

The Aberdeen City Council expansion of Early Learning and Childcare

Executive summary

The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) from 600 to 1140 hours required the delivery of a multi-faceted cross council programme of work to ensure that families were able to claim their 1140 hours of ELC from August 2021.

Despite the challenges of delivering the Programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Project team have successfully met their objectives. Key achievements include:

- All eligible children were able to access 1140 hours from August 2021;
- There is evidence of highly effective Programme governance;
- There is evidence of an increase in the quality of provision;
- The ELC workforce expanded from 224.16 FTE in 2017 to 460.31 FTE in 2021 (expressed as headcount this is an increase from 358 employees in 2017 to 539 in 2021). This is as a result of the inclusion of Support Workers, Modern Apprenticeships and amended contracts of existing staff;
- The successful delivery of 27 capital projects;
- 82.9% of parents and carers who responded to a recent survey are satisfied or very satisfied with the location of their ELC provision; and
- 82.4% of parents and carers who responded to a recent survey are satisfied or very satisfied with their child's experience of expanded ELC to date.

The Programme was delivered on time and on budget.

Background

A number of clusters across Aberdeen City Council collaborated to expand the provision of funded ELC from 600 to 1140 hours. Work across the organisation ensured that all eligible families were able to take up their expanded offer of ELC from August 2021.

The policy intention of the expansion was to support child development through the provision of high-quality services and in doing so support parents to return to work or study. Scottish Government stipulated that services should deliver:

- quality;
- flexibility;
- accessibility; and
- affordability.

Aberdeen City Council welcomed the opportunity to expand services in recognition of how the expansion of ELC could help reduce the poverty related attainment gap and improve long term outcomes for children and families. Planning for the Expansion was detailed in the Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan which was approved by the then Education and Children's Services Committee in September 2017.

The Delivery Plan presented an ambitious vision of ELC for Aberdeen City Council which extended beyond the national policy intention in order to ensure that the programme would help support the delivery of outcomes stipulated in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP).

This report seeks to evaluate delivery of the programme against the approved Delivery Plan in order to identify any early feedback and inform the development of the next ELC Delivery Plan.

Vision for Early Learning and Childcare across Aberdeen City

The Aberdeen Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan of 2017 detailed a local vision for the expansion programme.

'We will provide local flexible early learning and childcare which is accessible, affordable, is of high quality and builds on provision already in place to develop a flexible ELC offer, available up to 50 weeks of the year.'

Provision will be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of individual children, parents/carers and the wider community and will support parents to work, train or study, especially those who need routes into sustainable employment and out of poverty.

Each local offer of ELC will be designed around the needs of residents in each locality wherever possible. Quality and availability will be overseen by a skilled individual who will support families to design the flexible offer most likely to meet their individual needs. The skilled individual will also be well placed to advise how the local offer should continue to be amended or enhanced to meet local need'.

The Aberdeen City Council Delivery Models

Consultation with families was used to help shape the delivery models approved by Committee in 2017. Parents told us that they wanted choice in service delivery models. Some families were keen to secure their full entitlement over a few longer days (8am – 6pm) with others looking for access to daily provision for shorter periods. Some parents and carers were keen to access provision all year round with others preferring a term time only model. Parents wanted to be able to purchase additional hours of ELC if helpful for their family.

Families wanted to access provision locally with the most favoured option being provision at their local school or in their immediate community.

As a result of our consultation with families, 2 delivery models were approved as part of the Delivery Plan:

Delivery Model 1

Children would be able to access local ELC provision offering all 1140 hours in a fully flexible way over 50 weeks a year. Provision to be available from 8am to 6pm

Delivery Model 2

Children would be able to access provisions offering shorter blocks of ELC, in the traditional term time structure, 9am to 3pm.

In order to ensure the focus on quality, the following parameters were applied:

- The 1140 offer should be taken over no fewer than 38 weeks from the start to end of each academic year (including school holidays)
- An ELC session will not be less than 2.5 hours or more than 10 hours
- No more than 2 providers will be accessed (3 when childminders are used) to ensure continuity of relationships and care for children
- Children accessing their ELC entitlement over lunchtime (12.30 - 13.30) will be entitled to a free lunch
- Where school based provisions were unable to deliver a fully flexible provision, flexibility would be made across the Associated School Groups (ASGs).

Guiding Principles

As the initial Delivery Plan was being developed stakeholders expressed preferences for how settings should operate and the following guiding principles were used to inform our approach. It was agreed that all ELC provision across Aberdeen City should:

- Capitalise on intergenerational support
- Offer a level of personalisation to ensure maximum gains for children
- Be nurturing, inclusive and offer a holistic service to children and families in keeping with GIRFEC
- Feel owned by the community
- Fully utilise outside space to promote wellbeing
- Be staffed by skilled practitioners who have opportunities to develop their skills further through a suite of professional learning suited to their individual needs and situation
- Be quality assured across a locality by one skilled practitioner who will have a key role in supporting parents to fully capitalise on the local offer and shape subsequent offers

The vision, delivery models and guiding principles were used to inform the ELC Delivery Programme and all three have all been used to help evaluate the programme.

Central Structures to support high quality delivery of 1140

The Delivery Plan outlined the need to review the Early Years Structure to ensure that the service was able to support a transformed model of service delivery. The need to ensure that services worked more closely together across a locality to address some of the wider policy benefits of the programme guided thinking alongside the need to focus on improving quality.

A new Early Years Structure was developed, consulted upon and approved in 2018. The service worked with colleagues in People and Organisational Development to move to the new structure.

Self-evaluation and inspection reports evidence that the new structure is helping to improve the quality of the ELC offer across the city. Undertaking the restructure at an

early stage of the expansion was invaluable in helping ensure the Education Service were well placed to deliver on the policy objectives.

Governance of the Expansion of ELC

Following the approval of the Delivery Plan in 2017 the ELC programme was overseen by a Programme Board as part of the Council's executive governance arrangements. Membership of the Programme Board reflected the cross-council nature of the programme with representation from Education, Capital, Finance, Corporate Landlord, Legal and People & Organisational Development.

The Programme Board governed and provided strategic direction to the 5 main programmes of work: Quality, Workforce, Communications and Engagement, Capital, and Funded Providers. The Board monitored the finances and subsequent delivery of benefits, both financial and non-financial.

The ELC Board was chaired by the Director of Customer and membership consisted of:

ELC Programme Board	
Director of Customer	Talent Manager, Resources, People and Organisation
Chief Operating Officer	Solicitor, Legal
Chief Officer Education	Programme Manager
Chief Officer Capital	Principal Architectural Officer
Chief Officer Corporate Landlord	Estates and Assets Manager
Chief Officer Finance	Building Standards Manager
Finance Partner	

Meetings of the Board were scheduled monthly with collaboration between times as required.

The Programme Board provided highly effective oversight of the programme with the frequency of meetings and proactive approach to identifying and addressing emerging issues identified as a key strength. This approach helped Officers collaborate to address any potential risks timeously to keep the programme on track. The frequency of meetings was particularly helpful during the final stages of the programme due to supply chain issues experienced as a result of the pandemic.

The governance arrangements capitalised on the range of expertise across the Council and are thought to be a very good example of a 'one Council' approach to the delivery of a major programme.

Programme 1 – Improve Quality

Locality Lead Officers

The restructure of the Early Years team enabled the creation of Locality Lead Officers to oversee both quality assurance and the delivery of professional learning across a community. This approach continues to work well due to Locality Lead Officers having good awareness of practice and development needs across their locality.

There is emerging evidence that the new Early Years structure and provision of Locality Lead Officers is successfully driving an improvement in quality. At the time of writing the Delivery Plan in 2017 there was historical trend data evidencing that a higher proportion of Funded Provider settings securing positive inspection gradings than those of the Local Authority. This trend is no longer apparent with a more even distribution of quality grades. The pausing of the inspection programme has hampered our ability to evidence this change fully and Members will be able to check progress through the regular performance reports presented to the Education Operational Delivery Committee.

The inspection regime was suspended in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and resumed in August 2021. Two settings have been inspected since the resumption with both gaining awards of good or better. Both settings have significantly improved gradings from their last inspection.

The local knowledge held by Locality Lead Officers (LLOs) is helping to provide invaluable insights into the needs of each community to ensure that the models offered meet the needs of children and families. This local knowledge will help LLOs advise Nursery teams on how to shape the local offers made to Parents and Carers through Parents Early Education Partnership (PEEP) and will also help to inform our work in the years ahead.

Quality Assurance arrangements

A new quality assurance programme was successfully developed and implemented. As well as a core programme, the team can now respond proportionately to need at pace and offer a higher level of support and challenge where required. Provisions in need of additional support can access an increased number of visits and Locality Leads make themselves available to model and coach the development of best practice. This more agile approach is helping us address emerging risks more quickly. Analysis of quality data indicates that our current arrangements are far more effective and that the central team have greater oversight of quality in each setting.

The refreshed quality assurance framework is more fully aligned with the school improvement framework and this is helping to ensure most effective use of central team resource. Improvement required across the Early Years is now targeted through the National Improvement Framework Plan and delivered as part of the wider education service improvement plan. This is helping address some of the disconnect evident previously.

Improvement Planning

Staff teams are encouraged to link with their Locality Lead Officer and reflect on their improvement plans in order to engage with professional learning opportunities

appropriate for their service improvement. This approach has made a more direct link between areas for improvement and the provision of high quality professional learning. As a result ELC practitioners engage more effectively within a 'cycle of involvement' now and have greater ownership of improvement planning.

Developing Leadership Capacity

The 'Stepping into Leadership' programme was developed to increase confidence levels amongst Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) and address existing skills gaps which prevented EYPs moving into a Senior Early Years Practitioner (SEYP) role. It also aimed to support higher level thinking skills, including reflection and critical analysis to take account of the need for more strategic planning in the SEYP role. The programme aimed to maximise internal progression and develop talent pipelines by 'growing our own' senior staff. Staff entered the programme with varying levels of confidence and understanding of the SEYP role.

The programme has been a great success. The seven sessions were designed to empower, upskill and support internal EYPs in applying for the role of SEYP, with a focus on leadership and management themes.

A total of 30 practitioners participated in cohort 1, with 18 of these having now been successfully appointed to the role of SEYP. Following the success of cohort 1, this programme has been repeated, with 27 practitioners in attendance, with a further 20 progressed to the role of SEYP.

The programme was highly effective in clarifying the additional duties and responsibilities expected of those in a senior role and empowered those with leadership potential to develop the skills and the confidence to apply for and secure leadership positions effectively.

'Empowering Us' Programme

In light of the ELC Expansion, it was recognised that our current ELC leaders would benefit from the opportunity to develop their current skills/practice. In collaboration with colleagues within People & Organisational Development, Family Learning, Excellence and Equity Practitioners and the wider education team, the ELC Locality Lead Officers designed a long term voluntary CLPL programme, aimed at ELC Leaders (SEYPs and DHTs) to upskill the current workforce and promote quality ELC provision. The programme utilised digital tools for online delivery, timetabled to meet the needs of the workforce.

The intended outcomes for the programme were:

- Increased knowledge and skills in ELC leadership practices.
- Increased awareness in the expectations of leaders in ELC.
- High quality ELC provision for all children and families in Aberdeen City enhanced by skilled staff.
- In line with the 'Funding Follows the Child' approach, equitable ELC offer regardless of provider.
- Improved quality grades across the city, particularly in Leadership and Management.

Sessions were well attended by a mixture of SEYP, PT and DHT staff. Feedback was positive and highlighted that having space to reflect with other ELC leaders was beneficial for staff development. Inspection reports are evidencing higher leadership gradings and this is thought to be partially attributable to this programme.

Provision of high-quality professional learning for the workforce

A highly skilled workforce is critical for the delivery of a quality service and the Early Years team refreshed approaches to ensure a wide range of opportunities were available by drawing on the ACC capability framework and Learning Academy.

Both the change to ELC operational times and the COVID 19 Pandemic presented challenges to staff accessing professional learning. To combat this, the Early Years team have taken a digital delivery approach, utilising the platform ACC Learn and the digital capability available across the Council. The Council wide investment in digital has positively impacted on staff in Local Authority settings and in Funded Provider settings.

A combination of accessible and flexible online materials can now be accessed independently/as a staff team via the ACC Learn portal with virtual sessions delivered termly via Microsoft teams. The materials include continuous reflective questions, prompts for further development and opportunities to link with other teams in the locality via the online discussion boards as well as sign-posting to further materials or training opportunities in Aberdeen City (i.e. – specialist outdoor work with Juliet Robertson). The discussion board for sharing good practice has been welcomed by colleagues who report being able to make links with other settings within the community with greater ease. The digital organisation of the offer enables senior leaders to reflect on their improvement plan for the year and engage with the online materials appropriate for their teams' development.

Reflections made with staff in both the local authority sector and the Funded Providers sector indicate that professional learning is more successful when delivered to multiple members of the team in order to create a shared ethos. Practitioners also note that professional learning is more impactful when they engage in the 'cycle of involvement' that includes opportunities for small group work, large group work, self-study and reflection with others. A number of practitioners who took part in a recent survey (58.8%) are happy to access materials online.

Now that this approach is well established, live sessions are reviewed annually to take account of inspection feedback/quality assurance visits to meet the sector's needs. Previous live sessions become online materials to enable them to be accessed by others. The team have developed and continue to deliver a good mix of national, regional and local offers as well as leading supportive collaborative groups to share practice.

The refreshed approach to the delivery of professional learning has improved accessibility, enabled greater personalisation and helped staff make connections with others to share best practice. The agility and responsiveness of the model is thought to be a major strength.

Uptake for Eligible 2s

In keeping with the Delivery Plan, the provision of effective support for eligible 2s was reviewed, as only 7% of eligible 2s accessed their offer in 2017. This was lower than the national uptake of 9%.

A recent *Public Health Scotland* 'Early Years Expansion – learning from the baseline' survey (October 2021) observes that uptake of eligible 2-year-old places remains modest with the national average continuing to remain at 9%. Consultation with eligible families to understand this better identified issues with the accessibility of services and branding which have been addressed through the expansion programme and led to a local increase in uptake to 9% in keeping with the national average.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will increase demand for eligible 2s places, particularly as the post-pandemic picture emerges. To encourage greater engagement and uptake with families, the Early Years team will continue to work closely with health visitors and other professionals, to identify eligible families and ensure that children receive the benefits of their entitlement.

Eligible 2s: Improving Accessibility and Flexibility

A 'Stay, Play and Learn' trial was commissioned to help inform our approach. The trial provided a flexible mode of delivery for up to 20 families and was highly evaluated by those who participated, although the uptake of eligible 2s places continued to be low. Further exploration with families highlighted that families found it hard to commit to the model and would prefer to access provision not limited to eligible 2s.

The Delivery Plan highlighted a need for a proactive strategy to address issues with 'branding' around provision for Eligible 2s. A review of current research was led by The Educational Psychology Service to inform future service delivery and the decision was taken to make the offer for Eligible 2s available in mainstream ELC settings.

In response to the ask of families, the service integrated eligible 2s into several of our school nursery settings rather than restricted to a stand alone 'Me2 service'. To this end, in our capital projects we increased capacity and refurbished settings to create enabling learning environments that would enhance the ELC experience of eligible 2-year-olds and their families, with particular focus in our priority areas.

The table below outlines the capacity within our local authority settings in 2020/21 and 2021/22, which has increased by 66 spaces. There is scope to further increase spaces, in some of our other capital projects, which are not currently registered with the Care Inspectorate for eligible 2-year-olds, which provides additional flexibility to the service. The Early Years team will continue to monitor demand as this integrated approach to eligible 2s embeds in our local authority settings.

2020/2021		2021/2022	
Setting [2020/2021]	Operating Capacity	Setting [2021/2022]	Operating Capacity
Ashgrove Children's Centre	24	Ashgrove Children's Centre	24
Williamson Family Centre	20	Muirfield School Nursery	10
Deeside Family Centre	24	Walker Road School Nursery	10
Riverbank	10	Riverbank School Nursery	10
Seaton	30	Links Nursery and Hub	40
		Woodside School Nursery	10
		Gilcomstoun School Nursery	10
		Tillydrone Nursery	20
		Cummings Park Nursery	40
Total	108	Total	174

Families seeking to use their entitlement also have the option of accessing ELC at a funded provider or childminder, the latter not having been an option for families prior to the implementation of the expanded hours. In 2020/21 there were 24 eligible 2-year-olds accessing up to 1140 hours of ELC with a childminder. However, at the time of writing for session 2021/22 eligible 2-year-old families have not sought to access provision from a childminder. Further research will be undertaken by the service to identify the reasons for this shift in use – while speculative at this stage – greater promotion of childminders as an option may need to be undertaken to raise their visibility amongst families and health professionals. As outlined in the aforementioned Public Health Scotland survey, for the most disadvantaged children who are eligible for ELC at age 2, developmental outcomes improve after a year of funded ELC, with the exception of gross motor development. To this end, the service will be seeking to collaborate further with partners and local communities to promote the eligible 2-year-old entitlement.

Eligible 2s: Quality

In preparation for the expansion to 1140 hours of ELC, the Educational Psychology team have developed an invaluable 'Ready, Steady, 2' resource to support staff to work with Eligible 2s and those who have not met developmental milestones.

Five pilot nurseries (Kirkhill, Muirfield, Riverbank, Tullos, and Woodside) have accessed virtual training sessions developed by the Educational Psychology Service to complement and build on key messages within the Ready Steady 2 resource. SEYPs from each of these settings have participated in group coaching facilitated by the Educational Psychology Service, to support the implementation of the approaches recommended in Ready Steady 2. The virtual training sessions are available for all ELC settings within Aberdeen City to access. The Educational Psychology Service, Early Years Team and Scottish Childminding Association are promoting this universal resource across the City.

Feedback from staff is positive and the qualitative evidence from families accessing eligible 2 provision is also reflective of a positive ELC experience. Parents/carers have responded in their end year of review forms:

“I really appreciate all your efforts in looking after my son. Since he started nursery I have noticed so many changes and development – especially in his language.”

“I’m more than happy with how my daughter has been getting on at nursery. She’s more than happy to come every morning and see her teachers and friends.”

“My son seems to really enjoy nursery, especially the outdoor play.”

By investing in the upskilling of staff, practitioners are better able to support families who are in vulnerable situations and provide targeted support to children who are at risk of poor outcomes. The service will continue to monitor demand and evaluate the impact of change to ensure we are improving outcomes for our eligible 2-year-olds.

Excellence and Equity Practitioners

As part of the expansion programme, a new role of Excellence and Equity Practitioner (EEPs) was established and recruited to Bramblebrae, Kittybrewster, Riverbank, Seaton and Woodside schools. The 5 EEPs were allocated to settings serving areas of deprivation to provide additionality to help address the poverty related attainment gap. Each EEP has worked closely with leadership teams to determine the focus of their work.

Work has been undertaken to improve knowledge of the impact of poverty on families. The introduction of EEPs in the ELC workforce has had a positive impact on supporting children and their families in our priority areas. In partnership with community groups the EEPs have been involved in initiatives such as ‘Healthy Family Fun Day’ which showcases a variety of services across the community that are available to support and advise families. Through the delivery of PEEP groups, outdoor learning sessions and Book Bug sessions they have supported the positive engagement of families in their children’s learning. Early engagement with families through links with toddler groups has supported the building of relationships and smooth transitions into the ELC setting.

The EEP role has been welcomed by staff, children and by families. The Covid-19 restrictions hampered some planned work as EEPs have worked to help mitigate the risk of setting closure due to staffing shortages as a result of staff being required to isolate pending PCR test. We will continue to monitor the impact of the EEPs as the Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

PEEP Learning Together Programme

At the heart of the ELC Expansion is increasing family resilience through improved health and wellbeing of children and parents, so as a Local Authority we took the opportunity to put significant resources into the PEEP ‘Learning Together’ Programme for ELC staff in both our school nurseries and funded provider settings.

The programme is designed for practitioners who work with parents and babies/ young children, to contribute to:

- strong parent-child relationships;

- increased parental knowledge and confidence in how to support their child's learning and play in day-to-day life; and
- children's personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, early literacy and maths, and health and physical development.

Sessions are delivered online via Microsoft Teams over four half day sessions and are ongoing. The practitioners engage with a small group during the training in order to develop confidence using the PEEP resources and are then introduced to the PEEP Team Network. 106 practitioners from ELC settings in Aberdeen City have completed the programme and are qualified to deliver PEEP as part of our universal family support offer. The delivery of the programme to parents and carers has been hampered by the Covid-19 restrictions although settings are using remote delivery where possible.

ELC Admissions

Key policies were refreshed to help deliver the expansion, including the ELC Admissions Policy. Routine cycles of review have been put in place to ensure that these key policies continue to meet the needs of families. Delays to the nationally delivered Early Years SEEMiS system have hampered progress with the development of associated systems and will not be available until summer 2022 at the earliest. To this end, in collaboration with web development colleagues we have built an interim online system to accept ELC applications and support the allocation process.

This interim system was put in place in January 2021, moving away from what had traditionally been a paper-based application system. With greater choice and patterns of attendance available to families, the online system facilitated the high number of applications to be processed effectively due improved data quality. The move to a digital application also offered greater convenience to families allowing them to apply any time or day within the admissions period.

Rapid uptake of the online admission system was reflected in the first week of admissions opening on 25 January 2021, with **1540** number of applications received. By the close of the admissions period on 18 February 2021, a total of **2562** applications had been submitted.

Following the allocation of ELC spaces, **90%** families received their 1st choice as per their ELC application. There have been **3002** 1st choice offers sent in total. 2301 1st choice offers were to On Time applications. There have been 3949 applications received as of today (10 January 2022).

- 76% got 1st choice offers in total
- 90% of On-Time applications got 1st choice offers.

In the absence of the National Early Years SEEMiS system, we continue to refine the interim online system to be open for ELC Admissions in 2022/2023. This is an iterative process as we continue to build on the feedback from families and improve the backend processing of the platform.

Building confidence in the delivering the curriculum outdoors

Considerable work has been undertaken to develop the use of outdoor space in order to improve the quality of provision.

Significant progress has been made in this area with two Aberdeen City settings recently featuring in a national conference: Learning Estates, which took place November 2021. The two videos below from Dyce and Middleton Park school nurseries show case the transformation of their environment and the impact specifically in relation to children's physical development.

[Our Journey to a Movement Rich Environment by Middleton Park Nursery on Vimeo](#)



Dyce ELC Outdoor Spaces: <https://vimeo.com/644276155>

How satisfied are parents and carers with their child's experience to date?

We asked parents and carers how satisfied they are with their child's experience of Early Learning and Childcare to date.

Of the 454 parents and carers who responded, 82.4% of respondents stated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their child's experience of ELC to date.

We asked parents and carers if they would be interested in purchasing additional hours / sessions over and above the statutory 1140 hours funded entitlement, should Aberdeen City Council be able to sell additional hours / sessions of Early Learning and Childcare to parents and carers who require additional wrap around care (subject to the availability of places).

29.2% of respondents said, that if made available, they would purchase extra hours of ELC.

A further 34.5% suggested that they would possibly purchase additional hours of wrap around care should they be available in the future.

22.9% said they would not purchase extra hours.

13.4% stated they were not sure if they would purchase more hours.

There is considerable evidence that the focus on quality is helping to improve outcomes for children and there is an appetite from parents to purchase additional hours. Data will continue to be monitored carefully to ensure that an agile approach is taken to continuous improvement. Work undertaken has successfully delivered the ambition contained in the ELC Delivery Plan of 2017.

Programme 2 – Workforce

Reviewing staffing structures

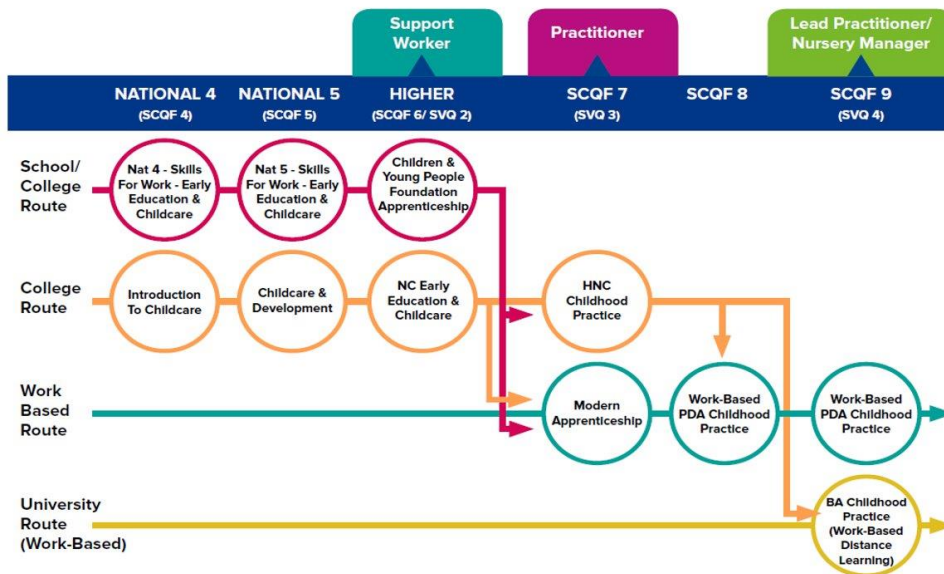
Analysis of the average cost of an ELC space in Aberdeen City in 2017 confirmed that the cost per learner was high compared to other Local Authorities and higher than the national average. This led to considerable work being undertaken to agree a sustainable staffing structure which would help develop a pipeline of talent into the sector whilst meeting quality standards. The approved new structure was implemented from August 2021 with a wider range of roles now evident with Support Worker roles and Modern Apprenticeships now available across settings. The impact of this change will be monitored closely but staff report that there is now a clear career progression pathway and there is evidence of greater diversity in the workforce in terms of age, gender and race.

Establishing the Early Learning and Childcare Academy

The Delivery Plan outlined that an innovative approach would be required to ensure we had a sufficient number of qualified staff to deliver an expanded offer of ELC.



To support the expansion of ELC, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Aberdeen City Councils collaborated with Training Providers and Funded Providers to establish an ELC Academy in 2017. The ELC Academy supported the recruitment and retention of quality ELC staff in the North East Scotland and was identified as national best practice. Noting the importance of developing appropriately targeted and engaging material to encourage school pupils into a career in ELC, the ELC Academy developed a Virtual School Roadshow with an animation and a toolkit for Guidance Teachers to promote ELC Careers to young people.



The materials were designed to clarify all of the different pathways into ELC. Details about the ELC Academy was circulated to all secondary schools and supported by a Social Media campaign and workshops offered across all three Local Authorities.



In collaboration with Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils under the umbrella of the ELC Academy Scot, we have been able to fund and deliver external trainers for ELC staff more cost effectively using digital delivery and this continues to be a long term agreement between the authorities. Feedback for these sessions has been overwhelmingly positive.

The ELC Academy launched the first Celebrating ELC Awards in 2019 to celebrate and share good practice across the ELC sector. The aim of the project was to promote collaborative working across the authorities and create 'benchmarks' for good practice and improvement. The categories included Working in Partnership, Outdoor Environment, Indoor Environment and Team. In Aberdeen City 7 ELC settings successfully achieved an award.

The Scottish Government launched a national recruitment campaign "Early Learning and Childcare Recruitment 2 Careers Changers/Returning to work audience" in January 2019. ELC staff supported the campaign by being available for field stands at Union Square and other central locations. ELC staff ensured that potential candidates were linked to local employers and training providers. In addition to this, the ELC Academy implemented a recruitment campaign with ELC pop-up shops rolled out across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire (including a drop-in session at Bon Accord Centre).



The establishment of the Early Learning and Childcare Academy helped raise the profile of careers in the sector and clarify the routes available to staff. The success of the model influenced the recently launched ABZ works website and associated social media platforms.

Growing our own

The potential shortage of highly qualified staff required to meet the needs of the expansion was a key consideration. We were also aware of the wider ELC sector and wanted to limit movement of staff from our Funded Providers. These factors led us to develop a bespoke in-house traineeship programme, where existing internal council employees, looking for a new challenge, could train to become an Early Years Practitioner, on a secondment basis from their substantive role (on their existing terms and conditions of employment).

Three cohorts of staff, 76 employees in total, undertook the bespoke and innovative traineeship from across the council. Of these, 63 have successfully completed the traineeship (83%) and gained permanent Early Years Practitioner roles. This proactive approach to 'growing our own' has significantly aided Council workforce and financial planning and addressed a risk in the delivery of 1140 hours of ELC. Feedback from settings has been very positive about the quality of practitioners.

Modern Apprentice Programme

A further initiative developed in future-proofing the ELC workforce, and addressing the need for increased staff sector wide in Aberdeen, was to include an ELC Modern Apprentice (MA) role within the new staffing structure. Once again this is a 'grow your own' approach and provides an opportunity for young people, aged 16-24 to undertake a tailored apprenticeship in early years, on an 'earn whilst you learn' approach.

The Apprenticeship programme has been very successful, to date we have 37 ELC Modern Apprentices, (increasing from 7 in 2019) with a mixture of hours and working patterns, who are supported to complete their qualification by 3 local training providers. The inclusion of MAs also allows our current Practitioners to take on the role of a mentor and develop their coaching and leadership skills.

On successful completion of the MA programme, our apprentices can apply for Support Worker or qualified EYP roles, with our guaranteed interview scheme. This again provides that talent pipeline in Early Years, providing developing opportunities for staff, aiding retention and supporting our workforce for the future.

Developing Outdoor Practice

In October 2019, 19 Early Learning and Childcare professionals went on an ERASMUS funded mobility study visit to Saltamontes Outdoor Nursery in Madrid. The group spent 5 days in Spain, learning outdoors, every day. They returned to share their experiences and to adapt and progress their working practices in Aberdeen.

The study visit equipped the group with reignited passion and extended knowledge, with 100% of the participants engaging in outdoor learning professional development sessions in the year following their trip, as well as continuous professional dialogue and sharing of outdoor practice within the network and beyond. Around 40% of the ERASMUS participants have become part of Specialised Interest Groups, where they are undertaking innovative research projects alongside other network members and will showcase their findings at an open Outdoor Conference.

A second ERASMUS study visit, to North Germany, was cancelled in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a virtual conference enabled us to visit Waldkindergarten, in Flensburg, in June 2021, joining Petra Jäger for three days of training.





In June 2019, WIGLS, a Community of Practice (Working In Green Local Spaces), was developed to support practitioners in their outdoor ELC work. Beginning with 38 practitioners from 30 settings it quickly grew to 78 practitioners from 38 settings, enabling the development of a shared outdoor perspective in many of the city's ELC settings.

WIGLS has built capacity in our ELC workforce by offering on-line and in-person training, participation in ERASMUS conferences, hospitality visits across the city, small practitioner research groups (SIGs) and peer-mentoring groups. The programme was successfully moved on-line and is still on-going. The wider dissemination of this work is under way, to be shared city-wide and further afield.



Mud, Mess and Magic

In Collaboration with Creative Star, Mud, Mess and Magic was developed as a guide for ELC staff to naturalise their outdoor environment. The guide enabled staff to create, enhance and physically improve the ELC outdoor space in order to create spaces ideally suited to delivery of the curriculum.

The guide has supported staff teams to enhance approaches to gardening, the promotion of biodiversity and realise other climate friendly benefits. In some cases school gardens are now providing fruit, vegetables and berries that help children make connections by preparing these for snacks and celebrations.

The promotion and investment in outdoor learning has been critical to our response to the pandemic given the clear positive wellbeing impacts on children and staff and all settings enjoy sustained periods of time outside.

A number of settings applied to be part of a pilot scheme in partnership with Juliet Robertson, Education consultant, using the Mud, Mess and Magic document as a baseline for developing practitioner knowledge and the physical outdoor space. The impacts of the covid 19 pandemic meant that the settings involved opted to pause the pilot until Jan 2022.

Increasing the Number of Childminders to promote choice

A key change to the expansion to ELC was the ability of childminders to deliver up to 1140 hours as part of the funded entitlement, this had not been the case previously.

The Early Year team worked closely with Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to build relationships with the childminding community of Aberdeen. As of 2020/21 there are approximately 130 registered childminders operating in Aberdeen.

The childminders are key partners in delivering the expanded hours. Some children cope better in home like environments with childminders as they have low adult/child ratios. For many children, this 'home from home' experience is exactly what they need to provide the most nurturing environment. The childminder sector occupies a very distinctive place in the provision of early childhood services and family support. In many places, they offer an attractive and flexible provision for parents many of whom have working commitments. They often provide highly valued services in home settings where other services may be at time unavailable or are less flexible.

To increase choice and capacity across the city we undertook a procurement exercise to bring childminders who met the National Standard into partnership with Aberdeen City Council. A series of engagement sessions were held in Autumn 2019 and Winter 2019/2020 with the childminding community. The engagement sessions were an opportunity to discuss the policy drivers and benefits of the introduction of the expanded hours for children and families.

Following this exercise, 72 childminders have now entered into partnership with Aberdeen City Council to deliver the expanded hours. Prior to this we had 6 childminders in place piloting the entitlement. This reflects an increase of 1100%. Out of the total of 130 childminders currently operating in Aberdeen, 55% of the city's

registered childminding sector, who meet the criteria set out in the National Standard, are in partnership to deliver the expanded hours.

The impact of this increase results in greater choice to families and provision being more evenly distributed geographically. As of April 2021, 135 eligible pre-school children accessed up to 1140 hours from childminders across the city. Families have improved flexibility with some childminders starting their working days at 7am and others working as late as families.

Building Capacity in our childminders

All of Aberdeen City Council partner provider childminders have been through specific training and meet the requirements of our Quality Assurance procedures. Crucially, they also meet Scottish Government's National Standard for delivery of ELC.

In order for childminders to be used by families as part of the universal offer of 1140 they require to be registered and quality assured by the Care Inspectorate. The Early Years' service has successfully utilised the Learning Pathway for childminders to increase the number of fully qualified childminders across Aberdeen City. Approximately 8 childminders working in the city in 2017 held a qualification at SVQ Level 3 and were fully registered to deliver funded ELC, this has now extended to 72 fully qualified staff. A further 17 Funded Provider childminders are currently undertaking SVQ Level 3 qualification and 2 are undertaking BA Childhood Practice. Additionally, most of our childminders now have access and have logged into ACC Learn to support their on-going development. The service will continue to work with SCMA to support best practice.

Work to bring childminders into partnership has been highly effective to date and will be on-going.

Supporting practitioners to gain the qualifications they require

Aberdeen City Council is committed to expanding, developing and training the ELC workforce and offers funding annually to support workforce development and expansion in the early learning & childcare and out of school care sectors.

The purpose of the funding is to:

- Support early learning & childcare and out of school care staff to undertake recognised accredited qualifications;
- Ensure workers are appropriately qualified for their current job role and to meet Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registration requirements;
- Support Managers and/ or lead practitioners to meet the entry requirements for the PDA Childhood Practice Award at SCQF Level 9.
- Support Managers and/ or lead practitioners to undertake the BA Childhood Practice at The University of Aberdeen

Since 2017, 279 ELC workers have been funded to undertake accredited qualifications, at Support Worker, Practitioner and Manager levels. Aberdeen City Council has agreed to continue this commitment for the next 3 years through a joint Framework Agreement with Aberdeenshire Council. This will ensure we can support staff training, retention and career progressions whilst achieving best value.

Changing contracts of current staff for the new delivery model

The introduction of delivery models which extend beyond traditional school opening hours and school terms led to a need for our workforce to provide the staff cover to support this change. A review of contractual hours and working patterns of our existing ELC workforce was undertaken to determine what was needed to support the change.

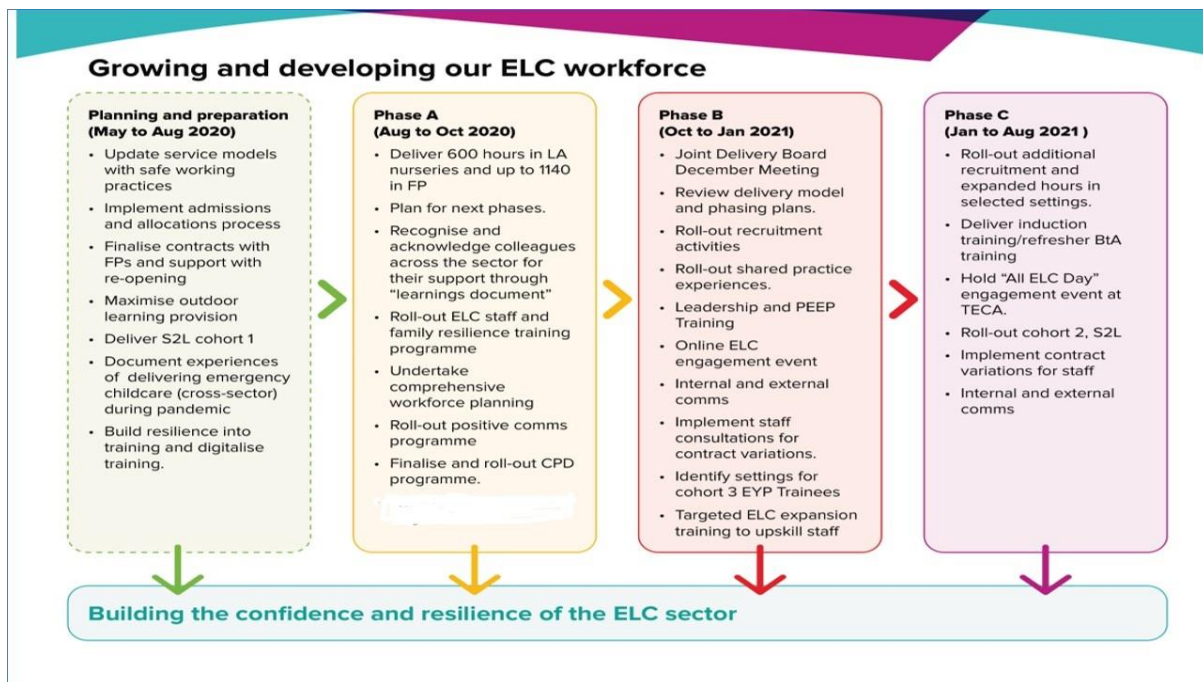
A period of engagement and consultation with staff had begun at the start of 2020 but had to be put on hold to enable the service to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Close working with People & Organisational Development and Trade Union colleagues saw this work resume from February 2021 with a significant engagement and consultation exercise to enable staff to state their preferred working patterns within the new model.

Despite the challenging timescale, revised working patterns to support the new models were implemented in August 2021, and in the vast majority of cases employee's preferences were able to be accommodated. To deliver the new model has resulted in some employees moving from 39 to 52-week contracts, increasing their contractual hours and in some cases moving to alternative settings depending upon their contractual preference. Of existing Early Years staff that chose to move onto a 52-week model approximately 150 contract variations were processed as part of the change to the service.

The delay in this process due to the pandemic led to many new teams not being in a position to form until August 2021 and this placed a pressure on settings to build a sense of teamwork at the same time as they welcomed children to access their expanded offer. There is no doubt that this presented challenges for settings, and we are exceptionally grateful for the professionalism of staff shown.

In a like manner, Facilities colleagues also undertook a period of consultation with staff to discuss the changes to ELC delivery. Throughout this process the programme team tried to align staff consultations across Education and Facilities teams to ensure information was shared within the same period. With sites open for more hours and many settings effectively operating all year-round additional support is required of janitorial, catering and cleaning colleagues. The expansion of ELC offered an opportunity for existing Facilities staff to increase hours if they wished to do so, and in the case of catering colleagues move onto a 52-week contract. Approximately, 38 contract variations were processed for catering colleagues.

The service are extremely grateful for the flexibility and engagement of Trade Union colleagues in supporting solutions to meet the needs of all staff.



Diversifying our workforce

Progressive steps have been undertaken to increase the diversity of the workforce in relation to age, gender and race.

There is clear evidence of a changing age profile with a significant increase in younger age groups now represented and this will greatly support workforce planning in the longer term. In 2017, there were only 31 employees within the 16-24 age range working in ELC. This has increased to 61 in 2021 and is thought to be due to the wider range of roles now available (figures are expressed as headcount). The introduction of the Modern Apprenticeship programme for Early Years, which targets young people aged 16-24 has directly led to an increased number of younger employees within the overall ELC workforce.

There is also some evidence of a very slight increase in the number of male staff choosing to work in the sector. In 2017 the ELC workforce had only 6 members of staff identified as male, this has now increased to 11.

Based on the available evidence the programme has contributed to greater diversity within the ELC workforce. To note, data is limited as it is optional whether employees wish to provide this information. Based on responses from employees who chose to provide this information, as of 1st September in 2017, there were 9 employees who identified as being of an ethnic minority (excluding white minority) background. In 2021, this number increased to 17, with a smaller number identifying as 'Other' <5.

The service will seek to continue to develop the progressive growth in the diversification of the workforce by building on the initiatives set out by the ELC Academy and the Modern Apprentice scheme. In doing so the Service hopes to connect with a diverse range of audiences and raise the profile of ELC as a career choice.

The increase in the workforce and diversification of skills sets has considerably aided our work to expand provision across the city. The provision of a wider range of roles has introduced a clear career pathway with more entry routes. This change is helping to utilise the skills and expertise from a broader demographic and has helped us diversify the workforce. The delay in consultation and engagement with staff led to ELC teams forming for August 2021 and the pressure this placed on staff teams is recognised although could not have been mitigated. Work undertaken has successfully delivered the ambition contained in the ELC Delivery Plan of 2017.

Programme 3 – Communication, Engagement and Digital

Central to the work of the ELC Expansion programme was our communication and engagement activities. Communication cut across all our workstreams. This took on further importance as the programme adapted to the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. We sought to align local communications with national initiatives wherever possible.

A communications strategy was developed and regularly reviewed to ensure that key transformation messages and specific project information were shared with all relevant stakeholders. Moreover, that the views and experiences of stakeholders continued to contribute to the development and delivery of the programme. A series of engagement events took place with different stakeholders – school senior leadership groups, the early years workforce, facilities colleagues, funded providers and families – while the specific interests of each group differed the team sought to ensure that communication was purposeful, clear and of value.

Child and Family Centred Provision

In line with the ethos of the ELC Delivery Plan (2017) we continued to consult with families to ensure we delivered an ELC provision that was child and family centred. The programme maintained high levels of engagement with parents, grandparents, carers and potential parents. A survey undertaken between September and November 2019, gained 881 responses. This was followed up in January 2020 in-person engagement sessions held with parents/carers in each ASG across the city, which reached approximately 1000 parents in total. Most participants who responded to the survey and attended the engagement sessions, had one or two children, and a significant number of respondents had children between the ages of 2-3 years old and 3-4 years old for their first and second child. This being the cohort of children who would immediately benefit from the implementation of the policy. A summary of the results from our consultation and research was made publicly available on the Aberdeen City Council website and directly influenced our work:

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/Results%20of%20ELC%20Parents%20and%20Carers%20Survey%20-%20November%202019.pdf>

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/ELC%20Focus%20Group%20Presentation%20-%20January%202020.pdf>

Sharing Progress

To build on the levels of engagement with families and to highlight the transformative level of investment being made in Early Years, a series of press releases, online content and short films were released. This enabled parents and the wider community to follow the progress of the programme and see first-hand how the programme sought to deliver on the ask from families. In relation to the capital programme of works we sought to highlight how we were creating enabling environments for children to learn and play; embedding nurseries within the community – ensuring that facilities were accessible and local to families; and developing family learning and support.

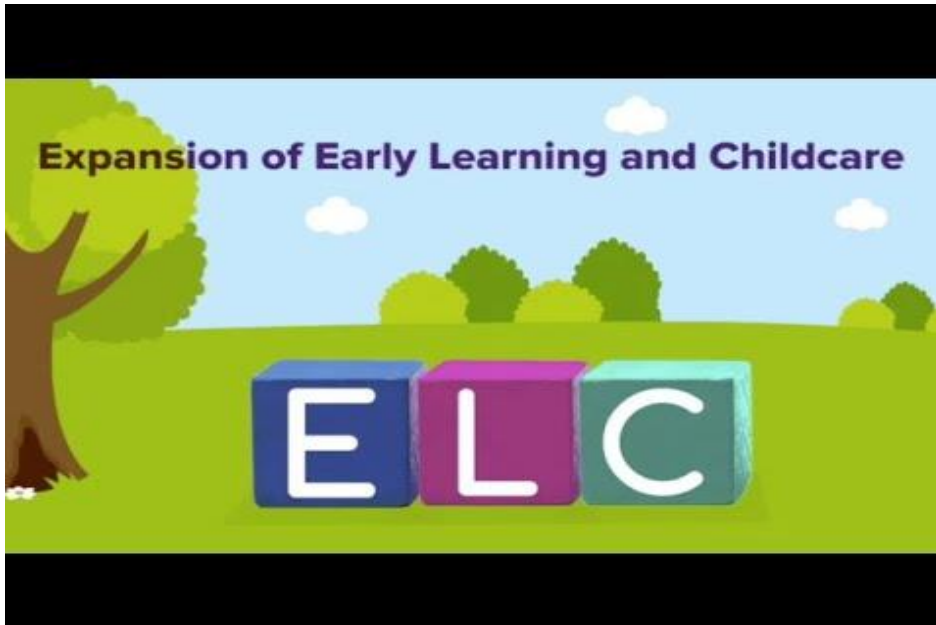
The use of multi-media and online content took on greater importance due to the challenges of the pandemic. We invested more heavily in multi-media and virtual tours to help share progress with families and the wider community, with the most recent film showing completed settings being utilised by children.

[Project Reel: LC Projects Progress \(28 January 2021\)](#)



[ELC schools Final HD 1080p - YouTube](#)

[Project Reel: ELC Projects Completed \(24 November 2021\)](#)



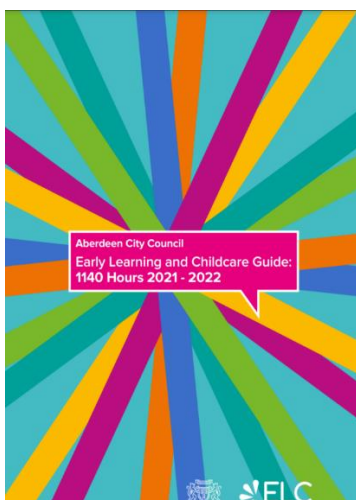
[Final ELC school build 1 ELC HD 1080p - YouTube](#)

Policy Development

The Early Learning and Childcare admissions policy was refreshed to take account of the new delivery model. Following approval at Committee, routine cycles of review have been put in place to ensure that this key policy continues to meet the needs of families. The timely approval of the policy enabled effective communication with families about the offer available to them from August 2021. To that end, a comprehensive jargon free guide was developed on the expansion of ELC for families to access. This guide was also promoted via the Family Information Service, made available on the Aberdeen City Council website and referenced in the ELC admissions applications.

A copy of the guide can be found here:.

https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/ELC%20Guide%201140%20Hours_2021_2022.pdf



Feedback on the communication from families is generally positive. However, despite the range of communication methods utilised the latest ELC parent/carer consultation highlighted that only 51.5% of 453 parents and carers who responded were aware of Gaelic Medium provision.

51.5% of parents and carers are aware that Gaelic medium Education is an option at Gilcomstoun school, with 48.5% being unaware.

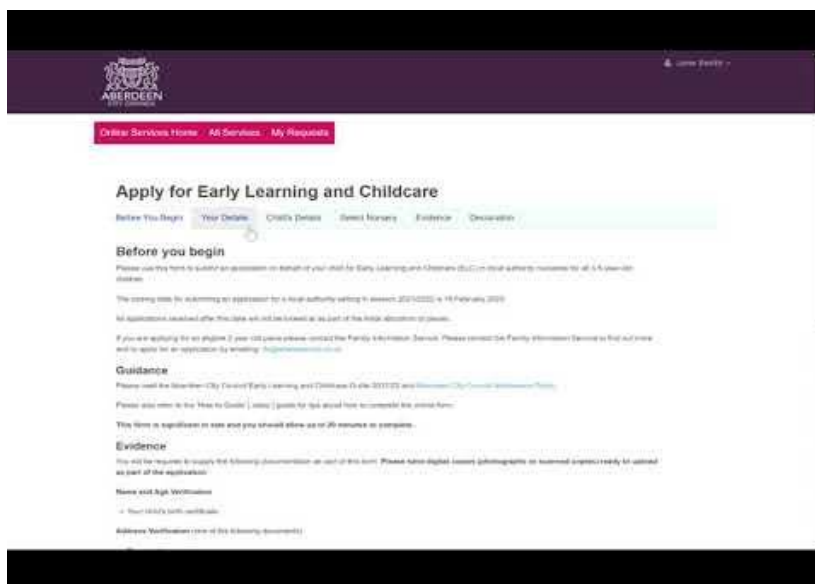
The vast majority of parents and carers (69.8%) indicated that they would not be interested in a Gaelic medium education in ELC, whilst 12.8% were interested in a Gaelic medium education in ELC. 12.8% of respondents did not know.

There is a need to promote provision at Gaelic Medium. The service will take this as a learning point.

Allied to the change to the admissions policy, the programme team also sought to support parents through the admissions application process. To raise awareness around the changes to ELC - the team worked closely with colleagues in Customer to produce customer communications, online help videos and updated the online chat bot with frequently asked questions.

The introduction of the aforementioned digital triage tools enabled the Admissions team to make better use of resources, during this busy period. Approximately, 17% of all applicants accessed the online 'how to videos', while this figure isn't a high percentage, we anticipate the utilisation of such support tools will steadily increase as the online system and ELC expansion embeds.

ELC Application 'How to Videos': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN_CMDvADrQ



To continue to ensure high engagement with families during the admissions period, we will continue to work with Customer colleagues to draw on their expertise to sense check usability and accessibility as we strive to deliver a positive customer experience.

Using technology to share progress

We used social media to share information and promote good practice and opportunities via our Twitter feed @EduAbdnELC. With over 550 followers, this helps to reach parents, providers and everyone with an interest in ELC in Aberdeen and beyond.

The Education Newsletter was used to share progress towards the expansion of ELC and allowed the service to share some visuals given the restrictions on in-person visits to new settings. Ideally, we would have welcomed communities into new settings and this will be considered as the restrictions in place as a result of Covid-19 are eased.

Given the restrictions in place, a number of films were commissioned to help families tour provisions virtually. Although families would have undoubtedly appreciated an in-person visit, the 3D walk throughs were an innovative tool that we applied to support nursery inductions and enable children and families to explore and connect with the new settings. The immersive 3D walk throughs focused on some of our newly completed nursery projects: Tillydrone nursery; Cummings Park nursery; Kingsford School nursery and Gilcomstoun School nursery / Sgoil-Araich.

The walk throughs offered an opportunity to explore the recently completed nursery projects and virtually tour the buildings. The high resolution 360 degree walk throughs were shared with schools and made available to families and the wider community. Settings will prioritise welcoming children into new settings as soon as restrictions are eased.

To access the 3D walk throughs please click the links next to the bullet point below:

Kingsford School Nursery, Mastrick (64 place nursery)

- [Kingsford](#)

The Links Nursery, Seaton (90 place nursery)

- [Link Nursery](#)

Tillydrone Nursery, Tillydrone (56 place nursery)

- [Tilydrone ELC](#)

Cummings Park Nursery, Northfield (80 place nursery)

- [Northfield ELC](#)

Gilcomstoun School Nursery / Sgoil-Araich, City centre (88 place nursery)

- [Gilcolmstoun](#)

Engagement with families registered for outdoor provision

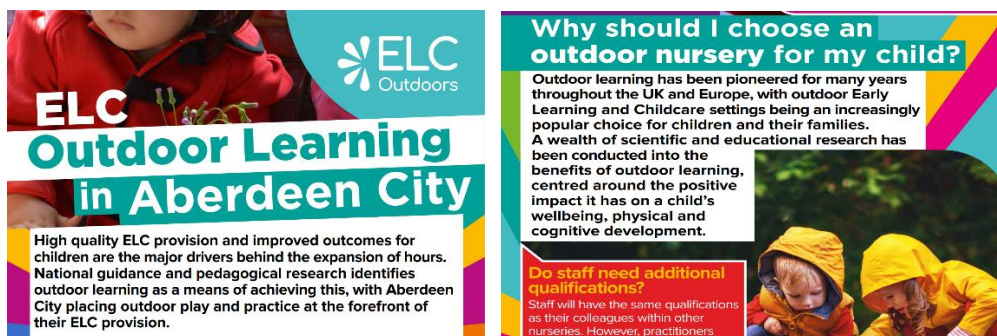
A cornerstone of the programme has been the investment in outdoor learning, and this is keenly reflected in the establishment of two new outdoor nurseries at Duthie Park and Hazlehead Park. Both will have an outdoor focus in their education and provision, but each will offer unique and varied experiences for children, families, staff and the wider communities. The establishment of the two new outdoor nurseries is a first for Aberdeen city and a pioneering provision for the Early Years sector. Regrettably, due

to the impact of the pandemic on the supply chain the completion time for the aforementioned projects was extended and both will be operational from January 2022.

The Early Years team have sought to provide more insight and understanding into the world of an outdoor nursery through the eyes and experiences of children and families by sharing information posters and video links.



<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/Outdoor%20Learning%205760x1080px>.



For parents who had applied for a place at the outdoor nurseries an online welcome/introduction session was hosted by the Outdoor ELC Manager at the

beginning of Term 1. Due to Covid-19 restrictions it was felt this would be a positive opportunity for families to meet the skilled practitioners that would be working with the children. Furthermore, it was also an occasion to discuss the values, aims and overarching pedagogy.

Those parents that had applied for a place at the outdoor nurseries are currently receiving their ELC entitlement at a contingency setting. The programme team have sought to keep families up to date with site progress sharing information bulletins and site photos. However, in a recent survey of parents undertaken by the outdoor nursery team families have reported that they would have preferred more information on the timings of moving into the new outdoor settings. The team appreciate that parents and carers seek certainty that is hard to provide in a rapidly changing context of supply chain issues exacerbated further by storm Arwen. Nonetheless, families reported confidence in the outdoor nursery team and positive experiences for their children:

“Thank you so much for providing a positive formative experience for my child, I know how important and valuable it is, and thank you all for contributing to that foundation.”

“The children all seem to have developed great relationships with the teachers, and AI never stops chatting about them! We’ve felt very supported.”

Engagement with key partners

Working with SCMA has improved quality as we all work together to support both childminders and families. We have regular ACC and SCMA meetings with childminders so that we can keep them up to date with changes and give them the opportunity to tell us how they are. Additionally, this gives us a chance to assess training needs. ACC have devised a communication procedure to ensure we have consistency for children and their families. We have been promoting strong communication between childminders and nurseries during our meetings and when on QI visits, this supports best outcomes for each child who is taking part in a blended placement.

Communication and engagement with settings

Regular communication was established to share updates on the programme with Local Authority settings. The service faced considerable challenges during the early stages of pandemic and this impacted on the frequency of communications. This was rectified by engaging with Head Teachers more frequently during Head Teacher meetings although the service recognise that communication would have benefited from being ‘in person’ in some cases.

The Locality Lead Officers played a more considerable role in helping settings plan for the expanded model and engaged with individual teams to explore staffing arrangements, this helped free up the Programme Manager to support the final stages of the capital programme. Some settings report that they felt apprised of progress whilst others would have welcomed more frequent communication. This will be taken as a learning point for consideration in any future programmes of work.

Consulting with children to shape service delivery

As stated in *A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland*, a key element of the 1140 ELC programme is to enable “ELC experiences [which] provide children with an important opportunity for maximising healthy eating and establishing healthy eating habits in the earliest years.” (p. 40, 2018) Many of our settings have embraced this new routine, with one shaping their approach to this by auditing continuous reflective dialogue with staff and collating observations and feedback from their children. Using this information, the setting changed their lunchtime routine to ensure it was meeting individual needs and providing the most nurturing experience for all children. In moving the location of this mealtime to a space within the Nursery, children shared their evaluations explaining that they liked having their food in the new area “because it’s still Nursery”, “it’s a nicer room”, “we just wash our hands and come through” and “I just like all of it!” The Early Years team continue to support settings to utilise this approach.

How satisfied are parents and carers with the induction process?

We asked parents and carers how satisfied they were with their child’s induction process, keeping in mind the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and Scottish Government guidance that all Early Learning and Childcare settings are following. The majority of the 454 parents and carers who responded were satisfied with the process.

68.3% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their child’s induction process.

13.1% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

10.2% were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied

The service recognises the need to review induction arrangements as soon as public health measures allow.

A range of communication and engagement methods were utilised but the Covid-19 restrictions did impact on the level of satisfaction of parents and carers in induction arrangements and in staff given the lack of in-person engagement. This will be taken as a learning point.

Programme 4 – Capital

Planning the location of capital works

At the time of writing the Delivery Plan, it was clear that there were considerable implications for our infrastructure. The previous Aberdeen City Council ELC offer has been delivered using a traditional model based in schools and did not fully utilise each building. There was a need to maximise the use of buildings whilst recognising that some would be unable to offer the flexibility so only able to provide ELC offer of 600 hours.

Projects were split into three Phases with an overall capital budget for the ELC Expansion Programme of £23million. Phase 1 of the expansion programme focused on areas that have the greatest difficulty in accessing services and targeted those most likely to benefit first. Phase 2 covered the other areas identified where there is a clear need for additional provision and the remaining Phase 3 projects addressed minor enabling and refurbishment works at other sites across the city.

ELC Expansion Capital Programme		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duthie Park Outdoor Nursery • The Links Nursery (formerly Woodlands) • Tillydrone Nursery • Cummings Park Nursery • Westpark School • Kingsford School • Woodside School • Tullos School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culter School • Cults School • Hazlehead Park Outdoor Nursery • Kingswells School • Kirkhill School • Broomhill School • Charleston School • Gilcomstoun School • Loirston School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danestone School • Dyce School • Glashieburn School • Forehill School • Fernielea School • Scotstown School • Kittybrewster School • Greenbrae School • Walker Road School

In total the capital investment comprised of works to 27 settings, of these 8 were new stand alone facilities, 2 were extensions and significant refurbishments of a standalone nursery, 1 was an extension to a school to form a new nursery, 2 were significant refurbishments within an existing school nursery, 1 was a significant refurbishment of a non-operational building to convert it into a new nursery and 12 were minor work refurbishments of existing nursery settings.

A comprehensive review of the suitability of school-based provisions was undertaken to determine local circumstances and inform each local offer based on the agreed delivery models. The provision of a quality outdoor learning environment was prioritised in recognition that such a provision will enable coherent delivery of the curriculum over a mix of sessions.

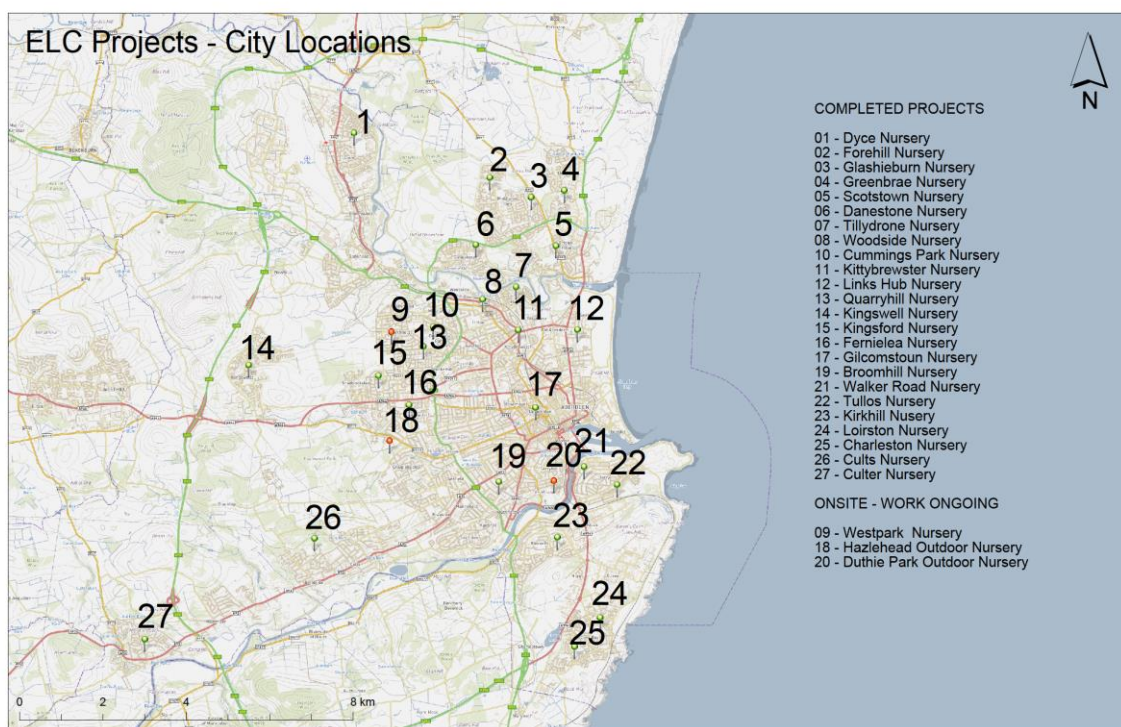
Buildings thought suitable to offer a higher number of ELC places if internal and external spaces were improved were identified. The feasibility of each was scoped to ascertain the long-term efficiency of undertaking this work to ensure that capital resource was spent wisely.

Aberdeen City Council's internal design team and appointed consultants were commissioned to produce a series of feasibility reports covering each site under consideration for expansion works. These studies were based on a design brief developed in collaboration with the Early Years Team, Design Team as well as Operational and Facilities Teams across the Council. This enabled a uniform approach to be taken across the estate when reflecting on existing facilities and new operational priorities moving forward under expansion.

To ensure a consistent approach across the city existing nursery facilities were reviewed to ensure the quality of their facilities were comparable to that of a new build. This is to ensure that for parental choice and staff retention the quality of the facilities is uniform across the city and to ensure the best outcomes for delivery of the ELC Programme.

The accessibility of services was analysed. Careful analysis of uptake of services evidenced that some families chose not to access their entitlement as they didn't perceive provision to be accessible and considerable consideration was given to travelling distances to remove this barrier.

The agreed capital projects spanned the city with a mix of new build, refurbishment and light internal works to enable the delivery of a flexible model to families across each Associated Schools Group. The map below outlines the geographic spread of the 27 ELC Expansion capital projects.



Oversight of the Capital programme

Oversight was provided by the ELC Programme Board. This cross-council approach was critical as the team managed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such challenges were managing national material shortages, extended delivery times and an increasing number of staff in the supply chain who had to self-isolate, all of which impacted on the availability of materials. Against this challenging landscape the programme team undertook a value engineering exercise to ensure that the programme remained on track financially.

The design team also worked closely with the main contractor to evaluate the impact on the programme with regard to Scottish Government guidance and the requirement to comply with physical distancing measures as well.

Framework

The framework considered and used was the Major Projects Procurement Hub Framework. This framework allowed one main contractor to be used across all the 27 projects ensuring a close collaborative approach and best market value. It also had the benefit of sharing knowledge between the design team and the main contractor at an early stage of the design process to ensure there was a slim lined procurement route.

Following the lockdown and the introduction of COVID 19 restrictions, to manage the pandemic, the close collaboration approach with the main contractor allowed us to maintain progress onsite and resolve issues across the whole capital programme to maximise savings and mitigate delays to the programme.

Design Approach

A brief was issued by the client in line with the Northern Alliance documents. This brief outlined the number of spaces and facilities required as well as identifying each location and the number of learners in each setting. Each location had a unique identity and issues to overcome whether it was an internal refurbishment or an extensive extension of an existing building or a new build.

Before starting the design of the individual properties by the individual designers a holistic approach was considered regarding the overall feel of the buildings. It was agreed that a light and bright open space with a welcoming feel was the approach to adopt. Spaces were to be welcoming and practical with the learners the main focus for the design. Investigation was undertaken regarding the materials to be used both internally and externally and a palette of materials and finishes were chosen by the client to be used across all the projects. The below extract was a useful tool when choosing considering this:

'For years there was a prevailing mindset that children should be surrounded by bright colour. Walls, carpets, curtains and even furniture were done in vivid hues from green, to red, yellow, purple or orange. Children actually find it difficult to relax and concentrate in an environment reverberating with loud colour. You rather want your setting to be homelike, with plants, area rugs, and wall hangings.' – Extract from *Space for Children*

The individual designers all approach the design to suit the different location, but all used the basis as above. This has resulted in a varied design solutions at each location, however the overall approach has been maintained across the board.

Capacity and Flexibility

A review of supply and demand data was undertaken in 2017 and again in 2019 to identify the required capacity and flexibility required by the service. This process enabled the team to have a high level of confidence in the projects being progressed and ensure that capital projects were being provided where most needed. The

programme team worked closely with the Improvement Service to sense check supply and demand data and welcomed the external challenge.

Combining the capacity from local authority settings and funded provider partner purchased provision across the city it was estimated that there would be a total capacity of 6,046,560 hours in 2021, which is effectively 5,304 bundles of 1140 hours of ELC. The required additional capacity for each ASG was identified and specified per setting to ensure that we had sufficient mix of delivery models available locally.

A total of 579 additional physical indoor spaces have been created as part of the ELC Expansion capital programme with no family asked to travel outwith their local area for ELC provision unless requested by them. This confirms that the capital projects have met the policy intentions outlined in the ELC Delivery Plan of 2017.

Service Model Redesign

Two service delivery models were identified to deliver 1140 hours of ELC:

- 9am-3pm x term time
- 8am-6pm x 46 weeks (offering a long morning; long afternoon or two and half days)

The new model of 8am-6pm x 46 weeks when applied enables the service to maximise the physical capacity of the building and effectively doubles the operating capacity. When current operating models for session 2021/22 are applied to our capital projects we have created 1,676 additional ELC spaces despite only creating 579 additional physical indoor spaces. This demonstrates the efficiency of the approach taken.

This provides additional flexibility and headroom to enable the service to meet and respond to demand as required. In the case of capital projects, the table below outlines physical capacity prior to works; physical capacity post work; current capacity based on some settings delivering a mixture of term time and full year models; and the final column highlights the maximum capacity when the 8am-6pm model is applied to all the capital projects. This ensures that we have a sustainable model and places us in an advantageous position if eligibility for ELC changes.

Project Name	Physical Capacity Prior to Works	Physical Indoor Capacity Post Works	Operating capacity based on current models applied for 21/22	Maximum operating capacity if 8am-6pm model applied to all capital projects
Greenbrae School	40	48	96	96
Walker Road	60	65	130	130
Quarryhill School	40	48	96	96
Tullos School	40	48	96	96
Links Nursery	0	90	135	180
Kingsford School	40	64	96	96
Tillydrone	0	56	112	112

Northfield/Cummings Park	0	80	160	160
Woodside School	55	80	120	160
Broomhill School	40	56	112	112
Gilcomstoun School	40	81	162	162
Culter School	40	48	96	96
Charleston School	30	40	80	80
Cults School	40	64	128	128
Danestone School	20	56	84	112
Duthie Park	0	20	40	40
Dyce School	60	60	80	120
Fernielea School	40	40	60	80
Forehill School	30	48	96	96
Glashieburn School	30	60	60	120
Hazlehead Park	0	40	40	80
Kingswells School	40	40	80	80
Kirkhill School	40	64	96	128
Kittybrewster School	30	30	60	60
Loirston School	60	60	120	120
Scotstown School	40	40	40	80
Westpark School	40	48	96	96
Total Spaces	895	1474	2571	2916

In total there are 45 local authority settings offering 1140 hours and 4 settings delivering 600 hours due to physical limitations of the building/nursery environment.

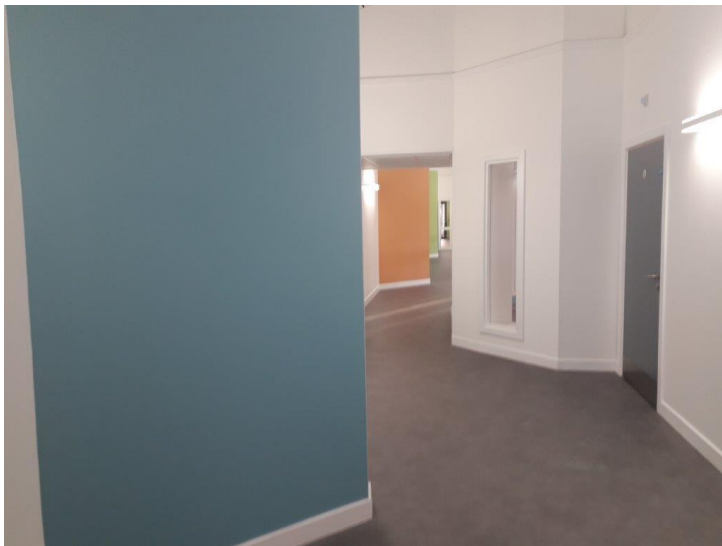
An overview of local authority settings and models delivering 1140 hours since the start of the new term (August 2021) can be found here: https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/ELC%20Guide%201140%20Hours_2021_2022.pdf

Spotlight on The Links Nursery and Hub

The Links was an existing building owned by Aberdeen City Council, but the original use had ceased. Being an existing building there were restraints when approaching the design. Structural works were undertaken to open the space and increase the size of the windows. This allowed the building to be brighter and allow for interesting spaces due to the existing building layout.



Picture above shows bright open space with access to the outdoors.



Creating an interesting space using the existing buildings layout.

The Links Nursery and Hub opened on the 16th August 2021. The renovated building is now an important part of our continuum for up to 90 children and their families who would benefit from a multi-agency response. The service aims to:

- Provide high quality provision, learning and experiences for all the children and families attending our setting.
- Improve children's outcomes and help close the poverty- related attainment gap.
- Increase family resilience through improved health and wellbeing of children and parents
- Support parents into work and study or training.

Currently 21 Eligible 2s and 25 3–5-year-olds access the ELC provision. Approximately 44.2% of children who attend the Early Learning and Childcare provision have English as an additional language (EAL).

The Links Nursery and Hub has a Health Visitor on site and one Band 3 Nursery Nurse who is employed by Health and currently awaiting start date. As the provision develops, there is the possibility of introducing additional multi-agency representation based on site, i.e. Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and Children's Social Work. The Hub enjoys a close working arrangement with the Family Learning team. This model provides an opportunity to test the benefits of the Community Campus principles agreed by Committee in November 2021.

Spotlight on Broomhill

Broomhill school nursery is a stand-alone facility with a capacity for 56 3 and 4 year old children at any one time. The nursery is located in the school playground, which enables the school and nursery setting to maintain a close relationship. Prior to the expansion programme, the original Broomhill nursery was split between a demountable in the school playground and an upstairs classroom. The latter room lacked free flow and children could not independently access the outdoor space.

The new nursery has a secure outdoor area to the rear, which the children are fully utilising and enjoying in all weathers. In line with our other settings Broomhill now has all the facilities identified by the Early Years Team as necessary to support the full offering of 1140 hours including improved staff facilities and Family spaces which allow staff to support and work with families alongside the children.



Broomhill nursery outdoor space



The activity space of the new Broomhill nursery is light and airy. The snack kitchen is integrated into the playspace enabling practitioners to have a clear line of sight of the children at all times. Adjacent to the main activity space are auxiliary facilities including a dedicated laundry and nappy change room. Consideration was given to the proximity of these spaces and the general layout of the building to ensure staff to children ratios aren't impacted and maximise the support available to children.





The school have been complimentary of their new nursery and shared, “what a difference to what they had!”

Spotlight on Kingsford

The new Kingsford nursery has increased capacity from 40 to 64 children at any one time. The nursery benefits from having two play spaces (physical capacity of 32:32). The play spaces have the option of being interconnected or separated by double doors with vision panels. The inclusion of the two play spaces provides flexibility to the service to offer a mixed model e.g. term time and full year-round, which increases choice and flexibility for parents. In the development phase of the project, design team colleagues thought of the use of building from the perspective of young children as well as adults. For example, windows are either full length or at child height to enable children to see outdoors. Details such as the positioning of soap dispensers and paper towel holders have been installed with children in mind - accounting for the height and reach of pre-school children.

The layout of Kingsford means there are very few corridors, so rooms and spaces are linked with the main entrance leading into a central cloak area/flexible hall allowing families into the heart of the building. This maximises the amount of usable available floor area for the building as well as bringing staff and families together to build close relationships and feel part of the nursery alongside the children. The central cloak area leads directly to family support spaces and both activity rooms so support families and children together.



Kingsford Nursery exterior and freeflow playspace (l to r)



Kingsford Nursery activity space and staff room (l to r)

Research identified the lack of appropriate staff space for practitioners in some of our existing nursery buildings. To this end, we have sought to offer high quality staff space and auxiliary accommodation. This staff space can also be used flexibly as a multi-purpose room if required.

Spotlight on Woodside

Woodside nursery was a substantial extension to an existing nursery building. The new nursery has the capacity for 80 children at any one time and offers ELC to eligible 2-year-olds as well as 3 and 4 year old children. The old nursery at Woodside did not have adequate free flow and to access the nursery children had to climb several flights of stairs. The new nursery space enables children to access the outdoors and offers them a rich learning environment in which to learn and play. Woodside like Kingsford has two play spaces and this offers a mixed model to be delivered from the nursery and meet the individual needs of families.



Woodside Nursery

Spotlight on Dyce

The scope of Phase 3 projects generally encompassed minor works and/or refurbishments. Examples of work undertaken in Phase 3 projects ranged from new flooring, redecoration, refurbishment of toilets, creation of a laundry room or nappy change. Dyce school nursery is one such example of a Phase 3 project. The works carried out comprised of new flooring, redecoration and the refurbishment of the toilets. The result was an enhanced nursery space that was fit for purpose for the delivery of 1140 hours. Dyce nursery has a capacity for 60 at any one time and offers a mixed model of 9am-3pm over term time and 8am-6pm over 46 weeks. The school were delighted with the results and described their refurbished playroom as ‘beautiful.’





Spotlight on Culter

To deliver the additional hours at Culter school nursery the existing nursery was extended and the internal spaces remodelled to create a fit for purpose environment. The flow of the nursery has been improved and the activity space is light and airy with free flow. The outdoor area is fenced and there is a mix of hard standing and grass areas, the nursery also has access to a 'secret garden', which the children can enjoy. The extension also enabled the required supporting accommodation to be included: nappy change, new toilets, a snack kitchen, a family room, accessible toilets and staff accommodation, staff toilets and a reception room. A laundry, internal store and comms room as well as cleaner's store and external store were also part of the works.

The design team considered the situation of the nursery and opted for a brick extension and reused the granite from the existing nursery to create a facility that was in keeping with the surrounding buildings and area. Physical capacity increased from 40 to 48 children at any one time.



Culter school nursery



New Culter school nursery entrance



Culter school nursery playspace – free flow doors and bright and light windows. Internal resource store off the activity space.



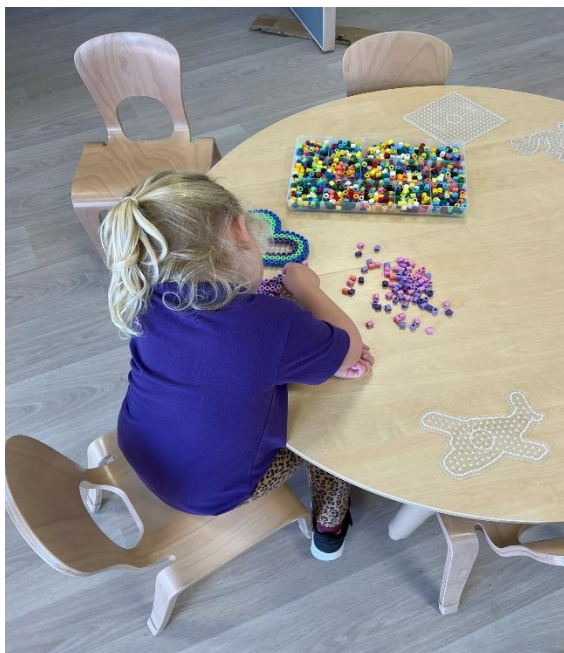
Culter school nursery snack kitchen integrated into activity space. Note:- low level sinks for children to access and clear line of sight for staff from kitchen area into the play room.



Culter nursery laundry room and nappy change room.

Spotlight on Cults

Cults nursery project involved a substantial extension and remodelling of internal spaces. Two interconnected nursery playspaces with free flow were created. Previously, the nursery did not have fit for purpose free flow. New toilets, nappy change facilities, resource store, family room, office space, new cloak area, a laundry room and comms room were also created as part of the building works. The outdoor space is extensive and secured with a perimeter fence. The outdoor area features a slabbed area and turfed external play areas. Cults nursery has increased from a registered capacity of 40 to 64 preschool children at any one time. The nursery is delivering an 8am-6pm model over 46 weeks of the year.





Children at Cults nursery learning and playing

Parents and children can enter through main reception, to the right of the reception area is a reception office. Barrier matting covers the reception area. Families and children enter through double doors, which leads them into a corridor space from which they can access the nursery rooms.

Roof lights keep this area light and they can be opened for ventilation.

Off the main reception area are the auxiliary spaces – office space; family room; visitor toilet and accessible toilet.

Playroom 1 has two low level sinks; one adult height sink and free flow with external doors to access the outside space. Flooring is nonslip and barrier matting has been laid down at the external door entrance.

The room is bright and light with floor to ceiling windows to the front and external free flow doors to enable the independent access to outside. Playroom 2 is a similar space with free flow access.

Staff accommodation is located off the left of the main reception area of the nursery and has fobbed secure access. All doors to the auxiliary accommodation are secured and accessed via a fob.

The Family room is located off the reception area. Staff have been PEEP trained and the addition of a family room within the nursery, enables staff to support and build relationships with families. The room has been designed with a small kitchen area as well to create a comfortable and homely environment.

Spotlight on Tillydrone and Cummings Park

The ELC Expansion capital programme has established new standalone nursery facilities within the Tillydrone and Northfield areas of Aberdeen. The newly built nurseries are fit for purpose and have created high quality and impactful learning environments. The total number of children that the nurseries can accommodate at any one time is as follows:

- Tillydrone nursery – 56 children at any one time

- Cummings Park nursery – 80 children at any one time

Aberdeen City Council sought to appoint an ELC provider to deliver funded ELC to 2–5-year-old children, within the two aforementioned Council owned purpose-built nursery settings. The nurseries are situated centrally within both communities. The location and design of the nurseries drew on the feedback from parent/carer consultations undertaken as part of the ELC Delivery Plan as well as quantitative evidence of supply and demand. The expansion team sought to ensure there was sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of individual children, parents/carers and the wider community to support parents to work, train or study, especially those who need routes into sustainable employment.

Virtual tours of the stand alone provision can be accessed via the links below:

Tillydrone Nursery,

- [Tillydrone ELC](#)

Cummings Park Nursery, Northfield

- [Northfield ELC](#)

The new facilities allow for a provider to deliver ELC in new, purpose-built nursery settings. It is also an opportunity for the provider to build relationships and work in partnership with the community to improve outcomes for children and young people.



Tillydrone nursery



Tillydrone nursery - activity space



Cummings Park nursery

Spotlight on our Outdoor Provisions



[credit Halliday Fraser Munro]

Despite the delay to our two outdoor provisions as a result of supply chain issues, children, families and staff of Duthie Park Outdoor Nursery and Hazlehead Park Outdoor Nursery have effectively transitioned and established themselves in their temporary bases.

The Outdoor ELC staff have built strong, nurturing relationships with children and families, resulting in full attendance of children who were previously tentative in accepting their temporary offer. Families from both provisions have provided positive feedback on the practitioners' pedagogies and approaches to parent partnership working, sharing thanks "for the trouble [they] have taken in helping [their son] to settle in well and a special thank you to [his Key Worker] for her detailed daily reports as to their son's progress; they are reassuring, helpful and much appreciated." Another parent added how "lovely [it is] to hear how close the Hazlehead outdoor kids have become and [their son] is very comfortable in nursery with his buddies and teachers."

Furthermore, parents have expressed how effective the induction process has been for their children where they "speak so fondly of everyone there". Lastly, a family have shared their delight in the progress they have observed in their child's wellbeing, development and self-regulation, where they have seen a "massive change in him, much more open, controls better his frustration, his confidence is much better now, he is singing songs all day, starts to make up sentences...and I must say he is very much used to coming every morning as he wakes up himself at 06.15, eats and is ready pulling his Dad's hand to come to the nursery."

Both ELC teams have also maximised this opportunity of collaborative working across their provisions, as well as with colleagues outwith, to share and build upon their outdoor pedagogy and assist in the development of two other outdoor spaces of new ELC builds. In the lead up to the completion of Duthie Park and Hazlehead Park outdoor settings, the Outdoor team are now planning the transition process to ensure

children, families and staff have opportunities to begin to build a connection with their new spaces and be involved in this exciting next step in shaping their provision. Our Lead Outdoor Early Years Practitioners have also focussed on making links with the Environmental Service team and wider community organisations in order to lay foundations for future collaborative work.



Duthie Park outdoor nursery rear extension

Realising Change

The transformation of the buildings and environments enables the transformative nature of ELC to be realised, making a real and meaningful difference to the lives of children and families in Aberdeen.

We have received positive feedback from staff that we have created positive and enabling environments for children to learn and play. While it has been challenging to deliver a programme on this scale against the backdrop of the pandemic, schools have commented that seeing the “children enjoying the new space has made it all worth it”.

The provision of quality outdoor learning environments has been a key ambition for the ELC expansion programme in recognition that such provision has a positive impact on a child’s development. The programme has sought to either create or enhance free flow in our ELC settings to enable children to independently access the outdoor space. Schools have feedback that this is supporting children’s creativity, health and wellbeing as they learn and explore their outdoor environment.

The inclusion of a family room in many of our projects has created a space for skilled Early Years practitioners to offer family support in an inclusive and supportive environment. As previously discussed, we have sought to ensure that spaces are welcoming, light and bright for staff, families and children to enjoy.

A key element that has contributed to the successful delivery of the ELC programme is the adoption of a ‘one team’ approach with colleagues across clusters - Capital, Corporate Landlord and Education - working in a coordinated and integrated manner. This approach contributed to the delivery of fit for purpose nurseries in which skilled Early Years practitioners can improve outcomes for children and families.

What do parents tell us about the choices available now?

454 parents responded to a recent survey on our provision of Early Learning and Childcare. Responses were gleaned from all eleven of the Aberdeen City’s ASGs with responses from those accessing provision through the Local Authority and from Funded Providers.

Associated School Groups (ASGs)	Responses	Percentages
Aberdeen Grammar School	45	9.9%
Bridge of Don	26	5.7%
Bucksburn	67	14.8%
Cults	45	9.9%
Dyce	4	0.9%
Harlaw	35	7.7%
Hazlehead	49	10.8%
Lochside	68	15%
Northfield	33	7.3%
Oldmachar	31	6.8%
St Machar	51	11.2%

Parents tell us that 75.8% have been able to secure a funded ELC place in their local area/ASG. 83 respondents (18.3%) have either not yet applied or found the question not applicable.

There is clear evidence of a range of choices across all ASGs with no feedback on gaps in provision. Some parents are very satisfied with the longer hours available whilst some parents (2) would prefer more 9-3 places.

“All settings should offer a 9-3 option. All settings should be truly flexible which they are not.”

“Very satisfied as it really helps a lot but may be more appreciated if there's a provision for full section five days a week so that parent can have more time to work. Many thanks”

As a result of the capital programme, an additional 1,676 spaces have been made available to children and accessibility issues have been addressed. Nursery settings are modern purpose-built environments which the staff and children are enjoying their time in. The focus on free flow access to the outdoor space is aiding delivery of a high-quality curriculum and the provision of Family Support space will help staff support families as we recover from the pandemic. Supply chain issues associated with the pandemic only impacted on the two outdoor nursery provisions but appropriate contingency arrangements were put in place.

Programme 5 – Funded Providers

Maintaining the balance of provision

The challenge for the programme was to ensure that Aberdeen has sufficient capacity to deliver every child's funded ELC entitlement. Approximately, 75% of all ELC was accessed from local authority settings in 2017, which was in keeping with the national profile. The remaining 25% of ELC was delivered via Funded Providers and this balance would have to be retained or increased to ensure that Funded Provider settings would be sustained. This has been maintained. A cross representation of private, independent, and voluntary settings continue to deliver funded ELC with the addition of new providers coming into partnership. At the time of writing one setting has indicated they are due to close. In this specific case, the impact of Covid-19 has been a contributory factor to the closure as has changes to the pattern of parent led demand. The service will continue to monitor the impact of pandemic on the sector.

Prior to the introduction of 1140, there were 40 funded (contracted) providers delivering 600 hours. From the 40 providers in partnership, 30 were delivering fully flexible wrap around provision to meet the needs of individual families.

The Scottish Government introduced, Funding Follows the Child, alongside the statutory roll out of the expanded entitlement, to ensure that funded entitlement is delivered in high quality settings. Under Funding Follows the Child, local authorities set a rate locally that is paid to funded providers to deliver the funded entitlement. This approach is 'provider neutral' and underpinned by the National Standard, so that all settings entering into contract with local authorities are of a high standard (Care Inspectorate Grade 4 or above).

A procurement exercise was undertaken to establish a non-competitive, flexible framework of ELC providers. The most significant change was the opportunity for childminders to enter into partnership to deliver funded hours (previously childminders had not been eligible). Following a review of commissioning arrangements we sought to ensure the sustainability of the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector and that parents were able to access funded hours free at the point of delivery.

Developing a sustainable rate

The sustainable rate is the "hourly rate that is paid to funded providers [...] to deliver the funded entitlement ensuring they can remain financially viable while offering funded hours to eligible children," [*Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard, 2018*]. Aberdeen City Council adopted the Scotland Excel guidance and template procurement documents (including model terms and conditions) to support the contracting process.

A series of engagement sessions were held from summer 2019 through to early 2020 with funded providers to discuss the options available to identify a sustainable rate. Understandably, there was apprehension about the application process and the roll out of the funded entitlement. To that end, the Early Years and Expansion team worked closely with providers and held a series of engagement events, drop-in sessions (subject to demand) and offered 1-2-1 meetings to discuss the process and the rollout. In addition, providers were signposted to support organisations: P4P, SenScot,

Supplier Development Programme Scotland. Partnership working was key to enable the successful roll out of the expanded hours.

In line with Scottish Excel guidance, a cost survey approach was adopted to identify a rate. The engagement sessions were a valuable opportunity for colleagues to outline the process, answer questions and for providers to share feedback and raise areas for consideration.

The 'provider cost survey' provided as accurate an estimate as possible of the costs associated with their provision of ELC for children under school age to inform the planning and modelling for the sustainable rate. This process was transparent and accessible for providers to engage in.

The result was a healthy response rate with 20 out of the 40 contracted nurseries providing a response. The survey collected information on costs, income, capacity and occupancy. There was cross representation from across the city, with responses received from a mixture of private, third and public sector organisations. In the case of childminders, costs information was also collected from a sample (n=6) of childminders. The rate for meals was calculated by identifying the average rate paid per meal by funded providers. This was then adjusted for inflation and market uncertainties.

This exercise enabled the Council to work out the current average cost of service provision across the survey, ensuring that the rates set for the introduction of 1140 hours, were truly reflective of cost and represented value for money. The outcome agreed was a rate of £5.45 for 3- and 4-year-olds and £6.05 for eligible 2-year-olds for Funded Providers. For childminders a rate of £5.35 for 3- and 4-year-olds and £5.65 for eligible 2-year-olds. The rate for a meal £2.75. The agreed rate is sustainable for partners and reflective of national policy priorities, including funding to enable the payment of the real Living Wage to all childcare workers delivering the funded entitlement.

Funded Providers: 1140 hours

In line with Funding Follows the Child, Aberdeen City Council are committed to reducing the administrative burden on providers, and this extends to the application process used for contracting. The recommended approach was flexible enough to allow new private and third sector providers, including childminders, to become funded providers.

Prior to the introduction of 1140 hours, the Council delivered 600 hours of ELC and operated 48 ELC settings (47 of which were in schools). ELC sessions provided part time places over 5 days during school term time and offered limited flexibility to parents. Following the contracting process, we increased capacity across the city – welcoming a range of new providers into partnership whilst also renewing our partnership with existing providers. Following this process there are currently 38 providers and over 70 childminders working in partnership with Aberdeen City Council to deliver up to 1140 hours. The profile of providers in partnership with the Council comprises of:

Funded Provider Type	Number
Independent	4
Private	25
Workplace	4
Voluntary (including Playgroups)	5

This diverse profile is advantageous to the city. There is increased choice for families around the different types of setting available and the range of models on offer to meet the needs of families.

Concessionaire arrangements: Tillydrone and Cummings Park nurseries

While there are a high number of funded providers in partnership Aberdeen City Council delivering expanded hours, it is notable that providers are not geographically evenly spread across the city. There are fewer funded providers operating in our priority areas compared to other localities such as the Grammar ASG, which has the highest concentration of funded providers offering a fully flexible model. The ELC expansion programme has sought to readdress this imbalance.

The route adopted was to undertake an open tender to let a concession agreement to appoint a provider(s) to occupy and deliver an ELC service from two of our purpose-built stand-alone nurseries within Tillydrone and Northfield. This was an opportunity to increase capacity across the city and specifically within our priority areas. The tender also presented an excellent opportunity to allow providers to access a purpose-built facility without incurring the upfront/ capital costs. Crucially, current practice has demonstrated that those providers operating within our priority communities are able to successfully engage with families and uptake of eligible 2s is higher within our funded providers than local authority settings. Appointing a provider to deliver ELC from the aforementioned facilities, builds on the good practice that providers are delivering within both communities and enhances our ELC offer to families, particularly to our more vulnerable families. Consultation with the local communities highlighted the preference to have greater diversity of the types of ELC provision available within the local area – adopting the concession approach enabled us to respond to this ask from families.

Hitherto a concession contract approach has not been applied to ELC. This approach subsidises the cost of ELC provision at Tillydrone and Cumming Park nurseries by attracting a rental income and a percentage of profit/surplus generated above a specified threshold value. The service worked closely with colleagues in Procurement and Legal throughout this process to realise this arrangement.

There is an initial contract duration of 4 years with the option to extend by a further 4 years. The tender was scored on quality alone ensuring the provider met the National Standard and Fair Working practices. Quality was central to this process. Indeed, without high quality ELC – from both a structural and process point of view – the positive benefits of ELC will not be realised. Investing at the Early Years level can mitigate against the long-term costs and supports, hence the imperative that the tender be fully weighted on quality.

Following the procurement process, Flexible Childcare Services, has been appointed as the successful provider to occupy and deliver ELC from both nurseries. Flexible Childcare Services are a North East provider with a wealth of ELC experience and a keen commitment to work in partnership with the communities of Tillydrone and Northfield. The new provider will enhance the choice available to communities offering a fully flexible model to eligible 2-year-olds to those children not yet attending primary school. The increase in capacity and choice in our priority areas will support parents/carers seeking to return to work or study. Moreover, the provider's commitment to offer family support and their experience of building relationships built on support and trust, aligns with our approach to early intervention and prevention.

Cross boundary arrangements

Under Funding Follows the Child, families are not restricted to provision within their own local authority area. To that end, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council worked in partnership to agree a cross boundary agreement to provide choice and flexibility to families. This was agreed in April 2021. Cross boundary patterns of uptake indicate that there is consistent parent led demand from Aberdeenshire based residents accessing ELC provision in Aberdeen city. At the end of 2020, there were 171 Aberdeenshire resident families accessing funded Aberdeen based ELC providers (including childminders) and 24 Aberdeenshire families accessing local authority ELC settings. To deliver on the principles of Funding Follows the Child, the cross-boundary agreement covered: applications and admissions; reconciliation of payments; data sharing and communications (in the event of complaints, issues or concerns). The cross-boundary agreement sets out a framework in which the host and resident authorities can work effectively together to deliver the best for families. It also outlines clearly the process of financial reconciliation between the authorities to ensure arrangements are both effective and sustainable. By implementing this agreement, families are assured that the choice available is not restricted by local authority boundaries.

The Living Wage

As we move forward, it will be vital to monitor the sustainability of providers and their capacity to meet the National Standard. Against the context of workforce challenges (retaining and recruiting staff), the sustainable rate, which enables the payment of the Living Wage, should contribute to creating a more level playing field across the sector. Nevertheless, while funded providers are expected to pay the Living Wage to staff delivering funded hours, this cannot be enforced by the local authority. This observation has also been echoed in the recent Audit Scotland ELC Expansion report (2020). While it cannot be enforced, we seek to encourage partners to commit to the Living Wage. To this end, inflationary and real Living Wage increases to the sustainable rate will be reviewed on a regular basis.

While the commissioning arrangements to deliver the expanded hours have been successfully implemented, they also need to be viewed against the context of workforce recruitment and retention. Workforce challenges, experienced at a local, regional and national level, have the potential to test the sustainability of the private, voluntary and independent sector. These challenges are further exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic as well as Brexit. This is a risk that the service will continue to monitor. It will seek to strengthen some of the mitigations already in place – building on the work of the ELC Academy, which showcased clear career pathways into the

sector and progression routes; access to the Workforce Development Fund and the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. The challenges of retention and recruitment serve to underscore the importance of the implementation of the Living Wage to create to greater equity of opportunity across the sector and contribute to attracting and retaining practitioners.

The planning and partnership working which has underpinned our work with funded providers has contributed to ensuring there is sufficient capacity across the city to deliver expansion. Throughout this programme we have been cognisant of the needs of the sector, demonstrated in our approach to identifying the sustainable rate, which was transparent and reflective of evidence of costs of delivery.

The introduction of a concessionaire to occupy and deliver ELC from two of our purpose-built buildings contributes to delivering greater parity of choice within our priority areas. This is particularly the case for families with eligible 2-year-olds. Indeed, successive parent/carer consultations reveal the need for a range of different models and types of provision to meet the varying and evolving circumstances of every family. The recent cross boundary agreement is an extension of these principles - assuring families that the choice available is not restricted by local authority boundaries and there is a level of flexibility to meet the requirements of parents.

Has the programme delivered against the vision, delivery models and guiding principles set out in the Delivery Plan?

What has the impact of the changes been on uptake?

As of June 2017 7% of 2 year olds, 82% of 3 year olds and 91% of 4 year olds accessed ELC provision in Aberdeen City.

At the current time, 9% of 2 year olds (33.03% of eligible 2 year olds) are attending but with numbers anticipated to rise again later in the year as children reach their second birthday. 90.7% of 3 year olds and over 98% of 4 year olds are attending ELC provision. This suggests that the new delivery models are better meeting the needs of children and families.

Has the programme delivered against the vision agreed by Committee?

A flexible model of Early Learning and Childcare is available to families which is fully accessible. Quality grades are improving and provision is in place for families to access provision outwith school holiday periods.

We asked parents and carers what impact the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has had on their child.

Although 19.4% of respondents suggested their attendance at ELC had no impact on their child's development, most service users did identify improvements to their child's development since attending an ELC setting.

The majority of respondents, at almost 65%, identified an improvement in their child's social skills with over half of the respondents seeing an improvement in their child's communication skills.

Almost half of all respondents recognised an improvement to their child's emotional development, creativity, listening skills and numeracy.

Over a third of respondents highlighted improvements within literacy, fine motor skills, and physical development.

A third of respondents had also seen an improvement in their child's problem solving and attention span.

The expansion programme has delivered against the vision agreed by Committee in 2017.

Has the programme delivered against the proposed delivery models agreed by Committee?

The two delivery models agreed by Committee have been delivered.

We asked parents and carers which model of provision they would prefer to use in the future in order to determine if the delivery models agreed in 2017 remain appropriate to meet the needs of families.

Most respondents at 229 (50.4%) said they would prefer a full day placement in the future.

126 respondents (27.8%) said they would prefer a half day AM placement with 51 respondents (11.2%) requiring a half day PM placement.

119 respondents (26.2%) would require a term time place with 141 respondents (31.1%) requiring an all-year-round placement.

66 respondents (14.5%) said they would look to have a blended space with 47 respondents (10.4%) requiring an Outdoor provision.

This feedback suggests that the models remain appropriate.

We went on to ask parents and carers how satisfied they are with the range of providers and models of Early Learning and Childcare offered in their local area / ASG

72% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the range of ELC providers and models within their local area (ASG).

14.3% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

13.1% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the availability of ELC provisions and models available.

This feedback suggests that the delivery models remain appropriate to meet the needs of families.

“We feel the extra hours have helped considerably for many reasons. Firstly, R loves nursery and gets lots out of it, not just social interactions but lots of learning and more therapy than previously, she also sleeps a bit better as she works hard during the day. It's great for her confidence and overall wellbeing and the extra sleep improves her (and our!) health overall. Also, because both of us work, it's lessened the worry of childcare, which is always a minefield with ASN kids. This has a good knock on effect on our mental health and means we're not worrying about the financial side of things as well as everything else. It's also meant that the 2 days I don't work, I can give L my full attention, something she missed out on since birth due to lockdown. This means that hopefully she'll grow up knowing that despite her sister needing extra care, she won't lose out. I feel this is incredibly important for a sibling of an ASN child. The downside is that we have less time with R and I do miss her a bit.

The previous afternoon sessions were great for all of the above, but the extended hours have really helped us as a family, and most importantly, R. A

Has the programme delivered against the guiding principles agreed by Committee?

The programme is ideally placed to capitalise on intergenerational support although progress has been limited due to the current COVID-19 restrictions in place. The restrictions have also limited the extent to which the facilities feel owned by communities.

The appointment of Locality Lead officers and more focussed approaches to setting improvement are helping to drive greater personalisation. This is aiding quality improvement approaches.

The provision at the Links Hub is being used to test approaches to partnership delivery to children and families.

All settings are utilising and promoting outdoor learning to promote wellbeing.

Staff have access to a wide range of professional learning to develop their professional skills.

The guiding principles have directly influenced the programme and will continue to do so as restrictions are eased.

We asked parents and carers what impact the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (from 600 hours to 1140 hours) has had on them and your family

51.2% of respondents stated that they had more time for other responsibilities as a result of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare.

38.7% of respondents indicated that they had more money/disposable income as a positive impact on their family.

28.5% are now considering a return to work or study.

26.1% stated improved wellbeing /respite as a positive impact from the expansion of ELC, with 24.3% of respondents finding they now have more time to themselves.

This data suggests that the programme has delivered against the guiding principles with the exception of intergenerational approaches which were limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This area will be developed further as restrictions are eased.

Has the programme been delivered on budget?

At this stage of the financial year we believe the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare will be delivered on budget, this includes staffing, meals, furniture and capital works. However, this will be subject to the completion of the outdoor nurseries at Duthie and Hazlehead Parks.

Summary Evaluation

This evaluative report evidences a multi-faceted and cross council programme of work delivered to ensure that all families were able to claim their 1140 hours of ELC from August 2021.

The pandemic has impacted on the success of some engagement due to the lack of face to face contact and the service will continue to develop the model in keeping with the guiding principles with regard to enabling intergenerational support for children. However, despite the considerable challenges of delivering the Programme during a pandemic the Project team have successfully met their objectives. Key achievements include:

- All eligible children were able to access 1140 hours from August 2021;
- There is evidence of highly effective Programme governance;
- There is evidence of an increase in the quality of provision;
- The ELC workforce was expanded from 224.16 FTE to 460.31 FTE (inclusive of amended contracts; support workers / Modern Apprenticeships / 63 trainee EYPs)

- The successful delivery of 27 capital projects;
- 82.9% of parents and carers who responded to a recent survey are satisfied or very satisfied with the location of their ELC provision; and
- 82.4% of parents and carers who responded to a recent survey are satisfied or very satisfied with their child's experience of expanded ELC to date.

The Programme was delivered on time and on budget as of December 2021.

Learning points to be built into the next ELC Delivery Plan:

- Review transition processes to allow in person transition as soon as public health guidance allows
- Be mindful of the need for early in-person engagement with staff if public health guidance allows
- There is a need to further promote Gaelic Medium ELC provision
- Monitor demand for childminders
- Monitor demand for eligible 2s placements
- Continue to work towards the delivery of intergenerational support as public health guidance allows