

# **Childcare sufficiency and sustainability during the COVID-19 outbreak**

**Chair: Stephanie Douglas**  
**Head of Intervention and Localities**  
**Doncaster Borough Council**

# Outline of the session

- The critical role childcare has played and will continue to perform in supporting recovery from COVID-19
- How Brent Council responded to COVID-19, providing a critical service to key workers and vulnerable children, moving towards a wider re-opening from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020
- How City of York Council is supporting early years and childcare providers ahead of autumn term 2020 and spring term 2021
- Some key issues and challenges to ensure a sufficient and sustainable childcare sector
- DfE policy update
- Q and A

# The sufficiency duty and childcare in the wider policy context

Ann Van Dyke

# The Childcare Act (2006)

- Improve outcomes for children under 5 and reduce inequality
- Securing sufficient childcare
- Information, advice and guidance

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21>

# Childcare within the wider LA context

- Safeguarding
- Narrowing the gap
- Inclusion
- Wellbeing
- Social mobility
- Regeneration

# Understanding our mixed economy and how we secure sufficient childcare

- Working **with** a mixed economy
- Influencing choices
- Providing as a last resort
- As far as reasonably practical

# How the childcare sector reponded to COVID-19

- A crucial service for key workers
- A vital support for vulnerable children
- Balancing public health and safety alongside existing duties



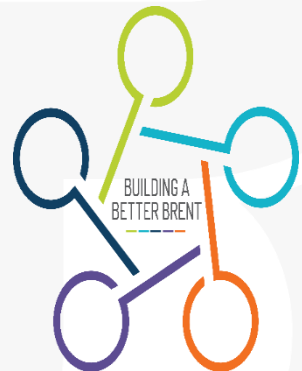
# How has COVID-19 changed childcare and early years?

- Financial strain
- Movement and changing demand
- New ways of working
- To early to say?

# Covid-19 lockdown – actions, challenges and impact

London Borough of Brent

March – July 2020



# Backdrop - provision pre-Covid

Private, voluntary and independent nurseries	Childminders	Nursery classes in schools	Maintained nursery schools
110	170	49	4

- As of December 2019, 96% (average across both maintained and PVI provision) of all providers in Brent were rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.
- Take-up of free entitlement places in 2020 was below both the London and national averages at 64% for the 2 year entitlement (was 53% in 2019, national average 68%) and 73% for the 3 and 4 year entitlement (national average 94%).

# What we did – starting in March'20

## Provider support

- Sharing local and national updates
- Interpretation of guidance
- Funding support
- Training
- Regular contact

## Parent support

- Brokerage
- Miscellaneous queries including additional charges and moves

## Approach

- Collaborative
- Responsive
- Creative
- Flexible

# Provider and parents survey in June'20

- Providers and parents were called and asked to answer questions set up on an online survey. The answers were noted online by the caller. The provider and parent calls took on average 30 and 15 minutes respectively. The response breakdown is as follows:
  - 90 private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries
  - 110 childminders
  - 167 parents with children 0 - 5

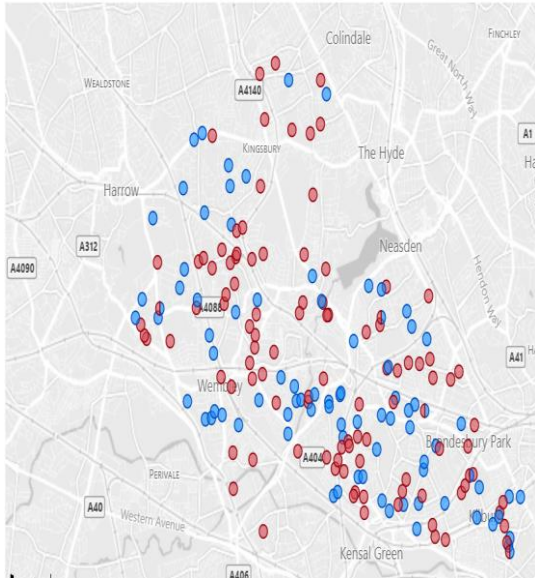
# Key findings from provider survey

- 59% of providers are worried about financial sustainability
- Worst case scenario - loss of 3,288 (52%) places
- 71% of PVI places and 44% of childminder places.
- 60% report that the free entitlement funding has kept them afloat.

