

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	18 February 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Report on Options to Rationalise Early Learning and Childcare Settings
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/001
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CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
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TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1 & 1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present options to the Education and Children's Services Committee on rationalising Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings in order to meet demand, maximise resources and achieve best value.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 considers the options presented and approves the amended Early Learning and Childcare delivery models, set out in Appendix 2 of this report, from August 2025, based on demand.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 As part of our statutory duties under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, we are required to consult with parents and carers every two years on the provision of ELC. The Early Years team consulted with parents and carers in June 2023 and the results were reported to Committee. [ELC Consultation with Parents and Carers 2023](#)

- 3.2 Responses did not indicate a need to amend our approach to the provision of a mixed model of ELC across the city. On that basis, the review of delivery models to rationalise our offer has sought to maintain a mixed model of ELC across Associated School Groups (ASGs) to ensure families continue to have choice. Officers will consult with parents and carers again in Spring 2025.

Review of Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Models

- 3.3 One of the key actions in our ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26 is to continue to monitor demand across the city and in individual ASGs. This is in order to meet the needs of families and to achieve best value. Recent detailed work on capacities shows that, similar to previous years, we continue to have an oversupply of 'afternoon' places available and Officers have taken this learning

into account in planning proposed delivery models for 2025/26. The team continue to receive applications for ELC placements on a daily basis as families move into the city and care has been taken to factor this into proposals.

- 3.4 We know from parent and carer feedback that while a large majority of respondents (79.4%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the range of ELC providers and models within their local area/Associated Schools Group (ASG); and (75.8%) were able to secure a funded ELC place in their local area/ ASG, some delivery models continue to be more popular than others and there are slight changes in demand across each ASG.
- 3.5 We also know that the number of ELC age children (age two to five years) in Scotland is seven per cent lower in 2022 than was projected at the beginning of ELC expansion, and is expected to continue to fall over the next 10 years (*National Records of Scotland (NRS) population projections*). This may have an impact on demand for ELC places in the longer term although the number of children attending currently is remaining stable due to the number of new families making Aberdeen their home.
- 3.6 At the time of the ELC Parent and Carer Consultation in 2023, term-time, full-day and fully flexible placements were most popular. For half day placements, morning places continue to be more highly sought after than afternoon places, with afternoon placements the least popular out of all the delivery models. This has been triangulated through recent work on ELC capacities (Appendix 1).
- 3.7 As a result of this analysis, we have identified two ELC settings across two ASGs which could change from an 8am-6pm all year round model (which offers either full day or 5 long mornings and 5 long afternoon placements), to a fully 9am-3pm term time model. These are:
 - Greyhope School ELC (Lochside ASG) – 53 places (including 5 x Eligible 2's places)
 - Quarryhill School ELC (Northfield ASG) – 48 places
- 3.8 A number of other Local Authority settings continue to operate under capacity, particularly in the afternoon sessions of the 8am-6pm all year round model:
 - Cults – currently operating at between 33-52% capacity in afternoons. And between 45-60% in holiday periods.
 - Heathryburn – currently operating at between 30-35% capacity in afternoons. Holiday attendance has increased to 75% capacity by moving to morning sessions only (in consultation with families).
 - Kingsford – currently operating at between 30-50% capacity in afternoons. And between 10-66% in holiday periods.
 - Kirkhill – currently operating at between 33-50% capacity in afternoons. And between 10-50% in holiday periods.
 - Loirston – currently operating at between 42-58% capacity in afternoons. And between 20-70% in holiday periods.
 - Tullos – currently operating at between 22-35% capacity in afternoons. And between 10-25% in holiday periods.

