington Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	661	504	878	1,172	899

Table 15 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Harlington area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	285	320	313
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↑386	↑416	↑387

Table 16 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Harlington Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Harlington	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	4	17	5	7	5	5
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	236	96	189	160	152	150

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Leighton and Linslade Cluster Area

Table 17 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Leighton and Linslade Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	1,926	1,443	2,129	2,750	1,877

Table 18 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Leighton and Linslade Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	780	817	792
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↓760	↓804	↓811

Table 19 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Leighton and Linslade Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Leighton and Linslade Cluster Area	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	7	65	9	18	35	7
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	494	448	228	515	940	345

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Sandy Cluster Area

Table 20 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Sandy Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	721	505	785	1,071	793

Table 21 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Sandy Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	242	249	247
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↓235	↓244	↑249

Table 22 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Sandy Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Sandy Cluster Area	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	4	18	2	7	9	3
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	313	112	96	237	250	99

Population/Provision 0–14 year olds in Shefford and Stotfold Cluster Area

Table 23 - Estimated population of 0-14 years in the Shefford and Stotfold Cluster area (source: ONS 2020-MYE)

	0-2 years	3-4 years	5-7 years	8-11 years	12-14 years
Cluster Population	1,840	1,346	2,118	2,786	1,869

Table 24 – Forecast change in the number of resident 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Shefford and Stotfold Cluster area 2023/2024 – 2026-2027 (source: CBC 2020 [Housing-led])

	Resident 2 year olds	Resident 3 year olds	Resident 4 year olds
Forecast Cluster Population 2023/2024	815	881	844
Forecast Cluster Population 2026/2027	↓779	↓856	↑881

Table 25 - Number of childcare providers and places in the Shefford and Stotfold Cluster area (source: CBC 2022)

Shefford and Stotfold Cluster Area	Number of providers by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	10	57	11	9	18	8
	Places by childcare type					
	Day Nurseries	Childminders	Pre-Schools	Nursery/ Pre-school in a school	Out of School Clubs	Holiday schemes
	637	375	451	264	668	487

5. Funded Childcare

Table 18a below presents the take-up of the three types of funded childcare during the summer term 2022 across the Central Bedfordshire locality source: CBC 2022)

Cluster Name	Type of funded childcare		
	No. of funded 2 year-old children accessing a funded place	No. of 3&4 year-old children accessing a universal funded place	No. of 3&4 year-old children accessing an extended funded place
Ampthill & Flitwick	31	405	217
Biggleswade	52	496	260
Cranfield	19	379	142
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	132	1,228	600
Harlington	16	311	143
Leighton & Linslade	62	941	520
Sandy	30	343	164
Shefford & Stotfold	85	923	552
Out of County	37	472	258
Central Bedfordshire	**464**	**5,498**	**2,856**

Funded Two Year olds

During the spring term 2022, 71% of eligible children accessed 2 year-old funding (33 were out of county).
(Source: DfE publication of provision for children under 5 years of age in England).

Funded Three and Four Year olds

During the spring term 2022, 99% of 3 and 4 year olds benefitted from funded early education (259 children were out of county).
(Source: DfE publication of provision for children under 5 years of age in England).

Three and Four Year olds Extended 30-hour childcare offer

During the summer term 2022, 2,598 children in a 30 hours place represented 77% of all codes issued to parents in the Central Bedfordshire local authority area for extended funding.
(258 children were out of county).
(Source: HMRC ECS check report (13/04/2022)).

Children in Care - CLAs

Table 18b below shows the number of children that were looked after who were accessing a free entitlement place *summer term 2022*.

summer term 2022	Number of CBC CLAs - 2 year olds	How many claimed 2 year old funding…		Number of CBC CLAs - 3 and 4 year olds	How many claimed 3 and 4 year old funding…	
	Total	Within CBC	Outside of area	Total	Within CBC	Outside of area
CBC CLA	11	x	5	13	10	x
Other LA CLA	-	5	-	-	x	-
Total	11	9	5	13	14	x

All funded children	Number of children claimed
2 year old funded	464
3 and 4 year old funded	5,538

x - cohort number is under 5 so has been suppressed to preserve confidentiality

Feedback given by: (a) early years and childcare providers/settings and; (b) registered childminders as part of the autumn 2022 consultation process to inform this CSA showed that:

22% of responding early years childcare providers/settings who provided **free entitlement for 2 year olds places said that they had vacant/unused places** in autumn 2022, most frequently from the Dunstable and Houghton Regis area.

39% of responding early years and childcare providers/settings (at an average of 6.5 places per relevant provider) who provided the **universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds places said that they had vacant/unused places** in autumn 2022.

Feedback on this theme included:

"As there is a lot of demand for 15 hours places, we are giving priority to the 3 year olds on universal funding".

"Parents are only using their funded hours and not paying for additional hours" – and similarly:

"Lots of parents are just using the funded hours rather than paying for extra days".

(In comparison) 24% of responding early years and childcare providers/settings (at an average of 5 places per relevant provider) who provided the **extended 30 hours childcare offer** said that they had vacant/unused places in autumn 2022.
Feedback on this theme included:

(Most frequently, words to the effect) *"More demand for 30 hour funding, as mostly our parents are working".*

"We are capping the number of funded hours to 19, allowing us to offer more places on the Universal hour for 3 year olds".

"More parents seem to be eligible for the 30 hour funding than before… it is frustrating that HMRC won't back date".

6. Childcare Provision, Occupancy and COVID-19

For the 2022 Central Bedfordshire CSA the following approaches were used to consult with childcare providers.

135 of the localities' early years childcare providers/settings (i.e. PVI nurseries, maintained school nursery classes and pre-school/playgroups) responded to a request to participate in a structured telephone interview.

11 of the localities registered childminders were invited to participate in a structured interview and 39 childminders responded to a request to complete an on-line survey.

20 of the localities out of school childcare providers (i.e. (sometimes duel…) holiday playschemes, out of school clubs and breakfast clubs responded to a request to participate in a structured interview and 30 responded to a request to complete an on-line survey.

Finally, the reader can note that the use of the term 'childcare provider[s]' in the following section 6. denotes a reference to all three types of providers, i.e. (a) early years childcare providers/settings; (b) registered childminders and; (c) out of school childcare providers/settings.

6.1 Childcare, Occupancy and Provision Dynamics

6.1.1 In terms of fundamental occupancy:

53% of early years childcare providers/settings had a waiting list in autumn 2022, with (only) 4% stating that its size had *decreased* since autumn term 2021.
27% stated that its size had *increased* since autumn term 2021.

31% of registered childminders had a waiting list in autumn 2022, with (only) 3% stating that its size had decreased since autumn term 2021.
18% stated that its size had *increased* since autumn term 2021.

