

Childcare Sufficiency Annual Report

Early Education and Childcare
2022-2023



Document Details

Title	Annual Childcare Sufficiency Report 2022 - 2023
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Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006, Section 6 which places a statutory duty on English local authorities to ensure that there are enough childcare places available for families who wish to access it. Staffordshire County Council's (SCC) Early Education and Childcare Team (EEAC) work relentlessly to ensure that this statutory requirement is met.

If an area is identified as causing concern in terms of sufficiency, closures of providers or a fall in standards within childcare providers (i.e., fall in Ofsted grade) SCC EEAC work collaboratively with our partners in Entrust to improve quality of provision and to develop the market. This could include working with existing childcare providers to expand their provision to offer more places, it could be working with a school to develop provision on their site, or it could be helping to develop new childcare in an area.

This report brings together the key priority areas of sufficiency planning for Staffordshire County Council. These are;

- **Ensuring there are enough places available for families of children of all ages across Staffordshire in places and at time when parents need it, taking into account population changes and housing development.**
- **Making sure that there are enough places for less advantaged two year olds to access the 15 hours funded early education entitlement known in Staffordshire as Think2.**
- **Ensuring there are sufficient places available to meet the demands of the 30 hours extended childcare entitlement.**
- **To support parents and providers through the cost of living crisis to ensure the childcare market remains diverse and sustainable.**

Explanation of terms and glossary

- **SCC** – Staffordshire County Council
 - **EEAC** – Early Education and Childcare Team
 - **PVI** – Private, Voluntary, and Independent
 - **Governor Run** – provision is run under the umbrella of the school as a separate entity but falls under the schools Ofsted inspection
 - **VMC** – Voluntary Managed Committee
 - **DfE** – Department for Education
- **Early Education Funding or EEF** - this is funding paid to childcare providers by government (via Staffordshire County Council) to enable all children aged three and four years to access either 15 or 30 hrs (depending on eligibility) of funded early education places per week over 38 weeks. It can also be claimed over up to 52 weeks up to a maximum of 570 hours or 1,140 depending on eligibility. Children can access a place from the term after their third birthday.
- **Universal 15 hours** - This is paid to childcare providers for all three and four year olds accessing EEF regardless of circumstances or income. It can be claimed as up to 15hrs per week over 38 weeks or stretched up to 52 weeks with a maximum of 570 hours per year. It can be claimed for any child regardless of the type of Ofsted registered provider so includes childminders, day nurseries, pre schools and governor run provision in schools until the child starts reception.
- **Extended Entitlement/30 hours** - This is paid to childcare providers for three and four year olds who meet the eligibility criteria. The main criteria is that both parents (or single parent) must be in paid employment earning at least the equivalent of 16 hours per week at the minimum wage or national living wage (which equates to approximately £120 per week) up to a maximum of £100k per year per parent. There are a few exceptions. Families must obtain a code via HMRC which is then validated by the childcare provider. The parent must reconfirm their code every three months to continue to receive the additional hours.
- **Think2-** This is paid to childcare providers for families on low incomes who meet specific income based criteria. It enables children aged two to access 15 hours of early education funding per week where families would otherwise be unlikely to afford it. It provides children from less advantaged families with the best start. Children who are eligible can access the funding the term after their second birthday. Once confirmed eligible the funding will continue regardless of whether the families financial circumstances improve.

- **Disability Access Fund** - Also known as DAF. This is a once a year payment that childcare providers can access for children who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). It can be used to help improve access for children with special needs.
- **Early Years Pupil Premium** - Also known as EYPP. This is paid to childcare providers for families who meet certain income criteria i.e., equivalent of free school meals criteria. It is paid for three and four year olds who meet the criteria. It is paid only in addition to the universal 15 hrs not the extended entitlement.

Key Summary

Early Years Population

- In 2020 there were 833,000 people living in Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent).
- There are approximately 44,000 children aged birth to four years in the county.
- There has been a fall in the birth rate.
- The largest number of 0-4 year olds is in East Staffordshire with the lowest in Staffordshire Moorlands.
- Approximately 5% of each district's population are aged 0-4.

Accessibility, choice and quality

- There are currently 830 childcare providers in Staffordshire.
- Staffordshire has a range of provision including day nurseries, pre schools and childminders across all districts.
- Childcare providers consist of private, voluntary or independently run. A number also operate as governor run under a schools existing Ofsted registration.
- 99% of group providers and 85% of childminders offer funded places.

Sufficiency

The number of places and vacancies fluctuates through the year. In the autumn there are the greatest number of places as children aged 4 years will have moved into school freeing up places. In the summer term there are the fewest places as providers will have a larger mix of age ranges.

0-2 years

- There are approximately 16,700 0-2 year olds living in Staffordshire
- Based on previous analysis it is expected that approximately 20% of children in this age group will attend childcare provision.
- In summer 2022 there were 2,748 childcare places and 537 vacancies resulting in a 20% vacancy rate.
- In autumn 2022 there were 2,862 childcare places for children aged 0-2 with 584 vacancies resulting in a 20% vacancy rate. This was a lower rate of vacancies compared to 2021/22.
- The number of places stays relatively static regardless of term for this age group.

There are enough places for 0-2 year olds to meet the needs of families, but the decline in places is being closely monitored.

2 years

- There are approximately 8,800 2 year olds living in Staffordshire.
- Based on previous analysis it is expected that approximately 80% of children in this age group will attend childcare provision.
- In summer 2022 there were 4,666 childcare places and 719 places resulting in a 15% vacancy rate.
- In autumn 2022 there were 4,624 childcare places for children aged 2 years with 1,156 vacancies resulting in a 25% vacancy rate.
- There was a reduction in overall vacancy rates for this age group compared to 2021/22.

Overall in Staffordshire there were enough places to meet the demands of families. There is targeted work to support providers ongoing in areas where vacancies are low.

3-4 years

- There are approximately 14,500 3-4 year olds living in Staffordshire
- Based on previous analysis it is expected that all children in this age group will attend childcare provision.
- In summer 2022 there were 12,557 childcare places and 1,776 vacancies resulting in a 14% vacancy rate.
- In autumn 2022 there were 11,828 childcare places for children aged 3-4 years with 3,230 resulting in a 27% vacancy rate.

Overall in Staffordshire there were enough places to meet the needs of families. There is targeted work to support providers ongoing in areas where vacancies are low.

Take up of funded places

- Participation for three and four year olds was 100% in 2022 across all terms.
- Think2 take up remains high but had fallen to 78% in spring 2023.
- Plans have been produced to support and increase partnership working with the ambition to increase take up.

Take up of funded places remains high and above the 80% target.

Staffing and recruitment across the sector

- Providers are reporting severe shortages with staffing levels.
- Low pay is the biggest single issue.
- There has been a small decrease in the percentage of providers with vacancies
- There has been an increase in number of candidates not turning up for interview or accepting a job and then turning it down later.

