

Little Owls Nurseries Review  
 Appendix 3  
 Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and  
 Integration (EDCI) impact assessment



As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration. In all appropriate instances we will need to carry out an equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment.

This form:

- can be used to prompt discussion when carrying out your impact assessment
- should be completed either during the assessment process or following completion of the assessment
- should include a brief explanation where a section is not applicable

<b>Directorate: Children and Families</b>	<b>Service area: Early Help</b>
<b>Lead person: Vicky Fuggles</b>	<b>Contact number: 0113 378 5536</b>
<b>Date of the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment: 24/05/2024</b>	

**1. Title:** Review of Little Owls nursery provision

Is this a:

**Strategy / Policy**
 **Service / Function**
 **Other**

**If other, please specify:** N/A

**2. Members of the assessment team:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Role on assessment team For example, service user, manager of service, specialist</b>
Amanda Ashe	LCC Children & Families	Children's Centres & Early Start Lead, Manager of service
Dawn Todhunter (TBC)	LCC Strategy & Resources	HR Business Partner, Specialist
Paul McGrath	LCC Children & Families	Project Lead, Specialist
Luke Tetsill	LCC Children & Families	Project Officer, Specialist
Darren Crawley	LCC Children & Families	Sufficiency & Participation Support Manager, Specialist
Sophie Dillon	LCC Children &	Sufficiency & Participation Support

	Families	Officer, Specialist
Joedy Greenhough	LCC Children & Families	Performance and Intelligence Manager, Specialist

### 3. Summary of strategy, policy, service, or function that was assessed:

Little Owls is a day care provision delivered by the Council for children aged 3 months to 5-years old. Currently, there are 24 Little Owls Nurseries at various locations across the city.

The Council currently provides a budget of £1,935,000 for the provision of Little Owls but they have recently overspent the allocated budget. The outturn position for 2022/23 reflected an overspend by £1,969,000, giving a total annual cost in 2022/23 of £3,904,000.

As the financial position of Leeds City Council becomes increasingly challenging, Little Owls current ongoing deficit, exacerbated by the Covid pandemic has come under additional scrutiny and has stimulated a full business review.

Interlinked with the financial pressure has been the ongoing, consistent recruitment and retention challenges currently faced by the service. There are both national and regional pressures on the recruitment and retention of qualified staff for Early Years settings. These pressures include an acute lack of level 3 qualified early years educators either being trained or available in the labour pool. The service has been attempting to meet these challenges through a variety of strategies. Compared to the wider Early Years sector, Leeds City Council employee terms and conditions are favourable in comparison with the private sector. The service actively advertises vacancies within the service both internally and externally through Leeds City Council's jobs website. The service also utilises agency staff to support delivery of the service. Nevertheless, the pressures have been ongoing and sustained for several years with no sign of significant change, that would inherently require national attention. The reliance on agency staff to deliver the service at several sites with existing staff vacancies has been a contributing factor to the financial pressures.

The legislative context is laid out in Sections 6 and 8 of the 2006 Childcare Act. Local Authorities (LA's) must secure provision of childcare so that it is sufficient to ensure parents can work/train. The childcare can either be provided by the LA or otherwise. LA's can only provide childcare themselves if no other provider is willing to or, where another person is willing, if it is appropriate in the circumstances for the local authority to provide it.

Section 8 does not stop LA's from providing their own childcare, but it does restrict when places can be offered, i.e. LA's should not provide places directly unless there are no private or voluntary sector organisations that are willing to do so. And in the event that if there is a provider who is willing to provide childcare, but the LA deem it more appropriate to provide the childcare (for example, where a provider has not received a positive Ofsted outcome).

In relation to Little Owls therefore, Leeds City Council can offer childcare if it determines that no other person/establishment is willing to provide it, or even if they can, and it would be more appropriate for the Little Owls service to provide it. Little Owls can only offer childcare where parents have not been able to secure it otherwise, either through a private nursery, childminder etc. It should be noted that the LA may make arrangements with childcare providers and provide support to them.