- 3.9 Within these ELC settings, we do not propose to change current delivery models, as we would not have enough places to move to a fully 9am-3pm term-time model. It would also remove some of the ELC options delivered across each of our ASGs which we have given a commitment to offering. We therefore propose to keep the numbers at each of these settings under review meantime, and realign the number of places offered in the mornings and afternoons, where possible, to balance attendance. Based on current uptake, this would have minimal impact on our service delivery. In order to maximise resources and achieve best value, Officers will also closely monitor staffing levels and recruitment requests for those ELC settings operating under capacity.
- 3.10 Holiday uptake has increased again in 2023-24, compared to in 2021-22 and 2022-23, however attendance remains significantly lower than during term time weeks. In order to accurately demonstrate and quantify this, Officers monitor attendance numbers on a daily basis during holiday periods. 30 ELC settings were open during the 2024 summer holiday period (-4 from 2023) and they were requested to submit their attendance figures on a daily basis. In the majority of cases, ELC settings operated at 50% or less and the actual numbers were lower than the estimated numbers, which were based on ELC settings speaking to parents and carers in advance of holiday period about their intentions. In the most recent October holiday period, three ELC settings opened in the mornings only, following consultation with their families.
- 3.11 In putting forward these proposals, based on current supply and demand data, Officers have considered the full ELC offer across each ASG with all areas still having a good mix of 8am-6pm all year round ELC provision and 9am-3pm term time provision (Appendix 2). Our ELC Funded Providers also continue to offer fully flexible funded ELC across the city and can meet the needs of families who require wrap around care and additional hours.
- 3.12 It is proposed that the amended delivery models outlined are implemented from August 2025 and that applications for ELC placements be opened before the end of February 2025, in keeping with established practice and enabling effective forward planning by families.
- 3.13 There will be no staffing changes in the remainder of the current 2024-25 session. Officers will work with People & Citizen Services and Trade Union colleagues to consider any impacts on ELC staff contracts, as a result of the proposed changes to some of the ELC models, in advance of the new ELC session commencing in August 2025. Any necessary reductions in staffing, as a result of reduced staffing allocations, will be achieved by natural wastage in the first instance, e.g. through staff turnover and by not filling vacancies.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Aberdeen City Council, as primary guarantor of quality and key enabler of flexibility and choice, is currently funded by the Scottish Government to deliver ELC, as part of Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE).
- 4.2 Officers continue to work with finance colleagues to ensure that our plans work towards realisation of a sustainable ELC provision. The options presented in

this report will help to achieve best value by rationalising ELC settings to match the Scottish Government Grant, if approved. (£216,000 per annum).

- 4.3 Reciprocal arrangements are in place via a Cross Boundary Agreement with Aberdeenshire Council. This means that an equal number of ELC places will be provided by each neighbouring Local Authority. For example, if Aberdeen City Council provide more funded ELC places than Aberdeenshire Council, the additional places will be recharged to Aberdeenshire Council in line with the Reconciliation and Payments part of the Cross Boundary Agreement on a termly basis. This ensures equity and best value for both Authorities, whilst offering flexibility and choice to families from both Authorities.
- 4.4 The selling of ELC places pilot at Culter School ELC is currently generating additional income for the Council.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The expansion of ELC has brought a number of duties on the Local Authority under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014:
- The provision of 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare for eligible two year olds and all three and four year olds.
 - Aberdeen City Council will retain the statutory responsibility for ensuring that funded ELC entitlement is available to all eligible children in the city.
 - Aberdeen City Council will continue to be the primary guarantor of quality and key enabler of flexibility and choice, ensuring that there is a range of options for all families in the city.
 - Aberdeen City Council is responsible for engaging and consulting with parents and carers on a regular basis (minimum of every 2 years) on the provision of ELC delivered locally.
 - Aberdeen City Council is responsible for preparing and publishing an Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan every 2 years.
- 5.2 The proposed amended Early Learning and Childcare delivery models, based on demand, will assist the Council to continue to develop and deliver high quality ELC in the city.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified. A cornerstone of the ELC expansion programme was the investment in outdoor learning, and this is keenly reflected in the establishment of two new outdoor nurseries at Duthie Park and at Hazlehead. Both 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. Across all ELC settings, good use is also made of outdoor and green spaces where practicable and feasible to do so.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	Risk of not meeting statutory obligations around 1140 hours.	Mitigated through delivery of the Expansion Programme and subsequent monitoring of supply and demand of ELC places.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk of not attracting enough new practitioners into the workforce.	Mitigated through the ongoing activities being undertaken to support workforce development, as outlined in ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26.	L	Yes
Financial	Risk of building a financially unsustainable model.	Care has been taken to redesign ELC around improving quality rather than simply doubling to reflect the additional hours and a more sustainable staffing model has been put in place. Officers are monitoring supply and demand on an annual basis in order to maximise resources and achieve best value.	M	Yes
Reputational	Risk of not delivering on legal obligations	Mitigated through delivery of the Expansion Programme and subsequent monitoring of supply	L	Yes

		and demand of ELC places.		
Environment / Climate	No risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the policy statement “<i>Aberdeen – A place where all people can prosper</i>”.</p> <p>The provision of funded Early Learning and Childcare has the potential to be transformational for many families, but especially for those with the lowest incomes in the city, and will contribute to our high level priority to reduce child poverty.</p>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
74% employment rate for Aberdeen City by 2026 (Stretch Outcome 2)	<p>The Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 will continue to have a positive impact on this priority theme and will help to deliver the LOIP.</p> <p>The workforce has increased significantly in order to deliver the increase in ELC provision and will not be detrimentally impacted by the proposals contained within this report.</p> <p>63 Aberdeen City Council employees retrained as Early Years Practitioners over 3 cohorts of a Retraining Programme, gaining an SVQ Level 3 qualification. We also recruited 110 Early Learning and Childcare Support Workers.</p> <p>In addition, we introduced a Modern Apprenticeship position into our ELC staffing structure. This involves training young people to become Early Years Practitioners as part of our ‘Grow Our Own’ workforce strategy. This is a new role in our Local Authority ELC settings and provides a positive destination and career pathway for our young people as well as strengthening our workforce. We currently have 28 Modern Apprenticeships working across the city.</p> <p>There will be ongoing opportunities to join the Early Learning and Childcare workforce in Aberdeen and to retrain, to upskill and for career progression.</p>

<p>95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026 (Stretch Outcome 3)</p>	<p>Our work in partnership with families and communities including through a Peep offer in all settings as part of a partnership Family Support offer will support children to reach their expected milestones. It will also increase the number of parents and carers who have awareness of how to support their children’s learning and development at home.</p> <p>Furthermore, every child who attends Early Learning and Childcare over a lunchtime period receives a minimum of one free meal per session attended as part of their statutory entitlement, as well as a portion of milk and fruit or vegetables daily via the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme.</p> <p>Early Learning and Childcare can improve long term outcomes for children and families.</p>
<p>95% of children, living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1&2), will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026 (Stretch Outcome 6)</p>	<p>The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has contributed positively to supporting positive destinations.</p> <p>We have introduced a Modern Apprenticeship (MA) position into our ELC staffing structure. This involves training young people to become Early Years Practitioners as part of our ‘Grow Our Own’ workforce strategy. This is a new role in our Local Authority ELC settings and provides a positive destination and career pathway for our young people as well as strengthening our workforce. We currently have 28 Modern Apprenticeships working across the city and are in the process of recruiting 4 new MA’s.</p>
<p>Regional and City Strategies</p> <p>Strategic Development Plan</p> <p>Children’s Services Plan</p> <p>National Improvement Framework Plan</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the Strategic Development Plan by supporting the workforce. The provision of high quality Early Learning and Childcare will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support families to take up employment and training opportunities; 2. Develop the Young Workforce; and 3. Support business to recruit and retain staff. <p>The Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 is aligned to the Children’s Services Plan and the National Improvement Framework Plan and work to address poverty in the Child Poverty Action Plan.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare has been reviewed and no changes are required.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required as no personal information will be shared.
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Best Start: Strategic Early Learning and School Age Childcare Plan for Scotland 2022-26 (Scottish Government: October 2022)
- 10.2 Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Analysis of uptake of ELC Placements – January 2025
- 11.2 Appendix 2 – Early Learning and Childcare Models Proposed from August 2025

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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