SEND

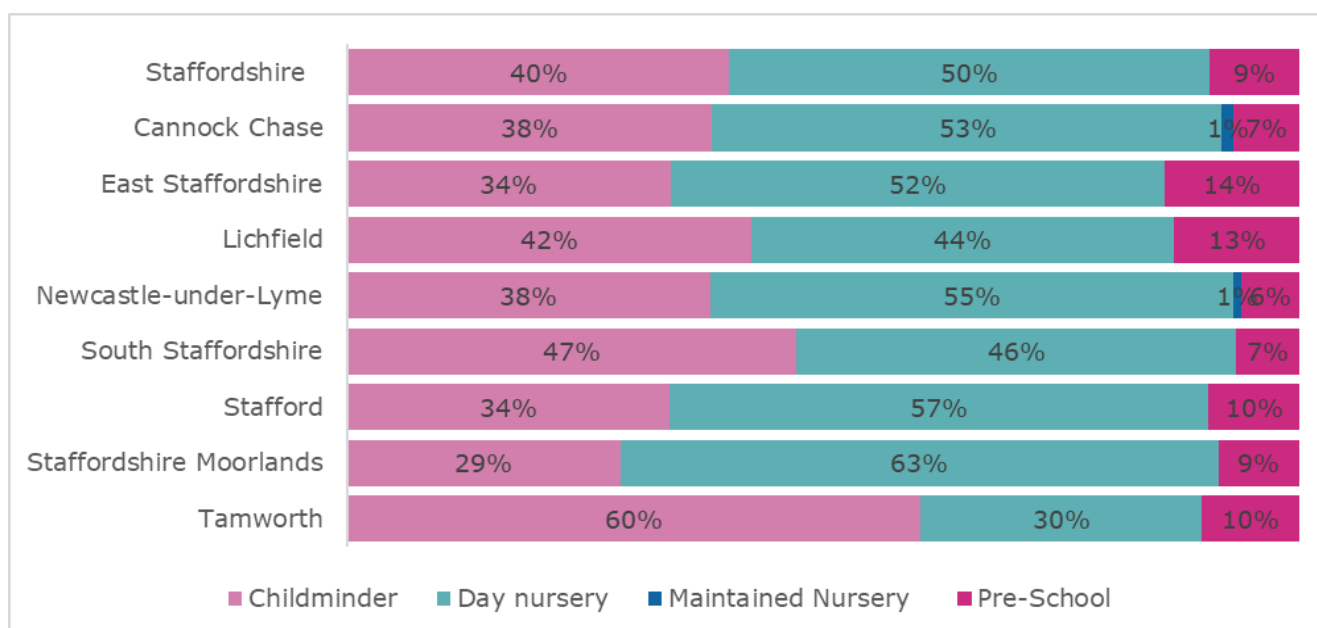
- 90% of providers said they were at least partly accessible for children with a physical disability.
- More than 9 out of 10 children with Special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) attend a mainstream provider.
- There has been an increase in the number of children requiring additional support.

Number of childcare providers

There are 832 private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) childcare providers across Staffordshire including governor run provision, (the majority of which are former maintained nursery classes). Of the PVI providers 94% offer early education funded places (EEF) up slightly from 90% in 2021/22. All providers not offering EEF are childminders. However 86% of childminders do now offer funded places. Additionally there are approximately 257 group based childcare providers that are known to SCC are operating out of school provision which is an increase on the previous year. Many of those operating out of school provision are day nurseries as well as schools. We may not be fully aware of the numbers of places offered or the number of providers as the majority are schools which do not have a separate registration for out of school provision. However, we will be developing this work as the Government announcement to support the development of Wrap Around Provision becomes embedded.

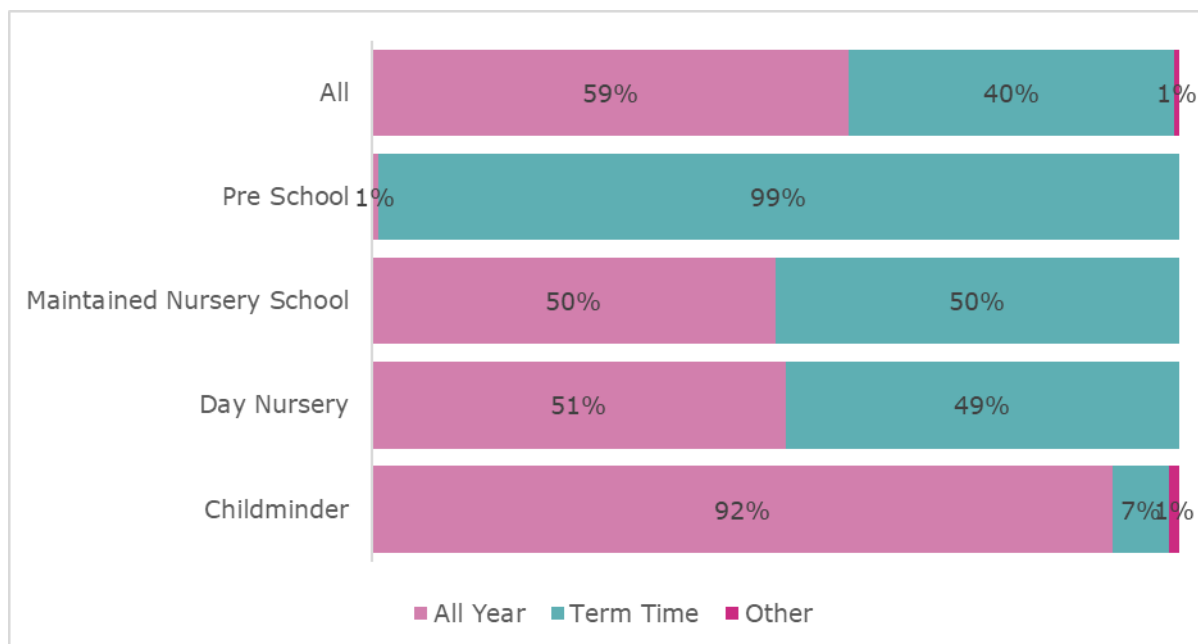
Over half of all day nurseries in Staffordshire are now governor run with the highest in South Staffordshire with 61% and the lowest in Tamworth with 38%. Of the other half the vast majority are privately owned with a small number of voluntary run committees (VMC). This is completely different to pre schools where 60% are run by voluntary managed committees (this has fallen from 62% in 2021/22) with 23% privately owned and 17% governor run. There are also a much smaller number of pre schools compared to day nurseries as families may need longer opening hours and more weeks of childcare compared to the past which may be due to work commitments. There are also two maintained nurseries Oaklands in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Hednesford Nursery in Cannock Chase.

Fig 1 The number of providers by type



40% of providers are childminders with 50% day nurseries and 9% preschools. Tamworth has the highest percentage of childminders and lowest percentage of day nurseries. The lowest percentage of childminders was in Staffordshire Moorlands, with the highest percentage of day nurseries being in Staffordshire Moorlands.

Fig 2 Chart to show number of weeks operating by type of provider



Approximately 60% of all providers operate for more than 38 weeks a year (term time). 87% of privately run childcare providers operate all year compared to just 4% of school based provision. This of course can have implications for working families who often need all year provision. Most preschools are only open term time which may suit non working families or those who use informal childcare such as grandparents to help fill the gap.

There are differences across the districts. In Stafford 95% of private providers are open more than 38 weeks compared to 77% in Lichfield. In terms of those governor run provision in Tamworth all were only open term time compared to 84% in Cannock Chase.

More than nine in ten providers offer all day care either as a standalone or with wraparound from another provider. This means that most parents have the flexibility to use all day provision if they choose. However how this is offered can vary from place to place with some offering 'school hours' while others offering early morning until evening hours. Six percent of childminders offered before and after school care only.

99% of group providers offer early education funded places either Think2, 15 hrs universal, 30hrs or a combination of all three. 85% of childminders offer funded places.

830 childcare providers across Staffordshire with majority offering funded places for 2,3 and 4 year olds.

Open and closures

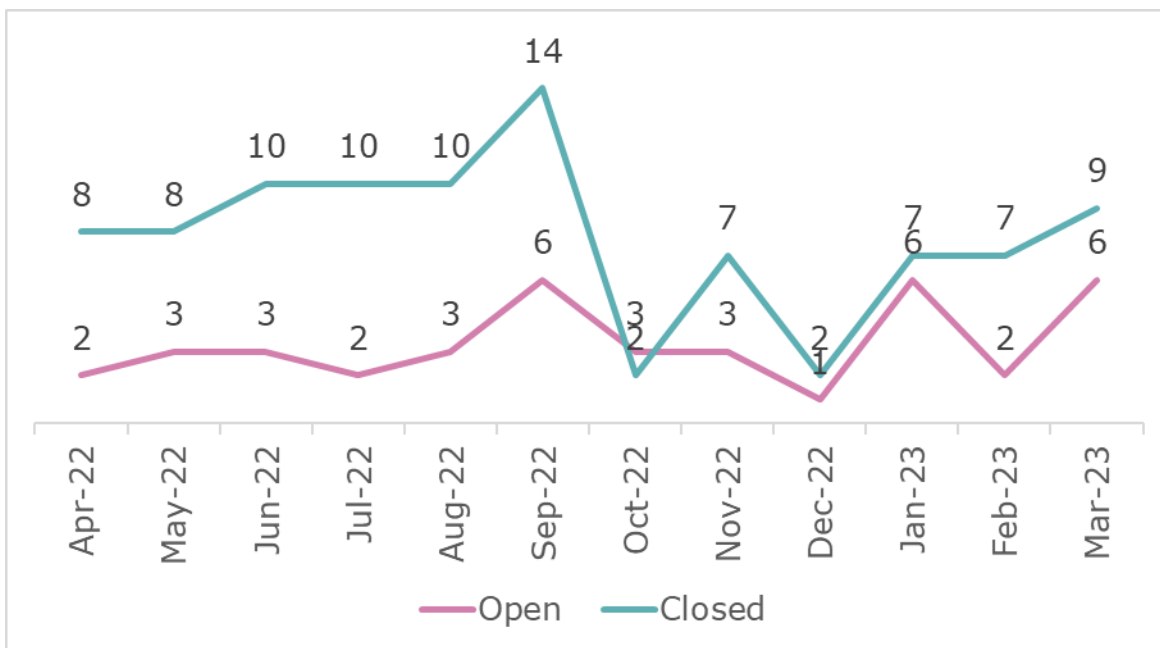
Over the previous 12 months between April 2022 and March 2023 40 new providers have opened down from 50 in the previous year. In the same period 94 providers have closed, up from 82 the previous year.

Of the closures 56 were childminders continuing the decline that has been seen over the last few years. Just 5% of children now attend a childminder. Whilst childminders are unable to take large numbers of children and so their impact may seem less it can cause difficulty in some areas particularly in rural areas where childminders are often the only source of childcare for families unable to travel.

In many cases a provider may close and then another provider open in its place so there is less impact and less chance of a loss of places. However between April 2022 and March 2023 28 group based providers closed with no continuation of provision on the site leading to the loss of more than 700 places for children aged 0-4 years.

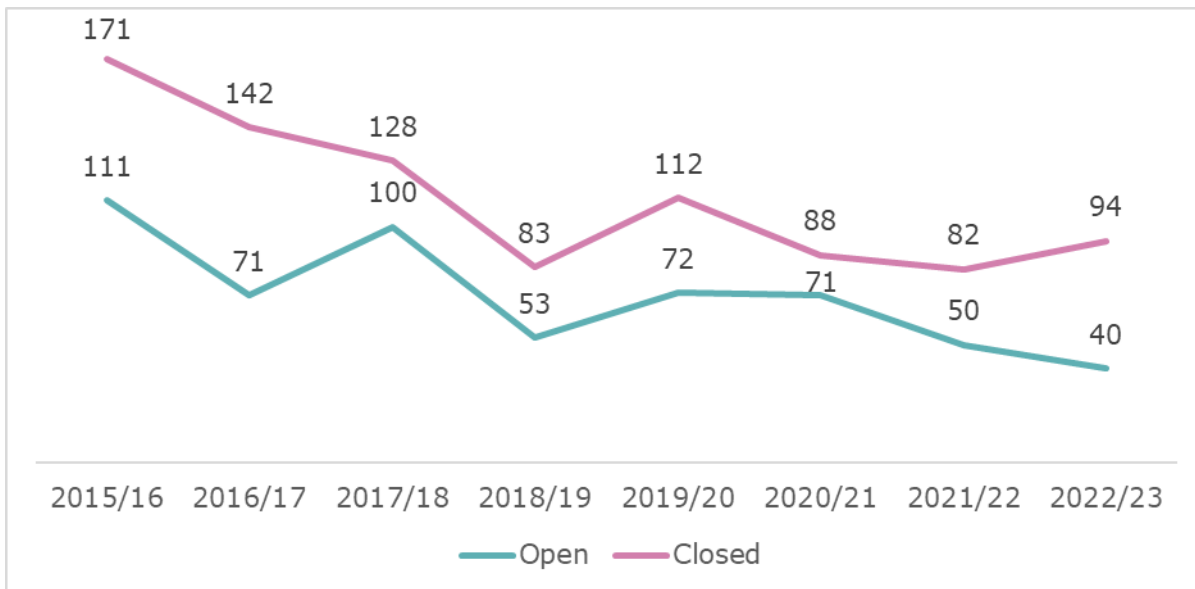
Some of the other closures were private and voluntary preschools or nurseries based on a school site who were taken over by the school as governor run. The impact of this is that schools are less likely to take two-year-olds which can lead to a shortfall of places particularly for Think2 in some areas.

Fig 3 Open and closures between Apr 2022 and Mar 2023



There continues to be more closures than openings as has been the trend for a number of years. Due to changes in the market since the pandemic and in changes to the economy it is possible that there will be an increase in closures in the future.

Fig 4 Annual open and closures between 2015/16 and 2022/23



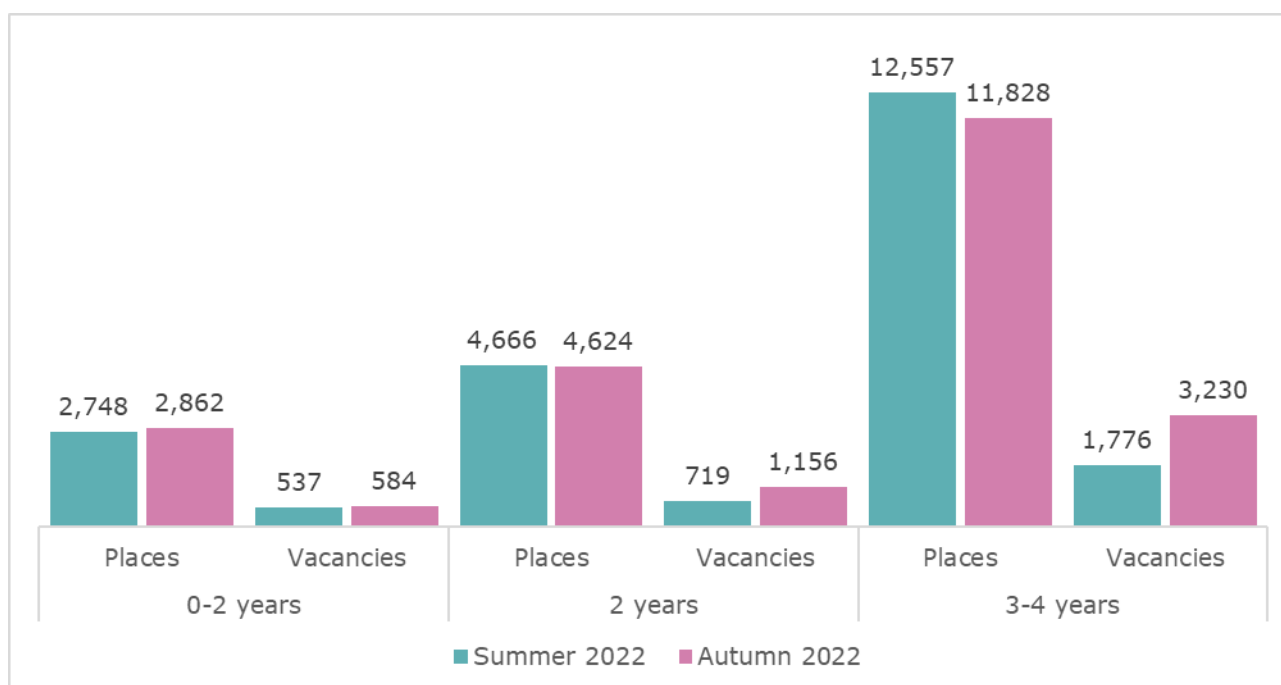
Places and vacancies

Across Staffordshire and in all districts childcare places are provided by a variety of different types of providers who cater for different age ranges. There are variations across the districts and the number of places varies due to continuous opening and closure of provision which impacts the market. When choosing childcare parents may look at a variety of factors including cost, location, quality, opening times and flexibility. Therefore, there needs to be a variety of types to meet this demand.

Every provider will have a breakeven point that is the absolute minimum of children needed to ensure that their costs are covered and most providers will consider themselves 'full' at 85%-90% capacity to allow some flexibility.

The below chart shows the total number of places available for each age group and the number of vacancies out of that total for 2022.

Fig 5 Places and vacancies by age group



0-2 years

Fig 6 Table to show places and vacancies for 0-2 years over previous 12 months

	Summer 2022			Autumn 2022		
	0-23 months places	0-23 months vacancies	Vacancy Rate	0-23 months places	0-23 months vacancies	Vacancy Rate
Cannock Chase	209	16	8%	232	35	15%
East Staffordshire	402	85	21%	420	78	19%
Lichfield	456	60	13%	485	83	17%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	463	90	19%	462	118	25%
South Staffordshire	338	78	23%	304	82	27%
Stafford	392	100	26%	422	74	18%
Staffordshire Moorlands	337	77	23%	355	66	19%
Tamworth	151	31	21%	183	49	27%
Staffordshire	2,748	537	20%	2,862	584	20%

Overall, the number of places for under 2's has been relatively stable over the past few years although there has been a small drop between 2021 and 2022. The

vacancy rate has fallen in the past year though from 25% in 2021 to 20% in 2022 which is of concern indicating there is a squeeze on places in some areas. However, due to staffing issues and pressures on other age groups due to increased numbers there is a concern that the number of places for younger children could be reduced which will reduce places further. This would of course have a severe impact on working families and parents' ability to work if they are unable to source suitable care. In light of the additional funded hours that will be available to working parents of children aged 9 months plus from September 2024 and then again in September 2025 this is something that needs a close monitoring.

There was a bigger fall in Cannock Chase than elsewhere in the county where the vacancy rate fell from 29% in summer 2021 to just 8% in summer 2022. Lichfield also had a low number of vacancies with just 13% in summer 2022.

Generally based on previous analysis there needs to be approximately 20% of the overall number of children living in the area in childcare places, so essentially 2 childcare places for every 10 children in the age group living in the ward. Currently there are approximately 17% in places so broadly in line with need. However again with the introduction of 15 hours for 9 months plus in 2024 and then 30 hours in 2025 this is likely to increase.

2 years

Fig 7 Table to show places and vacancies for 2 year olds over previous 12 months

	Summer 2022			Autumn 2022		
	2 year places	2 year vacancies	Vacancy Rate	2 year places	2 year vacancies	Vacancy Rate
Cannock Chase	501	78	16%	522	135	26%
East Staffordshire	637	114	18%	609	166	27%
Lichfield	641	57	9%	603	132	22%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	660	80	12%	667	173	26%
South Staffordshire	571	110	19%	637	161	25%
Stafford	775	143	18%	667	151	23%
Staffordshire Moorlands	506	87	17%	507	142	28%
Tamworth	375	50	13%	411	96	23%
Staffordshire	4,666	719	15%	4,624	1,156	25%

The number of places available for two year olds has remained static over the last few years although the vacancy rate has fallen. In autumn 2022 it was 25% compared to 27% in 2021, 32% in 2020 and 29% in 2019. The rate in summer 2022 also fell to 15% from 22% the previous year.

East Staffordshire saw a significant fall in the vacancy rate falling from 28% in summer 2021 down to 18% in summer 2022. South Staffordshire also saw a similar fall.

Demand for two year old places is made up of working families requiring childcare to enable them to work and Think2 places, providing 15 hours of funded education for those families on a low income (many who are also working).

Approximately 27% of families in Staffordshire are eligible for Think2 places which equate to 15 hours of funded early education over 38 weeks a year (can be stretched up to 52). Families who are entitled are on low incomes and may not be able to afford

to pay for additional hours or 'extras'. They often are unable to travel far and require provision within walking distance. It is essential that these families are able to secure a place to enable children to get the best start.

From April 2024 working families will be able to access 15 hours of funded childcare which will increase to 30 hours from September 2025. This is expected to create additional demand for two year old places and may result in a squeeze on three and four year olds places.

3-4 years

The number of children attending within this age group fluctuates through the year. Most children will start school after they turn four years at the next school intake. Most schools still operate one start point a year in September. This means that in September most children aged four will start at school leaving childcare providers with only three year olds. Gradually over the spring and summer terms the numbers attending will increase as more children turn four and further numbers join who are three.

Therefore, most providers will have fewer children in autumn term. This is the time they are most likely to suffer with sustainability issues. In terms of sufficiency this is the term most closely monitored. If there is a squeeze on places in autumn, there are unlikely to be enough places by spring and summer to accommodate the additional children. However, if providers do not have enough children in autumn they are at higher risk of closure due to sustainability which again puts further pressure on the wider market.

All three and four year olds are entitled to 15 hours of funded early education for 38 weeks a year (can be stretched over longer period) from the term following their third birthday. Additionally, the majority of children are entitled to an additional 15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year if both parents (or single parent and some other exceptional circumstances) are working. This means that there should be approximately one place available per child across the county.

The table below shows the places and vacancies for three and four year olds across both summer and autumn 2022. This data did show some concern for the number of available places in some areas particularly in Lichfield where the vacancy rate fell to 10%. Tamworth and Cannock Chase also experienced a lower than normal vacancy rate. There has been ongoing support and development work in these areas to support providers and look at ways to increase capacity.

Fig 8 Table to show places and vacancies for 3-4 years over previous 12 months

	Summer 2022			Autumn 2022		
	3-4 year places	3-4 year vacancies	Vacancy Rate	3-4 year places	3-4 year vacancies	Vacancy Rate
Cannock Chase	1,410	164	12%	1,405	311	22%
East Staffordshire	1,811	229	13%	1,772	513	29%
Lichfield	1,516	146	10%	1,516	330	22%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	1,894	270	14%	1,843	567	31%
South Staffordshire	1,550	249	16%	1,433	368	26%
Stafford	1,873	294	16%	1,707	448	26%
Staffordshire Moorlands	1,478	301	20%	1,302	470	36%
Tamworth	1,025	123	12%	851	223	26%
Staffordshire	12,557	1,776	14%	11,828	3,230	27%

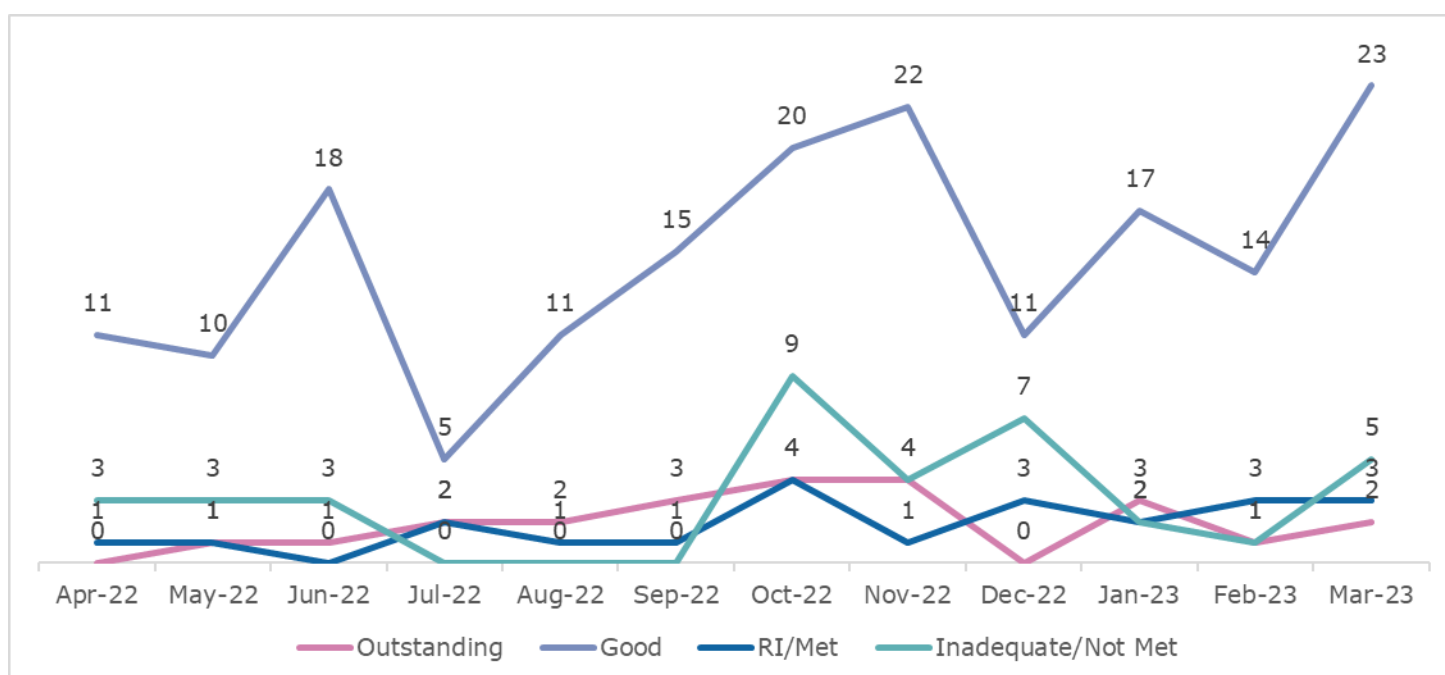
Quality of childcare

Fig 9 Table to show outcomes of Ofsted inspections in previous 12 months

	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Met	Not Met	Total
Cannock Chase	2	15	1	4	0	0	22
East Staffordshire	6	26	1	5	2	0	40
Lichfield	2	23	3	2	0	1	31
Newcastle-under-Lyme	4	27	1	4	2	1	39
South Staffordshire	4	23	2	3	4	0	36
Stafford	3	24	4	4	2	0	37
Staffordshire Moorlands	1	20	4	0	1	0	26
Tamworth	1	19	3	2	2	1	28
Staffordshire	23	177	19	24	13	3	259

There was a total of 259 Ofsted inspections (up from 95 the previous year) carried out between April 2022 and March 2023 in early years settings including childminders. 77% of the inspections resulted in a Good or Outstanding judgement. There were 27 inspections which resulted in a Inadequate or Not Met judgement. Lichfield and Staffordshire Moorlands had the highest percentage of Good and Outstanding judgements with 81% each. The lowest percentage of Good and Outstanding judgements was in Tamworth with 71%.