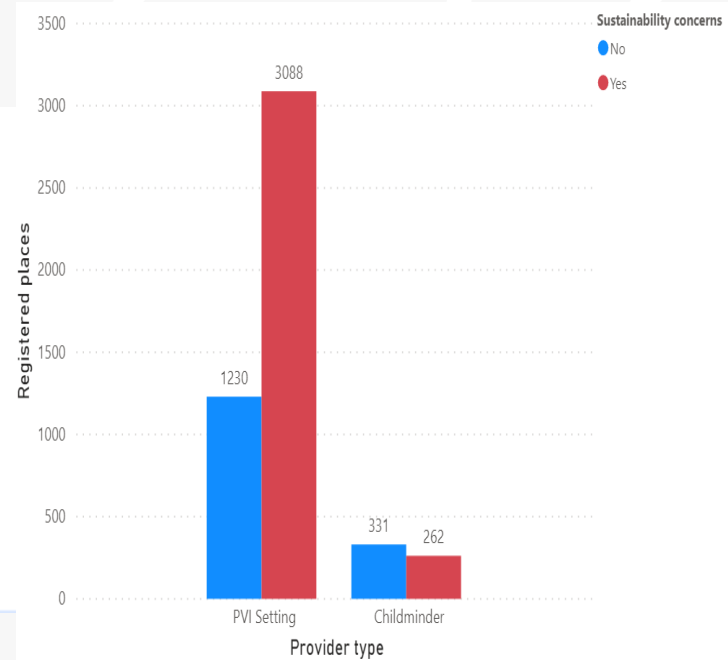
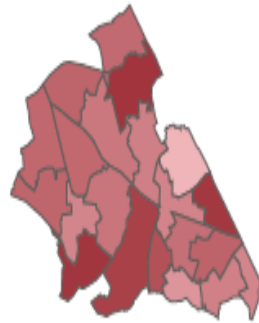
# Impact on providers

## Providers concerned re sustainability – geographic distribution across Brent

Concerned ● No ● Yes



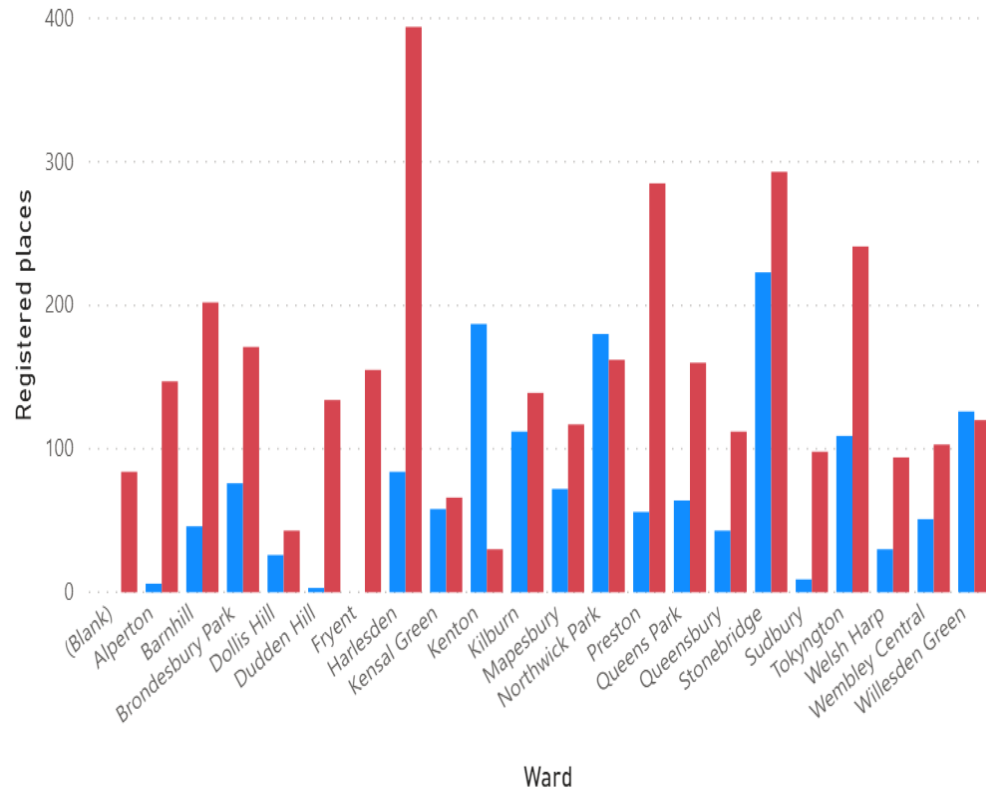
Potential loss of places - NB depth of colour illustrating higher numbers



