

**Luton Council
Childcare
Sufficiency
Assessment**

2019 – 2020

Contents

About this report	4
Methodology	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Recommendations	6
Limitations	7
Summary of findings and responses from the 2018 – 2019 CSA	8
Main findings	8
Responses	8
Introduction.....	9
Areas of Luton	9
Luton Summary	10
Early education funding.....	10
Funded two year old places in Luton.....	10
Statistical neighbour comparison.....	11
Three and four year old universal funding in Luton	12
Three and four year old extended (30 hours) funding in Luton.....	12
Providers offering funded early education places.....	13
Current strategies to improve take-up	15
North Luton.....	16
East Luton	17
South Luton	18
West Luton	19
Central Luton	20
Parental demand for childcare in Luton	21
Challenges to finding childcare.....	21
Affordability of childcare	22
Childcare to meet the needs of children of working parents	23
30 hours early education funding for working parents	23
Tax-Free Childcare.....	23
Universal Credit and childcare.....	24

Flexible childcare.....	24
Out of school settings.....	24
Children needing holiday care.....	25
Cost of holiday childcare.....	26
Supply of childcare places in Luton.....	26
Sustainability.....	27
Childcare to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).....	28
Finding inclusive childcare.....	28
Disability Access Fund.....	28
Provision of places.....	29
Specialist holiday schemes.....	29
Quality of providers in Luton.....	29
Latest inspection outcomes.....	29
Historical comparison.....	30
Comparison to statistical neighbours.....	30
Family Information Service.....	31
FIS enquiries.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Luton Investment Framework.....	31
Preparing for future childcare sufficiency assessments.....	31
Useful links:.....	31

Additional documents:

Appendix A: Supporting tables and graphs

Appendix B: Parental and Employer Survey responses

About this report

The Childcare Act 2006¹ places a duty on all local authorities to secure sufficient childcare, so far as it is reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 (or up to 25 for disabled children). The Childcare Act 2016² places a further duty to secure funded childcare for qualifying children of working parents following the introduction of the 30 hours extended entitlement.

Luton Council has a statutory duty to work with 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. In this report, we have made an assessment of sufficiency using data about the need for childcare and the amount of childcare available, and feedback from local parents about how easy or difficult it has been for them to find suitable childcare.

This report was written prior to spring 2020, with additional references added in April 2020 in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the childcare sector in Luton.

Methodology

This report provides an overview of childcare sufficiency using qualitative and quantitative data from a number of sources:

- Department of Education statistical data of childcare providers and inspections³
- information submitted to the Luton Family Information Service (FIS) by childcare providers⁴
- Luton 2017 Mid-Year Population Estimates⁵
- Luton Council two, three and four year old funding data from summer 2019
- Funding and provision data from the Early Years Census January 2019⁶
- The Coram Family and Childcare Trust – Childcare Survey 2019⁷
- Analysis of 435 responses to the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) 2019 Parental Survey and to the Childcare Perception Survey 2019

¹ [Childcare Act 2006](#)

² [Childcare Act 2016](#)

³ [Ofsted Inspections 31-august-2019](#)

⁴ [Appendix A : CSA 2019/2020](#)

⁵ [Business Intelligence Luton Council](#)

⁶ [Headcount data -under-5-years-of-age-january-2019](#)

⁷ [Coram Childcare Survey 2019](#)

Executive Summary

COVID-19

This report was primarily written before March 2020 and COVID-19. The childcare sector has experienced huge challenges since the outbreak including temporary closures, a reduction in income and major changes to early years practice. Luton's childcare providers have responded to government guidance and valuable childcare spaces have been provided for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

The long term effects that COVID-19 will have on the childcare sector in Luton, and the town, are presently unknown. Childcare providers may need additional support to remain sustainable, as there may be a significant change in demand from parents due to unemployment, or a concern for the well-being of their child after restrictions are lifted.

Throughout this extraordinary time Luton Council will continue to work closely with childcare providers to ensure that sufficient high quality childcare can be provided for the families in Luton and that the childcare sector is able to remain sustainable now, and in the future.

Summary to March 2020

Luton continues to provide high quality childcare with 96.4% of early years providers being judged as good or outstanding. This has increased by 7 percentage points over the last three years; it is also above the national average.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2019/2020 shows that Luton is able to meet the current demand for childcare spaces, and has adequate vacant spaces to manage an increase in the take up of early education funding. However, there is some concern regarding future supply in certain areas with the potential impact of the Luton Investment Framework future housing and commercial developments.

Luton has seen an increase in the take up of two year old funding from 59% in 2018 to 60% in 2019. Luton's increase compares to a decrease both regionally and nationally of 1% and 4% respectively.

The number of children accessing universal funding has remained the same over the last twelve months; however, the take up rate has fallen from 89% to 86% due to revised population figures.

Business Intelligence data analysis has indicated that a number of children with a home language of Polish, Romanian and Urdu are not accessing early education funding so promotional materials in these languages have been produced and are being displayed in public locations within these communities.

Childcare providers have also been consulted regarding the demand for promotional materials in additional languages, and different marketing methods, and this information has been used when looking at how to reach different communities.

Survey responses continue to indicate that cost and timings of childcare remain a challenge to working parents in Luton. Ensuring parents are aware of all the funding and support available to them remains a priority in Luton. The Family Information Service is now supported by the Luton Early Years and Childcare Facebook page, in sharing information with families

Throughout the last year providers have been encouraged to sign up for Tax Free Childcare to help working parents with the cost of childcare. This has resulted in a 9% increase in providers offering Tax Free Childcare in Luton.

Recommendations

- to support providers to remain sustainable as the effects of COVID-19 on the childcare sector are understood – advising on financial support, offering additional business support sessions and advising providers how to maximise funding opportunities and reduce costs
- to provide support and guidance around safeguarding, changes to practice and regaining parental confidence in childcare following the pandemic
- to continue to maintain the quality of childcare in Luton by working closely with providers, offering help and advice to improve practice and support with the new Ofsted education inspection framework
- to ensure that sufficiency and the quality of childcare provision remain considerations for the Luton Investment Framework and long term development within Luton
- to monitor the effectiveness of promotional materials in different languages and to investigate the use of community social media sites
- to monitor the response in enquiries generated by digital screen and waste fleet advertising to advise on future marketing plans
- to target promotional activity in wards where two year old funding take-up is particularly low
- to increase early years funding awareness and the Family Information Service by using different advertising methods to reach families

Limitations

Data to assess sufficiency is collected from three sources; the FIS database, annual updates and monthly vacancy updates which are updated by childcare providers. Not all providers respond to the data requests and therefore some historical data or estimates have been used.