Fig 10 Chart to show Ofsted inspections by month and grade in 2022/23



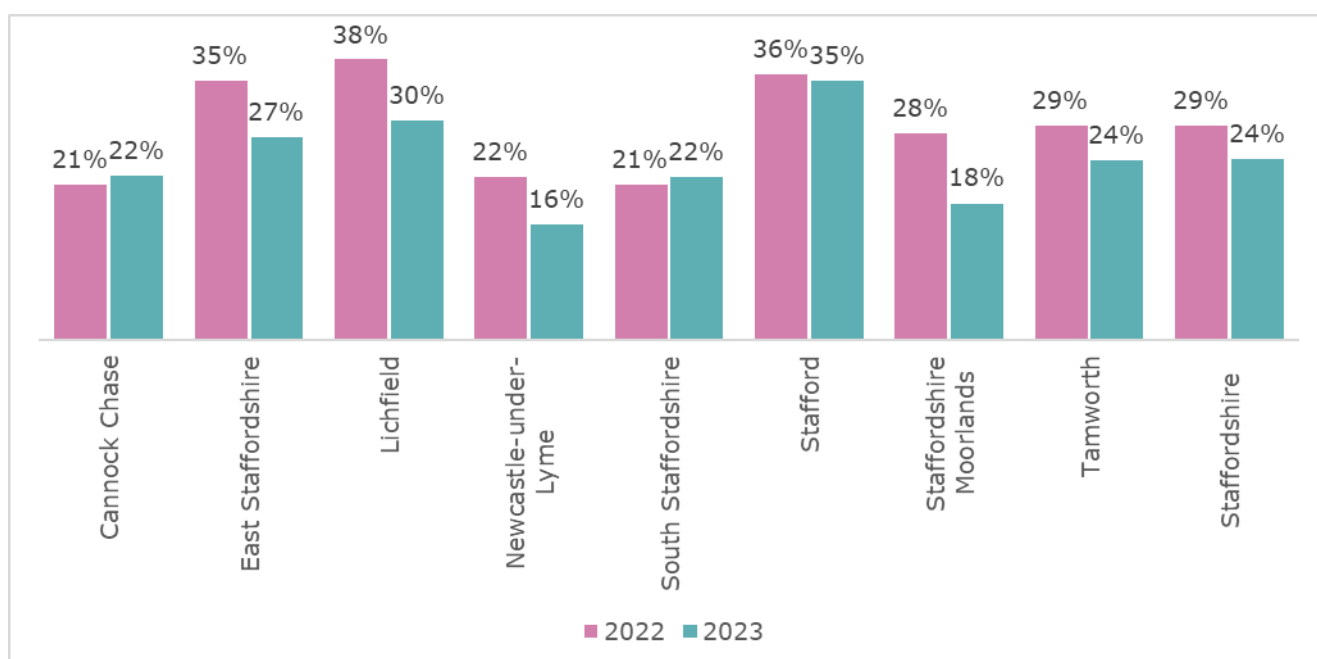
October 2022 was the month that the highest number of inspections was carried out with 37 followed by March 2023 with 33. July 2022 was the month with the fewest inspections with just 9. Many providers are closed in July and August which explains why there are fewer inspections during that time.

However overall across Staffordshire our good and outstanding Ofsted grading as a whole are at 97%. Conversion rates to an improved category following an Inadequate or Requires Improvement judgement after SCC support is 100% for those that remained open.

Recruitment and retention of staff

The childcare sector has been experiencing severe difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff since the pandemic. Many experienced staff have left the sector due to low pay, long hours and poor conditions and many providers are struggling to replace them. Pay is the biggest driving factor, most staff earn the National Living Wage or close to it and have found that they can work in places like supermarkets for more money and less responsibility.

Fig 11 Chart to show percentage of providers with current vacancies



There has been a fall in the percentage of vacancies across all districts with the exception of Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire which has since a one percentage point increase. Overall the percentage of vacancies has fallen from 29% to 24% in the past 12 months. However there is still a large number of providers who currently have vacancies.

62 providers (12%) have had to reduce the number of places they can offer either temporarily or permanently due to staff shortages. Another 44 (9%) said they may have to in future.

	Not enough experience	Not turning up for interview	Accepting a job and then changing mind	New starters leaving within 6 months	Not enough qualifications
Cannock Chase	31%	33%	26%	15%	37%
East Staffordshire	35%	39%	23%	14%	45%
Lichfield	42%	45%	35%	23%	52%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	24%	33%	14%	15%	37%
South Staffordshire	30%	25%	21%	14%	30%
Stafford	35%	31%	17%	13%	39%
Staffordshire Moorlands	26%	27%	21%	8%	30%
Tamworth	32%	47%	29%	12%	44%
Staffordshire	32%	34%	23%	14%	39%

One area of concern is around the current qualifications and training. Nearly forty percent of providers felt that applicants did not have sufficient qualifications. A number of providers voiced concerns that the current levels are not fit for purpose and therefore applicants do not have the required levels of practical experience and knowledge .

Many people are also either leaving the profession or not even starting due to the high levels of experience and qualifications required which do not match the salary on offer.

A third of providers felt that applicants did not have enough experience rising to 42% in Lichfield. In Newcastle-under-Lyme only a quarter felt that applicants were not experienced enough. Just under a fifth of providers also felt that although those applying for jobs had the right level of qualifications, they did not have enough knowledge around the basics of childcare.

