

30 Hours Free Childcare

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 18th January 2017

Author:	Head of Education
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee, of work being undertaken as part of Swindon Borough Council's role as an Early Implementer of the government initiative to offer working families '30 Hours Free Childcare'.
- 1.2 The report will outline why we bid to Government to be able to make this offer to some residents, up to a year early.
- 1.3 This report supports the Priority Two of the Vision to offer residents the ability to 'help themselves'. This additional support makes working financially viable for families with pre-school children, who might previously have found childcare costs an obstacle to remaining in/returning to work.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the work being undertaken to inform and shape government policy.
- 2.2 Note the likely future demand there will be from parents to access this entitlement when it is rolled out nationally from September 2017.

3. Detail

- 3.1 In November 2015 Swindon bid to Government to become an early implementer for a new high-profile initiative that formed one of their manifesto pledges. The '30 Hours' scheme was designed to support 'hard-working families' with the rising cost of childcare, to ensure that working is not only financially viable but also beneficial.
- 3.2 This policy takes the existing 15 hours of free early education aimed at 3 & 4 year old children to ensure they are school ready, and matches this with an additional 15 hours of funded childcare aimed at working parents; giving 30 hours in total.
- 3.3 To qualify *both* parents must be working, and earning at least the minimum equivalent of 16 hours at the national living wage, and not *individually* earn more than £100k pa.

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- 3.4 For the early implementation year, local eligibility criteria also apply. Applicants must be resident in Swindon and agree to take their childcare within the Borough.
- 3.5 In early February 2016, Swindon was confirmed as one of eight local authorities who would be participating in the £13m trial. The others involved included York, Wigan, Staffordshire Portsmouth, Northumberland, Newham and Hertfordshire. However, only York was tasked with a full roll-out of places to all families wishing to participate. The other seven (including Swindon), were offered 415 places to be used in delivering pre-agreed learning back to the Department for Education (DfE).
- 3.6 Swindon's role has been to look at the need for really flexible childcare, typically requested by shift-working families. In providing this, we were further asked to assess the impact this had on their employers in terms of staff retention and recruitment. It was therefore agreed with the DfE that we would identify employers to work with who were likely to have a high number of staff who would be eligible, so the resulting data would be more meaningful, and they should also require a proportion of their staff to work shift-working patterns.
- 3.7 Initially the Borough's Great Western Hospital was selected as a partner employer, to include all staff based there and those working for the emergency services. Being fully operational 24 hours/all year round, the hospital had a large number of potentially eligible staff who immediately met our shift-working criterion. Also, as many other parents were very disappointed not to be immediately eligible themselves, it was felt that by supporting the hospital it would also indirectly benefit all residents.
- 3.8 Despite ongoing communication of the offer and drop-in sessions for interested staff, the up-take from the hospital was much lower than anticipated. The offer was then extended to include Honda and BMW, who both operate shift-working patterns that include early mornings, evenings and weekends.
- 3.9 Since then, in order to achieve the target number of applications, we have continued to slowly broaden the number of participating employers. These now include: The Great Western Hospital, The Emergency Services, Seqol, Honda, BMW, Royal Mail, The Brunel Shopping Centre, Nationwide, Network Rail and The Great Western Railway.
- 3.10 From January 2017 we will be delivering 297 funded places, which represent approximately 72% of those we have available. Additionally we have already confirmed 27 places for April 2017. Work continues, to allocate the remaining 91 and Thames Water has recently been added to the list of qualifying employers with on-site engagement work due to commence before Christmas 2016.
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- 3.11 Swindon providers have been very supportive of the '30 Hour Free Childcare' offer, with only 4 formally declining to take part. Those that declined to participate were part of the larger nursery chains and appear to be waiting to see the learning generated by the early implementation work, while assessing parental demand. To date, in Swindon 96% of applicants have been able to access their additional hours with their first choice of provider.
 - 3.12 Funding is paid at a higher rate of £4.41 per hour across the whole 30 hours, even if the provider is only delivering a proportion, as parents can split their funding between up to three separate settings.
 - 3.13 In August 2016 we submitted a Capital bid to the DfE for a share of the £50m grant funding set aside to fund target areas within local authorities most in need of capital to assist delivery of 30 Hour places by September 2017.
 - 3.14 Current guidance indicates that we will have a statutory duty to ensure places are available for families wishing to take up the '30 Hour Free Childcare' offer, but we will not be required to promote and ensure uptake as we are with early education for 2-year-olds.
 - 3.15 In our work as an early implementer for the '30 Hours free Childcare' offer and in preparation for the national roll-out of the scheme from September 2017, we face a number of challenges around SEND and place creation.
 - 3.16 Swindon providers have highlighted that doubling the number of hours that SEND children are entitled to, will require additional staffing and adequate funding. Children with enhanced needs can dominate sessions because of the greater levels of attention they will potentially require, and therefore this needs to be appropriately resourced.
 - 3.17 Place creation is an ongoing challenge. Many providers are reviewing session times and possible ways to expand in order to meet anticipated demand. We continue to work with them to increase capacity within the Borough and also to encourage new provisions. The DfE is expected to announce the results of capital bids in December 2016.
 - 3.18 Swindon's work as an Early Implementer has already been recognised. On 28th November 2016, Caroline Dineage MP, Minister for Early Years & Equalities, visited Swindon to review the work we are undertaking. This was the first visit to an Early Implementer, during which she had the opportunity to meet senior leadership from the Great Western Hospital and staff who are already accessing their '30 Hours' funding. It was also possible for her to spend time with a representative number of our providers, who had the opportunity to pose questions and offer their thoughts and observations during a constructive discussion.
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30 Hours Free Childcare

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

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4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The '30 Hours Free Childcare' scheme will be rolled out nationally from September 2017. It will be a statutory duty to ensure availability of places, and so non-participation was not an option. It was in this context that we bid to become an Early Implementer in order to contribute to and shape policy, as opposed to reacting to it.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 Swindon received a one-off grant of £150K to fund all costs associated with our early implementation work. This is being used for staffing, grants to providers, marketing and communication purposes. Place funding for '30 Hours Free Childcare' is also fully met by the DfE.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 The Council has a responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient childcare places available.
- 5.3 Human rights considerations have been taken into account fully in compiling this report. It is considered that the work covered in this report is compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.4 The proposals for additional school places comply with Section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 to develop school policy to maximise school attendance.

Risk Management

- 5.5 Termly governance meetings are being held, during which a progress report is made to representatives of the Swindon Borough Council senior leadership team.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

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8. Appendices

8.1 None