Vacancy data is difficult to assess as a vacancy could be considered as one session or a full week childcare place. Waiting lists can indicate the demand for a setting, but the number of children on waiting lists is not a reliable source of data as children can be on a list because they have not reached an eligible age, rather than because there is not a current space available to them. Parents also frequently place their child on more than one waiting list to ensure a suitable place.

The survey responses used within this report do not necessarily represent the diverse population within Luton and these can only provide an indication of opinion, as they represent a small sample of the population.

Supporting data tables can be found in Appendix A: CSA 2019/2020

Previous Childcare Sufficiency assessments can be found on the [Luton Council website](#).

Summary of findings and responses from the 2018 – 2019 CSA

Main findings

- Luton was able to meet the demand for childcare spaces, and had adequate vacant spaces to manage an increase in the take up of early education funding - however there was some concern regarding future supply in certain areas with the potential impact of the Luton Investment Framework future housing and commercial developments.
- 30 hour funding for working parents had not had a negative impact on the availability of early years childcare in Luton - however it was recognised that changes to the number of early education hours made available to families, or changes in thresholds may affect this demand
- an area of concern was the decline in the take up of early education funding for two, three and four year olds in Luton over the last two years compared to a gradual increase nationally
- survey responses indicated that childcare that met the needs of working parents, particularly those that worked irregular hours, remained a concern for parents along with the cost of childcare

Responses

- monitoring the potential impact of new developments continues to be a priority when assessing the sufficiency of childcare in Luton
- various strategies to address the decline in take up have been put in place over the last year which have contributed to the increase of two year old children in funded spaces from 870 to 915, however there has not been an increase in the number of three and four year olds accessing early education which remains a concern
- the use of social media for early years has increased, promoting the use of Tax Free Childcare and early education funding to help parents understand the support available to them
- the information provided to parents regarding holiday schemes and out of school clubs has been improved and been updated, helping working parents find suitable quality childcare.

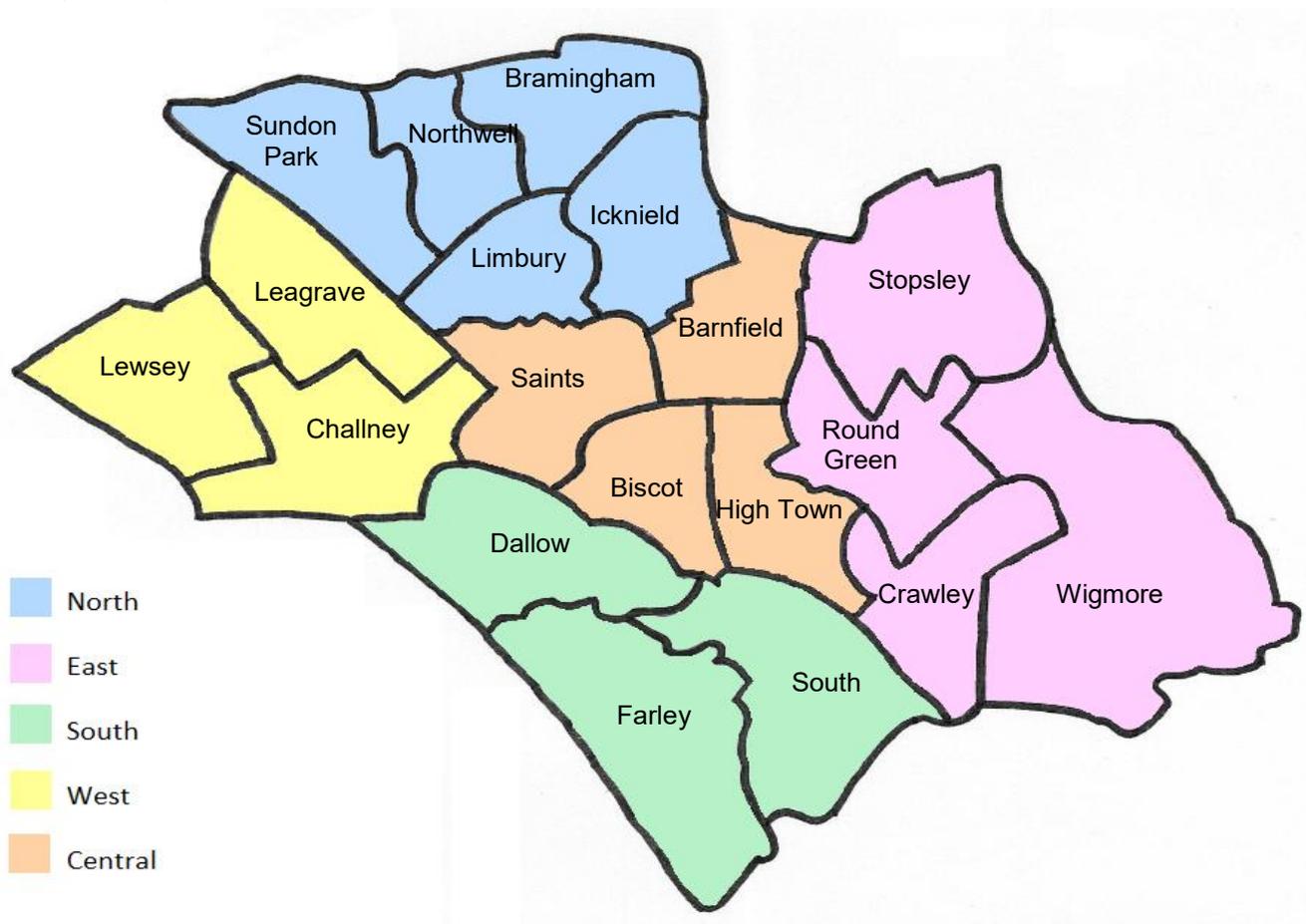
Introduction

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of childcare sufficiency in Luton and includes how Luton Council meets the childcare needs of:

- children aged two, three and four taking up early education and childcare places, including the extended 30 hours
- children with parents who work irregular hours
- school age children
- children needing holiday care
- children in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit
- children with special educational needs and disabilities

Areas of Luton

The findings in this report are presented as a Luton summary and also as five areas, North, East, South, West and Central in order to understand local differences.



Luton Summary

Population of Luton - 214,658⁸

Childcare type in Luton

Type of provider	Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries in a school
Total	133	41	31	6*	16

*over 7 sites

Early education funding

Early education funding is available to eligible two, three and four year olds and is paid directly to approved childcare providers by Luton Council.