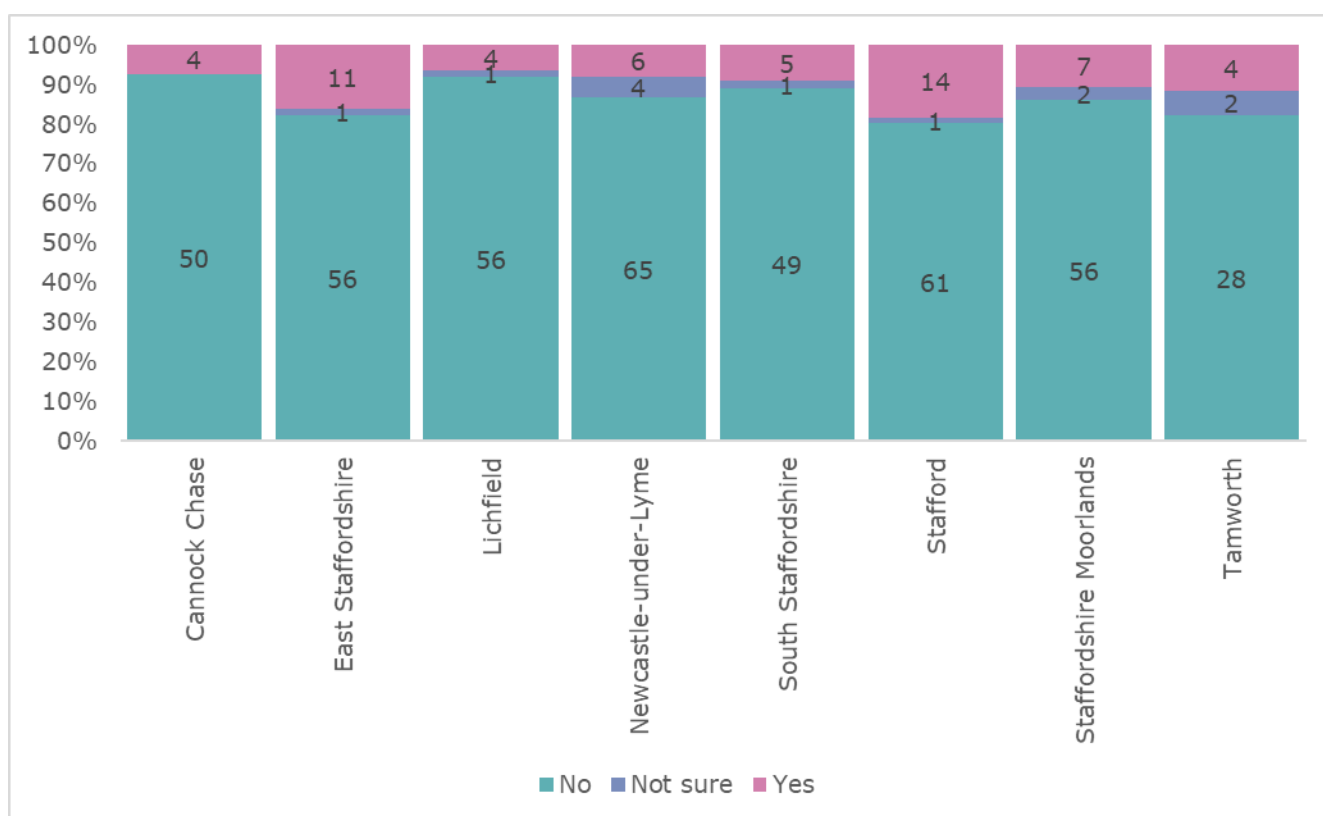
Even when providers found possible ideal applicants there were still challenges, with 34% (up from 25% the previous year) reporting they had candidates not turn up for interview and 23% (up from 17%) accepting a job and then changing their minds. In Lichfield this was a particular problem with 45% having candidates not turn up for interview and 35% changing their minds after accepting a position. Due to the fact that there is such a recruitment crisis applicants are able to pick and choose the role more than ever.

Children with additional needs

The vast majority, more than nine in ten, children with special educational needs attend a mainstream childcare provider with the remaining attending a specialist provider. This can sometimes be difficult for mainstream provision to manage due to additional staffing etc. especially if they have a large number of children with additional needs, but the settings are supported through the process and in some cases additional funding is available. As a result, SCC are investing in a significant suite of training and participating in a significant inclusive practices project funded through Comic Relief.

Across Staffordshire 90% of providers said that they were at least partly accessible for children with a physical disability with 3% saying they were not accessible at all.

In the previous 12 months 55 (11%) providers across the county stated that they had had to turn away a child because they could not accommodate their needs. This is a huge increase on the 15 providers who declared previously and is concerning. Of these the highest percentages were in Stafford with 18% of providers and East Staffordshire with 16%. The lowest percentages were in Cannock Chase and Lichfield with 7%.

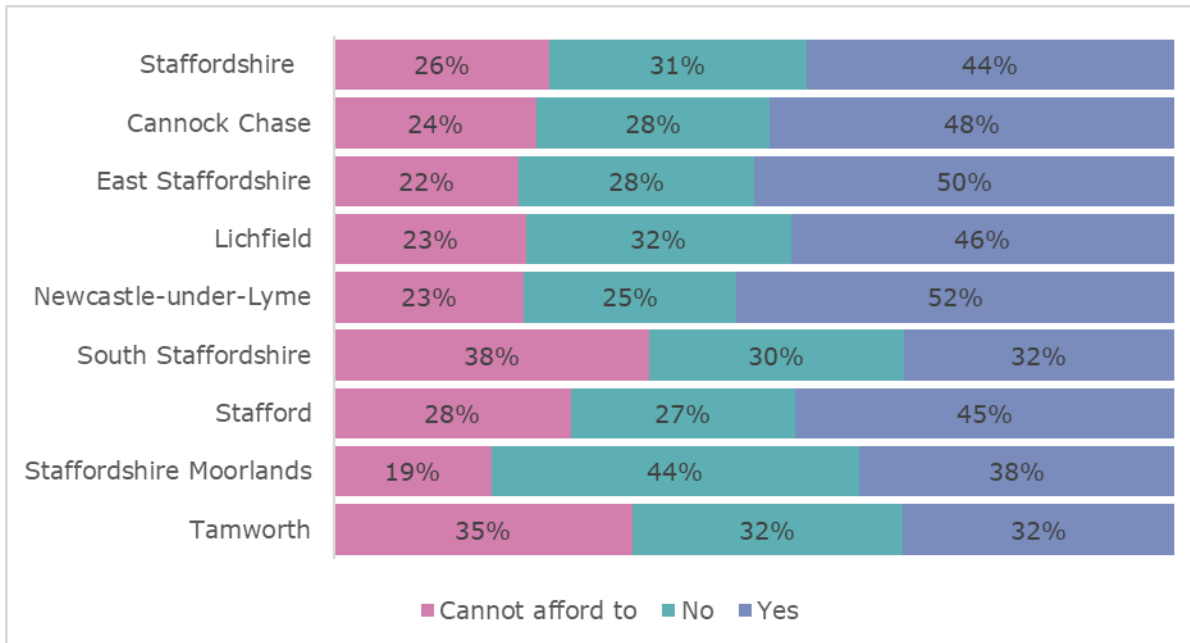


44% of Providers (up from a quarter last year) indicated they employed specialist staff to support children with SEND. Nearly a third said they did not and the rest could not afford to even if they needed to.