# Impact on providers

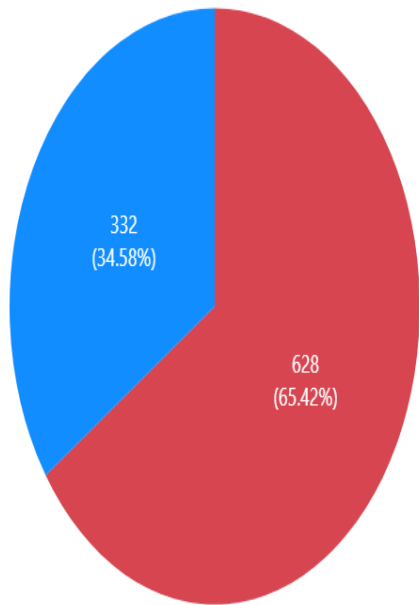
Ward	Potential loss of places
	84
Alperton	147
Barnhill	202
Brondesbury Park	121
Dollis Hill	43
Dudden Hill	134
Fryent	155
Harlesden	394
Kensal Green	66
Kenton	30
Kilburn	139
Mapesbury	117
Northwick Park	162
Preston	285
Queens Park	160
Queensbury	112
Stonebridge	281
Sudbury	98
Tokington	241
Welsh Harp	94
Wembley Central	103
<b>Total</b>	<b>3288</b>

Concerned ● No ● Yes



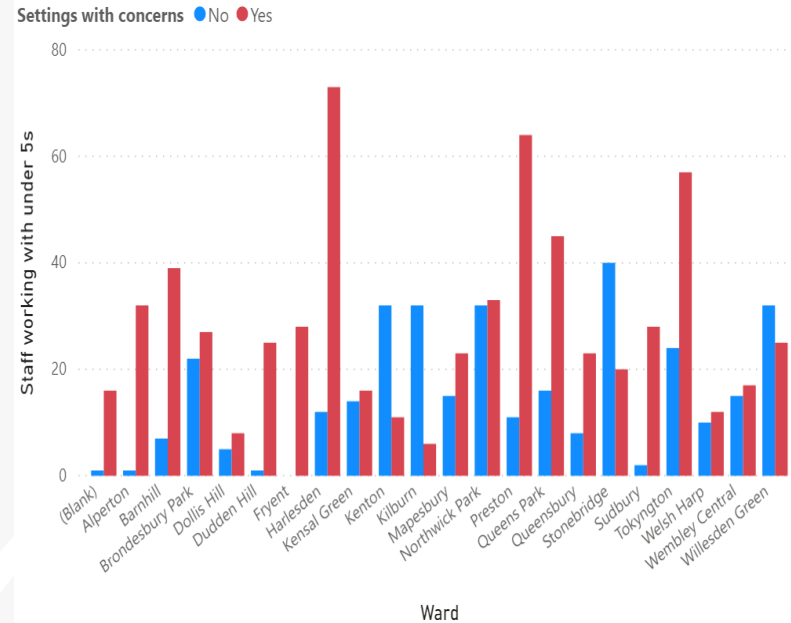


# Impact on providers



Staff potentially impacted

- Yes
- No



# Impact on parents

- Only 31% of survey respondents were accessing childcare.
- Actual take-up:

Summer 2019

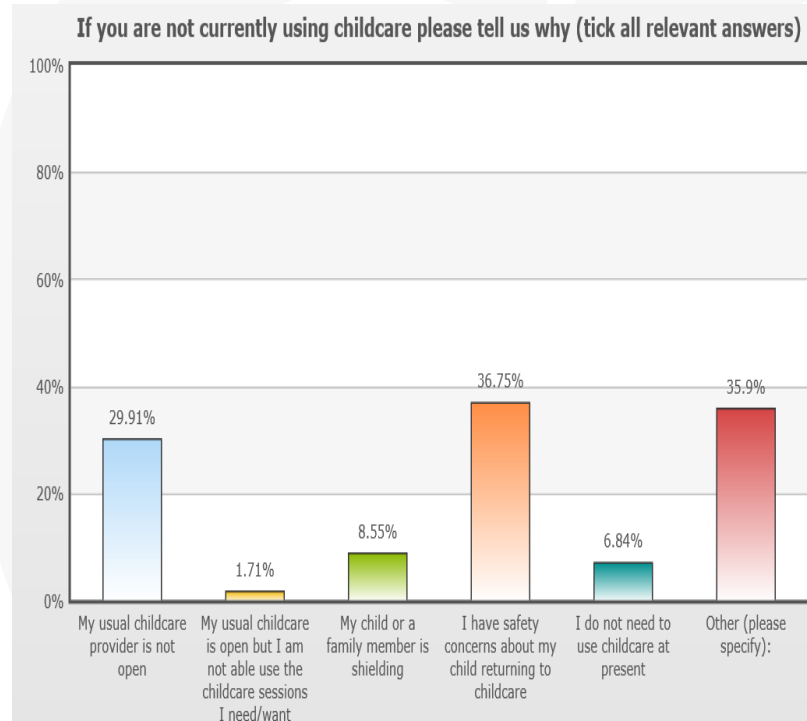
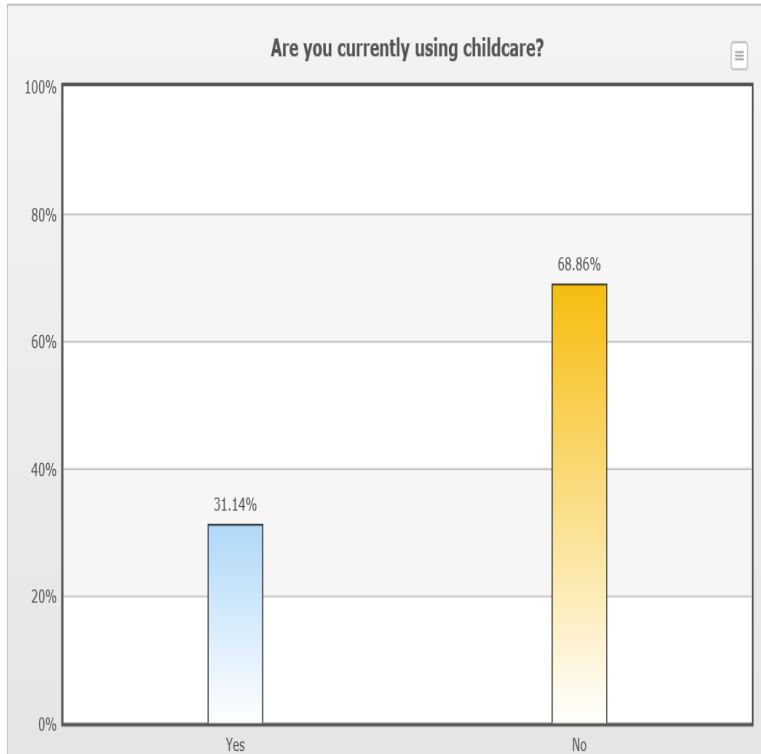
4,523

Summer 2020

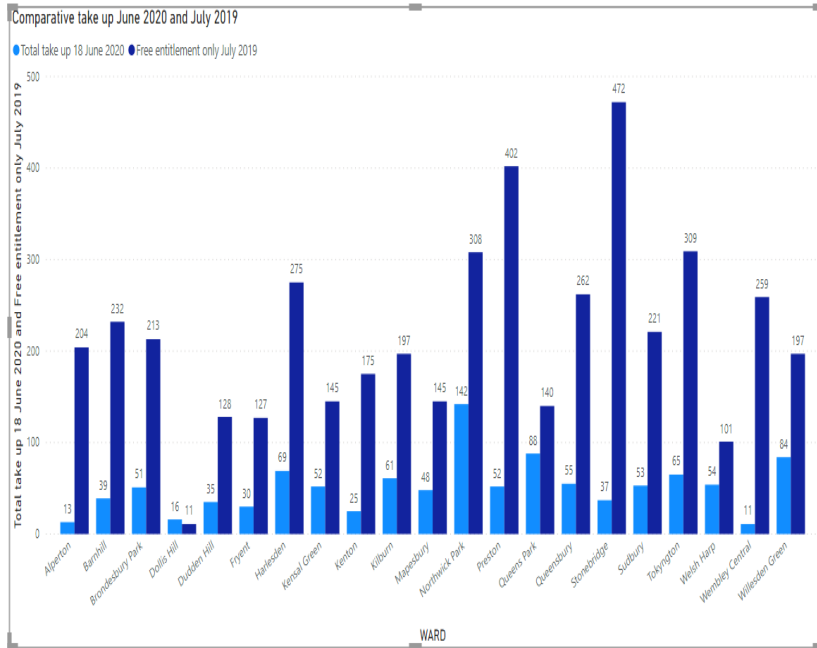
1,270

- Parents showing willingness to send children back if safety concerns addressed, anxieties remain, particularly due to perceived mixed messages.
- When asked what would need to be in place for them to send their child back to their childcare provider, parents' responses included, 'the death rate going down', 'the number of new cases going down', 'clearer guidelines from the government' and 'a vaccine being in place'

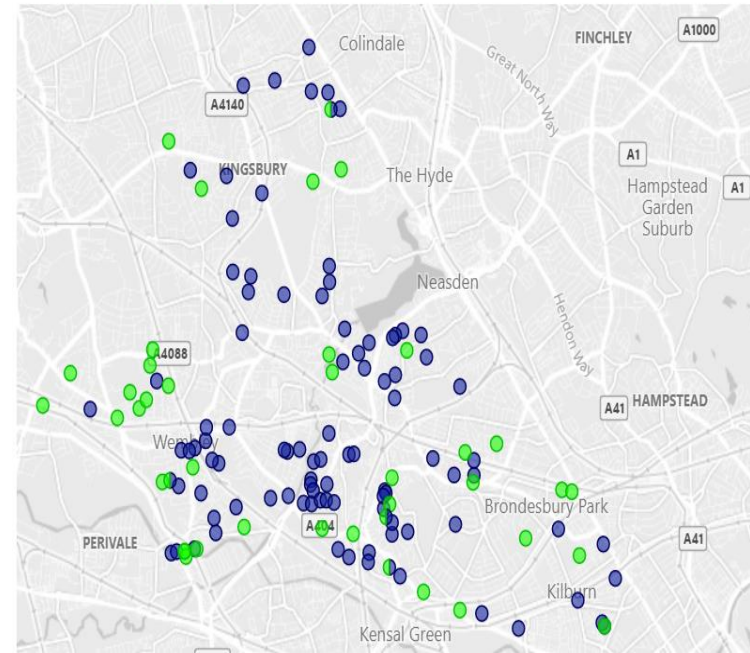
# Impact on parents



# Impact on parents



Current access ● No ● Yes



# Our preparations for possible future lockdowns (1)

## Plans are in place for...

- funding arrangements
- data collection
- local outbreaks
- tracking sufficiency
- tracking financial health
- supporting attendance of vulnerable children
- sharing plans with teams and providers for clarity on roles and expectations
- ensuring virtual solutions are kept up to date

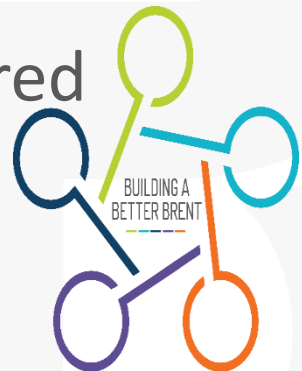
# Our preparations for possible future lockdowns (2)

## On announcement

- Initiate plans
- Prompt sharing of DfE, PHE and other govt. updates
- Ongoing engagement with and support for providers, including appropriate training
- Team members well informed and involved in shaping of work

# Learning we will build on

- The power of strong working relationships for engagement
- Business support is critical for future sustainability
- Technology helps in extending reach and quick communication
- Targeted, localised/individual approaches to ensure effective support
- Close knit committed teams working with shared vision and actions



# Next steps

- Real time sufficiency and take up tracking
- Tailored, bespoke support for providers
- Persuading parents to take up places
- Encouraging innovative and agile approaches across teams
- Ensuring political leadership is kept abreast of issues and developments



# **Moving ahead into the autumn term and beyond...**

Barbara Mands, City of York Council

# Current Sufficiency Picture in York

- 100% day nurseries open
- 74% playgroups open
- 77% childminders open
- 96% schools with nurseries open
- 65% oosc open
- 52% vulnerable children (National 24%)
- 47 FIS brokerages to date (all closed)

# Opening/closures

- Temporary closures due to low demand set to re-open by September at the latest
- 2 pre-schools closed permanently – one pre-covid decision/one low demand
- 1 large new nursery set to open in September
- Nil childminders lost and 12 provisional new ones gained.
- Some place pressure points emerging in meeting demand for 15/30 hours places

# Enablers

- Agreeing our immediate priorities - vulnerable children & key workers, and delivering EEF at the right time for cash flows
- Communications - clear ways to engage
- Regular sufficiency surveys with best and worse case scenario planning for pressure points
- Regular contact with every provider about barriers to sufficiency and vulnerable children
- Good partnerships + Employer flexibility

# What Went Well

- Engagement of senior officers – C Exec, Director, Executive Member, Public Health
- Regular Sufficiency Surveys/brokerages
- Vulnerable Child Register + prompts
- Regular telephone contact with all providers
- PPE deliveries/council helplines
- COVID-19 Daily Updates to Providers etc.
- PSED resources/transition

# Looking Ahead - Challenges

- Supply & Demand – changing patterns, supply of 15/30 hours places/more eligible two year olds/deferred entry
- Parental Feedback – areas of disadvantage
- Vulnerable Children - SEND
- Staffing – Recruitment and Retention
- Less opportunity to charge/financial strain
- Potential further partial/full lockdowns

# Looking Ahead – Supply & Demand

- Robust sufficiency assessment and analysis – Risk Assess and RAG rate + larger chains
- Encouraging providers to carry out regular parent surveys/LAs focus on disadvantaged
- Building parental/provider confidence – case studies/wider comms
- Provider contingency plans for lockdown
- Facilitating the market + growth of childminders
- Securing Section 106 Developer Contributions

# Looking Ahead – Vulnerable Children

- Encouraging all children to return including those that are vulnerable
- Building parental confidence for children with SEND – Providing Reassurances/Connection
- Consistent message from all professionals working directly with these families
- Prompts – Well being, L&D, barriers to engagement, daily routines etc.
- Vulnerable child register at LA/Provider Level



# Looking Ahead – Financial Viability

- Business Support web page with links to national and sector support
- Engage external support to explain breadth of support and encourage new adaptive business modelling inc. new marketing approaches
- Explore opportunities to build in business skill modules to apprenticeship and other training routes – future proof
- Make strong case for new/additional funding with other key organisations

# Looking Ahead – Top Tips

- Key leadership messages about building provider/parental confidence – a responsive and resilient market etc.
- Keep senior support engaged within the LA
- Secure early years and childcare within Economic Strategy recovery plans
- Provider engagement and dialogue to inform recovery plans – open/honest communication to build trust
- Wider communications to parents – 1 Sept

- <https://www.york.org.uk/workforce2014/coronavirus-update.htm>

# Risks and opportunities

Barbara Wilson, Hempsall's

# What have we learnt?

- It has taken a huge effort and the work is not complete
- Government funding has been invaluable, but providers remain concerned about their future sustainability
- Demand remains low, especially looking ahead to the autumn term

# What have we learnt?

- There is a real need for provider business support
- Funding is essential to support providers in a lockdown situation
- Childcare sufficiency needs to take account of the full duty – which includes childcare for older children and for children with SEND

# What can we take forward?

- Early years and childcare sits within economic strategy and recovery plans
- Sufficiency assessment is key to managing a turbulent market

# What do we need to be thinking about?

- How can we support providers to assess their own market (and harvest that information)?
- How can we put in place provider business support?
- How can we stimulate demand (eligible 2-year-olds, differentiated messaging)?
- Work with parents and employers, Job Centre Plus and other stakeholders to understand how the local employment market is changing and what this means for childcare demand
- Assess the market termly until new patterns of supply and demand are established
- Have in place a strategy for any future lockdown – have in one place the key tasks and responsibilities – learning from what worked well and what could have been done differently



# Policy Update

**Emily Arch**

Head of Early Years Funding



Department  
for Education

**Q & A**

**Coming up...**

**LGA Action Learning Sets**

Early years inclusion: supporting young children (0-5)  
Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> August

Supporting parents with home learning Friday 7<sup>th</sup>  
August

Childcare sufficiency and sustainability Friday 14<sup>th</sup>  
August and Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August

Thank You