The service review has been undertaken within this financial, legislative, recruitment and retention context, resulting in three proposals in relation to Little Owls nursery provision, these being:

- 1) The proposed withdrawal from Chapel Allerton, Gipton North and Kentmere Little Owls nurseries.
- 2) To Conduct a market sounding exercise with Private, Voluntary, and independent sector (PVI) childcare providers and schools to explore what interest there is in the takeover by the PVI sector of 12 other Little Owls nurseries.
- 3) Retention of the remaining 9 Little Owls nurseries.

This EDCI is focused only on the proposals 1 and 2 if taken forward but refers to the retention of 9 as a mitigating factor.

These proposals, if accepted, will not impact Leeds City Council's statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare to ensure parents can work or train. These proposals also would not unfairly affect the communities in the provision in the affected areas. Sufficiency of provision will be preserved in both cases, and there exist for the closures sufficient alternative provision, not limited to other nearby Little Owls Settings.

**4. Scope of the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment**  
(complete - 4a. if you are assessing a strategy, policy or plan and 4b. if you are assessing a service, function or event)

<b>4a. Strategy, policy or plan</b> (please tick the appropriate box below)	
The vision and themes, objectives or outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>
The vision and themes, objectives or outcomes and the supporting guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>
A specific section within the strategy, policy or plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please provide detail:</b>	

<b>4b. Service, function, event</b> please tick the appropriate box below	
The whole service (including service provision and employment)	<input type="checkbox"/>
A specific part of the service	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

(including service provision or employment or a specific section of the service)	
Procuring of a service (by contract or grant)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Please provide detail:</b></p> <p>A service review has been undertaken, resulting in three proposals in relation to Little Owls nursery provision delivered by the council for 0–4-year-olds, these being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The proposed closure of Chapel Allerton, Gipton North and Kentmere Little Owls nurseries.</li> <li>2) To Conduct a market sounding exercise with private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI) childcare providers and schools to explore what interest there is in the takeover by the PVI sector of 12 other Little Owls nurseries.</li> <li>3) Retention of the remaining 9 Little Owls nurseries.</li> </ol> <p>The proposals will not disadvantage those communities that need childcare to work/train. The Little Owls service currently accounts for a small portion of the Early Years Childcare market within Leeds. The proposed reduction of 3 settings would account for a 12.5% decrease in Little Owls' provision, and smaller decrease in the overall sufficiency across the city, already limiting the overall impact.</p> <p>An expected result of the proposals being implemented is a consolidation of staffing and operating resource across any retained nurseries will provide opportunities to enhance the financial viability of those nurseries. This will be due to the ability to address significant issues of recruitment and retention, which currently limits the number of children who can be accommodated at individual locations. The continuing Little Owls will be far more self-sustaining and not need the current level of subsidy. This in turn preserves the role they play in areas that have no other sufficiency or providers. Further mitigation is detailed in the lower sections.</p>	

<p><b>5. Fact finding – what do we already know</b></p> <p>Make a note here of all information you will be using to carry out this assessment. This could include previous consultation, involvement, research, results from perception surveys, equality monitoring and customer/ staff feedback.</p> <p>(Priority should be given to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration related information)</p> <p>Any changes to service provision will impact on 3 main groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children attending the settings,</li> <li>• parents/carers,</li> <li>• and staff, who are the subject of a separate EDCI organisational screening.</li> </ul> <p>There would likely be differential impact amongst these affected groups, therefore, the Directorate carried out an initial review (for the Children and Families Delivery Board) of</p>
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provision. The review considered each setting individually, looking at: Deprivation, SEND, sufficiency, any co-location with other services and the population and demographics of the area. These factors were considered throughout the process with multiple sources of data.

A scoring matrix was then produced which considered the following EDCI related factors, with sufficiency the overriding indicator as to whether provision could be withdrawn, explored, or needed to be retained:

- a. Number of SEND children attending a setting.
- b. Number of children known to Children's Social Work Services (Child in Need, Child Protection Plan, Children Looked After) attending a setting.
- c. Number of children living in the most deprived Lower Super Output Areas attending a setting.
- d. The setting's market share of 2 & 3yr old Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) take-up.
- e. Sufficiency and demographics.