There was a variation between types of providers with half of school based provision employing specialist support compared to 40% of private providers and 30% of

voluntary managed committees. Nearly half of voluntary managed committees said they could not afford to employ specialist staff compared to 18% of school based provision

Fig 12 Chart to show providers employing additional SEND support



Vulnerable children

The EEAC team monitors whether children known to social workers and those either on a Child Protection Plan or Looked After by the Local Authority attend a childcare provider. In turn providers monitor children in their care for signs of concern including neglect or harm and flag to the relevant safeguarding authorities as appropriate.

Staff within settings are able to access training on safeguarding for early years.

Take up of funded places is very high across all these groups.

Think2 take-up and sufficiency

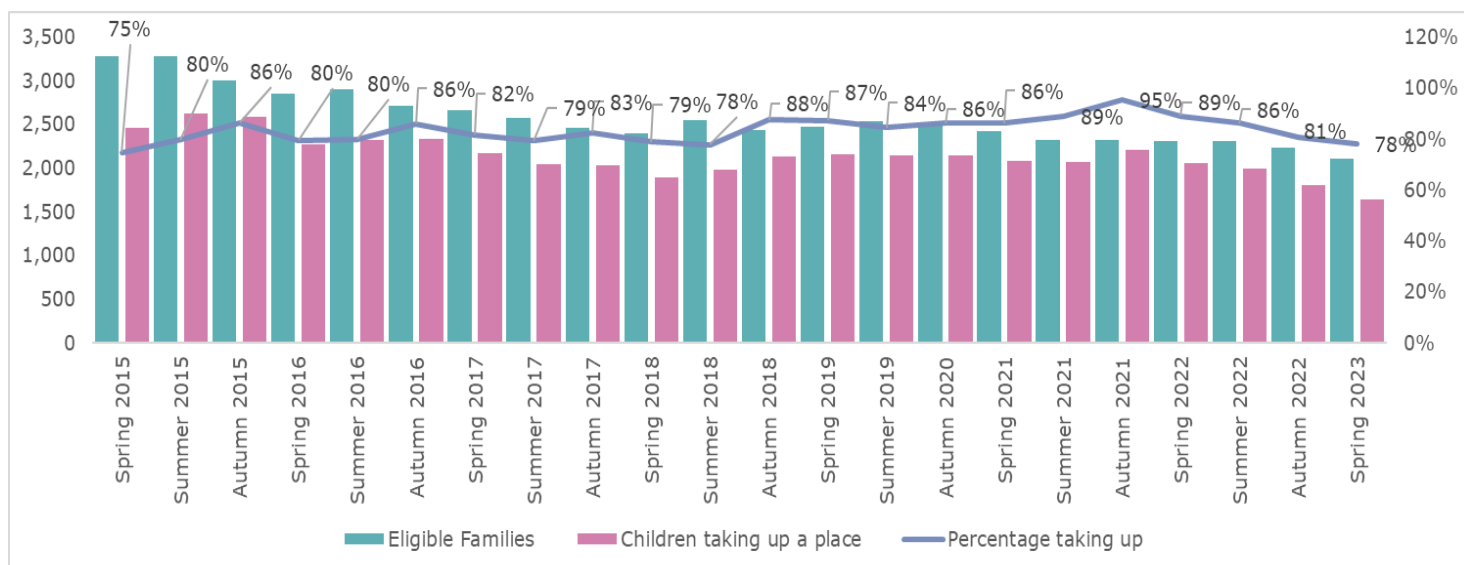
Think2 means that over the last few years thousands of children have been able to access early education from families who would likely otherwise be unable to afford it. It provides up to 15 hours a week over 38 weeks (or can be stretched over 52 weeks) to families from low income families and some other groups. Families should be able to access this place free of charge at the point of use with nothing additional to pay if they do not want to buy additional services or hours. This has made a huge difference to those families. It enables them to take up employment, education or even just time out for mental wellbeing.

Take up of Think2 has risen and remained consistent since the full rollout of the project in autumn 2014, although this has fluctuated with higher take up in autumn and lower in spring.

Since autumn 2014 the number of families eligible for Think2 had been steadily falling up to spring 2018 from 3,200 down to 2,200, a fall of over 1000 families. This is likely due to the improving economy in Staffordshire with more families in work and having a higher income means less families meet the eligibility criteria.

The target for take up in Staffordshire by eligible families is at least 80%.

Fig 13 Think2 eligibility and take up between 2015 and 2023



Take up has fallen back since the high of spring 2022 and in spring 2023 had fallen from 95% to 78%. However, there are a number of reasons identified that may be behind this. One of the main reasons is families have struggled to access places with nothing additional to pay. The early years sector is suffering from low pay, low funding and a recruitment crisis which has led to some increasing charges and limiting available places for those families who only wish to access the funded hours. Due to the fact many of these families are in severe poverty and limited access to travel they are unable to find a place nearby. Other reasons have included that some families are unaware of the entitlement. Staffordshire County Council has undergone a number of changes in the last few years and these have meant staff changes so there has been a drive to raise awareness in the entitlements to ensure anyone

having contact with families makes them aware. SCC have commissioned a small scale project to seek what barriers exist for families and how these may be overcome. With the introduction of the new Family Hubs it is hoped that this too will increase awareness.

Out of school provision

Generally in terms of sufficiency the market for out of school places manages itself. The majority of schools now offer either provision themselves or have another organisation including sports clubs operating it for them. The majority of day nurseries provide longer hours and generally provide care all year round.

Schools themselves can usually offer unlimited numbers of places for out of school up to their overall headcount. Therefore they tend to provide places as demanded rather than having a set number.

Addressing and complexities and managing the market

Following each Childcare Sufficiency Audit and publication of the sufficiency data by ward a development plan is established to rate all wards in terms of their ability to meet general sufficiency requirements as well as those for Think2 and 30 hours of childcare. Areas are rated as red, amber, green for both 30 hours and Think2.

These plans and ratings enable effective monitoring of the market and to concentrate support and development in areas most in need at the time of the sufficiency audit.

It is important to note that places and vacancies change continuously and therefore whilst a ward might show as having sufficient places this can change if for example a childcare provider closes.

We recognise that costs are continuing to rise across the sector and in particular, a minimum wage increase is anticipated to add further financial pressures on providers. We will continue to target resource at providers who need assistance with business modelling to ensure we are able to sustain and grow (where necessary) places across Staffordshire.

In the near future from April 2024 there will be the beginnings of the rollout for the new entitlements which will eventually see working families being able to access up to 30 hours of funded childcare per week for babies over 9 months old. A detailed action plan and communications strategy will be developed to support this roll out to realise the ambitions in the Government announcements

We continue to support the market and offer advice and guidance to providers and parents to achieve a sustainable market.