

Executive summary

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1. Overview

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) currently receives £80m from the Department for Education (DfE) to deliver the free early education and childcare entitlements for two, three and four year olds as part of the early years dedicated schools grant (EYDSG) funding.

2. Purpose of the report

Family Services Commissioning was commissioned by Schools Forum to evaluate the early years DSG funding before making an informed decision on the budget for 2019/20.

The six elements of the DSG funding to be evaluated are:

- quality improvement
- business support
- full time places
- managing free early education and childcare schemes
- early years sufficiency
- IT infrastructure

3. Current service provision

- **Quality improvement**

Since 2017, Herts for Learning (HfL) early years team have undertaken commissioned work both universally and in identified targeted areas. There have been 50 courses held by HfL during April 17 – March 18, with 1109 delegates.

Universal support

The quality of early years registered group settings is sustained and continues to improve. There has been an increase of 2 per cent from April 2017; 96 per cent of PVI group settings are now judged as good or better by Ofsted (as of September 2018).

Settings graded as require improvement by Ofsted have reduced from 4 per cent to 2 per cent, with fewer inadequate settings, 2 per cent to 1 per cent (both April 17 - March 18). There has been an increase of 7 per cent of outstanding providers between April 2017 and September 2018, now just over a quarter (26 per cent) of settings are outstanding.

During April 2017 – August 2018

- The numbers of providers that have improved and are now good and outstanding:
 - Three Rivers – 100 per cent
 - Watford – 100 per cent
 - Welwyn Hatfield – 96 per cent
 - St Albans – 98 per cent
 - Dacorum – 96 per cent
 - Broxbourne – 97 per cent
- Of those providers judged require improvement, 90 per cent improved their Ofsted grading at their next inspection.
- Of those providers judged inadequate, 100 per cent improved their Ofsted grading at their next inspection.

- Of those newly registered providers, 86 per cent were graded good or better on their first inspection (April 17 – August 18).
- Of the 100 per cent of childminders judged inadequate by Ofsted, 86 per cent improved to good; 2 per cent improved to requires improvement (April 17 – March 18).

Support was received by both group providers and childminders to help improve their Ofsted grading.

Targeted support: April 2017 – March 2018

Some children's centre (CC) group areas were identified as lower performing areas through analysis of children's achievement data at the end of the foundation stage (EYFSP), the quality of provision and identification of a higher proportion of vulnerable and disadvantaged children (early years pupil premium (EYPP) and eligible two year olds) in the areas. Borehamwood, Broxbourne East, Oxhey, Ware, Watford North and Watford South received a targeted programme of support for the period.

97 per cent of PVI settings were engaged in the target area training and all settings received a safeguarding audit, assessment moderation EYPP, British values audit and regular bespoke visits to further develop areas where gaps had been identified in practice. Visits focussed on developing practitioner skills supporting and enhancing children's development through high quality and effective teaching, learning and assessment practice; following this training 90 per cent of practitioners said they had improved their confidence and skills.

- 74 per cent of the schools who engaged in the programme in the target area improved the proportion of children that reached a good level of development (GLD), compared to 68 per cent for those schools who did not engage.
- 78 per cent of schools in the Borehamwood target area increased the proportion of children reaching a good level of development (GLD), compared to 60 per cent of those who did not engage.
- The 20 per cent gap has narrowed by 5.9 per cent in the Borehamwood target area where 64 per cent of schools use the HfL 'Making a difference' toolkit, strategies from which were shared during target area training and visits to settings.
- 100 per cent of schools in the Oxhey target area accessing training improved the proportion of children achieving GLD.

Samples of 82 PVI settings were invited to share their data for those two year old children accessing a free early education (FEE) place. The data indicated an increase in all prime areas of learning for those working at age related expectations by April 2018; a 14 per cent positive increase in those working at age related expectations in communication and language.

Following moderation training and focussed assessment visits there has been high levels of improved practitioner confidence in making accurate assessment judgements in Watford North and Oxhey.

At the beginning of year one target area work a total of 73 safeguarding audit visits were completed with 72 per cent of settings with effective safeguarding practice and 100 per cent effective by the end of March 2018.