Funded two year old places in Luton

Children aged two whose families receive certain benefits (including low-income families in receipt of in-work benefits), or those who meet additional non-economic criteria, are entitled to 15 hours funded early education per week.⁹ Nationally, around 40% of two year olds are estimated to be entitled to this offer with Luton having an above average of 42% of two year olds being eligible.

Eligible children taking up their two year funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Luton and nationally as at January 2019.¹⁰

Area	Take Up %
Luton	60%
National	68%

Luton has seen an increase in the take up of two year old funding from 59% in 2018 to 60% in the January census in 2019. Luton's increase compares to a decrease both regionally and nationally of 1% and 4% respectively.

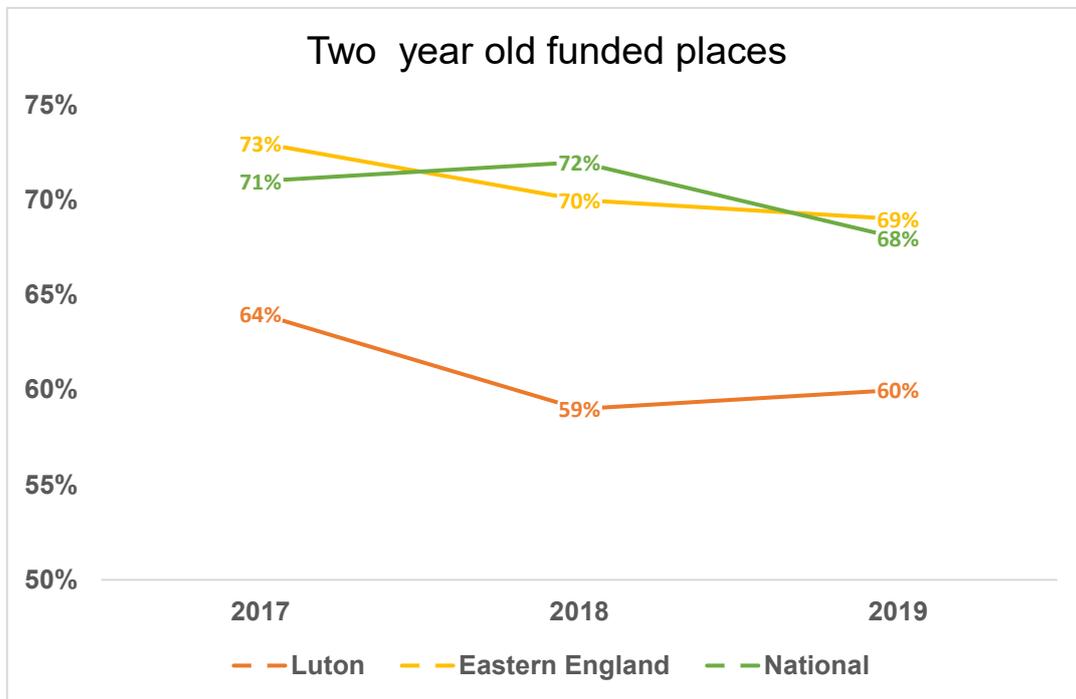
The gap between National and Luton has reduced from 13 percentage points in 2018 to 8 in 2019.

⁸ Luton 2017 Mid-Year Population Estimates – Business Intelligence Luton Council

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-2-year-olds>

¹⁰ [Headcount data -under-5-years-of-age-january-2019](#)

Actual numbers of two year old in spaces show a 5% increase in children compared to 2018, from 870 to 915.



Statistical neighbour comparison

Luton has ten statistical neighbours when comparing Ofsted and Department of Education (DfE) data and these range from being “Very Close” to “Somewhat Close” to various statistical aspects of Luton.

The “closeness” of these statistical neighbours has been decided by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)¹¹ who were commissioned by the DfE to identify and group similar local authorities in terms of their socio-economic characteristics. Each local authority was assigned 10 such neighbours.¹² These socio-economic characteristics include among others; the mean weekly pay, the percentage of pupils known to be eligible for Free School Meals, the percentage of residents from different ethnic backgrounds, and the general health of those in the area.

In January 2019 Luton ranked 8th out of its eleven statistical neighbours with the take up of two year old funding in these local authorities ranging between 48% and 70%.¹³

¹¹ local-authority-interactive-tool-lait

¹² Appendix A : CSA 2019/2020: Table 2

¹³ Appendix A : CSA 2019/2020: Graph A

Three and four year old universal funding in Luton

All children aged three and four are entitled to 15 hours funded early education per week until they start reception class in school. Parents do not have to use all the hours of their child’s funded entitlement and can choose to split the hours between providers. With the agreement of their provider, parents may also spread them across the year – for example, rather than taking 15 hours for 38 weeks a year they could take just under 12 hours for 48 weeks a year.

Eligible children taking up their universal funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Luton and nationally.¹⁴

Area	Universal Take Up %
Luton	86%
National	94%

The take-up of the 15 hours universal funding in Luton has continued to decline since 2016, falling from 92% to 86% with Luton being ranked 8th out of eleven of its statistical neighbours.

Three and four year old extended (30 hours) funding in Luton

Since September 2017 children aged three and four from eligible working families are entitled to 30 hours funded early education per week until they start in a reception class in school.

To qualify parents must each expect to earn (on average) at least £125 per week (equal to 16 hours at the National Minimum or Living Wage) and less than £100,00 per year. Parents may still qualify if they are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or are unable to work because they are disabled or have caring responsibilities.

Parents who think they are entitled to a 30 hours extended hours place apply for this online through the government’s Childcare Support website [Childcare Choices](#). The same website is used to apply for tax free childcare and parents can apply for either or both. If a parent is eligible, the system creates a code which they can use with their chosen childcare provider. If they are ineligible, they will still be entitled to the universal 15 hours of funded childcare.

¹⁴ [Headcount data -under-5-years-of-age-january-2019](#)

Eligible children taking up their extended hour funded place (for at least some of the available hours) in Luton and nationally.¹⁵

Area	Extended Hour Take Up %
Luton	62% ¹⁶
National	84% ¹⁷

Based on the indicative number of families that may be eligible for extended hours provided in September 2017 the take up in Luton has increased from 57% in 2018 to 62% in 2019. However it still remains significantly lower than the national average at 84%.

The increase of 5% relates to an additional 65 children taking up a 30 hour space in Luton, totalling 975 in January 2019. Of those codes that are issued in Luton over 95% of these are validated which indicates that the family has taken up, or intends to take up, a place at a provider.

Currently we do not have the information of potentially eligible families by ward and therefore are not able to accurately identify areas where families are not accessing the extended hours funding, as eligibility within wards will vary.

Providers offering funded early education places

The percentage of providers offering early education funding is show in the following table:

Type of provision	Childminders	Nurseries in schools	Maintained Nurseries	Private, voluntary and independent nurseries
Number of providers	133	16	6	72
2 year funding	47%	0%	100%	86%
3 & 4 year universal funding 15 hours	46%	100%	100%	100%
3 & 4 year extended funding 30 hours	42%	6%	100%	90%

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2019>

¹⁶ Based on 2017 DfE estimate of potential eligible families in Luton - 1580

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2019>

Providers are paid by the government for delivering funded early education. Luton providers currently receive £5.10 per hour for a funded two year old and £4.36 for a funded three or four year old (April 2020 rates will be increased to £5.16 and £4.44 respectively). They are not required to offer funding to parents, but parents may choose to use a different provider if they do not. Some providers offer a restricted number of funded places.

Data suggests that there are currently sufficient childcare places to provide the 30 hours extended entitlement in Luton. This is monitored by the FIS who record vacancies as well as applications and enquiries made by parents. Some childminders have chosen not to offer the 30 hours funding due to the impact the hourly funding rate has on their income.

Of the respondents to the CSA Parental Survey who answered questions regarding early years funding entitlements, 81% were aware of two year old funding, 92% were aware of universal funding for three and four year olds and 89% knew of the 30 hours extended hours for working parents.

Early education funding by provider type

The number of two, three and four year olds accessing early education funded places in Luton as at the January 2019 Early Years census¹⁸ is shown below.

Type of provider	2 year old funded children	Universal funded children	Extended hours funded children
Private and voluntary	668	2609	612
Childminders	32	76	81
Independent	10	124	20
Maintained nurseries	199	702	199
Nursery classes in primary schools	3	593	63
Reception classes in schools	-	2116	-
Special schools	3	15	-
Total	915	6235	975

¹⁸ [Headcount data -under-5-years-of-age-january-2019](#)

Current strategies to improve take-up

Various strategies to address the decline in two year old funding take up have been put in place over the last year including:

- banners displayed in wards that were identified as having low take up of funding
- digital screens in The Mall promoting early education funding
- advertising on waste fleet lorries
- simplified promotional and application forms for two year old funding
- promotional materials available in Polish, Romanian and Urdu following data analysis indicating that take-up is lower within these communities
- increased partnership working with other professionals to promote early education
- joint working with the Flying Start Children's Centres contacting and supporting families who may be eligible for early education funding
- launch of a new Early Years and Childcare Facebook page to promote early education and help with funding

These strategies have contributed to the increase of two year old children in funded spaces from 870 to 915, however there has not been any increase in the number of three and four year olds accessing early education which remains a concern and requires more understanding as to why families are not taking up early education.

North Luton

Population 38,672 (18% Luton)

North area: Bramingham, Icknield, Limbury, Northwell and Sundon Park

Childcare type in North Luton

Type of provider	Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries in a school
Total	46	7	7	2	2

Sufficiency

Northwell is still waiting for the re-opening of a nursery closed in 2018 which has been delayed and a further nursery closed in 2019. However new nurseries are due to open in both Sundon and Limbury in 2020.

There are vacancies for childcare in all wards, however Limbury currently has low vacancy rates for preschool age children and no spaces for children under one. Icknield has very few spaces available for two year olds, however there are spaces available in neighbouring wards. Both Bramingham and Northwell have high vacancy rates.¹⁹

Funded two year old places

64% of eligible children accessed two year funding in the area during summer term 2019 which is the Luton average for that term and an increase of 2% from 2018. Across the wards, Northwell saw an increase from 41% to 69% and both Icknield and Limbury saw falls of 15% and 20%, with Icknield now having one of the lowest take ups at 58%.

Three and four year old funding

Universal funding in North Luton is around the Luton average at 86%. Icknield and Sundon Park had the lowest take-up at 73% and Limbury continued to have the highest rate calculated at over 100% based on population estimates.

Estimated data²⁰, assuming a standard eligibility rate across Luton, shows that North Luton has an above average take up of extended hours funding, although some of these wards are likely to have a higher than average percentage of eligible working families.

¹⁹ Appendix A: CSA 2019/2020: Table 9 & 10

²⁰ Appendix A: CSA 2019/2020: Table 5

East Luton

Population 37,541 (17% Luton)

East area: Crawley, Round green, Stopsley and Wigmore

Childcare type in East Luton

Type of provider	Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries in a school
Total	37	6	7	1	3

Sufficiency

East Luton is an area that will experience the effects of some of the Luton Investment Framework's key developments bringing residential and employment opportunities to Luton. With 10,000 additional jobs planned at London Luton Airport by 2030 as well further opportunities at Butterfield Business Park, Century Park and Napier Gateway the demand for childcare in this area will potentially increase.

Sufficiency in this area is currently good, however it is vital that the number of spaces available continues to meet the demand and that families continue to be able to access high quality childcare throughout Luton. Both Wigmore and Stopsley have relatively low vacancy rates compared to the rest of the area and there is a particular concern over the proposed relocation of an existing 112 place nursery located near to the airport.

Funded two year old places

74% of eligible children accessed two year old funding during summer term 2019, well above Luton's average of 64%. Take up was lower in Stopsley at 64% however the number of eligible children in Stopsley is also very low. Wigmore had the highest above average take up of around 85%.²¹

Three and four year old funding

East Luton had an average take up of 86%, with wards varying from Wigmore at 73% to Crawley at over 100% based on population estimates. Some of the families in these areas may be accessing childcare in other local authorities and many of the families accessing Luton childcare but living outside the town may be using provisions in this area close to the airport. Extended hours take up is estimated to be high in this area at 91%

²¹ Appendix A: CSA 2019/2020: Table 1

South Luton

Population 48,048 (22% Luton)

South area: Dallow, Farley and South

Childcare type in South Luton

Type of provider	Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries in a school
Total	15	9	6	2	3

Sufficiency

A new nursery opened in South ward during 2019 and a further nursery is due to open in Farley in summer 2020.

South Luton may be affected by the future developments in Luton including Newlands Park which should increase employment opportunities and potentially the demand for childcare.

There have been previous concerns regarding the availability of funded two year spaces in this area, however FIS data now indicates that there are vacancies available in all wards although Farley has a lower number of spaces available for two, three and four years compared to neighbouring wards.