## **Key findings: Service-wide**

### **Deprivation**

The Little Owls nurseries settings in the past decade have been characterised by providing low-cost, high-quality childcare to children in areas of high deprivation or where there was an existing gap in sufficiency.

Recent data from 2023 shows that deprivation is a significant factor for children in the following Little Owl settings: Chapelton, Harehills, Shepherds Lane, Kentmere, Parklands, Seacroft, New Beverley, Hunslet Rylestone, Hunslet St Mary's, and Osmondthorpe, where all children currently on roll fell into the 0 – 20 % demographic of high deprivation. Gipton North and Armley Moor, also had a large majority (over 90 %) attending from the 0 – 20% demographics.

Additionally, FEEE (Free Early Education Entitlement) places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds were considered when conducting the review of Little Owls settings. 2-year-olds can get free childcare if parents/ carers live in England and get any of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit (or both), and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

The data shows that Little Owls settings with the highest 2-year-old FEEE provision are: Harehills (96 places), New Beverley (45 places), Gipton North (36 places) and Shepherds Lane (34 places). It is proposed that Harehills and New Beverley Little Owls remain open to meet the needs of local demographics. Meanwhile, sufficiency analysis found that in case of Gipton North Little Owls closing, there are several Private, voluntary, or independent providers (PVI)s within the locality offering FEEE places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and 3–4-year-olds.

### **CIN/CP**

Regarding, children in the local area subject to a CIN (Child in Need) / CP (Child Protection) plan, the largest number are in the areas with the following LO settings: Middleton Laurel Bank (88), Armley Moor (80), Harehills (68), New Bewerley (67), Swarcliffe (61) and Seacroft (56). Per proposal, all these settings are going to stay open and maintain their current nursery provision.

### **Children Looked After - CLA**

Another consideration for EDCI impact assessment has been the numbers of children who have become looked after by the authority in the areas with the following settings: Harehills (16), Parklands (16), Middleton (13), Osmondthorpe (13), Swarcliffe (9) and Armley Moor (8). Out of these, Parklands and Osmondthorpe are proposed to form part of the MSE, but the rest of them are remaining open.

### **Early Years Funding For Inclusion - EYFFI**

When reviewing the Little Owls, the effort was made to ensure that the Council keeps on addressing significant issues relating to the insufficiency of places for children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and ensure there are places available for the most vulnerable children in the city.

The highest number of SEND children are on roll in these LO settings: Little London (18), Two Willows (14), New Bewerley (12), Hunslet Rylestone and Hunslet St Mary's (11), Chapeltown (10), Armley Moor (10), Bramley (10). Out of these, the joint Hunslet settings and Bramley are proposed to be explored through the MSE, with the others maintaining their nursery provision.

## **Findings specific to withdrawal of provision:**

### **Chapel Allerton**

The nursery is located within an area well served by a mix of private childminders, school nursery, and private, voluntary, and independent sector childcare settings (PVI) offering places all year round to children aged 0-4, including FEEE places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and 3-4-year-olds. Chapel Allerton is also in the same Childcare Planning Area (CPA) as Little Owls Chapeltown (proposed to be retained), which is located 1.3 miles away.

Analysis undertaken by the Sufficiency and Participation team has determined that, should Chapel Allerton close, there is enough capacity and choice available at alternative providers within the vicinity of Chapel Allerton Little Owls to absorb all forecast demand for places. A subsequent guarantee of a place at nearby Little Owls settings has been given to all parents with children currently attending. Parents were asked for their preferences, given that multiple factors such as transport links would affect their ability to access a different site.

In comparison with the other 23 Little Owls nurseries, the children on roll at Chapel Allerton are significantly less likely to live in areas of high deprivation, have SEND or be CLA. However, the setting is located within Chapel Allerton, which is a priority ward and is an area of high deprivation.

