Little Owls Nurseries Review 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

Directorate: Children and Families	Service area: Early Help
Lead person: Vicky Fuggles	Contact number: 0113 378 5536
Date of the equality, diversity, cohesion 27.09.2024	and integration impact assessment:

1. Title: Review of Little Owls nursery provision			
Is this a:			
Strategy / Policy	X Service / Function	Other	
If other, please specify: N//	4		

2. Members of the assessment team:

Name	Organisation	Role on assessment team For example, service user, manager of service, specialist
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 & Families	Sufficiency & Participation Support Officer, Specialist

Joedy Greenhough	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 21 Little Owls Nurseries at various locations across the city.

The Council currently provides a budget of \pounds 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 \pounds 1,969,000, giving a total annual cost in 2022/23 of \pounds 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 was undertaken within this financial, legislative, recruitment and retention context, resulting in three proposals in relation to Little Owls nursery provision, which were subsequently approved At Executive Board on the 19th of June 2024, these being:

- 1) 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 primarily focused on the decision 2 which has been taken forward and refers to the retention of 9 as a mitigating factor. All bold and underlined text has been refreshed to reflect the MSE exercise.

These decisions have not impacted Leeds City Council's statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare to ensure parents can work or train. These decisions also do not unfairly affect the communities in the provision in the affected areas. Sufficiency of provision has and will be preserved in each case.

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

(complete - 4a. if you are assessing a strategy, policy or plan and 4b. if you are assessing a service, function or event)

4a. Strategy, policy or plan (please tick the appropriate box below)	
The vision and themes, objectives or outcomes	
The vision and themes, objectives or outcomes and the supporting guidance	
A specific section within the strategy, policy or plan	
Please provide detail:	

4b. Service, function, event please tick the appropriate box below	
The whole service (including service provision and employment)	
A specific part of the service (including service provision or employment or a specific section of	x

the service)	
Procuring of a service (by contract or grant)	

Please provide detail:

A service review has been undertaken, resulting in three decisions in relation to Little Owls nursery provision delivered by the council for 0–4-year-olds, these being:

- 1) The closure of Chapel Allerton, Gipton North and Kentmere Little Owls nurseries.
- 2) To conduct a Market Sounding Exercise (MSE) 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.

The decisions do 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 MSE was conducted to only ascertain levels of interest within the sector for the 12 sites. The result of the MSE will inform any next steps, but the primary focus of the service is to preserve the sufficiency of provision within each settings' local area.

A result of the first decision being implemented was a consolidation of staffing and operating resource across retained nurseries, enhancing their financial viability. This was due to the ability to address significant issues of recruitment and retention, which limits the number of children who can be accommodated at individual locations. The continuing Little Owls are more self-sustaining and should not need the previous 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.

5. Fact finding – what do we already know

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.

(Priority should be given to equality, diversity, cohesion and integration related information)

Any changes to service provision following the MSE will impact on 3 main groups:

- children attending the settings,
- parents/carers,
- <u>and staff, who were the subject of a separate EDCI organisational</u> <u>screening at the time of the decision going to executive board.</u>

<u>There would likely be differential impact amongst these affected groups, therefore,</u> the Directorate carried out an initial review (for the Children and Families Delivery Board) of 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: Chapeltown, Harehills, Shepherds Lane, Parklands, Seacroft, New Bewerley, Hunslet Rylestone, Hunslet St Mary's, and Osmondthorpe, where all children currently on roll fell into the 0 - 20 % demographic of high deprivation. 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-yearolds 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 Bewerley (45 places), Gipton North (36 places) and Shepherds Lane (34 places). It is proposed that Harehills and New Bewerley 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/CPP

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.

Proposals regarding the Market Sounding Exercise (MSE).

<u>Regarding the 12 settings in the scope for finding alternatives to Leeds City Council</u> provision after the MSE has concluded, the intention is 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-bysetting 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.

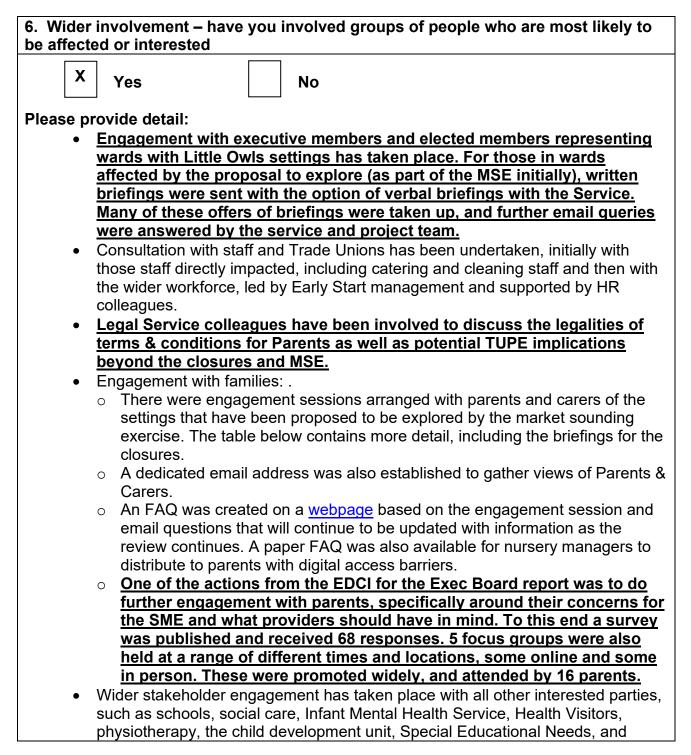
Are there any gaps in equality and diversity information Please provide detail:

There are the following potential gaps in the EDCI information.

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. Additionally, 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.

Action required:

- 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.



Inclusion Team (SENIT), Specialist Training in Autism and Raising Standards (STARS), and dental and public health services.

- <u>The MSE itself for the 12 Little Owls settings in scope to be taken over by</u> <u>alternative childcare providers is engagement. The focus has been on</u> <u>ensuring that high quality PVI providers can both access the information</u> <u>they need to consider respond, and that the service can gain the</u> <u>necessary information to inform further decisions based on these</u> <u>responses.</u>
- 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
Hawksworth 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

Sum	mary
High*	19
Low	2
Total*	141
Mean*	9
Median	9

The asterisk can be expanded upon thus: some meetings 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:

7. Who may be affected by this activity? please tick all relevant and significant equality characteristics, stakeholders and barriers		
	y to your strategy, policy, servi characteristics	ce or function
Lquanty		
	Age	X Carers X Disability
	Gender reassignment	x Race Religion or Belief
	Sex (male or female)	Sexual orientation
X	Other	
areas that being)	at impact on or relate to equalit	partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and those sy: tackling poverty and improving health and well-
	pecify: Poverty, Child in Need or FFI funding, or other relevan	I (CiN), Children Looked After (CLA), those that
Stakeho		
X	Services users	X Employees X Trade Unions
X	Partners	X Members X Suppliers
	Other please specify.	
Potentia	l barriers	
	Built environment	Location of premises and services.
X	Information and communication	X Customer care
x	Timing	Stereotypes and assumptions
	Cost	X Consultation and involvement
X	Financial exclusion	X Employment and training

specific barriers to the strategy, policy, services or function

Please specify:

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. For the MSE a key focus has been on potential providers being measured on their commitment to providing the same level of customer care as is current.

Timing: Timing for the outcomes of any proposals following on from the results of the MSE remains a potential barrier - 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. It also informed the 5 focus groups held.

Financial exclusion: <u>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 were 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 formed a key 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.</u>

Employment and training: The EDCI considerations for staffing affected by these proposals have been addressed in a separate screening document published at the time of the decision being taken at June's Executive Board. 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. 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 the original engagement 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. The subsequent focus groups since the decision as taken have been held at a variety of locations, online and offline, and at differing times alongside a survey to better capture thoughts, concerns and feelings of parents.

This is further supported by the ability for parents to speak to their setting managers. Setting managers know their areas very well, and know their families individually. Often conversations happen at the nursery, informally between the managers and parents, and this is the preferred medium for many. By empowering setting managers to have conversations about the MSE, the closures, and the future of the service and providing them with resources we have been able to reach parents, including those more digitally isolated, or isolated by language barriers. By having these multiple methods for engagement, parents have been 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:

MSE: There are no direct negative impacts of the 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:

• Continued engagement with parents at the affected sites.

9. Will this activity promote strong and positive relationships between the groups/communities identified? Х 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 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) Х Yes No Please provide detail: Action required: 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) Х No Yes

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 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 conduct specific further screenings or assessment following the MSE.	Following the MSE	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.	Following the MSE	Potential decisions following the MSE have due regard to the children with SEND at each setting.	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
Continue to communicate with all relevant parties on a regular basis in relation to Childcare provision provided by Little Owls.	Ongoing action.	The website to continue to be updated regularly as the proposals progress. Decisions and implementation timelines to be highlighted.	Vicky Fuggles, Amanda Ashe

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,	27.09.2024
	Transformation &	
	Partnerships	
Date impact assessment completed		27.09.2024

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

	As part of Service Planning performance monitoring
X	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 <u>equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk</u> 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 Governance Services	Date sent
For Delegated Decisions or Significant Operational Decisions – sent to appropriate Directorate	Date sent:
All other decisions – sent to equalityteam@leeds.gov.uk	Date sent: