509. ' .

The expenditure on Day Nurseries in the last published accounts of your Committee (1943/44) was £293,929. The amount for which provision has been made in the current estimates is £287,100. Both amounts include the expenditure of the Education Committee in this connection. On Resident-

ial nurseries the comparable figures are £213,350 and £213,759 respectively. The expenditure on Day Nurseries qualifies for 100 per cent. grant and on Residential Nurseries a grant is made on a per capita basis.

Although it appears likely that the Ministry will continue this service longer in Birmingham than in most other parts of the country, your Committee have thought it desirable to review the position having regard to current events and, in particular, to determine their post-war policy in relation to Day Nurseries as a permanent service.

It will be remembered that War-time Nurseries were established for the express purpose of caring for the children of mothers employed in factories and other services having for their purpose a direct or indirect contribution to the war effort. Children of mothers not so employed were not qualified for admission. The final cessation of hostilities will bring with it the end of the purpose for which these nurseries were provided.

Under Section 204 of the Public Health Act, 1936, "a welfare authority may . . . make arrangements for the care of . . . children who have not attained the age of five years and are not being educated in schools recognised by the Board of Education." The power conferred by this section has not previously been implemented in Birmingham to the extent of making provision for the institutional care of such children on a daily basis.

It has been represented to your Committee that nursery accommodation may be required for any or all of the following groups of children:

1. Children who have been orphaned or abandoned and are in the care of the Local Authority.
2. Children whose mothers are temporarily unable to look after them by reason of another pregnancy, an illness or some domestic crisis.
3. Children whose mothers may have to go out to work for economic reasons, e.g., the children of widows or illegitimate children.
4. Children who live in very overcrowded housing conditions and whose opportunities for fresh air and play are very restricted.
5. Children whose mothers have no domestic help. Such mothers may wish to have a half-day or a day free either regularly or occasionally, to enable them to do their washing or shopping or to go out and have some recreation with their husbands.

It may well be appropriate here to consider the provisions of the Education Act, 1944, in this connection, as they have a considerable bearing on these problems in relation to children of two years and upwards.

The Education Act, 1944, Section 36, states: "that the compulsory school age means any age between 5 and 15 years," and in Section 8 (6b), "that the Local Authority shall have regard to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who have not attained the age of 5 years, by the provision of Nursery Schools, or, where the Authority consider the provision of such Schools to be inexpedient, by other provisions.

WAR-TIME NURSERIES.

In July, 1940, your Committee reported the acute necessity to make provision for the care of children up to five years of age arising out of the employment of large numbers of young married women in essential services as a result of the war. Contemporaneously with the Committee's proposals a communication issued jointly by the Ministries of Health andLabour was received, emphasising the necessity for immediate arrangements to be made for the provision of day nurseries for the young children of women so engaged. The implementation and extension of this policy in Birmingham has been the subject of report from time to time. The ultimate programme agreed with the Ministry was 80 such day nurseries (a number providing a 24-hour service to meet the needs of women employed on night shifts or at irregular hours) and 75 were ultimately provided. Subsequently, sanction was obtained for the provision of Residential Nurseries to meet the needs not met by Day Nurseries, and premises at The Oaks, Droitwich, and at Walsall Grove, Wednesbury (previously used by your Committee as convalescent homes) were adapted and applied to this purpose, and Pype Hayes Hall has been used for both types of accommodation. The problem of accommodation and care for such children has also been approached from a different angle by the Education Committee, who have provided Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes for that purpose on a substantial scale.

The position at the time this report was submitted for the Committee's approval was that 75 day nurseries provided 3,970 places and five residential nurseries 215. During the week ending 21st April last, 3,114 children attended the day nurseries, of whom 1,147 were under two years of age and 1,967 from two years to five years of age; 242 mothers placed two children each in the nurseries; 118 children under two years of age and 67 between two and five years were cared for in the residential nurseries and 16 mothers had two children each in such nurseries. Your Committee have not been prepared to accommodate more than two children of the same parents.
The Nursery School is primarily an educational establishment for children from the age of two upwards, whose parents wish them to receive the type of instruction provided there. Attendance is not compulsory, but children ordinarily attend daily during the school term. The mothers of children attending Nursery Classes do not necessarily go out to work. It is not a condition of admission to a Nursery School or Class that the mother goes out to work, that she is ill or that she needs relief from her domestic duties. Provided the necessary accommodation is available, any child between the ages of two and five of any parent, can be admitted for whole-time attendance at a Nursery School or Class.

There are approximately 86,000 children in the City under five years of age, of whom approximately 60,000 are between two years and five.

Representatives of your Committee have discussed in conference with representatives of the Education Committee the many problems common to both Committees in this connection and further conferences may be arranged at appropriate times. It appears that the Education Committee Nursery Classes established under the provision of the 1944 Act and have regard to suitability of hours and continuity during school holidays where the need is established.

Your Committee have arrived at the conclusion that the provision of Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes in implementation of the duty imposed by the 1944 Act will meet the reasonable needs of mothers whose children of two years of age and over require care during day-time hours and that the continuation of War-time Day Nurseries to meet this need is neither necessary nor desirable. Many problems will arise in the inevitable period of transition and it may be that in a number of instances premises and staff at present used in the War-time Nursery will be required by the Education Committee in early implement of their programme. Your Committee will give the Education Committee the utmost assistance and co-operation in their power. Representatives will be made to the Ministry of Health at the proper time and should it appear likely that the present service is to be discontinued at short notice.

The problem of the care of the child under two years of age is not so readily determined. Your Committee are emphatically of the opinion that the proper care of children of such tender age is the responsibility of the mother and should be her first concern. They are mindful that the Maternity and Child Welfare services of this City, which have been developed so fully and successfully, have as a major objective the education of the mother in the care and welfare of her child. To set up an elaborate organisation such as is suggested by the Department of the Nursery policy in relation to the child of under two years would appear to be an exact reversal of the policy hitherto adopted by your Committee.

Apart from such considerations it is material to note that to be effective Day Nurseries must be geographically placed near to the demand. A small number of such nurseries would meet only local demands and the provision of a number sufficient to cover the City as a whole would require financial provision out of all proportion to the problem.

Your Committee is advised that, while such statistical data as are available leads to no unassailable conclusions, it must be recognised that general epidemiological grounds as certain that young children, aggregated in any kind of institution, whether it be Day Nurseries or Nursery School, must be subject to higher risks of spread of infectious diseases than would be the case were they in their own separate homes. In regard to children under two years of age, your Committee attach special importance to this conclusion.

Your Committee are of the opinion that the paramount needs of those for whom some such service is imperative must be met otherwise than by the provision of Day Nurseries. Children under the care of the Local Authority are already adequately served. Those whose mothers are temporarily unable to look after them by reason of pregnancy, illness or other domestic crisis can be and are already being accommodated in short-time Residential Nurseries. Illegitimate children come under the purview of your Committee and of the Public Health Department, and such problems as arise are dealt with in several alternative ways. The remaining problems are best solved by better and adequate housing and the provision of adequate financial assistance to meet current needs.

Your Committee’s conclusions may therefore be summarized as follows:

1. The day-time care of children over two years of age can be met where the need arises by the provision of Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes.

2. Day-time Nursery accommodation for children under two years of age is most undesirable. In appropriate cases where the need is proved, provision is best made in short-term Residential Nurseries.