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## 1.1 Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006 puts the provision of childcare in statute for the first time and Local Authorities will be expected to act as market managers for this provision on a local basis. As a step towards achieving this aim, each Local Authority must publish a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 under the direction of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Their guidance states that a childcare sufficiency assessment must be carried out by the Local Authority on a three year cycle with an annual interim review. In Swindon this duty falls to Swindon Sure Start Partnership.

Many varied stakeholders contribute to the successful working of the childcare market. This is a broad study of how Swindon based stakeholders such as the Local Authority, schools, childcare providers, parents, children, employers, colleges, Job Centre Plus, the Children's Information Service and others work together to deliver an effective childcare market in Swindon, enabling parents to access work and training. The main objective of the report is to assess the extent to which supply of childcare meets demand in Swindon for working parents of children aged 0 – 14 (16 if the child has special needs).

Since the launch of the National Childcare Strategy and following successive initiatives to develop childcare services in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors, Swindon Sure Start Partnership has invested considerable resources in the growth of the childcare market. This means at the time of researching this report, there was already a well-developed childcare and early education base in Swindon.

Recommendations drawn from the information gathered focus on two main areas:

- **Gaps in services.** These could be geographic, eg an area where there are insufficient early education places to meet parents' entitlement. There may also be gaps in types of provision eg services to meet the needs of secondary school children.
- **Market improvement.** This could be where an existing aspect of the childcare market could be promoted or informed more effectively. Examples of this could be where targeted information would enable more parents to access the childcare element of working tax credit or where parents need additional support during changes to their childcare needs eg during transition to school.

Recommendations from the analysis will be incorporated into Swindon Sure Start Partnership's business plan 2008 – 2009. The outcomes from this will contribute towards Swindon achieving the level of childcare sufficiency required by March 2009.

## 1.2 Scope

The scope of the recommendations that are made in this report is limited by the activities laid down in the Childcare Act 2006.

The Local Authority uses the General Sure Start Grant to direct and administer these activities. Where appropriate, feedback from consultation has influenced the recommendations for improvements to them. They include:

- providing information for parents to meet the Children's Information Function through Swindon Borough Council's One Stop Shop and Contact Centre, and its website [www.swindon.gov.uk](http://www.swindon.gov.uk)
- providing information to childcare practitioners through Swindon Sure Start Partnership's website ([www.earlyyearschildcare.org](http://www.earlyyearschildcare.org)) and through regular newsletters
- subsidising training and qualifications for childcare practitioners
- advising practitioners on meeting and exceeding childcare standards
- offering grants to childcare providers to create new or extend existing provision to meet demand

While feedback on some occasions expressed sensible suggestions for market improvement, on some of these occasions the Local Authority either has no influence or the suggestion falls outside the scope of this narrow area of work. These include:

- school admissions which is managed by the Local Authority but falls outside the scope of this report
- changes to the tax credit system which is administered by HM Revenue and Customs
- the regulations around the duration and start date for early education funding as this is determined by the DCSF
- pricing of childcare other than limiting support to childcare providers who charge above the thresholds at which parents can optimise their tax credit claim
- the Local Authority (excepting schools) delivering childcare other than where it already exists as this contravenes DCSF directives.

### 1.3 Acronyms and Glossary

#### Acronyms

DCSF	The Department for Children Schools and Families (formerly the DfES Department for Education and Skills)
SSSP	Swindon Sure Start Partnership
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education

#### Glossary

Tax Credits	The system administered by HM Revenue and Customs through which parents can make a claim for money to support their childcare costs
Nursery	A daycare provider usually offers childcare for 0 – 4 year olds to enable parents to access work or training
Pre school	A group that usually offers early education sessions for three and four year olds
Out of School	Breakfast, after school or holiday childcare for school aged children
Childminder	A self employed registered childcare provider working in his or her own home. Childminders can offer daycare and/or out of school care dependent on their registration
Children's Centres	The family support and health services available to parents and children in an area of Swindon for 0 – 5 year olds
Extended Services	The services available to parents and school aged children including childcare and out of school activities
Atypical Care	Childcare that is required before 8am, after 6pm or at weekends and bank holidays. The term is also used to describe childcare needed to cover patterns of need that are subject to change eg to cover shift work
Maintained Nursery	Early education delivered by a school
Setting	The childcare sector term for a childcare provision eg a daycare setting or an out of school setting