In addition to a number of high quality alternative childcare providers, the nearby Ofsted rated 'Outstanding' provision at Little Owls Chapeltown would help to ensure that the Child Friendly Leeds ambition of giving children the best start in life, providing a safe and supportive environment for children at risk of child protection issues and supplying sufficient, high quality childcare places for all children particularly those with SEND is still met if Chapel Allerton closes.

### **Gipton North**

The nursery is located within an area well served by a mix of childminders, school nursery, and PVI childcare providers offering places all year round to children aged 0-4, including FEEE places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and 3–4-year-olds. In addition, Little Owls Harehills and Shepherd's Lane are both in the same CPA as Little Owls Gipton North, located 0.9 and 1.2 miles away respectively and are both proposed to be retained.

Analysis undertaken by the Sufficiency and Participation team has determined that, should Gipton North close, there is enough capacity and choice available at alternative childcare providers within the vicinity of Gipton North Little Owls to absorb all forecast demand for places. A subsequent guarantee of a place at nearby Little Owls settings has been given to all parents with children currently attending. Parents were asked for their preferences, given that multiple factors such as transport links would affect their ability to access a different site.

Gipton North is situated within the priority ward of Gipton and Harehills and over 90% of the children currently on roll at Gipton North live in an area of high deprivation. The nursery also caters to the needs of several children with SEND, including a number who have not yet received a diagnosis. Should the nursery close, there are alternative providers operating within the locality, offering FEEE places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and 3–4-year-olds. In addition, the Ofsted rated 'Outstanding' provision at nearby Little Owls Shepherds Lane and Ofsted 'Good' rated provision at Little Owls Harehills would remain accessible to families in this area, providing high quality childcare places for all children and particularly those with SEND.

### **Kentmere**

The nursery is located within an area where childcare is predominantly provided by Little Owls settings, including two other Little Owls nurseries, with minimal alternative provision available for parents. Little Owls Parklands and Seacroft are both in the same CPA as Kentmere Little Owls, located 1.3 and 1.1 miles away respectively.

Analysis undertaken by the Sufficiency and Participation team determined that planning would need to be in place to ensure Little Owls Parklands and Seacroft increase capacity to maintain current levels of FEEE funded places in the area, including paid for (non-funded) places for under 2-year-olds. This planning is now in place with a subsequent guarantee of a place at nearby Little Owls settings given to all parents with children currently attending. Parents were asked for their preferences, given that multiple factors such as transport links would affect their ability to access a different site.

Kentmere is situated within Killingbeck and Seacroft which is a priority ward and is close to the priority neighbourhood of Boggart Hill. All the children currently on roll at the setting live in an area of high deprivation. The nursery also caters to the needs of several children with

SEND, including a number who have not yet received a diagnosis. Should the nursery close, there are some PVIs and school nurseries within the locality offering FEEE places for disadvantaged 2-year-olds and 3–4-year-olds. In addition, the Ofsted ‘Good’ rated provisions at Little Owls Parklands and Seacroft would remain accessible to families in this area, providing high quality childcare places for all children and particularly those with SEND.

### **Additional information & mitigation**

Beyond the individual context for each of the proposed closures, further mitigations have and are being planned. The first of these was an initial delay of the timeline for proposed closure to after the summer break 2024, following parental feedback in the early stages of engagement. This decision was taken to minimise disruption particularly to those families with children leaving nursery to join primary school and to enable parents and the service more time for a transition.

Mitigation of impact is also supported by the aforementioned guarantee from the service to every family currently with a child or children at Little Owls proposed for closure. The guarantee is of a place at a geographically close Little Owls setting, unless parents indicate otherwise. A limited number of parents have expressed they wish to take their children to alternative non-Little Owls provision.

Finally, given the consolidation proposals with regards to the service facing significant recruitment and retention issues; staff will also be supported in moving to take up roles at the settings receiving guaranteed-place children. This will have the effect of preserving existing strong relationships between the staff and parents, children. It also ensures specific knowledge and experience of the needs of the children is preserved within the service.