Year one – April 2017-March 2018*

CC Group Area	GLD 2016	GLD 2017	GLD 2018	FSM Gap 2016	FSM Gap 2017	FSM Gap 2018	20% Gap 2016	20% Gap 2017	20% Gap 2018
Borehamwood	63	66.7	70	10.5	8.7	20.2	37.1	41.4	35.3
Broxbourne East	66.9	68.4	70	17.1	6.9	20.4	35.4	37.2	33
Oxhey	61.4	67.2	67.9	30.5	31.4	3.8	39.3	32.8	35.2
Ware	62.9	71.4	72.4	5.7	14.1	41.7	28.2	34.9	29.8
Watford North	66.9	68.8	67	23.4	16.9	22.3	37.8	37.7	39.4
Watford South	61.9	62.9	62.6	29.9	16.8	32.8	37.8	40.3	40.1
National	69	71		18	17		31.4	31.7	

*Caution needs to be taken when looking at the FSM figures; the cohort by children's centre group area can be very small therefore the percentage difference can appear quite high, although this may only equate to a very small number of children.

Targeted support: April 2018 – March 2019

Further analysis of the EYFSP data in 2017 identified Hemel East and Hemel West as areas to be included in year two target programmes of support. The proportion of children reaching GLD had declined and high proportions of children with vulnerable characteristics were identified which could be contributing to the widening of disadvantaged gaps. This included characteristics such as, children in need, children in receipt of a funded place and numbers of child protection referrals.

For the year two programme, training has so far included; a 'chat in the box' session, focussed on continuing to improve practitioner skills in supporting children's communication and language development, sustained shared thinking audits to each setting and assessment visits to focus on cohort analysis and driving progress for all children.

Following 'chat in the box' training, 100 per cent of practitioners stated they had increased their confidence in supporting children's early language development through the ideas shared at the event. Subsequent visits will further support and evaluate practitioner skills.

Events to bring schools and settings together have been well attended in Hemel East and Hemel West target areas. In particular, in the summer term, the large majority of settings (77 per cent) and schools (75 per cent) attended a transition event to support professional dialogue about individual children moving from the PVI setting into the EYFS in local primary schools.

In Hemel East (94 per cent), Broxbourne East (93 per cent) and Borehamwood (83 per cent), settings are judged by Ofsted to be good or better. Within these areas settings with requires improvement and inadequate judgements are receiving bespoke targeted intervention and encouraged to engage in the target area training offer.

100 per cent settings in target areas for Watford North, Watford South and Hemel West are now judged to be good or better by Ofsted.

Year two – April 2018-March 2019*

CC Group Area	GLD 2016	GLD 2017	GLD 2018	FSM Gap 2016	FSM Gap 2017	FSM Gap 2018	20% Gap 2016	20% Gap 2017	20% Gap 2018
Borehamwood	63	66.7	70	10.5	8.7	20.2	37.1	41.4	35.3
Broxbourne East	66.90	68.4	70	17.1	6.9	20.4	35.4	37.2	33
Hemel Hempstead East	68.5	68.8	69.9	22.4	18.4	16.5	34.6	38.1	37.4
Hemel Hempstead West	68.5	65.6	71.0	10.5	25.5	24.8	31.1	35	31.2
Watford North	66.9	68.8	67	23.4	16.9	22.3	37.8	37.7	39.4
Watford South	61.9	62.9	62.6	29.9	16.8	32.8	37.8	40.3	40.1
National	69	71		18	17		31.4	31.7	

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- **Business support**

CBIS deliver business support services to the childcare sector across the country working directly with local government agencies, private sector clients and childcare providers directly. In Hertfordshire demand for support is generally driven by providers reacting to policy delivery issues, staffing problems, or general support due to a lack of business acumen or focus within the setting.

In Hertfordshire, interventions and engagements with childcare providers are analysed by reason and root cause to identify the need and type of support which is provided in the following ways:

- direct face to face support
- social media and event planning platforms
- training sessions
- team development sessions on site
- conferences
- telephone/email and conference calling.

During September 2017 to September 2018, there have been 185 provider interventions, not including social media. The majority of interventions required are delivered via online meetings and support via email and telephone conversations. The sharing of their childcare business resources is used extensively to provide tools and techniques that providers often do not have the time or skills to develop themselves.

One to one support is useful when supporting a team with complicated or challenging circumstances or where the team need coaching through new business challenges or for those providers which do not have the experience or skills.

CBIS Contract Performance 2017-2018

TOTAL PROVIDER INTERVENTIONS
TOTAL PROVIDER ENGAGEMENTS

185
9456

Mentor Support		
Providers accessing mentor services	54	
Support by provider type	No.	% of support
Schools	6	11%
Private	26	48%
Voluntary	17	31%
CM's	5	9%
New cases	8	
Cases closed	42	
Cases pending	13	
Breakdown of support	No.	% of support
30 hours queries	1	2%
Business development activity	8	15%
Organisational structure change	6	11%
Staff management	1	2%
Committee Roles and support	1	2%
Occupancy / low numbers	3	6%
Financial management issues	3	6%
Start up advice	9	17%
Property Issues	0	0%
Closures	0	0%
Business sale	0	0%
Employment	4	7%
HMRC issues	0	0%
Misc enquiries	6	11%
CBIS resources	9	17%
CSS Referral	0	0%

Training		
Total training attendance	62	
Training Courses	Date	Att
Competent Manager	19/11/18	14
Costing & Pricing	7/2/18	8
Making Social Media Work for you	8/3/18	8
Recruitment and Retention	20/4/18	5
Making Social Media Work for you	21/6/18	17
Competent Manager	19/9/18	10
Social Media Engagements	9271	
FB Promotions (training or events)		3442
FB Views		
FB Likes		105
FB Reach		5687
FB Post engagement		37
Followers		
<i>Last 28 days</i>		

Events		
Total event attendance	13	
Events	Date	Att
CBIS Summer School	21/7/18	13

Website	
Blogs	3
Resources	53

23 September 2018

Business support outcomes

Childcare providers need to access support in the areas of childcare delivery which are most difficult for them; business activities and operational analysis and efficiency, (specialisms are quite complicated in a childcare business scenario due to the myriad of legislative and legal conditions with which providers needs to comply).

Feedback from the training offered is extremely positive as is shown in the following table.

Training Feedback				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall Impression	22	27	2	
Content	22	25	2	
Delivery	27	22	1	
Expectations Fulfilled	20	35		
Objectives met	27	25		
Course delivery				
Teaching methods	30	20		
Clarity	30	24		
Time for feedback	31	17	5	
Organised	27	24		1
High Standards	25	24	1	
Relevant	28	23		1
Venue Accessible	22	23	4	
Comfort	25	20	4	
Catering	19	27	2	

Total Attendees
52

18 January 2018	14
7 February 2018	8
8th March 2018	8
19th April 2018	5
21st June 2018	17

UPDATED
4/9/18

A case study is attached as appendix A, which shows the positive impact for one setting.

- **Full time places**

Full time places (FTP) is a grant that children's centres (CCs) have access to and can apply for in order to facilitate the resolution of a short term crisis within one of their local families. A total of £50,000 was available for CCs to apply for across the 2018/19 financial year.

An application form must be completed alongside a family star, except where there is social care involvement. If successful, the family will be able to access an additional 15 hours free early education at an Ofsted registered provider which will provide an opportunity for professionals to work with the family, appointments to be attended or visits carried out with the family.

Each place is agreed on a termly basis with the ability to apply again if there was not a resolution to the family situation. This then equates to around 30 individual termly places per year.

Summer term 2018

There were ten applications submitted, of which five were approved. These were all for the full 15 hours per week using £4409.84 of the budget.

Of those five approved only one family had a follow up application in the autumn period showing that 80 per cent of agreed applications were resolved within the first intervention.

Applications were agreed based on the following:

- parents mental health
- physical health
- safeguarding children
- relationship boundaries.

Autumn term 2018

There have been seven applications submitted to date, of which five were approved. These were all for the full 15 hours per week using £4916.30 of the budget.

Six of these applications were new applications showing a sharp decrease in the number of interventions running over more than one term.

Improvements made to the scheme in 2018/2019

There is now the requirement to submit a case study at the end of each year for all applications that have been agreed, not just for those that did not have a family star. This was to help identify the outcomes from the work being done with the families.

- Last year the number of applications submitted and agreed was much higher in the summer by comparison. It was 50 per cent more with a decrease of 75 per cent in the total applications agreed (summer 2017, 21 applications made, 20 agreed).
- In the autumn there was a 30 per cent drop in applications and a 50 per cent drop in the total applications agreed (autumn 2017, 11 applications made, 10 agreed)
- There were 10 applications made in the spring term 2018 with 9 agreed. The figures for spring 2019 are not yet available for comparison.
- There is a reasonable spread across the county of where the applications come from however Welwyn/Hatfield still submits the most.
- The changes to the children's centre web pages has prompted much more traffic on the full time place scheme with more calls coming in asking how to submit.
- The scheme has been successful once again in supporting families in a time of need where a short intervention is required. This is shown in the 10 applications approved to date with 90 per cent having had a resolution within the first funding period.

Full time places outcomes

Full time places have enabled families the following positive outcomes:

- stability at home
- supporting parents mental wellbeing such as depression, post-natal depression or PTSD
- supporting families to access life changing services or treatment
- avoiding the need for children being taken into foster care
- safeguard children from domestic violence
- allow interventions with parents around partner choices or managing stress with the children
- support parents fleeing abusive relationships
- support extended family with a sudden change in care responsibility for a child
- support parents coming back from substance or alcohol misuse
- allows services to intervene around neglect.

A case study is attached as appendix B, which shows the positive impact for one family.

- ***Managing free early education and childcare schemes***

Family Services Commissioning (FSC) delivers on behalf of the local authority Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 which places a duty on all English local authorities to secure sufficient childcare, where reasonably practicable for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 (18 for disabled children).

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) are required by legislation to secure free early education places for all three and four year old children from the term after they are three until they start full time education. In addition HCC has to ensure that eligible families of two year old children can access a free early education place at the earliest opportunity.

The government has also introduced 30 hours free childcare for three and four year olds for all parents who are working a minimum equivalent of 16 hours per week at the national living wage, and where each parent earns less than £100,000 per year.

Other early education entitlements that FSC also manage on behalf of the local authority include Early Years Pupil Premium and Disability Access Funding for eligible three and four year old children.

On average there is a cohort of 15,500 three and four year old children and approximately 3,300 eligible two year old children in any given year.

Currently there are 1562 early years providers in the sector delivering places within all three of the entitlements and FSC engage with all these providers across the year.

Family Services Commissioning:

- identify and engage all eligible families and ensure that all eligible families are able to access information regarding the entitlements including early years pupil premium and disability access fund
- support the Family Centre Services in engaging with eligible families to ensure families access the correct entitlements in a timely fashion
- engage professionals in health, social care, virtual school, SEND, fostering and adoption services to ensure that families they come into contact with are aware of the entitlements
- design and deliver a communications campaigns which includes:
 - publicity material available to parents in family centres and other appropriate places
 - use of social media campaigns explaining benefits of all the entitlements

- direct mail out annually/termly to eligible parents on all entitlements (where necessary)
- along with Family Centres, undertake specific work in areas of low take up engaging directly with parents including exploring the reasons why take up is low in an area and identifying actions to support increase take up
- work with providers in targeted areas exploring the challenges of offering free early education to young two year old children and deliver solutions to providers who are challenged
- support all sectors in reviewing their offer to parents on all entitlements to ensure sustainability and availability of places in a locality
- make early years providers aware of funding streams such as Disability Access Funding (DAF) and Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) and how to access this funding and advising on the criteria for their use and to meet Ofsted inspection requirements
- develop funding strategies to support the delivery of new places and ensure all early education providers fully understand how to access the funding
- ensure sufficient capacity within the early education sector to meet any additional demand created due to increase take up
- provide a dedicated website for early years providers with regards to resources, information and guidance
- provide an online newsletter for early years providers with updates on legislation and early years practices, information and guidance
- ensure that all 1562 early years providers are paid accurately and monthly using efficient IT systems which ensures a reduction in the administrative burden on both providers and the local authority.

FSC are responsible for the local authority's early years annual census return in January each year and ensure all children are claimed for on each of the five entitlements and the correct amount of resource funding is claimed from the Department for Education.

Managing free early education outcomes

- Two year old free early education take up has increased from 57 per cent in 2015 to 70 per cent in 2018; this meets the regional average.
 - FSC and the Family Centre Service reach have contact with 90 per cent of the eligible two year old families in a given term.
 - Three and four year old free early education take up remains unchanged at 93 per cent in 2018; the national average is 94 per cent.
 - The number of children in receipt of early years pupil premium has grown to 2600 in the summer term 2018. DfE national statistics places Hertfordshire third in the country behind Birmingham and Manchester. This equates to approximately £285k additional funding being available to early years providers working with vulnerable children in 2018/2019.
 - The number of children who are receiving the 30 hour free childcare entitlement for summer term 2018 is 8125 which is the fourth largest cohort in the country and equates to a 104 per cent take up.
 - Communications strategy for 30 hours free childcare was recognised as best practice by the DfE as quoted in their published operational guidance for 30 hours free childcare.
 - The number of children who are in receipt of Disability Access Fund up to summer term 2018 is 237. This equates to approximately £145k additional funding being available to early years providers working with children with a Disability Living Allowance Award.
- ***Early years sufficiency***

Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on all English local authorities to secure sufficient childcare, where reasonably practicable for working parents or parents who are studying or training for employment, for children aged 0-14 (18 for disabled children). Hertfordshire County Council are required by legislation to secure free early education places for all three and four year old children from the term after they are three until they start full time education. In addition Hertfordshire County Council has to ensure that eligible families of two year old children can access a free early education place at the earliest opportunity.

Section 2 of the Childcare Act 2016 includes the local authorities statutory duty to deliver the 30 hour entitlement for working parents of three and four year olds (30 hours free childcare).

Section 12 places a duty on English local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents.

In Hertfordshire the following activity will be undertaken to achieve this.

- Regular monitoring of the supply and demand of childcare and free early education places using data supplied by early years providers, schools, health and local intelligence gathering.
- Ensuring the requirements for new/additional early years places are included in all large scale building developments.
- Ensuring developer contributions (S106) is used efficiently and generates new places where new demand has been created.
- Delivering the annual childcare sufficiency report which details market data and parental requirements by district.
- Referring both new and existing providers to the childcare sufficiency report when planning new or expanding provision to understand where the potential gaps may be and ensuring sustainability of existing provision.
- Using the childcare sufficiency grant to target areas that have been identified as having deficient places and for early years providers and schools to apply for a fixed grant of up to £10k to deliver new places in an area.
- Offering free confidential business support which can be requested by any individual, school or organisation wanting to start or expand a childcare business.
- Developing business tools to support new and existing providers which are available via the free business support offer.
- Offering targeted setting support to existing childcare providers and schools for a range of business issues which may impact on sustainability or expansion.
- Offering free local networks/briefings covering all related issues to support the delivery of high quality, sustainable early years and childcare provision.
- Working with property colleagues discussing and monitoring suitable available premises in areas identified as having a potential childcare sufficiency need.
- Signposting childcare providers in targeted areas to relevant funding streams to support the development of new childcare and free early education places.
- Supporting providers to work in partnerships within areas to collaborate to meet future demands.
- Supporting schools who are concerned with falling numbers in their nursery classes to review their offer to parents.
- Carrying out free early education entitlement compliance checks to ensure parents are able to access their free places within the statutory guidance ensuring that this is free at the point of delivery.

Early years sufficiency outcomes

- 227 places were created in 10 of the 22 target areas utilising £87k of the childcare sufficiency revenue grant.
- 646 places created in 14 areas using £255k capital grant S106 developer funds.
- Supported the delivery of capital bids to the Education Funding Agency from two early years providers and one nursery school securing over £380k in capital funding to deliver new 30 hour free childcare places.
- The free early education and childcare places data collection, spring 2018, evidences that sufficiency gaps were fully closed in 9 out the 10 areas that received the above funding.
- To date we have had no communications from parents or providers that children have not been able to secure a place on the 30 hour free childcare scheme due to sufficiency.
- Take up of the 30 hour free childcare scheme in spring 2018 was 89 per cent, which is much higher than the initial target of 80 per cent.
- The annual childcare sufficiency report was published in June 2017 detailing the availability of childcare and free early education in Hertfordshire and parental requirements.

2018 – 2019 (to date)

- 107 places have been created in 7 of the target areas utilising £66k of the childcare sufficiency revenue grant (the second round of applications are to be confirmed).
- 41 places created in 3 areas using £66k capital grant S106 developer funds (4 additional applications in discussion).
- Discussions on large property developments, i.e. Gilston (10000 properties) and identifying and agreeing the need for additional childcare and free early education places with developer.
- 3 Education Funding Agency builds now completed creating an additional 75 30 hour free childcare places.
- Take up of the 30 hour free childcare scheme in summer 2018 was 93 per cent; the national take up is 89 per cent.
- Schools are supported by FSC team in reviewing their nursery provision to ensure sustainability.
- A workshop for schools on 'sustaining your nursery provision' is to be held on 23 October.
- Local operational guidance for delivering free early education and 30 hours free childcare was developed and published to schools in May 2018.
- The annual childcare sufficiency report was published in July 2018 detailing the availability of childcare and free early education in Hertfordshire and parental requirements.

- ***IT infrastructure***

The early years portal was developed over several years to replace the paper process of claiming free early education funding. With the introduction of two year old funding, early years pupil premium and the 30 hours free childcare scheme this became an essential piece of development to firstly ensure that providers were paid accurately and secondly to simplify the existing processes.

The two year old application system was also integrated into the early years portal from the outset which allows parents to have an instant response as to whether their child is eligible and the earliest possible start date. This also allows provider's access to accurate eligibility results for two year old funding ensuring they are only offering places to those children who are eligible.

The system is used by 1600 providers of free early education and is available throughout the duration of the year to allow eligibility checking of all free early education entitlements along with early years pupil premium and disability access fund. The early years pupil premium checks are performed at least four times each term to ensure eligibility continues.

The system has been developed further to allow providers to see an almost live update on the validity of the 30 hours free childcare codes by performing an automatic overnight refresh of between 3000 and 6000 eligibility codes (most other local authorities only check twice a term). This means the introduction of 30 hours free childcare has not lead to an increase in administration at the local authority compared to others and it allows providers to see up to date eligibility results.

A move to monthly payments for all providers took place in April 2017 which offers providers a sustainable level of payment to cover their outgoings, whilst recognising that they may have had an increase in children; two reconciliation payments per funding period are made based on their returns. The nature of using figures from a previous year means there will be differences between the two and sometimes this means a future monthly payment may be reduced which is not always ideal. To mitigate this we have developed our online portal to show accurate detailed payment information as soon as a provider submits a return to see the impact of their return on any future payments. This details all payments for the rest of the financial year and has been well received by all providers who have found budget share documentation confusing.

Developments take place each year in the early years portal each year based on user feedback and legislative changes from the DfE and HMRC, and to support the early years census submission for PVI providers each January. The most significant development this year is to integrate payments into SAP (the system the LA uses to make payments to providers) as this will allow a full audit of payments and lead to payments being made as soon as possible after submissions.

IT infrastructure results

The portal has been recognised as an example of excellent practice by DfE, ECS (eligibility checking service) and HMRC colleagues, including providing a demonstration of the system at Number 10 Downing Street for policy colleagues in DfE, HMRC and the Prime Minister's Office.

We are regularly consulted by the ECS about future changes given that our portal is one of the leading systems that cover the full journey of free early education from application through to payment to providers.

4. Summary

The evaluation shows that the funding allocated to Family Services Commissioning to deliver the six elements of the dedicated schools grant is beneficial and offers value for money. Family Services Commissioning work well in partnership with stakeholders and have been stated as an exemplary authority by the Department for Education, in regards to the eligibility checker services and the early years portal.

With the introduction of 30 hours free childcare, Family Services Commissioning has been able to manage the increased workload by changes to service delivery to remain within the resource envelope, ensuring an efficient service.

The evaluation shows the impact of the work delivered by Family Services Commissioning and the commissioned services of quality improvement and business support.

The target area programme, carried out with Herts for Learning, highlighted gaps in provision to support disadvantaged and vulnerable children which then informed training content and follow up visits with early years providers to drive improvement.

Without the business support provided some settings may have faced difficulty or even closed. Due to the business support given, providers who access services are generally more likely to remain sustainable and deliver their places more efficiently and in a financially viable way. There have been no unforeseen closures over the past 3 years, due in some considerable part to the available business support.