



TRAFFORD COUNCIL

AGENDA PAPERS MARKED 'TO FOLLOW' FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 14 February 2023

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Place: Committee Rooms 2&3, Trafford Town Hall, Talbot Road, Stretford,
M32 0TH

A G E N D A	PART I	Pages
6.	OFSTED INSPECTION OUTCOME	1 - 18
	To receive a report from the Corporate Director of Children's Services.	
7.	IMPACT OF THE COST OF LIVING ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	19 - 28
	To receive a report from the Corporate Director of Children's Services.	

SARA TODD
Chief Executive

Membership of the Committee

Councillors D. Western (Chair), Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), J. Bennett, R. Duncan, F. Hornby, S. Maitland, S. Procter, M.J. Welton, G. Whitham, A.M. Whyte, S. Zhi, D. Acton (ex-Officio) and M.P. Whetton (ex-Officio).

Further Information

For help, advice and information about this meeting please contact:

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Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 14 February 2023

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Trafford Children's Social Care ILACS Reinspection November & December 2022 Summary of Findings & Next Steps

CYP Scrutiny Committee

Jill McGregor
Corporate Director Children's Services





Overview

- Inspection was carried out under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework (ILACS). This is the first standard ILACS Trafford has had – Our previous ILACS in 2019 was '**short**' (**2 days**) due to our 'Good' judgement at the time
- Inspection was a **3 week process**: 1st week off site & involved data & evidence submission, 2 weeks on site
- Core team of inspectors of 4 His Majesty's Inspectors who were then joined by 2 regulatory inspectors (looking at fostering and adoption) and a Schools HMI
- The process involved meeting with **practitioners and some managers**. The inspection team talked to **parents and carers and to some children and young people** (Children in Care Children council & After Care forum) as well as some teachers
- They looked at **partnership working** through the evidence that we presented but primarily through children's records and what the team could see about interventions and effectiveness
- The inspection covered every aspect of Children's Social Care – right through from **Early Help to Adoption**.
- It was '**unannounced**' with the three week process commencing on Monday 14th November when we received formal notification via a phone call.



General Feedback

- The lead inspector, in the initial set up meeting, outlined that the team would approach this inspection from a **strength-based** perspective. Our experience of the inspection process was exactly as outlined.
 - Similar to in the Monitoring Visits, the team **did not tell us anything we didn't already know**
 - Our self assessment was clear, and the Inspection Team's observations and judgement aligned with our own - this is a significant change from 2019. As a team of inspectors from outside of the region they worked hard to understand our context and journey. The self assessment and our approach to inspection helped with this.
 - They recognised the significant journey we have been on including the **culture change** across the service
 - Daily Keeping in Touch (KIT) meetings took place with the Lead Inspector where very **detailed feedback** was given which isn't able to be fully reflected in the final report; however we are taking account of *all feedback* in the next steps
- 



The Judgement

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good



The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families – Key Headlines

- The reason for the 2019 Inadequate judgement was due to the leadership elements of the inspection framework
- Improvements since the last inspection;
 - There is a strong **Corporate and Political oversight** and ownership. The local authority now knows its children's services well. The leader, lead member and Chief Executive understand and challenge children's services and their work effectively.
 - Senior leaders have created **stronger foundations in practice** to begin to support improvement.
 - The **cultural change** in children's services in Trafford is tangible and there is now a much clearer focus on understanding the needs of children
 - The senior leadership team is more **visible and accessible** to the staff group. Senior leaders have been open and transparent with inspectors about the remaining shortfalls in practice.
 - Practitioners are overwhelming positive about working in Trafford



The experiences & progress of children who need help & protection – Key Headlines (Strengths)

- Children's needs are identified promptly on a **partnership basis** in the first response service at the front door and managers have oversight at key decision-making points
- The need for early help services is **promptly identified** ensuring that families receive early support as difficulties emerge
- The assessments undertaken by social workers provide a clear **evaluation of strengths and risks** surrounding the child and most children benefit from child in need plans that are largely focused on what needs to happen to improve their circumstances
- Children are stepped up to child protection plans **appropriately when risks escalate**, or when their circumstances do not improve
- The **relational approach** to social work practice is increasingly well-embedded across the service, although it has been impacted, until recently, by frequent changes of social worker
- The child exploitation team 'SHINE' is a strength, due to the establishment of **effective working relationships** with key agencies who advocate for children who are hard to engage
- There is **strong oversight** of children who are missing from education