### **Proposals regarding the Market Sounding Exercise (MSE).**

Regarding the 12 settings in the scope for finding alternatives to Leeds City Council provision after the MSE has concluded (subject to approval to proceed), the intention would be to engage with suitably qualified alternative childcare providers able to ensure the continuity of high-quality provision that meets the needs of each setting’s particular demographic profile.

Further screening/equality impact assessments would be conducted on a setting-by-setting basis following the outcome of the MSE to ensure any proposals to outsource each setting fully consider any EDCI implications.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is evidence to support the belief that the ambition to ensure everyone can thrive from early years would continue to be supported by retained Little Owls provision, childminders, schools, and PVIs, and by ensuring that childcare provision remains sufficient in all areas.

### **Are there any gaps in equality and diversity information Please provide detail:**

There are the following potential gaps in the EDCI information.



Firstly, the geographical locations of alternative provisions may not be fully suitable for some families at the closure settings. The guarantee of a place at a nearby little owls is expected to heavily mitigate this however without knowing the addresses and undertaking a transport survey the service cannot know for sure. The service is working to signpost parents to nearby alternatives where parents are communicating that the nearby Little Owls are unsuitable.

Secondly, there is a risk that in the case that the guaranteed place at a nearby Little Owls is unsuitable, parents and carers may be unable to afford alternative PVI provision. This is a fear that has been raised in the engagement and the service is committed to working with parents to avoid this situation. In the long-term there is a potential risk of affordability if alternative providers take over Little Owls settings following the MSE. This is a potential gap that will need to be managed and addressed with specific site screenings.

Thirdly there is a potential gap in the specific data held by the service centrally regarding children with SEND. Whilst individual settings' staff will know the children well, it's important this information is retained and passed forward if children are transitioning to alternative Little Owls or providers (following the MSE) because of closures.

**Action required:**

- To obtain detailed knowledge of home addresses and transportation to consider the travel implications.
- To obtain knowledge of affordability concerns and work with Council services and partners to support parents.
- To conduct specific further screenings or assessment following the MSE.
- Detailed knowledge of those children with SEND to ensure transition processes are managed effectively.

**6. Wider involvement – have you involved groups of people who are most likely to be affected or interested**

Yes

No

**Please provide detail:**

- Engagement with executive members and elected members representing wards with Little Owls settings has taken place. For those in wards affected by the proposals to withdraw or explore, written briefings were sent with the option of verbal briefings with the Service. Many of these offers of briefings were taken up, and further email queries were answered by the service and project team.
- Consultation with staff and Trade Unions has been undertaken, initially with those staff directly impacted, including catering and cleaning staff and then with the wider workforce, led by Early Start management and supported by HR colleagues.
- Legal Service colleagues have been involved to discuss the legalities of terms & conditions for Parents as well as potential TUPE implications beyond the closures and MSE.
- Engagement with families:
  - For children on roll at the Little Owl settings proposed to close, all can be

accommodated at other nearby childcare providers, with transition visits that will be/have been offered. All have been offered a guarantee that they can be accommodated in other Little Owls settings.

- There have been 15 engagement sessions arranged with parents and carers of the settings that have been proposed to be closed or explored by the market sounding exercise. The table below contains more detail.
- A dedicated email address was also established to gather views of Parents & Carers.
- An FAQ was created on a [webpage](#) based on the engagement session and email questions that will continue to be updated with information as the review continues. A paper FAQ was also available for nursery managers to distribute to parents with digital access barriers.
- Wider stakeholder engagement is planned to take place with all other interested parties, such as schools, social care, Infant Mental Health Service, Health Visitors, physiotherapy, the child development unit, Special Educational Needs, and Inclusion Team (SENIT), Specialist Training in Autism and Raising Standards (STARS), and dental and public health services.
- The MSE would be conducted for the 12 Little Owls businesses in scope to be taken over by alternative childcare providers. The focus will be on ensuring that high quality PVI providers can both access the information they need to consider respond, and that the service can gain the necessary information to inform further decisions based on these responses.
- All media requests have been responded to.