6.1.2 Table 19 below presents the position reported by *childcare providers* in terms of vacancies, in autumn term 2022.

Table 19 - Vacancies within childcare providers in autumn 2022

Type of Provision	Percentage reporting vacant places in autumn 2022	Age group evidently accounting for the highest number of vacant places across the locality
Early Years Childcare Providers	47%	3 year olds
Registered Childminders	39%	2 year olds
Out of School Childcare Providers	43%	n/a

For early years childcare providers the Ampthill & Flitwick Cluster (72%) accounted for the highest *number of settings* reporting vacant places, followed in frequency Cranfield Cluster (66%).

For registered childminders the Leighton Buzzard and Linslade Cluster accounted for the highest *number of childminding professionals* reporting vacant places.

For out of school childcare providers the Harlington Cluster area also accounted for the highest *number of settings* reporting vacant places.

6.1.3   Image 1 shows how early years childcare providers/settings summarised their occupancy in October 2022, compared to October 2021:
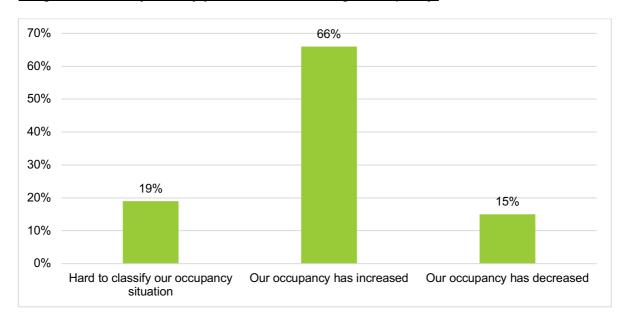
<u>Image 1 - Summary of early years childcare settings' occupancy</u>

Those early years childcare providers/settings that stated that their occupancy had decreased provided a number of reasons for this, with the three most frequent being:

- We think this is due to a declining local birth-rate
- We are not sure – though we have heard that local schools are also witnessing a declining demand?
- We think that this is because of the cost of living crisis

The Ampthill & Flitwick Cluster area accounted for the most frequent proportion of providers who stated it had *increased.*

The Leighton & Linslade Cluster area accounted for the most frequent proportion of providers who stated it had *decreased*.

Image 2 shows how registered childminders summarised their occupancy in October 2022 compared to October 2021: This sector has seen a slightly higher incidence of a decrease than the early years childcare provider/settings – i.e. day nurseries and pre-schools, with regard to occupancy.
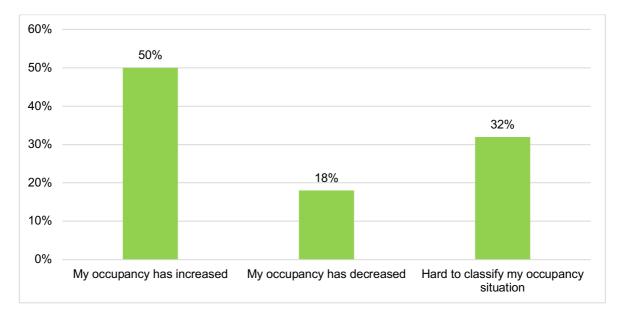
Image 2 - Summary of registered childminder occupancy

Image 3 shows how out of school childcare providers summarised their occupancy in October 2022 compared to October 2021 – with them collectively having the lowest incidence of decreasing occupancy.

Image 3 - Summary of out of school childcare providers occupancy

6.1.4 44% of (all three types of) childcare providers stated that they had witnessed new trends since autumn 2021, with the top 5 being (in order of frequency):

1. **Aligned to costs of living challenges - increasing demand for free entitlement for 2 year old places**
2. Increasing demand for places for children with SEND
3. Decreasing demand for support on Fridays
4. Increasing demand for wrap-round childcare
5. Increasing demand for flexibility and part-time places aligned to childcare timings (in particular this feedback was notable provided by registered childminders

6.1.5 Each of the responding childcare providers/settings were requested to state what they considered to be their standard opening hours.

Table 20 - most frequent opening and closing times for types of registered childcare providers located in the Central Bedfordshire locality

Type of Provider	Most frequent opening/start time	Most frequent close/finish time
Early Years Childcare Provider/Setting	09:00	18:00
After School Club	15:30	18:00
Registered Childminder	07:30	17:30

6.1.6 Early years childcare providers/settings and registered childminders outlined how higher or lower they expected demand for certain places to be in autumn 2023 – compared to autumn 2022, i.e. approximately six months on.

Table 21 - Envisaged demand for types of early years and childcare places in autumn 2023

Early Years Childcare Providers/settings	Fee paying places in autumn 2023…	Free entitlement for 2 year old places in autumn 2023…	Universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds in autumn 2023…	Extended 30 hours childcare offer places for 3 and 4 year olds in autumn 2023…
Significantly higher	5%	0	6%	3.5%
Higher – but not significantly	30%	24%	25%	29%
About the same	38%	42%	45%	42.5%
Lower – but not significantly	5%	0	5.5%	6%
Significantly lower	1%	0	0	1%
Don't Know	10%	10%	13%	10%
Rather not say	0	0	9%	0
Non applicable	11%	24%	2.5%	8%
Childminders	Fee paying places in autumn 2023…	Free entitlement for 2 year old places in autumn 2023…	Universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds in autumn 2023…	Extended 30 hours childcare offer places for 3 and 4 year olds in autumn 2023…
Significantly higher	8%	5%	8%	8%
Higher – but not significantly	26%	13%	23%	24%
About the same	37.5%	48.5%	42%	39%
Lower – but not significantly	8%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Significantly lower	5%	0	5%	5.5%
Don't Know	13%	18%	16%	16%
Rather not say	0	0	1%	0
Non applicable	2.5%	13%	2.5%	5%

Table 21 shows that early years childcare providers/settings envisaged that demand for fee paying and/or funded childcare places would be *higher* in autumn 2023 more frequently than their childminding colleagues.

Additionally, approximately (only) 6% of early years childcare providers/settings stated that they envisage demand for funded places for 3 and 4 year olds will be (to some extent) lower, in autumn 2023.

6.1.7 10% of early years childcare providers/settings said that they have plans to *increase* their capacity over the forthcoming 2 years. Table 22 also presents feedback from registered childminders and out of school childcare providers.

Table 22 - Intentions to increase places/capacity during 2022-2024

Type of Provision	Percentage with an intention to increase the number of places over the next 2 years	Cluster Area(s) accounting for the highest number of reported/intended new places – or an extension to capacity
Early Years Childcare Providers/Settings	10%	Dunstable and Houghton Regis
Registered Childminders	13%	Leighton Buzzard and Linslade
Out of School Childcare Providers	16%	Sandy

6.2   Fees and Finances

6.2.1 Table 23 below shows the average standard hourly fees applicable for each type of childcare provision for specific key age groups, **for fee paying places**.