The experiences & progress of children who need help & protection – Key Headlines (Areas for Improvement)

- The **out-of-hours service** is not sufficiently proactive in evaluating contact and referrals, which can lead to some delay in needs and risks being assessed by daytime services.
- Most children who have **complex and additional needs** are not receiving the right service at the right time. Some children experience drift and delay in the progression of their plans
- When children aged **16 and 17 present as homeless**, the approach from the local authority is inconsistent
- Arrangements to ensure children are progressed into **pre-proceedings** at the right time are underdeveloped, due to insufficient scrutiny of children on child protection plans
- The absence of **legal input into the pre-proceedings** process can also cause delay for children



The experiences & progress of children in care & care leavers – Key Headlines (Strengths)

- Decisions for children to come into care are **appropriate and timely**
- Social workers give **careful consideration** to supporting children to have positive family time with significant family members.
- Most children live in **stable placements with carers who meet their needs well**, and are making positive progress
- Children in care have their **physical and emotional health needs** identified and well met.
- **Visits are purposeful** and when children have the opportunity to develop a trusting relationship with their social worker, this contributes effectively to assessments and plans for permanence.
- The recent redesign of fostering services in Trafford is beginning to **positively impact** on the recruitment of foster carers.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are **well cared for**.



The experiences & progress of children in care & care leavers – Key Headlines (Areas for Improvement)

- Too many children have experienced **changes of social worker**, which impacts on the quality and frequency of direct work completed.
- The assessments of children in care are **not routinely updated** when children's circumstances change, which means that care plans do not always reflect the child's changing needs.
- Children in care with additional and complex needs, experience **significant gaps** in the quality of service they receive.
- Care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans, although the quality of **the detail in plans can vary**. Pathway plans are not always informed by the active involvement of the young person or take into account where the care leaver **is also a parent**
- When care experienced young people are in **custody, the ability of the care leaving team to keep in touch** with them is hindered by changes of after-care worker
- Driving **permanence for children** needs further development
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers receive a variable service. For younger care leavers, there is a sensitive consideration of their religious and cultural needs by the local authority. For older care leavers, there is a lack of focus on ensuring their immigration status is settled by after-care workers.



Priority Areas Identified Our Plans for Continuous Improvement



What Ofsted Said Needed to Improve

The report specifies 6 areas that have been identified as needing to improve:

- The quality of out-of-hours service provision to offer a more comprehensive and timely service for children.
- The support for homeless children over 16.
- The support to children in care to help them understand their entitlements and how they can influence the shaping and developing of children's services.
- The use of direct work and life-story work to gain the voice of the child and to support children's understanding of their life history.
- The support for care leavers in preparing for their transition to independence.
- The quality and frequency of supervision.

There will be an action plan for each area





Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team

- Our self assessment was clear that our **Emergency Duty Team (EDT)** model needs a full review, with consideration being given to increasing the capacity of the offer for children.
- The fragility of the service had **already been recognised** resulting in an increase in the staffing complement to ensure that the service to our children and vulnerable adults improved, and to ensure the support the wellbeing of team members. The team has a good reputation and as a result have managed to successfully recruit to all vacancies in the service, including the newly created posts.
- A report was submitted to our **Quarterly Assurance Meeting** with the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Lead Member for Children in January 2023 to outline the current position and to keep them sighted on the developments
- A **Peer Review** of the service is planned for March 2023
- Whilst it is acknowledged that further work is required to support the growth of the service, colleagues in Adult and Children's Social Care are **working closely together** to improve the knowledge, skill & experience of the workforce alongside working to establish robust management oversight and grip via a performance management & quality assurance framework

Complex & Additional Needs Service

- We were open about the work **still required to strengthen this service**, but the difference the new manager and changes are having has been recognised:.

“Most children who have complex and additional needs are not receiving the right service at the right time. Some children experience drift and delay in the progression of their plans. This is due to frequent changes in social worker, lack of supervision, and, until recently, weaker social work practice. Some social workers have not been appropriately supported to develop the relevant skills to enable them to undertake direct work with children with additional needs. Senior leaders understand this and have developed an action plan in response, which has led to the establishment of a managed social work team of interim social workers. This team works within the management arrangements of the local authority.”