Funded two year old places

61% of eligible children accessed two year old funding in this area with Farley having the lowest take up of 46% and Dallow the highest, with an above average take up of 68%.²²

Three and four year old funding

South Luton has a below Luton average take up of universal funding at 81% with South ward being particularly low at 73% and Farley at 74%. Extended hours take up is estimated to be low at 34% compared to the Luton average of 63%. This is possibly due to there being fewer eligible families in this area as Dallow has an above Luton average of economically inactive residents at 37%²³ compared to an average of 31% and also South ward has over twice the Luton average amount of students at 15%.

²² Appendix A: CSA 2019/20 Table 1

²³ <https://www.luton.gov.uk/Environment/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/Planning/Census/2011%20census%20data>

West Luton

Population 39,526 (18% Luton)

West area: Challney, Leagrave and Lewsey

Childcare type in West Luton

Type of provider	Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries in a school
Total	17	7	3	2	7

Sufficiency

This area has a relatively high number of schools with nursery classes that offer early education compared to other areas in Luton (43% of provisions).

Due to the this area's proximity to Dunstable, children resident in Central Bedfordshire are also likely to access Luton childcare provisions, and equally families resident in Luton may choose to take their funded hours in Dunstable. Therefore take up for funded hours may be not accurately reflect the true numbers of children accessing early education places. FIS data indicates that all wards some vacancies for all age groups.

Funded two year old places

61% of children accessed two year old funding during summer term 2019. Take up varies across the area with Challney at 57%, Leagrave at 60% and Lewsey the highest at 69%.²⁴

Three and four year old funding

West Luton's take up for universal funding is slightly higher than the Luton average at 88%. Take up varies across the area with Leagrave high at 93%, Challney close to average at 85% and Lewsey much lower at 78%.

Extended funding is also relatively low at 42%, although as eligibility by ward is not available this may indicate a lower number of eligible families in this area.

²⁴ Appendix A: CSA 2019/2020; Table 1

Central Luton

Population 50,871 (24% Luton)

Central area: Barnfield, Biscot, Hightown and Saints

Childcare type in Central Luton

Type of provider	Childminders	Day Nurseries	Pre-schools	Maintained Nurseries	Nurseries in a school
Total	18	14	8	0	1

Sufficiency

A new nursery opened in spring 2020 in Saints ward.

Both Barnfield and Hightown have very few spaces available for two, three and four year old children, however both Biscot and Saints have relatively high vacancy rates for these age groups. Hightown does not have many registered spaces for children under one, although the neighbouring wards are able to offer these spaces.

Funded two year old places

Central area had a lower than average take up in summer term 2019 at 61%, below the Luton average of 64%. Barnfield had the lowest take up at 47% although numbers of eligible children are very low in this ward. Saints and Biscot were also low at 55% and 60% respectively. Hightown was the only ward above average at 79%.

Three and four year old universal funding

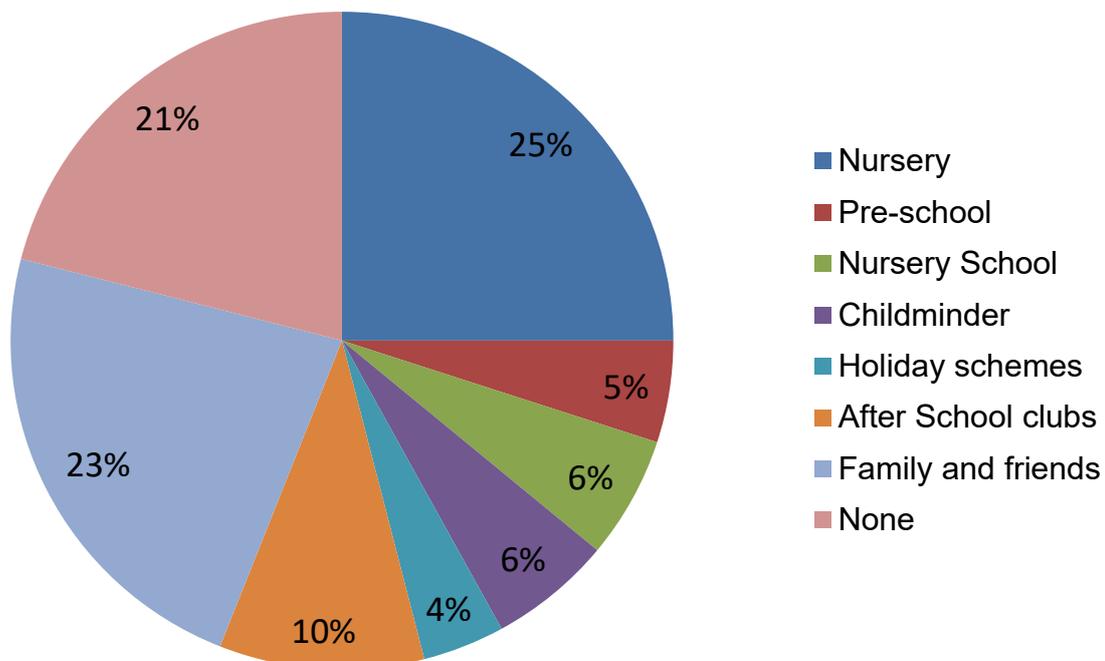
Central Luton has a below average take-up of funding at 82%. Barnfield and Biscot have an average take-up however both Hightown and Saints are lower at 74% and 75% respectively.

Extended hours estimated take-up is low in the Central area with Biscot having the lowest percentage at 31% compared to neighbouring Barnfield where data indicates that take-up is almost 137% which would suggest that eligibility is much higher in this ward than others. Census 2011 data shows that 43% residents of working age in Barnfield are in full time employment compared to 25% in Biscot and 37% across Luton.

Parental demand for childcare in Luton

The CSA Parental Survey showed that of the parents who responded 79% were currently using some form of childcare. Of those using childcare, 70% used some type of formal childcare rather than only using informal childcare such as friends or family.²⁵

Type of Childcare Used



The number of parents using informal childcare was similar to the previous year's CSA at 21%. The majority of responses (62%) indicated that parents and carers' main reason for using childcare was to enable them to work full or part time²⁶ and 23% considered the social or educational benefits to be an important reason for using childcare.

Of the total 435 respondents 89 indicated that they worked shift work and 24 worked overnight.

Challenges to finding childcare

The main difficulty parents reported when securing formal childcare was cost, with 34% of total respondents who had experienced a difficulty listing this as an issue. The timings, and hours of care, were also a challenge for 26% of respondents. Other issues are included that spaces were not available with their chosen provider and concerns regarding the quality or location of providers.

²⁵ Data based on 435 responses to CSA Parental Survey 2019

²⁶ Data based on responses to CSA Parental Survey 2019 - Appendix B: Table 4

Affordability of childcare

Respondents to the survey were asked how they felt about the cost of childcare in Luton and of those who expressed an opinion 25% were either unhappy or very unhappy.

As part of the annual provider update FIS ask providers about their fees and if they are able to offer early education funding for 2, 3 and 4 year olds, and the 30 hours entitlement.

Each year the Coram Family and Childcare Trust²⁷ carry out a national childcare cost survey and publish a report on their findings, by contacting the FIS in each local authority. The report details the average cost of childcare by region and nationally.

The previous CSA reported that although a childminder in Luton was more expensive, the charge for a 25 hour nursery space was below the national and East of England average. This year's data shows that the cost of a childminder in Luton is now similar to both the East of England and regional average, and the cost of a day nursery space for 25 hours per week is considerably less, as shown in the table below.

There has been a reported rise of between 4 and 5% in costs across Great Britain for spaces for under three year olds over the last year, however Luton's charges have remained relatively unchanged.

Children under three years of age with no early education entitlements

Hours	Childminder	Day Nursery	Home Carer	Out of School Care	Pre-school
Luton per hour	£4.69	£4.78	£4.50	£3.50	£4.35
Luton per week	£140.18	£173.09	£200.00	£40.83	£131.63
Luton 25 hour week	£117.33	£119.47	£112.50	£87.50	£108.66
East of England 25 hour week	£115.49	£141.95	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
England regional average 25 hour week	£119.83	£134.65	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available

²⁷ Coram Childcare Survey 2019

Parents pay considerably less for childcare for three and four year olds due to the early education entitlements. The following table shows the average cost for 25 hours childcare for a three and four year old including the 15 hours universal entitlement. This does not include families who are eligible for the extended 30 hours.

Children aged three and four accessing 25 hours per week (including 15 hours universal early education funding)

Area	Childminder	Nursery
Luton	£46.93	£47.79
East of England	£40.69	£50.71
England Regional	£47.20	£50.75

Luton’s cost for hours above the funded 15 hours is close to the regional average, but higher for the East of England average charge for a childminder.

With the cost of childcare remaining a concern for families in Luton it is essential that parents are aware of the different types of childcare support available depending on their circumstances: the three free entitlements, childcare vouchers (no longer available to new applicants from October 2018), Tax-Free Childcare, Universal Credit and Tax Credits.

Childcare to meet the needs of children of working parents

30 hours early education funding for working parents

Since September 2017 children of eligible working parents are entitled to 30 hours per week early education funding. In January 2019, 975 families in Luton were accessing an extended hour childcare space, an increase of 7% on the previous year.

Tax-Free Childcare

Working parents can receive up to £2,000 per child, per year towards childcare costs for children under 12, or 17 if disabled. With Tax-Free Childcare, parents get a government top-up of £2 for every £8 paid in. It is available to working parents including the self-employed, who earn (on average) at least £139 per week and less than £100,000 per year. Tax-Free Childcare payments can go towards a whole range of regulated childcare including nurseries, childminders, before and after school clubs and holiday clubs. Parents can take advantage of the offer at the same time as 30 hours free childcare.

Providers have been encouraged to sign up to Tax Free Childcare during the last 12 months and this has resulted in an increase of 9% from 164 to 178 providers offering the facility.

Universal Credit and childcare

From November 2018 Universal Credit became available to most residents in Luton. Universal Credit replaces many different benefits including the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Through Universal Credit parents may be able to claim back up to 85% of their childcare costs. Parents, and partners if living with them, will usually need to either be working or have a job offer and the childcare must be provided by a registered childcare provider. The FIS is able to provide advice on all the childcare support available to families within Luton.

Flexible childcare

There is a need in Luton for flexible childcare for parents and carers. Of the respondents to the CSA Parental Survey 14% were either unhappy, or very unhappy, with the hours that childcare was available. In Luton shift patterns and irregular hours are accommodated through childminders and a few nurseries²⁸

- 34% of providers offer flexible hours for shift workers
- 9 childminders provide overnight care
- 18 providers offer weekend care

Out of school settings

During 2019 Luton Council participated in a Department of Education project to look at out of school settings (OOSS). The project built on existing information to map the number and type settings available to families in Luton.

Settings recorded as OOSS November 2019

Type of setting	Number
County Sports Partnership	18
Culture / Drama	17
Faith group	40
Holiday club	1
Holiday and after school clubs	13
Language groups	7
Ofsted Registered setting	16
Sports & activities	37
Supplementary Schools	14
Tuition	30
Uniformed	10
Youth	23
Total	226

²⁸ Appendix A: CSA 2019/2020: Table 7 - Data provided uses information received through the provider annual updates and historic information.

This list does not include all the breakfast and after school clubs that run under individual school registrations as FIS has difficulty obtaining this information. This is most likely because these clubs usually only cater for children from their own school, and therefore do not advertise their services through external means. However, by researching schools' websites FIS was able to find out that of the 75 educational provisions (maintained schools, independent schools, academies, and alternative provisions) there are 39 breakfast and 21 after school clubs operating in Luton.

The DfE project introduced draft safeguarding voluntary guidance to settings to discuss safeguarding and welfare to assess what was already in place, and where there may be advisory or training needs. In total 32 support visits to discuss safeguarding and good practice were completed.

An additional area of the project was to raise parental awareness around safeguarding and to reassure parents that it was acceptable to check and question safeguarding procedures within an out of school setting. A checklist leaflet for parents was developed, and this was promoted using digital boards in The Mall shopping centre, radio advertising and via Twitter and Facebook pages.

The project also developed links with community Madrassah's to support safeguarding practice and awareness, and worked with community teams supporting safeguarding in community centres and building links with the Prevent team.

An additional page dedicated to out of school settings is now available on the Luton Council website with links to childcare information.²⁹

Moving forward there are plans to continue supporting out of school settings to ensure that safeguarding and good practice is maintained.

Children needing holiday care

High quality holiday childcare is essential for working families and gives children the opportunity to experience new activities. However, finding suitable childcare can be challenging with some prices being higher than regular childcare and many parents find it difficult to find childcare that covers the hours they require.

Information for every holiday scheme and activity in Luton is not always available, as many of the schemes do not provide their information to FIS. However to meet parental need FIS compile and publish details of activities, schemes and attractions before each school holiday, including universal services and those that are available for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

²⁹ [safety-in-education - out-of-school-settings](#)

This information is available on the Family section of the Luton Directory and is also provided directly to over 900 families who have subscribed to the e-newsletter³⁰.

Luton Council are not aware of any parents exercising their right to request holiday childcare which allows parents to request that their child's school provides before and after school or holiday childcare, or opens up their facilities for another provider.

Cost of holiday childcare

The Coram Family and Childcare Trust³¹ publish an annual holiday childcare report which collates local authority data to provide average costs for childcare. The national average cost has risen by 3% since 2018, but has reduced by 5% the east of England, bringing it closer to the national average cost.

The survey continues to find that gaps in the availability of holiday childcare and high prices can mean parents see little or no financial gain from working once they have paid for childcare.

The Coram Family and Childcare Trust also reports that for many families, the increase in prices from term time to holiday childcare can be difficult to manage. Parents that use Tax-Free Childcare can spread the cost by paying monthly into their account throughout the year.

Supply of childcare places in Luton

There has been some movement in childcare in Luton during 2019 as shown in the table below. There has also been an increase in out of school and tuition services registering with Ofsted.

Luton Provision Changes January 2019 to December 2019

Provider Type	Registrations	Resignations	Proposed as at 31 Dec 2019
Childminder	13	13	3
Day Nursery	5	2	1
Holiday Scheme	2	0	1
Home Carer	5	2	0
Out of School	5	0	3
Pre School	1	1	0
Tuition Service	7	0	1
Total	38	18	9

³⁰ https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health_and_social_care/children_and_family_services/family-support-guidance/Family%20Information%20Service/Pages/School-holiday-activities-in-Luton.aspx

³¹ <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/holiday-childcare-survey-2019>

Data suggests that currently Luton has sufficient childcare spaces, and enough vacant spaces to manage an increase in the take up of early education funding. Luton's projected population data³² indicates a possible decrease of 5% in the 0 to four year old age group between 2017 and 2027 therefore demand for childcare in Luton may decrease. However employment and housing developments, as well as any changes to the number of early education hours made available to families or changes in thresholds may affect this demand.

FIS data suggests that the number of spaces for funded two year olds is currently sufficient and the number of eligible two year olds appears to have fallen over the last twelve months. However, we need to closely monitor the availability of these spaces to make sure that the focus of 30 hour extended places does not have unintended consequences in some cases for two year old places. As the Social Mobility Action Plan³³ has early years as a priority we need to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support eligible families to access the two year old entitlement and the take up of the universal entitlement for three and four year olds

Sustainability

Luton Council recognises the need for provisions to consider their sustainability in an ever changing childcare market. It is settings that respond to families' needs in terms of flexibility that will continue to thrive whereas smaller, sessional providers may not be viable unless they can deliver models that meet parental needs.

Luton Council continued to provide business workshops in 2019 to help providers consider how they may need to remodel their charging or hours to be able to offer the flexibility that some parents need with extended hours.

COVID-19 Update

There is understandable concern among childcare providers regarding the long term impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. It will undoubtedly create unexpected challenges for providers with families experiencing loss of employment, and changes of circumstances resulting in a potential reduction of childcare hours. Parents may also be concerned about sending their children to nurseries and preschools until they are confident that settings are safe and there is no risk to their child or their wider family.

Luton Council will continue to provide support to all childcare providers to ensure sustainability, by advising on financial support available and further business tool workshops. Guidance will also be provided on safe-guarding, changes to practice and how to achieve parental confidence.

32 Luton's Projected Population Growth 2017 – 2037 - Source Luton Council POPGROUP software

33 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-social-mobility-through-education>

Childcare to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Luton Council is committed to promoting equality and inclusion for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We aim to remove barriers that prevent children accessing free places and work with parents, health and social work professionals, and others to ensure that children with SEND are able to access their early education place.

Luton Council meets their duties under the Equality Act 2010³⁴ and take full account of the SEND Code of Practice 0-25³⁵ when securing and providing free places. Early Years SEN Advisors work with practitioners to support them to feel confident that they can support a child with SEND to access and enjoy their early years setting.

Finding inclusive childcare

10% of the respondents to the CSA Parent Survey 2019 indicated that their child had a special educational need or disability.

Parents and carers are able to find inclusive childcare on the Luton Directory's guide to services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities at the [Luton Directory](#). Currently 112 early years providers, holiday schemes and childminders are registered on the guide.

Two year old children in Luton are eligible for early education funding if the two year old has a statement of special educational needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC) or is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

Disability Access Fund

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) helps children with special needs access early years places. The funding available, currently £615 per year, helps providers make reasonable adjustments to their settings, purchase specialist equipment or seek specialist training that helps to meet the child's needs.

Luton Council's Special Educational Needs Service provides advice and support to settings and parents on the funding available and how to apply for DAF.

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

Provision of places

Luton has a range of providers who are able to support special needs; however providers report the following challenges when providing a place for a child because of their complexity of needs:³⁶

- recruiting additional qualified staff members with appropriate skills
- managing additional costs for training, First Aid and DBS checks
- funding not covering all the hours attended

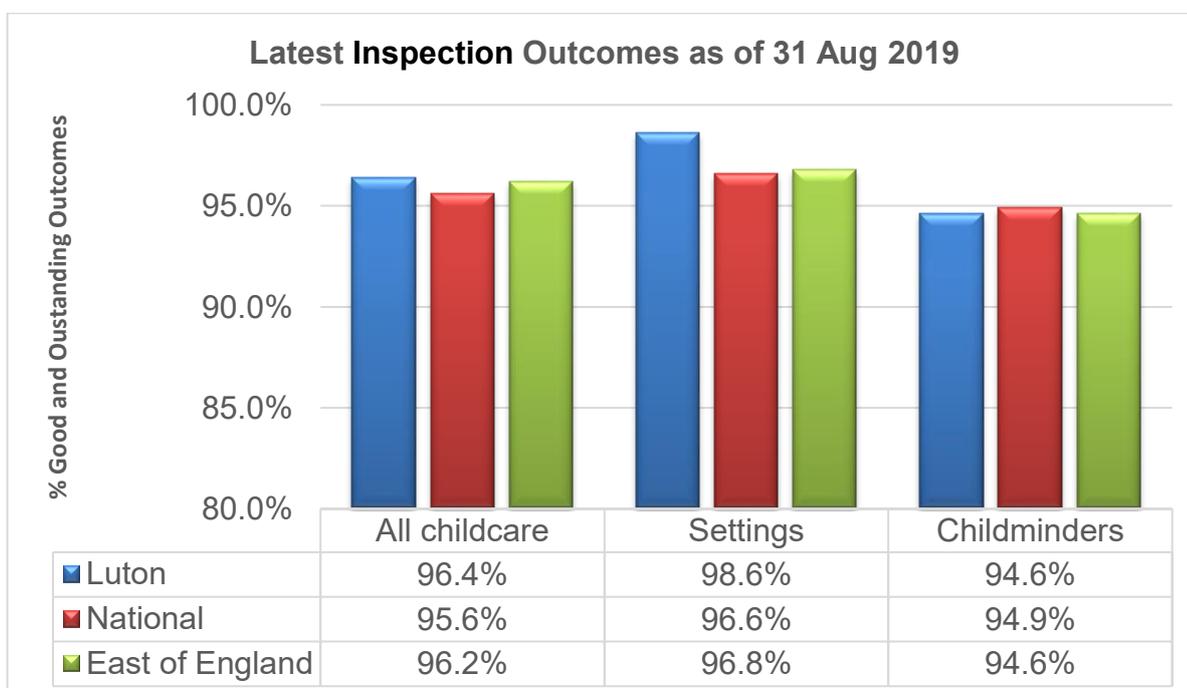
Specialist holiday schemes

Each year the council publishes a Short Break Service Statement that includes information on how to access residential short breaks and also a directory of services for information on groups, clubs and activities for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The Short Break Service Statement can be found on the Council website by searching for “Short Breaks”.³⁷

Quality of providers in Luton

Latest inspection outcomes

96.4% of all childcare in Luton is judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. This is above the national average as highlighted in the table below based on childcare providers and inspections as at 31 August 2019.³⁸



³⁶ Data from Luton Provider annual update forms 2019/2020

³⁷ https://www.luton.gov.uk/Education_and_learning/Special_educational_needs/SENsupport/Pages/Shared%20breaks%20for%20children%20with%20disabilities.aspx

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-providers-and-inspections-as-at-31-august-2019>

In accordance with Ofsted regulations an early years provider will be inspected within the first 30 months of their registration, Luton has 45 providers on the Early Years Register that have not been inspected yet.

When the Local Authority is made aware of an Early Years provider being judged to require improvement or inadequate by Ofsted, an Early Years Consultant or Childcare Advice and Support Officer will contact the provider to offer support and advice to help them improve practices and meet the required standards.

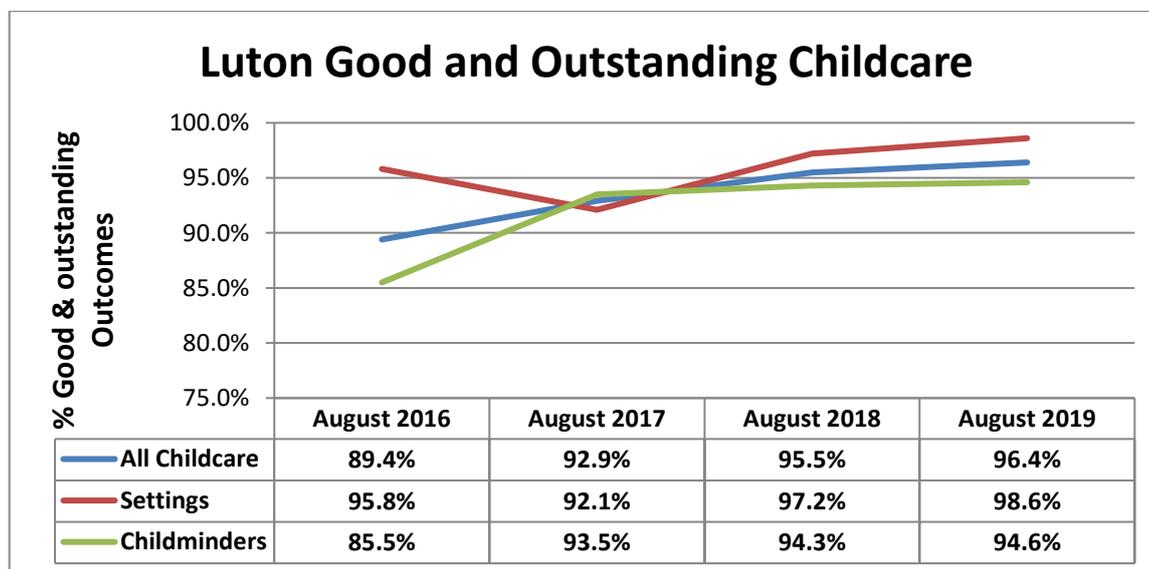
The 1.4% of early years settings offering childcare on non-domestic premises e.g. day nurseries, pre-schools, out of school clubs etc. judged at August 2019 to be inadequate or requiring improvement relates to one provider.

Of the 5.4% of childminders judged as inadequate or requiring improvement, this relates to five childminders who have previously received a 'requires improvement' judgement. They have all since been re-inspected but as they had no early years children at the next inspection they were given a 'Met' judgement, which means their judgement of requires improvement still remains as their latest full inspection.

Of the respondents to the childcare survey only 1% were either unhappy or very unhappy about the quality of childcare available in Luton.

Historical comparison

The graph below shows that the percentage of Luton's early years providers being judged as good or outstanding has increased over the last year by 0.9 percentage points and 7 percentage points over the last three years.



Comparison to statistical neighbours

Luton's Ofsted grades (as at 31 August 2019) compare favourably to our statistical neighbours. When the percentages of outstanding or good judgements are compared with those of our statistical neighbours Luton is the highest.

Family Information Service

Luton Family Information Service provides information, advice and guidance on a variety of services, helplines and websites that are useful to parents, carers, children and young people under the age of 20 and the professionals who work with them.

Between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2019 the Luton Family Information Service (FIS) logged 1114 enquiries, a 25% increase on 2018.

Information available to parents online has increased both locally and nationally regarding help with childcare costs and provision and there were over 20,518 page views of the FIS pages on the [Luton Council Website](#)

Luton Investment Framework

As Luton undertakes a 20 year plan for major transformation, the supply and demand for childcare will need to be considered throughout the stages of development of the town. The Luton Investment Framework (LIF) includes targets of 18,500 new jobs and 5,700 new homes which may change the demand for childcare in certain areas.

The effect of development on existing childcare settings will need to be a consideration and the areas in which there is major transformation will need to be closely monitored to ensure sufficiency of spaces for early education provision.

Preparing for future childcare sufficiency assessments

Due to the unknown impact at this stage that COVID-19 will have on the childcare sector in Luton there will be a need for more frequent childcare sufficiency reports. Quarterly reports of attendance, funded places and provider sustainability will be required to monitor the sector and ensure it is able to continue to provide the number of quality childcare places that is required by Luton families now, and in the future.

Useful links:

[Statutory guidance for local authorities on the provision of early education and childcare](#)

[Family Information Service](#)

[Luton Directory](#)