#### Engagement sessions information:

Setting	Session Date	LCC Attendees	Parent & Carer Attendees
Bramley	07/05/2024	4	11
Burley Park	08/05/2024	6	9
Chapel Allerton	24/04/2024	4	19
City and Holbeck	07/05/2024	6	5
Gipton North	29/04/2024	4	14
Hawsworth Wood	03/05/2024	6	16
Hunslet Rylestone	08/05/2024	6	10
Hunslet St Mary's	01/05/2024	5	7
Kentmere	01/05/2024	6	4
Meanwood	29/04/2024	5	16
Osmondthorpe	30/04/2024	5	2
Parklands	30/04/2024	5	7
Quarry mount	03/05/2024	6	4
Rothwell	09/05/2024	4	8
Shepherd's Lane	09/05/2024	4	9

Summary	
High*	19
Low	2
Total*	141
Mean*	9
Median	9

The asterisk can be expanded upon thus: some meetings (notably Chapel Allerton) more people did attend and were visible on screens but aren't counted as unique attendees. As a result, the summary High, Total and Mean numbers can be assumed to be a little higher.

#### Action required:

- Action to link in with Kayleigh Thurlow from the Voice and Influence team for parents of children with SEND.

- Action to check in with the observatory around languages parents speak, to ensure information is being distributed as wide as possible.
- Ensure the plans for the MSE reflect the concerns raised by parents during the engagement period, and that additional engagement where appropriate is planned.

### 7. Who may be affected by this activity?

please tick all relevant and significant equality characteristics, stakeholders and barriers that apply to your strategy, policy, service or function

#### Equality characteristics

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Carers  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gender reassignment  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Race    | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion or Belief    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sex (male or female) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other     |   |  |

(Other can include – marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and those areas that impact on or relate to equality: tackling poverty and improving health and well-being)

**Please specify:** Poverty, Child in Need (CiN), Children Looked After (CLA), those that eligible for FFI funding, or other relevant childcare benefits.

#### Stakeholders

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Services users | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employees | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trade Unions |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partners       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suppliers    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other please specify.     |   |  |

#### Potential barriers

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Built environment                        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Location of premises and services. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information and communication | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Customer care                      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Timing                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Stereotypes and assumptions                   |

Cost

Consultation and involvement

Financial exclusion

Employment and training

specific barriers to the strategy, policy, services or function

### Please specify:

**Location of premises and services:** As mentioned above the proposals may provide a barrier to some parents and carers at the proposed closure sites, should they not be able to access suitable transport for themselves and their child to an alternative provider or Little Owls site.

**Information and communication:** Whilst efforts have been made to provide communications in physical format as well as digital, there is a recognition the language they have been in has been English.

**Customer care:** There has been significant engagement from parents who have reiterated their strong preference for the customer care they currently receive at Little Owls. Whilst the closures are guaranteed a place at other Little Owls settings, for the proposed MSE a key focus will need to be on potential providers being measured on their commitment to providing the same level of customer care as is current.

**Timing:** It has been acknowledged in the engagement that the timing of the proposals initially provided a major barrier for parents, as it was proposed closures take place before the summer break. This has now been altered to after the summer break. Timing however for the outcomes of any proposals remains a potential barrier as any further changes proposed should consider the timing within the academic year for any transition periods, and the time parents may need to further engage and consider options.

**Consultation and involvement:** There has been significant efforts to consult with parents however the timing of engagement sessions, during the early evening, was raised as a barrier that may have prevented some from attending engagement sessions. Given that the settings are specifically provided to provide childcare for parents and carers in work or training it was not considered appropriate to hold sessions during the working day, nor was it considered appropriate to hold sessions later in the evening given the resultant need for alternative childcare arrangements to have to be made. Letters to parents have been provided as physical copies and the website Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) has been made available to nursery managers as a physical copy to be distributed to parents who do not have digital access.

**Financial exclusion:** It is acknowledged that Little Owls nurseries are some of (if not the most) affordable option across the city for parents and carers. Sensitivity around the price of childcare has been a repeated concern raised in engagement sessions, particularly for sites that will be part of the MSE information-gathering exercise. Any decisions made further down the line from these proposals should pay due attention to these concerns and it should form part of the conversation with interested providers during the MSE. The

Council will of course need to consider any issues arising from Subsidy Control legislation in this regard.

**Employment and training:** The EDCI considerations for staffing affected by these proposals have been addressed in a separate screening document. However, it is a potential barrier for some parents and carers of children that changes made to Little Owls could adversely affect their ability to access employment and/or training. This is related to the Council's statutory duty to ensure there is sufficient childcare to enable parents to do so. Although there is a separate staffing EDCI screening document it is also relevant to mention here that some Council staff currently have children at Little Owls settings and may be adversely affected in accessing the workplace due to these proposals.

## 8. Positive and negative impact

Think about what you are assessing (scope), the fact-finding information, the potential positive and negative impact on equality characteristics, stakeholders and the effect of the barriers

### 8a. Positive impact:

Whilst it has been acknowledged they were concerns around the timing of sessions, the online engagement sessions did allow each setting's parents and carers the opportunity for a voice without needing to be physically present at a location, avoiding time and resources being spent on travelling to attend.

This is further supported by the ability for parents to speak to their setting managers or email the dedicated inbox. By having multiple methods for engagement, parents were supported to make their voice heard.

The same goes for staff who have been supported in meetings with both Unions and HR present to hear barriers and concerns and respond accordingly.

### Action required:

- Continue to communicate with all relevant parties on a regular basis in relation to Childcare provision provided by Little Owls.

### 8b. Negative impact:

**Closures:** the concern of the negative impact of the closures as has been discussed earlier in this document is that the Little Owls acted as a market-leader both in terms of quality and on price. Whilst existing children are being guaranteed places at other nearby little owls there is a potential knock-on impact for some who were planning on utilising the closure sites now being unable to find similar affordable, high-quality provision. Where possible sibling children not currently at a Little Owls site will be offered places at the same Little Owls setting.

From the engagement the service has heard some parents fear this could impact their ability to attend work and/or training. Additionally, for those with a guaranteed space the new nursery setting could potentially be inconveniently situated for travelling, also having a possible impact upon their ability to access affordable, high-quality provision and attend work and/or training.

**MSE:** There are no direct negative impacts of the proposed Market Sounding Exercise, as it is an information-gathering exercise with potential PVI providers to assess what further options the Council may have. On a wider scale however, we have heard from the engagement sessions that there is some fear and uncertainty from parents and carers around the long-term plans and any subsequent decisions made following the MSE, particularly if it meant private providers taking on settings.

**Action required:**

- The mitigation detailed in section 5 including the guarantee and supporting of staff to transition alongside children.
- Continued monitoring by the Sufficiency team to understand the sufficiency picture after closures are implemented.

**9. Will this activity promote strong and positive relationships between the groups/communities identified?**

Yes

No

**Please provide detail:**

The level of interest that this has generated has enhanced a level of community cohesion amongst families affected.

**Action required:**

- Further communication with parents at the proposed affected sites as well as the communities the settings sit within will be conducted via the website FAQ and from Nursery management staff via email, letter and in person.

**10. Does this activity bring groups/communities into increased contact with each other? (For example, in schools, neighbourhood, workplace)**

Yes

No

**Please provide detail:**

The proposals include a guarantee for parents and carers with children at settings in the closure category that they will be offered a place at a nearby Little Owls. This may bring

families into areas further away from their home communities and into contact with new ones.

**Action required:**

- Should the proposals be accepted, staff would move alongside the children from the closures to new places at nearby settings. This has the benefit of easing concerns around transition and disruption and retains relationships and knowledge within the service.

**11. Could this activity be perceived as benefiting one group at the expense of another?** (For example where your activity or decision is aimed at adults could it have an impact on children and young people)

Yes

No

**Please provide detail:**

There is a potential perception of parents and carers at the affected sites feeling they are being disadvantaged compared to those at the proposed retained sites.