- The Head of Service and the Practice Manager meet and discuss the CAN Service performance on a weekly basis. Data that is received from the business intelligence unit is utilised to track basic compliance with standard KPI's and audit and dip sampling of cases provides a window onto the quality of the work being undertaken. We have seen improvements
- Detailed service specific Improvement Plan in place which is being tracked and monitored
- Meeting scheduled for March 2023 to bring together key leaders across the system to agree how we work together to stabilising and develop the service.
- Partnership Summit later in the year



The support to children in care to help them understand their entitlements and how they can influence the shaping and developing of children's services.

The support for care leavers in preparing for their transition to independence.

- Review of the Corporate Parenting Board **Strategy, Action Plan and Terms of Reference** is underway. This will include key actions to drive forward involvement and engagement of our cared 4 and care experienced young people and adults.
- Cared 4 Children and Care Experienced young people **attended the full meeting** of the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2023 which has given this a **new emphasis**
- Cared 4 and Care Experienced Service **Development plan in place**, workshops having been facilitated with the service by our DfE advisor and Practice Improvement colleagues
- Review of our **Care Leaver Offer is underway** (being co-produced with our cared 4 and care experienced young people) and will be presented at the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2023.



The use of direct work and life-story work to gain the voice of the child and to support children's understanding of their life history.

- Through our review of the Improvement Plan Ambition 4 workstream we have put in place **clear actions to strengthen our approach to life story work** for children so that they understand their story and the reasons for decisions
- We will be utilising the **skills of a qualified life story practitioner** from within the service to deliver core training to practitioners across the service so that life story work starts at the earliest opportunity
- Continue to roll out our **Case Recording approach** with reports, visits and plans written o children and young people in language that they can understand
- **Later life letters** for children are also being developed and some minimum practice standards will be agreed



The quality and frequency of supervision

Whilst Ofsted recognised that:

“There has also been an imaginative range of peer and group supervision, which aids social workers in progressing their learning and development” they also recognised that the quality & frequency of supervision remains an area that requires further improvement

"There is improvement in the quality of social work in Trafford.

They also advised that:

children in the local authority still experience too much inconsistency in the service that they receive. This situation is exacerbated by the variable frequency and quality of supervision for social workers from their team managers. Despite the relaunch of the supervision policy earlier this year, this is still an area for development

- Introducing a **Management Accountability Framework** - monthly submission by each manager across a range of measures
- Implementing revised **recording of Supervision** in Children's Files
- Commissioning a further Leadership Development Programme which will include **Coaching and Mentoring**

What Next?

- Whilst we are delighted that Ofsted have recognised the progress that we have made there is still **lots to do on our Continuous Improvement Journey** and we have already started progressing at pace the work in those priority areas
- We remain committed to our Improvement Plan' 'Our 8 Ambitions' & **still have work to do** to achieve them. .
- The **strong governance arrangements** that are in place through our Improvement Board have added value and ensured that there is regular challenge and scrutiny, and we are keen to retain some of these arrangements. We do not want to revert back to a position where we are reliant on a self-view of the service we are providing.
- A discussion paper was submitted to our Improvement Board in January 2023 as, as we move out of intervention, there is an opportunity for board members and the partnership to consider the arrangements that are going to support the ongoing improvement journey and how as a system, we can achieve a self-improving system that puts outcomes for children and families at the heart.
- Proposals for the development of an Ambitions for Children Board that would continue to oversee progress against the Ambitions Plan - our DfE Adviser continues to support the work with our partners
- We will now continue to build on the strong foundations that are in place, and are proud of the strength of the positive feedback that we received from Ofsted:

“The care and the passion for children and families seeped out of the walls at every level”

“Seen some of the best child centred case recording”



Any Questions

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: February 2023
Report for: Information
Report of: Karen Samples: Director of Education

Report Title

Early Education Sufficiency and Cost of Living

Summary

This report provides an update on early education sufficiency and impact of cost of living

Recommendation(s)

That the contents of the report are noted.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Zoe Sweeney: Early Years Service Manager
Jilla Burgess-Allen: Public Health Consultant
Anne-Marie Steadman: Senior Accountant

1. Impact of rising cost of living on children and families

According to a report of the APPG Children in the North (January 2023), child poverty, including fuel poverty and food insecurity, is higher in the North than the rest of England. Poverty is the principal driver of inequalities between children, which leads to worse physical and mental health, poorer educational attainment and life chances.

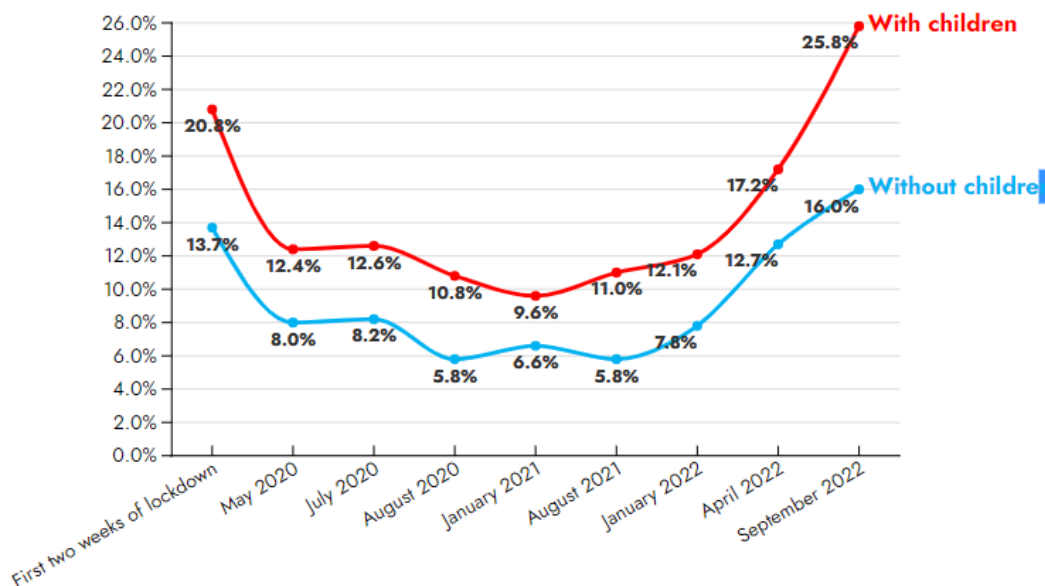
With the rising cost of living and the aftermath of the pandemic, more families are struggling than ever. The crisis is affecting households in most income brackets but is most acute for the least affluent, who typically spend a higher proportion of their income on food and housing. In 2020–21, households in the lowest income decile spent roughly 48% of their weekly expenditure on food and housing, compared with 27% for those in the top income decile.

On top of the 1.9 million children eligible for FSM, mainly because they live in households receiving benefits and with an annual income below £7,400, the Child Poverty Action Group estimates that there are 800,000 children in families below the poverty line, on universal credit or other benefits but missing out on FSM.

The Food Foundation conducted a survey of over 4000 adults in the United Kingdom in September 2022 and found households with children are at greater risk of food insecurity than those without and that gap has been increasing, as shown in the graph below.

Food insecurity has increased more in households with children

Percentage of households experiencing food insecurity*:



This picture is reflected at Greater Manchester. The GM Residents’ Survey showed that food insecurity continues to impact disproportionately upon households with children with 59% now reporting food insecurity at some point in the last year. This has increased since September (56%), and since original benchmarking in the spring (a merged sampled of February and April data, at 51%).

The Food Standards Agency’s recent study shows that food affordability and food insecurity is currently the most important aspect in consumer decision making and the way that people think and feel about food. When asked, 76% of people reported the price of food as a major concern for the future.

The cost of formula has also increased over the past year, with the price of the cheapest brand increasing by 22% (British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS)). The BPAS is seeing that the £8.50 Healthy Start benefit is now no longer enough to pay for the amount of infant formula needed to safely feed a baby in the first six months of their life.

In Trafford, as of 11th November 2022 there were 5627 children eligible for Free School Meals in Trafford, but 789 (14%) of these were not taking up this benefit.

There has been no uptake data published on Healthy Start nationally since March 2022, and this is being raised at a national and local level. However, we know that uptake at that time was only 72%, meaning that up to £3000 per week (£156k per year) was going unclaimed.

Greater Manchester respondents to the Residents’ Survey are more likely than the national average to have increased borrowing or used more credit in the past month compared to the same time last year (35% vs. 22%).

Ease of affording energy costs

Greater Manchester average: 56%

- Parents of children in early years (68%)
- Parents of children aged 19-25 (67%)
- Parents of children in primary school (66%)
- Those whose children are entitled to FSM (66%)

the same time last year (35% vs. 22%). For parents of children in early years the proportion is 67%, compared with 54% amongst parents of children in primary school, 50% amongst parents of

children in secondary school, and 63% amongst those whose children are entitled to free school meals.

Over half of respondents said they are having difficulty being able to afford their energy costs (56%), significantly higher than the national average (48%).

Trafford’s long term Poverty Strategy is based around a ‘cash-first’ response that provides independence and dignity to people. There is agreement to provide an additional payment in January 2023 to directly employed staff to uplift to the Real Living Wage rate of £10.90 – this includes council staff (primarily on low pay bands) and eligible school staff as well.

2. Early education

Trafford has historically had a strong early education and childcare market with a good mix of early years providers across all neighbourhoods offering parents and carers a range of options to suit their needs.

Sufficiency of early education places

The number of early education providers in the private voluntary and independent (PVI) sector has decreased as highlighted in the table below.

Type of Provider	Pre Covid	October 2020	September 2021	January 2023
Group Based Early Education Provider	98	93	92	90
Childminder	239	234	205	163 119 (offering funded early education places to either 2, 3 & 4 Year olds)

The overall number of childminders is also not a true reflection of those providing early education places as we are aware that a number may be ‘working outside the home’ and not currently childminding or offering ‘wrap around’ childcare. This means that whilst they have retained their ‘Registration’ with Ofsted they are choosing not to provide early education at this time. Of the 163 childminders, 119 are offering the funded early education places (either the 2 or 3- & 4-Year-Old entitlement or both) administered via the Trafford Early Years Team.

The numbers of Childminders have been steadily declining over a few years mainly due to the fact that this group have traditionally been in an older demographic with a number retiring from the profession. Covid accelerated this decline with many choosing to leave the profession and work outside of the home. Trafford has seen a 30% reduction in the number of childminders from pre covid to date. Whilst this represents a ‘loss’ in terms of places, this is offset in terms of quality of provision with a very high percentage of childminders achieving a Good or Outstanding Ofsted grade.

There has been greater stability in the number of early education group based settings over the course of this time. Reasons for business failure were varied and included:

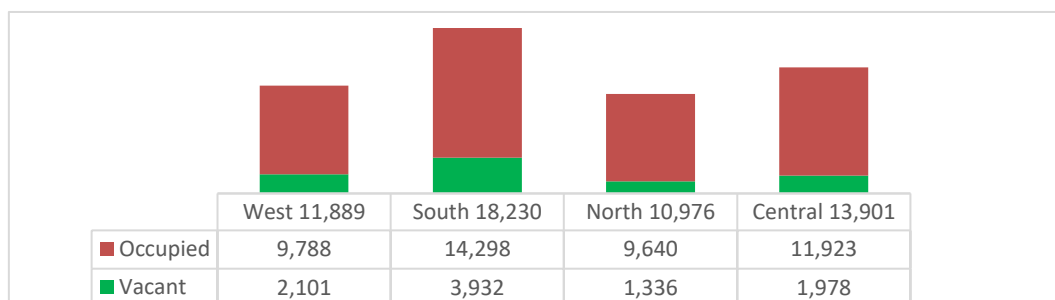
- low numbers of children pre-covid,
- loss of community premises,
- low parental demand due to changes in behaviour (commuter route)
- poor Ofsted outcome affecting business sustainability

Sufficiency Assessment

The Trafford 2021-2022 Early Education and Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (Appendix 1) highlights that at Spring 2022 Trafford was meeting sufficiency with 84% of early education places occupied across the early education sector.

There are no known sufficiency issues resulting in children being unable to access an early education place. All children who are being supported by the Special Educational Needs Advisory Service (SENAS) can access their early education entitlement in private, voluntary and independent settings. This is being carefully monitored.

North and West neighbourhoods have the least number of early education places across Trafford with South having the highest number of early education places. Two-year places in the North of the Borough were in short supply by the end of the summer term however this did not translate into a sufficiency issue as all children could be accommodated. The school holiday period and children transitioning to school created further capacity in the system in readiness for the September term. It does indicate that there is pressure on the system and sufficiency of places in some pockets of Trafford as the academic year progresses, the North of Trafford being a key neighbourhood. A loss of provision or a group early education setting could present risk.



The most pressing issue for sufficiency of early education places relates to the recruitment and retention of staff. The Sufficiency Assessment highlighted that one third of all group based early education providers (nurseries, pre-schools) were capping numbers of children due to a lack of qualified staff. Many left the sector to work in retail or office roles. The following table highlights the decline in early years practitioners working in the early education sector with a staggering 51% reduction in the number of graduates.

Take Up

Take up of early education of 3 and 4 year olds in Trafford is high at 97% (2022) This is above national 92% and is an increase of 2ppts from the previous year. Work is currently underway to develop an information sharing agreement which would enable Trafford to identify the very small cohort of families not taking up this offer.

(a) Academic Year 2021/22

Information to date for the current academic year

Term	Universal Part Time Equivalent (PTE) Places					Extended Part Time Equivalent (PTE) Places					Total Part Time Equivalent (PTE) Places					% children taking up 30 hours
	PVI		School		Total	PVI		School		Total	PVI		School		Total	
	PTE	%	PTE	%	PTE	PTE	%	PTE	%	PTE	PTE	%	PTE	%	PTE	
Aut 21	1,330	45%	1,612	55%	2,942	823	55%	673	45%	1,496	2,153	49%	2,285	51%	4,438	51%
Spr 22	1,989	54%	1,698	46%	3,687	1,276	62%	795	38%	2,071	3,265	57%	2,493	43%	5,758	56%
Sum 22	2,802	61%	1,770	39%	4,572	1,843	69%	830	31%	2,673	4,645	64%	2,600	36%	7,245	58%

In the school year 2021/22, there was a slight decrease of 203 part time equivalent (PTE) places. Of these 175 PTE were universal places. A potential reason for this could be the declining birth rate.

Where families are accessing places (either a school or PVI) has remained stable and consistent.

Take up of 2-year-old education places for families who meet the economic eligibility criteria remains exceptionally high at 108% (2022) with Trafford ranked 1st nationally out of 151 areas. This is significantly higher than statistical neighbours (79%) and significantly higher than national (72%). Trafford continues to be a net importer of 2-year-old education places with 17% of children accessing a place in Trafford despite living in another area. Exports are low with approximately between 2-3% of children accessing a 2-year-old early education place outside of Trafford. This is a contributory factor as to why take up is so high.

The numbers of families eligible for the 2-year-old offer has decreased in Trafford which is a trend that is replicated nationally. In Autumn 2020, 662 families were eligible for this entitlement. This has been steadily decreasing term on term with the lowest number eligible to date being 463 in Summer 2022.

2-year-old take up is now a key school readiness indicator across Greater Manchester (GM). Each GM locality has identified a neighbourhood where there will be a target or increased focus on increasing the two year uptake. In Trafford, the North neighbourhood was identified for this project as take up was considerably lower than other neighbourhoods across Trafford. The target was to reduce the take up gap between the North of Trafford and the rest of Trafford neighbourhoods (West, Central, South combined) by 10ppts to 15% by 2025. As can be evidenced by the table below this target has almost been achieved in the short time that the project has been in operation with Summer 2022 demonstrating the gap is at just over 16% having been at over 25% in Autumn 2021.

Period	Take Up % In North Trafford 3 term rolling average	Take Up % In Rest of Locality 3 term rolling average	Gap In Take Up Rate
Baseline	67.90%	93.30%	-25.40%
Autumn 2021	71.80%	96.70%	-24.90%
Spring 2022	78.9%	97.4%	-18.5%
Summer 2022	83.6%	99.9%	-16.3%

Cost of Living pressures in the Early Years Sector

The fragility of the early years sector and concerns about the costs of early education and childcare have been well-documented in the media and press.

National policy and funding for early education places means that only two-year-olds who meet the economic criteria will be eligible for 15 hours of early education, whilst the remaining population does not become eligible for either the 15 hours of early education entitlement or 30 hours for working parents who meet the economic criteria, until the term after a child turns aged three. This means that any working parent with a child would be required to pay private fees until their child becomes eligible to receive any entitlement. This is a national, not local policy decision.

It is worth highlighting that the recent Sutton Trust report, 'A Fair Start?' highlights that the extended 30-hour entitlement is in fact widening the attainment gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, by doubly advantaging wealthier families with additional hours of funded early education.

In terms of pay, almost a **fifth** (18%) of group based PVI staff aged 23 and over received **less** than the National Living Wage (NLW). Just over one in ten (12%) school-based staff received less than the NLW. (DfE and NCSRFE)

In a survey conducted by the GMCA Early Years Team with all 10 Greater Manchester Local Authorities, 4 out of 10 Local Authorities reported that it was **common or very common for early educators to have more than one job to supplement their income.**

Cost of Living Survey

The Early Years Service conducted a survey in November 2022 with early education providers. 57 responses were received. Of these 31 were Childminders and 26 were group-based settings (which represents over a quarter of all group settings). The survey highlighted the following:

- 70% of setting managers were *very* concerned about the cost of living challenge with 26% *quite* concerned. The remaining respondents did not have a concern
- 70% of settings reported that the cost of living had had a significant impact on their business with 28% reporting a slight impact. 2% reported no impact.
- With regards to parent demand 40% reported that demand had remained the same with 37% reporting a decrease and 23% reporting an increase.
- 53% had reported having to increase fees more than usual due to the cost of living increases.
- Energy Bills (42%) followed by food/consumables (32%) were cited as the biggest concerns. Staff costs was ranked third followed by reduced parental demand and premises costs in order.
- 79% reported a decrease in profit with the 21% reporting that profit would remain the same.
- Of those reporting a decrease in profit, 47% estimated this to be a 30-40% loss of profit, 23% reported a 10-20% loss of profit and 11% more than 40% loss of profit. 19% chose not to answer.
- In terms of business sustainability in the next 12 months 63% reported business stability, 11% reported stability as Good with 26% deeming their business to be at 'risk'.
- 54% of respondents reported financial impact as their biggest challenge, followed by staff recruitment and retention 21%, customer demand 19% and finally maintaining quality 5%.

The majority of group based early education settings reported that recruitment and retention was an issue for them. They also reported having to increase wages as a way of securing staff.

Cost of Living Support for Early Education settings at national level

The Department for Education have provided a package of business support for early education settings as follows:

- Increased the Employment Allowance from 4k to 5k
- Announced a freeze to business rates multiplier in 22/23 supporting all ratepayers ahead of re-evaluation in 2023.
- Applied the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) for private early education businesses not on domestic premises until April 2023
- Applied the £400 Energy Bill Support Scheme for Childminders working on domestic premises in addition with the Energy Price Guarantee (EPG) until April 2023
- From April 1st, 2023, to 31st March 2022 the EBRS will be replaced by the Energy Bills Discount Scheme providing a discount on wholesale energy costs.
- Childminders have not been included in any other scheme to date other than applying the EPG which is being adjusted to cap typical household bills to £3,000 until the end of March 2024 save the average household £500.

New funding rates at local level

In December 2022, following consultation, government announced an increase in income which Local Authorities will receive to fund early education entitlements in 2023/24. For Trafford the income rates will increase as follows:

- 2-year-old places – increased income of 10p per hour from £5.67 to £5.77
- 3-year-old places – increased income of 26p per hour from £4.61 to £4.87.

Despite this increase it is worth noting that the Institute for Fiscal Studies in their report 'Early years spending update: the impact of inflation' (Nov 2022) predict that any increase will most likely be negated in real terms by a fall of 10p by 2024-25.

Impacts and risks

Recruitment and retention: The biggest risk to the sector and sufficiency is staffing. Two early education settings have closed at exceptionally short notice since December because they simply were not able to secure and retain staff. Rising living costs, low wages, pressure on the sector and poor staff well-being have resulted in qualified early educators leaving the sector to find higher paid work with less stress and responsibility.

Rising costs and fees: As reported in the survey early education settings are having to increase costs in response to inflation and rising costs. This will create additional financial burdens for families who have children whose children are not yet eligible for early education funding or need to purchase additional hours privately to work.

Areas of disadvantage: The issues facing early education settings and families in areas of disadvantage are compounded as covid and the cost of living has resulted in children and families having much higher levels of need which has placed extra pressure on resources and staff well-being. The number of early education places are lower in areas of economic disadvantage and business fragility more of a risk as recruitment becomes more challenging.

Sufficiency: If the crises continue more early education businesses *could* fail which *may* potentially result in sufficiency issues, where Local Authorities may struggle to meet statutory duties.

Trafford's Response

It needs to be acknowledged that the problems are difficult to resolve at local level as the issues are significant and evident nationally at scale. Trafford is therefore supporting early education providers in the following ways:

- Working collaboratively with the GMCA Early Years Team to share information and concerns to lobby early education policy at a GM level in recognition of the scale of the issue.
- Trafford early education providers who expressed an interest were invited to attend a GMCA Led recruitment and retention focus group.
- Provide on-going feedback to the DfE Early Years Advisor about the issues in the sector linked to the national context
- Continue to provide a high level of Deprivation funding as part of the Trafford early education funding rate to work to redress inequalities providing additional supplements in recognition of disparities that exist across the Borough
- Piloted a leadership and supervision program with a focus on well-being to mirror the Headteacher offer.
- Provide support and advice for settings who are worried about business viability
- Explore on going opportunities to 'grow the workforce'.
- There is a multi-agency Healthy Start task force for Trafford, with key actions being carried out across the public and VCFSE sector to ensure professionals are able to promote Healthy Start benefit and support residents to make a successful application.

3. Impact of rising energy costs on schools

Schools have experienced significant increases in energy prices during 22/23. The Government have announced additional support to assist with the additional cost pressures schools are facing (including the increased energy costs, higher than anticipated pay awards and increase in general inflation)

- **Energy Price Cap – For 6 months to be reviewed in January 2023**
- **Additional school capital funding for the 2022 to 2023 financial year**

Eligible schools and sixth-form colleges will receive an allocation for capital funding to improve energy efficiency in 2022 to 2023. Funding must be spent on capital projects, prioritising projects that improve energy efficiency.

The formula allocation will give each institution at least £10,000 and an additional amount based on weighted pupil numbers.

2023/24 Mainstream School Additional Grant update

The Autumn Statement provided details of additional funds for schools, to be distributed in 2023/24 on the basis below:

- a basic per-pupil rate of £119 for primary pupils, including pupils in reception
- a basic per-pupil rate of £168 for key stage 3 pupils
- a basic per-pupil rate of £190 for key stage 4 pupils
- a lump sum of £4,510
- an FSM6 per-pupil rate of £104 per eligible primary pupil
- an FSM6 per-pupil rate of £152 per eligible secondary pupil

Funding is to be received in two tranches, in May and October 2023, so we will not have individual school figures confirmed until May 2023.

There is also analysis of FSM uptake and eligibility by school taking place, identifying schools where uptake is lower than eligibility and working with those schools to increase uptake and reduce stigma of receiving FSMs.

Special Schools additional Funding 23/24

A 3.4% increase to place and top-up Funding on 22/23 values. Indicative figures indicate this will allocate an additional £0.5m to the 7 Special schools and PRU.

4. The Household Support Fund (HSF) [Household support fund extended to March 2023](https://www.trafford.gov.uk) ([trafford.gov.uk](https://www.trafford.gov.uk))

The Household Support Fund (HSF) has been extended to allow Local Authorities to support those most in need to help with global inflationary challenges and the significant rising cost of living. The funding covers the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and for Trafford is **£1.458m**.

The DWP HSF guidance clearly states that the expectation is that local authorities will use the HSF to support households in the most need – particularly those who may not be available for the other support government has recently made available. There is no longer a requirement to spend a pre-determined portion of the fund on specified cohorts as there was in previous schemes

The decision was made to mirror the scheme in place for the same period last year, with the addition of proactive targeting of the cohort defined as follows Household support fund extended to March 2023 ([trafford.gov.uk](https://www.trafford.gov.uk)):

Free School Meals Holiday Awards (c£1m)

- Award £15 per week per child for the October half term and Easter Trafford school holidays
- Award £30 per week per child for the Christmas and February Trafford school holidays, the increase due to help with Fuel costs over the Winter months

Community Hubs Funding (£60k)

- Retain the community hubs funding to ensure wider support in Trafford communities continues, which is being used to fund the Trafford Living Rooms project [Response | Trafford Community Hubs \(traffordhubs.org\)](https://www.traffordhubs.org)

Over 50 'living rooms' have been established across the borough to provide warm spaces, with free hot drinks, for people to take part in activities, socialise, and get advice and support. The Living Rooms are listed and mapped on the Community Hubs website. Communication and Engagement work is underway to improve reach to the working poor- who either don't know the services the hubs offer or feel it's not for them.

Retain the Increased Number of Trafford Assist Applications (c£400k)

- Retain the increased number of applications allowed to the Trafford Assist scheme (food and fuel awards) in a rolling 12 month period from 2 to 4
- Proactive Take-Up Campaign to those who have not received other government support (Costs inc. in recommendation 3)
- Undertake an invite to claim Trafford Assist uptake program based on our Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support data, identifying residents who have yet to receive any of the support offered.

Summary

With involvement from Trafford's voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector, public services, health services, and housing associations, Trafford has produced a strategy in recognition of the cost-of-living crisis. This strategy sets out the commitments we have made in partnership to tackle poverty in our communities. This report highlights partnership work in action, particularly in supporting our most vulnerable children and their families.