Table 23 - Average standard hourly fees per age group

Type of Provision	Aged 0 – 12 months	Aged 1 year	Aged 2 years	Aged 3 years	Aged 4 years	Aged 5-8 years
Early Years Childcare Providers	£6.82	£6.82	£5.33	£4.95	£4.96	n/a
Registered Childminders	£5.22	£5.23	£5.52	£5.25	£5.24	£5.24

Out of School Childcare Providers – per session:
After School Club = £7.56
Breakfast Club = £4.96
Holiday Playscheme = £5.95

6.2.2 80% of early years childcare providers/settings stated that in autumn 2022, they currently promoted the availability of Tax Free Childcare to their parents.

In comparison, 97% of registered childminders stated that in autumn 2022, they promoted the

availability of Tax Free Childcare to their parents.

6.3   Ongoing effects of COVID-19

6.3.1   Table 24 below shows (in order of frequency for each type of provider) the four most frequent ***ongoing*** effects of COVID-19 outlined by childcare providers in autumn 2022.

Table 24 - Most frequent ongoing effects of COVID-19 outlined by childcare providers in spring 2021

Type of Provision	Early Years Childcare Providers (28% stated that they were still experiencing ongoing effects)	Registered Childminders (21% stated that they were still experiencing ongoing effects)	Out of School Childcare Providers (11% stated that they were still experiencing ongoing effects)
Repeated Effect 1:	**Financial effect** and *"business debts"* – for example: *"We are in debt having made very big losses during COVID. Having to stay open incurring all the costs without the paying children; while the schools could close"*.	**Financial effect – for example**: and *"the financial effect continues… We now have to let children in, even if they are coughing and sneezing. The funding has not increased whereas the costs have"*.	**Ongoing occupancy concerns – for example**: *"we have less children coming in and therefore less earnings has impacted on the sustainability"*.
Repeated Effect 2:	**Staff retention and recruitment** – for example *"Staff retention is tricky as the industry is being underpaid. We are reviewing our pay in early 2023. The demand is for Level 3 qualified staff"*.	**Increasing business costs – for example**: *"I have to heat my house because I am looking after children, there has been no financial help as I run my business on a domestic premise"*.	**Increasing numbers of children with SEND – for example:** *"There are more children needing more support - and there are more children with SEND"*.
Repeated Effect 3:	**Increasing business costs – for example**: *"After COVID-19 the cost of resources have gone up enormously. We have had to increase fees more than usual"*.	**Ongoing occupancy concerns – for example**: *"parents want less hours or are cutting their hours down due to working from home. The cost of living is rising but funding and childcare fees not"*.	
Repeated Effect 4:	**Ongoing occupancy concerns** – for example: *"Our demand has gone done, I think parents are keeping their children at home for longer"*.		

6.3.2   All childcare providers were requested to state if they had any continuing plans for reenergizing their income generation, to give further momentum to their emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic.

18% of early years childcare providers/settings stated that they did – and this was most frequently via continued fundraising, followed in frequency by raising their fees. Specific feedback included:

"*We have had to increase our fees more than usual* [and] *we are now taking the maximum number of children that are allowed at the Pre-School"*.

"*Our hourly charges are going from £4.00/hour up to £5.00/hour in January 2023"*.

"We will be restarting all our fundraising activities again… it all came to a stop during COVID".
"Our first aim is to employ staff first, i.e. a new leader and deputy… and then we would work on fundraising and grants".

In comparison, 11% of out of school childcare providers stated that they did – and this was most frequently via raising their fees, followed in frequency by increased fundraising activity and applications for grants.

6.3.3   Images 4, 5 and 6 present percentages aligned to how long the three types of childcare providers expected to continue to be offering a service/operating.

Image 4 - How long do you expect to be offering childcare?...early years childcare providers/settings

Image 5 - How long do you expect to be offering childcare?...registered childminders

Image 6 - How long do you expect to be offering childcare?...out of school childcare providers

6.3.4 Table 25 below shows the most frequent forms of support and advice that childcare providers have said they would continue to welcome from Central Bedfordshire Council.

Table 25 - Types of ongoing support and advice requested from the local authority

Type of Provision	Early Years Childcare Providers (with 39% specifying a type of support)	Registered Childminders (with 40% specifying a type of support)	Out of School Childcare Providers (with 34% specifying a type of support)
Support type 1:	To continue to offer guidance and support aligned to SEND children: including with regard to training and any financial support in the form of grants.	Continued facilitation of training on the Early Years Foundation Stage.	Continued advice on any grant giving funds and opportunities.
Support type 2:	Support with the theme of recruitment – and helping to generate a higher number of applicants.	Continued support and advice on preparing for Ofsted inspections.	Training which focuses on behaviour management.
Support type 3:	Support and advice with building adaptations and maintenance.	Continued consideration of the benefits of facilitating training courses over a weekend period.	Support with the theme of recruitment – and helping to generate a higher number of applicants.
Support type 4:	Help and advice on cost-themed sustainability – for example: *"I am really worried about the spiraling costs of running the nursery"*.	Training which focuses on behaviour management.	
Support type 5:	Give advice on grant funding sources and help/support with making applications – particularly any funds to support marketing and promotion.		

6.3.5　All childcare providers were invited to state whether there were any backgrounds/circumstances of parents/carers that attended their provision that they believed would benefit from more support - including support from the Local Authority and health services?
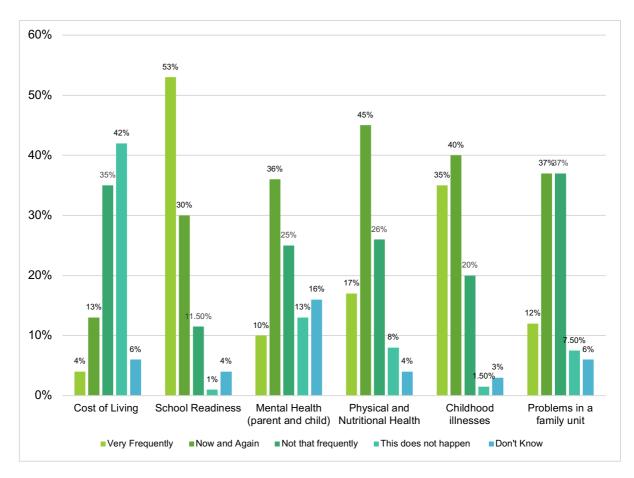35% of childcare providers/settings stated that they *did* and their five most frequent types of responses were – in order of frequency:

1. Carers of children with SEND and those with *"post COVID-19"… "behavioral problems"*
2. Parents and families that are experiencing challenges aligned to the cost of living and *"financial hardship"*
3. Traveller families
4. Families within which a member is experiencing mental health challenges
5. Children and families for whom English is an additional language

6.4　Workforce, Training and Qualifications

6.4.1　All childcare providers were requested to state the frequency with which parents, carers or guardians sought their advice on specific themes and issues:

Image 7 - Frequency with which parents, carers or guardians sought early years childcare providers advice on specific themes and issues

The Cluster area where the response Very Frequently of Now and Again for Cost of Living was stated with the highest frequency was Dunstable and Houghton Regis.

The Cluster area where the response Very Frequently of Now and Again for Mental Health Challenges was stated with the highest frequency was Leighton Buzzard and Linslade.

6.4.2 In terms of the early years childcare providers/settings - the following numbers of staff were evidently employed within each of the eight Cluster area:

Table 26 - Numbers of staff employed within early years childcare providers/settings each Cluster area

Cluster	*Average* number per setting	Percentage of settings where staff had exited *due to* COVID-19
Ampthill & Flitwick	15	64%
Biggleswade	19	50%
Cranfield	10	33%
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	11	64%
Harlington	9	90%
Leighton & Linslade	13	65%
Sandy	12	80%
Shefford & Stotfold	13	62%

Table 27 - fundamental workforce details among setting-based providers in Central Bedfordshire in autumn 2022

Type of Provider	Average number of staff employed at settings in Central Bedfordshire	Percentage of settings stating that they had staff leave in the past 12 months	Percentage of settings stating that they were currently experiencing problems with recruitment and/or retention	Percentage of settings stating that they had training needs or gaps
Early Years Childcare Provider/Setting	12	67%	50%	26%
Out of School Childcare Provider	7	27%	32%	14%

The Cluster areas that accounted for the highest incidence of staff leaving their position over the past 12 months were: (a) Dunstable and Houghton Regis and; (b) Leighton Buzzard and Linslade.

The three most frequent reasons for staff leaving were evidently:

1. Personal health reasons
2. To earn higher wages
3. Retired

Specific feedback included:

"Four staff left due to fuel costs - they had stayed in the early years sector but now have jobs closer to home".

*"The cost of living made it not viable for one person to carry on working here.
The pay in childcare is low, when all the costs are going up".*

"We are part of a school, but our hours and wages have been cut. With the rising cost of living, it is not viable for some staff, and they have left to get better paid jobs. Only the Level 3 staff who are senior practitioners get the Level 3 pay, otherwise they are paid at the same rate as Level 2".

"We all had our hours cut last year as demand wasn't high enough and a staff member went to a higher paid job in the area".

"Staff left because they were not being paid enough. Sometimes they leave when they have finished their training, and I cannot offer them a job at the right level".

"One staff member retired; one went to another early years setting as a promotion; one stayed in the childcare sector but maybe wanted more hours than I could offer".

"One staff member left due to her mental health".

Repeatedly stated posts/positions that evidently were aligned to recruitment or retention challenges/difficulties *included*:

- (Most frequently – by a significant level) Qualified to Level 3
- Teaching Assistant
- SEND Qualification
- Bank Staff
- Playworker

26% of early years childcare providers/settings had staff training needs/gaps and the three repeated were (in order of frequency):

1. Training about Early Years Framework and how it aligns to SEND
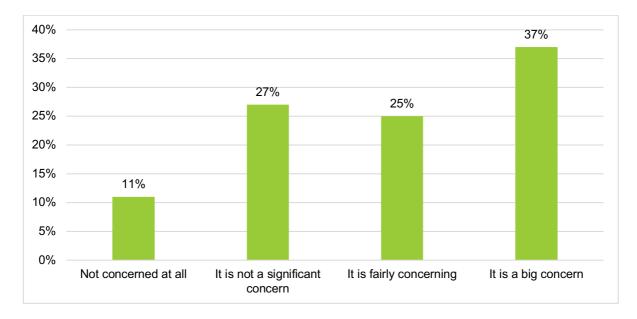2. *"Updated"* first aid training
3. *"Updated"* safeguarding training

26% of registered childminders also had staff training needs/gaps and the three repeated were (in order of frequency):

1. Training which returns to the practice of being face-to-face
2. *"Updated"* safeguarding training
3. Training which continues to be hybrid, though accessible outside of core working hours

14% of out of school childcare providers/settings said that they had staff training needs/gaps and the two repeated were (in order of frequency):

1. Training which focuses on the theme of behaviour
2. *"Updated"* first aid training

6.4.3   Image 8 - level of concern that setting-based childcare providers had about the theme of workforce recruitment and retention, including for the forthcoming period:
autumn 2022 – autumn 2023

A bar chart titled shows the following values:
- Not concerned at all: 11%
- It is not a significant concern: 27%
- It is fairly concerning: 25%
- It is a big concern: 37%

With regard to the early years childcare sector, the Shefford and Stotford cluster accounted for the highest frequency of the response: it is a big concern, followed in frequency by the Sandy cluster.

6.4.4   Image 9 - Frequency with which setting-based childcare providers states that they performed staff supervisions
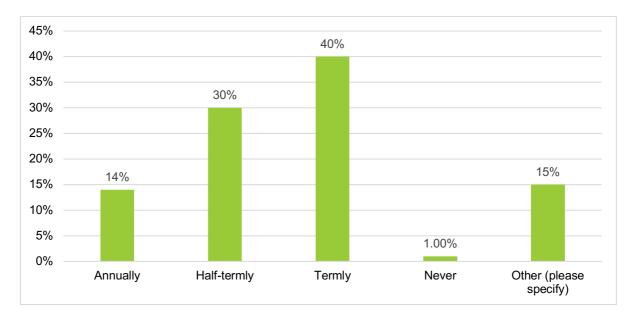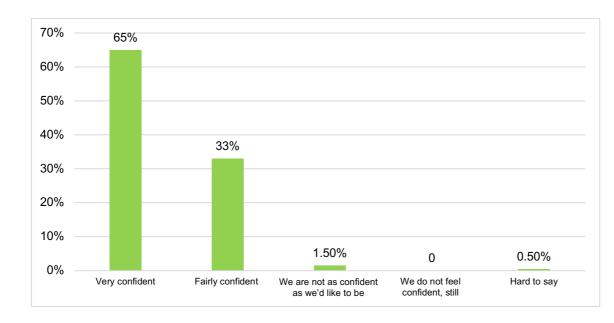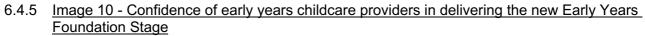
A bar chart shows the following values:
- Annually: 14%
- Half-termly: 30%
- Termly: 40%
- Never: 1.00%
- Other (please specify): 15%

Image 9 indicates that Termly was the most frequent interval via which setting-based childcare providers assigned staff supervisions.

6.4.5   Image 10 - Confidence of early years childcare providers in delivering the new Early Years Foundation Stage

Encouragingly, almost two-thirds of relevant childcare providers stated that they were very confident on the subject of their delivery of the September 2021 reformed Early Years Foundation Stage.

6.4.6   From a policy perspective, all childcare providers were invited to answer the question:
On drop-off or pick-up: Do parents and carers have access to your main building, or have you continued - in-line with COVID-19 Policy - to meet and greet outside?

24% of childcare providers stated parents and carers have access to your main building
48% of childcare providers stated we continue to meet and greet outside – with the remainder choosing not to specify.

6.5   SEND

6.5.1   70% of setting-based early years childcare and out of school childcare providers stated that they had at least one team member with a SEND-themed qualification.
Repeated examples of qualifications stated were:

- A trained and qualified SENCO
- Staff member(s) with Autism training/qualification
- Level 3 in SEND/Behaviour Management
- Level 2 SEND
- Trained speech therapist

Image 11 - Numbers of enquiries that responding childcare providers stated that they received in each calendar year from a carer of a child with SEND
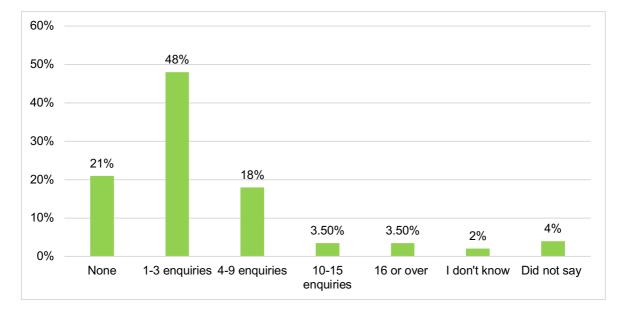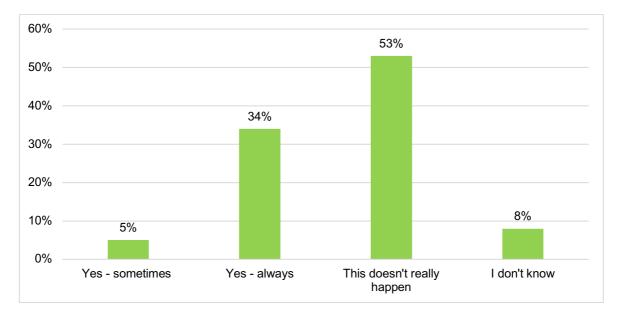

Image 12 - frequency with which childcare providers stated that they refer a family to another childcare provider if they cannot take a SEND child for any reason

6.5.2   71% of Central Bedfordshire-based early years childcare settings/providers and out of school childcare providers stated that they were still noticing some ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the development, behavior or demeanor of certain children.

Correspondingly, 31% of Central Bedfordshire-based registered childminders stated that they were still noticing some ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the development, behavior or demeanor of certain children.

Ultimately, all setting-based (early years and out of school) childcare providers were requested to state, on a scale of 1 – 10, how confident they thought they were as a (whole) setting in supporting children/young people with SEND:

The average rating provided by early years childcare providers/setting was 8.2/10 – and thus it can be assumed that approximately 82% of such places are accessible to children with SEND in the Central Bedfordshire locality.

The average rating provided by out of school childcare providers/setting was 8.1/10 – and thus it can be assumed that approximately 81% of such places are accessible to children with SEND in the Central Bedfordshire locality.

Additionally, the average rating provided by registered childminders was 6.3/10 – and thus it can be assumed that approximately 63% of such places are accessible to children with SEND in the Central Bedfordshire locality.

7. Parental Demand

In November 2022, 555 parents, carers and guardians completed an on-line 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment survey which was promoted via the Central Bedfordshire Council communications team - including via social media - and the Council's Family Information Directory.

7.1   Background of respondents

7.1.1   All responding parents and carers were invited to state what term best described their current circumstances aligned to their employment status. The most frequent stated circumstance of responding parents was in full-time employment/self-employment (30 hours + per week) (43%), followed in frequency by part-time employment/self-employment (less than 30 hours per week) (32%).

Additionally all responding parents and carers were asked to state, where applicable their partners' current employment circumstances. The most frequent stated circumstance of partners was in full-time employment/self-employment (30 hours + per week) (74%), followed in frequency by part-time employment/self-employment (less than 30 hours per week) (9%).

7.1.2   All responding parents and carers were invited to state their annual family income bracket (before tax).

Table 28 - Incidence of gross household income per year (before deductions/tax)

Annual household income	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers	Most frequently stated type of formal childcare accessed during term-time
Up to £16,190	4%	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare
£16,190 - £29,999	8%	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare
£30,000 - £54,999	20%	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare
£55,000 - £99,999	26%	Day nursery – full or part-time
£100,000 or above	7%	Day nursery – full or part-time
I don't know	2%	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare
I would rather not say	9%	Day nursery – full or part-time
Did not say	24%	Day nursery – full or part-time

7.2   Feedback from carers of children and young people with SEND

13% of responding parents, i.e. carers, who were resident stated that they were caring for/raising at least one child with SEND or a long-term illness.

The most frequent SEND type stated was Autistic Spectrum Disorder followed in frequency by

Speech, Language and Communication Needs.

These relevant respondents were invited to describe any particular issue(s) they have experienced as a carer of a child with SEND in accessing childcare – and the most frequent was: staff are not appropriately trained/qualified to support children with SEND, followed in frequency by: a lack of flexibility within the childcare offer.

7.3 Usage of Formal and Informal Childcare

7.3.1 <u>Table 29 - Most frequent type(s) of formal childcare evidently accessed within each Cluster</u>

Cluster	Most frequent type of formal childcare evidently accessed by responding parents	Second most frequent type of formal childcare evidently accessed by responding parents	Third most frequent type of formal childcare evidently accessed by responding parents
Central Bedfordshire	Day Nursery (41%)	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (38%)	After School Club (23%)
Ampthill & Flitwick	Day Nursery (53%)	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (30%)	After School Club (27%)
Biggleswade	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (46%)	Day nursery – full or part-time (39%)	Holiday Playscheme (27%)
Cranfield	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (46%)	Day nursery – full or part-time (32%)	After School Club (32%)
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	Day Nursery (23%)	Registered Childminder (19%)	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (6%)
Harlington	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (45%)	Day nursery – full or part-time (36%)	Holiday Playscheme (23%)
Leighton & Linslade	Day Nursery (42%)	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (37%)	After School Club (19%)
Sandy	Day Nursery (37%)	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (33%)	Holiday Playscheme (20%)
Shefford & Stotfold	Day Nursery (47%)	After School Club (30%)	Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare (28%)

7.3.2 The most frequent type of *informal* childcare responding parents/carers had evidently used for any of the children in their household at some point in 2022, was just me and/or a partner (61%) followed in frequency by grandparents (49%).

- 23% of responding parents stated that they were: **accessing formal childcare only**
- 20% of responding parents stated that they were: **accessing informal childcare only**
- 57% of responding parents stated that they were: **accessing formal and informal childcare**

7.3.3   Table 30 - Average number of hours (relevant) responding parents stated that they were accessing **formal** childcare for on a typical weekday in 2022 during term-time

Location	Average number of hours on a typical week day formal childcare was being accessed for – by relevant parents, during term time	Most frequent number of hours on a typical week day formal childcare was being accessed for – by relevant parents, during term time
Central Bedfordshire	6 hours 35 mins	10
Ampthill & Flitwick	7 hours 35 mins	10
Biggleswade	6 hours 12 mins	6
Cranfield	5 hours 30 mins	6
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	7 hours 30 mins	8
Harlington	7 hours 18 mins	6
Leighton & Linslade	7 hours 24 mins	9
Sandy	6 hours 18 mins	6
Shefford & Stotfold	6 hours 30 mins	8

7.3.4   Table 31 - Weekdays which responding parents were evidently most frequently accessing formal childcare during: (a) school term-times and; (b) school holiday-times aligned to cluster area

Cluster Area	Most frequent weekday – during term-times	Most frequent weekday – during holiday times
Ampthill & Flitwick	Wednesday	Wednesday
Biggleswade	Wednesday	Tuesday
Cranfield	Wednesday	Wednesday
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	Tuesday	Tuesday
Harlington	Wednesday	Thursday
Leighton & Linslade	Friday	Wednesday
Sandy	Thursday	Monday
Shefford & Stotfold	Tuesday	Thursday

A Wednesday was the most frequent that responding parents/carers were evidently accessing childcare support.

7.3.5   Table 32 - Average monthly amounts that relevant responding parents spent on formal childcare during: (a) term-time and: (b) school holiday-times

Cluster Area	Average monthly expenditure on formal childcare – term-time	Average monthly expenditure on formal childcare – holiday-time
Ampthill & Flitwick	£438	£435
Biggleswade	£255	£418
Cranfield	£276	£430
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	£382	£396
Harlington	£293	£399
Leighton & Linslade	£368	£388
Sandy	£298	£462
Shefford & Stotfold	£373	£465

Table 32 indicates that for term-time, the Cluster area which observed the highest incidence of monthly expenditure on formal childcare was Ampthill and Flitwick, followed in frequency by Dunstable and Houghton Regis.
For holiday-time, the Cluster area which observed the highest incidence of monthly expenditure on formal childcare was Shefford and Stotfold, followed in frequency by Sandy.

7.3.6   All responding parents and carers were invited to state any types of *formal* childcare that they would like to access in the near future, which they were not accessing in autumn 2022?:

Table 33 - Most frequent type(s) of formal childcare envisaged for future use

Cluster Area	Most frequent type of formal childcare evidently envisaged will be accessed in the future	Second most frequent type of formal childcare evidently envisaged will be accessed in the future
Ampthill & Flitwick	Pre-School or Playgroup i.e. sessional childcare	Holiday Playscheme
Biggleswade	After School Club	Holiday Playscheme
Cranfield	Holiday Playscheme	After School Club
Dunstable & Houghton Regis	Day nursery – full or part-time	Pre-School or Playgroup i.e. sessional childcare
Harlington	After School Club	Holiday Playscheme
Leighton & Linslade	Day nursery – full or part-time	Pre-School or Playgroup i.e. sessional childcare
Sandy	Holiday Playscheme	After School Club
Shefford & Stotfold	Holiday Playscheme	After School Club

The three most frequent themes and assurances that such relevant parents/carers stated that they would look for if they were to consider accessing formal childcare at some point in the future were – in order of frequency:

1. Good quality
2. Affordable childcare
3. For it to be close to my home/work

7.4   Funded Childcare

24% of responding parents/carers stated that they had a child aged 2 years.
9.5% of such parents/carers subsequently stated that they were currently accessing the free entitlement for 2 year olds.

Additionally, 41% of responding parents/carers stated that they had a child aged 3 and/or 4 years and 20% of such parents/carers subsequently stated that they were currently accessing the universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds.

41% of such parents/carers subsequently stated that they were currently accessing the extended 30 hours childcare offer.

The majority of parents/carers stating that they were currently accessing the extended 30 hours stated that it was either very easy to organise or fairly straightforward to organise – with 26% stating: it was not as easy as I would have liked or it was complicated and/or stressful.

Relevant parents were invited to give further feedback about the free entitlement for 2 year olds. The most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect): "*ideally this should be open to all parents with a 2 year old*".

Relevant parents were invited to give further feedback about the free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. The most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect): "*It should be made available from the term your child turns*".

Relevant parents were invited to give further feedback about the 30 hours childcare offer. The two most frequently repeated themes, were not within the LAs control and were (words to the effect): – i.e.:

"Needs to start as soon a child turns three not the term after". (11 respondents)

"This should be all year, not term time only". (6 respondents)

7.5   Childcare and COVID-19

7.5   All parents of pre-school aged children were invited to state whether they had any concerns about their relevant child(ren)'s early development, including their early years education, as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

15% of relevant parents stated Yes and the most frequent type of concern was (words to the effect): *"their social skills have been effected".*
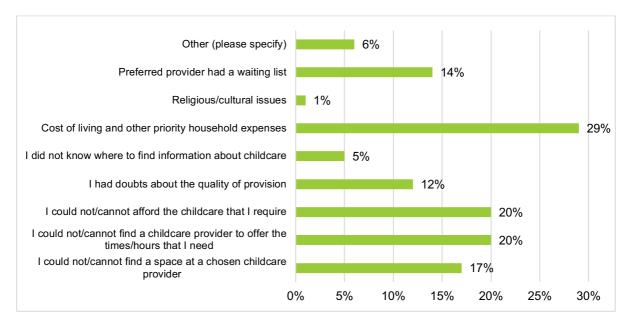
The second most frequent type of response was (words to the effect): *"their speech and language has been effected – or delayed".*

The third most frequent type of response was (words to the effect): *"my child is shy/anxious due to the impact on their emotion development".*

7.6   Barriers to accessing childcare

All parents and carers were invited to state whether – at some point in time – they had experienced specific barriers to accessing childcare:

Image 13 - Most frequent type(s) of barriers to access childcare

The Cluster area which accounted for the most frequent response cost of living and other priority household expenses was: Shefford and Stotfold.
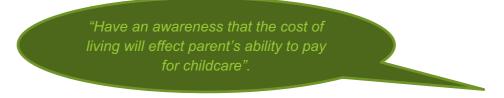
The Cluster area which accounted for the second most frequent response cost of living and other priority household expenses was: Biggleswade.

The Cluster area which accounted for the third most frequent response cost of living and other priority household expenses was: Cranfield.

7.7   Childcare and Central Bedfordshire Council

All parents were invited to state whether there was anything that Central Bedfordshire Council should be doing, in terms of supporting parents and carers with childcare, in late 2022.

The most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect):

"Have an awareness that the cost of living will effect parent's ability to pay for childcare".

Specific feedback on this theme included:

"Making childcare costs effective for working parents who are fighting the cost of living is vital. I work full-time and I am a single mum (I have to work full time to afford bills, my mortgage) yet I have to pay over £550 a month for 2 days 'full nursery care'. If I did not have informal childcare support I would be extremely stuck".

"Parents should be encouraged back to work by 'the state' offering more help with childcare during the first few years of a child's life. Sadly, there is little incentive for parents to return to work due to the cost of childcare outweighing earnings or it just not being financially viable to do so. How much money is then lost in taxes? And how many decent career women do we lose as a result of loss of confidence after several years away from work. It needs addressing and has done for some time".

"I will start work soon and almost all my salary will go to the nursery. With what money to feed/dress and any other needs I should cover childcare during this cost of living crisis?"

"Childcare costs are so expensive, especially during this cost of living crisis… I am a nursery practitioner myself and even with my company offering 40% discount on fees for staff I cannot justify going to work three days a week…".

"The way childcare is funded is terrible, and everyone is really struggling. We are having to cut back just to afford our current childcare arrangements".

The second most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect):

"Help to ensure more wrap around care".

Specific feedback on this theme included:

"Wrap around childcare for preschool children is non-existent in our area, and there aren't enough childminders around. Not every working parent can pick up 'kids' at 3pm. I had to go part-time at work in order to look after my second child after school, and I'm deeply disappointed at the lack of services locally. I don't know what the Council can do specifically but I'd like to note that small villages in Bedfordshire are not 'working parents friendl'y and it's a big disadvantage for people considering moving to this area.

"[In my experience] village schools have limited wrap around care for children, which has caused an issue for me when trying to find a new job as the hours I can do are limited".

"[In my experience] there is a huge lack of childcare for parents who commute to London (or any significant distance) for work. School wrap around care does not allow for a full day at work, even in a 9.00am-5.00pm job. This is a huge disadvantage for working parents and needs to be rectified".

"Could the Council somehow help to provide more wrap around care for working parents?
I think this gets easier when they're in school, but for pre-school it's a nightmare. I've had to send my child to a childminder who I wasn't happy with as there were no other options… as everyone else is full. I have since found her to be unsafe and have removed my son from her care and am now trying to juggle working full-time… and wrap around care too is very stressful

"Making sure all schools have wrap around care to enable parents to work full time if they wish would be very helpful. Perhaps trial different term times so that children can stay in schools throughout summer holidays to enable parents to work?".

The third most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect):

> *"help to develop more childcare during the school holidays".*

Specific feedback on this theme included:

"This area needs more subsidised holiday schemes and subsidised school wrap around care hours".

*"It is incredibly difficult to have a job where you have to work in school holidays.
The childcare costs for two children are too expensive… even if you get help through benefits you have to 'front' the full cost first. Childcare during the holidays should be more financially accessible for people on low/middle incomes who actually do want to work".*

"Could the Council create more specialised holiday clubs for children with SEND? There are some in Luton area and in Bedford… but I'm in Stotfold, so it is all very far away from us".

Providing affordable activities for children during holidays should be a top priority for the local authority".

8. Ukrainian Families

8.1 Qualitative feedback from parents who are arrivals from the Ukraine

8.1.1 On the 23rd November 2022, four Ukrainian mothers attended a focus group session at Stotfold and District Children's Centre. These mothers were resident in various locations within the locality and all had arrived in the UK since August 2022, i.e. they were relatively new arrivals as refugees from the war in the Ukraine. The majority had a partner who had remained in the Ukraine.

The ages of their children ranged from 2 years to 12 years. All of their children who were school-aged had begun to attain their education at a local Central Bedfordshire school and the majority of the children who were aged 2-4 years had taken-up a funded childcare place at a local childcare setting, most frequently a private nursery or a maintained school nursery class.

8.1.2 All four parents/mothers were aged between 25 years – 40 years. All were either seeking employment or had already taken up employment, including as a teaching assistant.
The parents (mothers) tended to have professional qualifications, including for example, as a teacher, a law professional or as a chartered surveyor. They outlined how they were seeking to attain UK-nationally recognised qualifications or additions to their qualifications, that would enable them to take up a position within their chosen profession. Essentially, all four mothers were insistent that they wanted to assimilate through taking up employment as swiftly as they practically could.

8.1.3 All four parents demonstrated a good awareness (even after just three months of residence in the UK with a supporting family) of funded childcare initiatives – and they explained that their resident family had been instrumental in explaining these programmes for 2, 3 and 4 year olds to them.

8.1.4 All four parents agreed that they were particularly keen that any out of school childcare would ideally also provide support with a child's ongoing education, including supporting them with their homework and their (child's) English language skills.

8.1.5 With regard to the subject of information, the parents agreed that they were navigating their understanding of how local libraries could support them with that aspect of their assimilation – and they also agreed, that if and when they sought further information about childcare options and availability, this would likely be where they would initially seek to find this.
There was not, as yet, an understanding or knowledge of the existence and role of Family Information Directory.

8.1.6 The parents that were (already) accessing a day nursery were very complimentary of how the staff at these settings had helped their child(ren) to assimilate and settle, and highlighted how this was an aspect of their settling in to the UK and into Central Bedfordshire which had been especially *"straightforward"* and *"not as challenging".* It was noted that they repeatedly referred to a nursery as a 'kindergarten' and it was explained that in the Ukraine, children did not start their primary schooling until they were seven years of age, however, they received their early education at a kindergarten. It was also note that staff at a day nursery had tended to be instrumental with regard to sign-posting the mothers to other forms of support and local services – including the work and role of the Council's Children's Centres-based Ukraine Families Support Worker, who they consistently believed was an excellent, reassuring and accessible source of such support and information.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Finding	Cluster(s) footprint (where relevant feedback was notable)	Relevant Recommendation for LA	Proposed Action
1/Sustainability remains a key and ongoing theme throughout the Central Bedfordshire locality. The ongoing emergence from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic remains a factor – however, it is evident that sustainability concerns are now (on an increasing basis) aligning with a consistent incidence to the national recruitment and retention (often described) 'crisis'.	Central Bedfordshire-wide	A) The local authority should continue to develop/fine-tune a clear early years and childcare workforce development plan and strategy. Central Bedfordshire Council should continue to support – where possible/viable – with workforce themes. This will include working with key education (colleges), training and employment partners to develop an ongoing training and employment pathway for those wishing to work in the sector, in the locality.	Workforce development and retention projects will include: a) Initiation of a recruitment and childcare career fair b) Promotion of apprenticeship pathways in partnership with local colleges c) ongoing support to promote the existence of vacant positions, as appropriate.
2/As is the case throughout England, a significant number of early years childcare providers and out of school childcare providers that are operating within the Central Bedfordshire locality are experiencing challenges with recruitment and retention – with professionals exiting the sector for a number of reasons, including (with the highest incidence) the fact that their profession is relatively low paid.			

Key Finding	Cluster(s) footprint (where relevant feedback was notable)	Relevant Recommendation for LA	Proposed Action
3/Early Years Childcare Providers/Settings have reported that the most frequent trend that they have observed during the period autumn 2022 – autumn 2023 is an increase in the number of enquiries about the free entitlement for 2 year olds – and a complementary increase in demand for such funded places from eligible and non-eligible parents/families. This is potentially being experienced as an outcome of the cost of living crisis and some ongoing effects of COVID-19.	Dunstable and Houghton Regis	B) Central Bedfordshire Council need to retain their awareness that Early Years Childcare Providers/Settings are reporting an increased demand for free entitlement for 2 year olds funded places – and examine this finding attuned to the data they receive from DWP, and the level of existing corresponding places accessible to eligible families in the locality.	Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to energetically promote the existance of the free entitlement for 2 year olds – and work in partnership with localised early years childcare providers to ensure that a sufficiency of relevant places is maintained.
4/There continues to be a pronounced incidence of new housing developments that are being constructed and occupied within the Central Bedfordshire locality, which will inevitably have a pronounced effect in terms of pressure for all types of childcare provision – and childcare sufficiency, particularly in certain locations.	Harlington

Shefford and Stotford | C) Central Bedfordshire Council should maintain a triangulated communication channel between 1. early years and childcare officer; 2. school places planning officers and; 3. planning officers, so as to primarily ensure that the incidence of any new - status approved - housing developments can feature in the sufficiency planning for requisite early years and childcare infrastructure on an ongoing basis. This would complement plans to establish a new school provision. | Central Bedfordshire Council's Section 106 policies will continue to attune with local early years childcare needs and requirements.

Action for 2023, will include progression to co-ordinate Section 106 strategic requirements, as appropriate and geographically relevant with neighbouring local authorities including Bedford Borough Council, Luton Borough Council and Milton Keynes City Council. |

Key Finding	Cluster(s) footprint (where relevant feedback was notable)	Relevant Recommendation for LA	Proposed Action
5/Approximately two-thirds of childcare providers are, aligned to their feedback, evidently still witnessing the global ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the development, behaviour or demeanour of certain pre-school aged children. This is affecting the transitions of certain children in to Reception classes and potentially highlights the need for **continued** training within the theme of speech, language and communications of early years professionals, plus continued specialist partnership working with the early years and childminding sectors across the locality.	Central Bedfordshire-wide	D) Central Bedfordshire Council should continue to monitor how children in their early years are progressing with their development and early education. Training should continue to be identified and sourced which continue to align to the early identification of potential speech, language and emotional problems with pre-school children.	Central Bedfordshire Council early years and childcare officers will continue to promote the five to thrive model: https://fivetothrive.org.uk/ and will continue to work with colleagues within schools to monitor progress in to Reception phase and Key Stage 1.
6/The national cost of living crisis is evidently affecting (the interaction of) both childcare providers located in the Central Bedfordshire locality and those families that (need to) access their support. Childcare providers have reported challenges that they face with increasing fixed costs, including energy costs, and parents/carers have reported how they are struggling to afford childcare fees as a proportion of their incomes, plus they are having to evidently give thought and consideration to the fuel costs required to travel to a childcare provider for drop-off and pick-up.	Dunstable and Houghton Regis. Shefford and Stotford Biggleswade	E) Central Bedfordshire Council should continue its work to promote accessibility to funded childcare places (including aligned to incidence of vacant places with certain providers) and also focus on promoting the (typically under-utilised due to a nationally recognised information gap) Tax Free Childcare programme.	With regard to childcare providers, Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to sign-post them to sources of sustainability grants and also advise on e-energy savings and measures for reducing energy costs.

Key Finding	Cluster(s) footprint (where relevant feedback was notable)	Relevant Recommendation for LA	Proposed Action
7/A recurrent theme highlighted by parents and carers for the 2022 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was the value that was placed on wrap-around childcare – particularly as an increased number of working parents are returning to their place of work and having to drop-off and/or pick-up *outside* of the core 8.00am – 6.00pm weekday period.	Central Bedfordshire-wide	F) Childcare planners and development officers within Central Bedfordshire Council need to continue to align their ability to support/influence the sector, including through an ongoing encouragement for (where possible) both before school provisions and after school provisions to ensure a degree of flexibility for their early morning opening hours and their evening closing times.	
8/Where a parents reported that they were raising a child with a type of SEND, the most frequent challenge that they reported was: *staff are not appropriately trained/qualified to support children with SEND*. However, it was evident that 70% of setting-based childcare providers reported that they *did have* at least on staff member who had a SEND-themed qualification. It is possible that some carers are not attuned to the increasing incidence of staff having such relevant experience and qualifications?	Central Bedfordshire-wide	G) Central Bedfordshire Council should continue to promote the accessibility to SEND-themed training courses and qualifications – in particular, to local childminders who have reported (for this CSA) lower confidence levels in meeting the needs of SEND children than their setting-based professional peers.	Central Bedfordshire Council should continue to promote the DfE's initiative to increase the number of local workforce professionals with an accredited Level 3 early years SENCO qualification

Key Finding	Cluster(s) footprint (where relevant feedback was notable)	Relevant Recommendation for LA	Proposed Action
9/There was a relatively high incidence of parental feedback on the importance of holiday playschemes and holiday clubs, to them, to support their ability to remain at work during the school holidays.	Ampthill and Flitwick	H) Central Bedfordshire Council should continue to prioritise its ability to affect the holiday playscheme sector within the locality and therefore continue to enhance its Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.	Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to promote the existence of registered childcare support for the school holidays, particularly the summer holidays. This will include it's promotion of the HAF programme(s). Sustainability for this sector will be a key priority.
10/Ultimately, if all of the forecast new housing 'build-out' was achieved as forecast by planners within the Central Bedfordshire locality then this would (aligned to the LA planning yield formula - assessed as 0.06 pupils per dwelling, per year group) calculate a need for an additional *approximate* 1,907 new 2-4 year olds resident across the locality – some of whom would require funded childcare places/provision.	Shefford and Stotford Harlington	I) Central Bedfordshire Council must continue to apply a[ny] Developer's Contribution Policy. This should be continually refined in partnership between relevant local authority officers – and will be informed by the subsequent, ongoing, Childcare Sufficiency Assessment outcomes.	EDGE Analytics will be producing updated pupil place projections including for N1, N2 and Reception in 2023.

Central Bedfordshire

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