**Action required:**

- Continued communication and updating of the FAQ on the website along with clear publishing of reports will ensure that the rationale for the decisions is made clear to parents and carers.

## 12. Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration action plan

(insert all your actions from your assessment here, set timescales, measures and identify a lead person for each action)

Action	Timescale	Measure	Lead person
To obtain detailed knowledge of home addresses and transportation to consider the travel implications.	Ahead of any withdrawal closures (September 2024)	Short report created detailing the findings and exploring options for mitigation.	Amanda Ashe
To obtain knowledge of affordability concerns and work with Council services and partners to support parents.	Ahead of any withdrawal (September 2024)	Short report created detailing the findings and exploring options for mitigation.	Amanda Ashe
To conduct specific further screenings or assessment following the MSE.	Following the MSE (October 2024)	Screenings or assessments created following the MSE.	Vicky Fuggles, Amanda Ashe
Detailed knowledge of those children with SEND to ensure transition processes are managed effectively.	Ahead of any closures (September 2024)	Staff within the service given appropriate direction and resources to support children with SEND.	Amanda Ashe
Action to link in with Kayleigh Thurlow from the Voice and Influence team for parents of children with SEND.	Ongoing action.	Kayleigh Thurlow appraised of situation, specific outreach to parents of children with SEND.	Amanda Ashe
Action to check in with the observatory around languages parents speak, to ensure information is being distributed as wide as possible.	Ongoing action.	Document detailing the prevalent languages in each area affected, that is then used to inform specific outreach.	Amanda Ashe
Ensure the plans for the MSE reflect the concerns raised by parents during the	Ahead of the MSE (September 2024)	The MSE documents to reflect the concerns raised by parents, and that it informs	Amanda Ashe, Mandi Kaushal



<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Lead person</b>
engagement period, and that additional engagement where appropriate is planned.		additional engagement following the MSE.	
Continue to communicate with all relevant parties on a regular basis in relation to Childcare provision provided by Little Owls.	Ongoing	The website to continue to be updated regularly as the proposals progress. Decisions and implementation timelines to be highlighted.	Vicky Fuggles, Amanda Ashe
The mitigation detailed in section 5 including the guarantee and supporting of staff to transition alongside children.	Ahead of any closures and transition to alternative Little Owls settings.	Proposed and actions taken to be reflected in the report to the Executive Board. Staff to be engaged with at regular intervals.	Vicky Fuggles, Dawn Todhunter
Continued monitoring by the Sufficiency team to understand the sufficiency picture after closures are implemented.	After withdrawal (September 2024)	Sufficiency colleagues to feed in at regular project meetings findings	Darren Crawley, Sophie Dillon

**13. Governance, ownership and approval**

State here who has approved the actions and outcomes from the equality, diversity, cohesion and integration impact assessment

Name	Job title	Date
Phil Evans	Chief Officer – Resources, Transformation & Partnerships	3/6/24
<b>Date impact assessment completed</b>		<b>3/6/24</b>

**14. Monitoring progress for equality, diversity, cohesion and integration actions** (please tick)

- As part of Service Planning performance monitoring
- As part of Project monitoring
- Update report will be agreed and provided to the appropriate board  
Please specify which board
- Other (please specify)

**15. Publishing**

Though **all** key decisions are required to give due regard to equality the council **only** publishes those related to **Executive Board, Full Council, Key Delegated Decisions** or a **Significant Operational Decision**.

A copy of this equality impact assessment should be attached as an appendix to the decision making report:

- Governance Services will publish those relating to Executive Board and Full Council.
- The appropriate directorate will publish those relating to Delegated Decisions and Significant Operational Decisions.
- A copy of all other equality impact assessments that are not to be published should be sent to [equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk) for record.

Complete the appropriate section below with the date the report and attached assessment was sent:

For Executive Board or Full Council – sent to <b>Governance Services</b>	Date sent: 3/6/24
For Delegated Decisions or Significant Operational Decisions – sent to appropriate <b>Directorate</b>	Date sent:
All other decisions – sent to <a href="mailto:equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk">equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk</a>	Date sent: