

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	24 January 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24 Update
REPORT NUMBER	CFS/23/003
DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
REPORT AUTHOR	Louise Beaton and Fiona Lawrie
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the implications of the national Childcare Delivery Plan on the work of Aberdeen City Council and to seek approval for amended Early Learning and Childcare delivery models based on demand.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes the Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26 (Scottish Government: October 2022);
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Education Officer to report on the progress and outcomes of the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24, and to prepare an updated Delivery Plan for 2024-26, in June 2024, to dovetail with the Strategic Plan for Scotland;
- 2.3 Approves the amended Early Learning and Childcare delivery models, based on demand; and
- 2.4 Instructs the Chief Education Officer to report on the National Delivery Framework for School Age Childcare and local delivery plans in 2023.

3. BACKGROUND

Local Context

- 3.1 Aberdeen City Council successfully delivered the Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programme in keeping with the Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan approved by the previous Education and Children's Services Committee on 16 November 2017.
- 3.2 The Early Years team consulted with parents and carers and future parents in November 2021 to seek their views to inform the evaluation of the Expansion

programme (OPE/22/001) and to help formulate the next Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Delivery Plan.

3.3 Learning points from the evaluation of the ELC Expansion Programme were included in the ELC Delivery Plan for 2022-24. These highlighted a need to:

- 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;
- Further promote Gaelic Medium ELC provision;
- Monitor demand for childminders;
- Monitor demand for eligible 2s placements; and
- Continue to work towards the delivery of intergenerational support as public health guidance allows.

Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24

3.4 The Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan for 2022-24, based on the findings of the evaluation, was presented and approved by Education Operational Delivery Committee on 14 June 2022 (OPE/22/084). The Plan included improvement activity and improvement actions to be undertaken over the next 2 years and took account of national policy documentation available at the time.

3.5 We are currently 6 months into delivery of the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24 and all actions are on track (Appendix 1).

Best Start: Strategic Early Learning and School Age Childcare Plan for Scotland 2022-26

3.6 The new Strategic Early Learning and School Age Childcare [Plan](#) for Scotland 2022-26 was published by Scottish Government in October 2022. It outlines the Scottish Government vision and priorities for the next four years; its approach to policy design and delivery; and next steps. The priorities outlined in the Plan are:

Priority 1: Realising the benefits of the expansion to 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare for children and families.

Priority 2: Progressing the expansion of our childcare offer, including building a future system of school age childcare and a new early learning and childcare offer for one and two year olds.

Priority 3: Ensuring that the delivery of our priorities is supported by a sustainable, diverse and thriving sector and profession.

Priority 4: Ensuring that our ambitions are underpinned by fair funding and outcomes frameworks, robust data and organisations that work together to support good outcomes for children and families.

- 3.7 Ensuring that families are aware of and able to take up an offer of ELC that meets their needs will contribute to supporting those that the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan identifies as being at greatest risk of poverty.
- 3.8 One of the key actions under Priority 1 is to maximise uptake of ELC among two year olds. Almost all three and four year olds (90.7% and 97% in Aberdeen respectively) take up their ELC entitlement, but uptake is significantly lower among eligible 2 year olds (currently 35% in Aberdeen which is estimated to be ahead of the national average).
- 3.9 The Scottish Government is currently working with the UK Government to establish a data sharing agreement that will enable local authorities to target information about the ELC offer to households with an eligible two year old child, as has been the case in England for a number of years. Aberdeen City Council is currently engaged in this process which will be rolled out by summer 2023. This approach is welcomed by Officers. Increasing the number of eligible 2 year olds accessing provision is already outlined in our local Plan.
- 3.10 Priority 1 also includes supporting parents and carers to make the right decision for their child about starting school. From August 2023, all parents and carers in Scotland can defer their child's entry to primary school if they are not yet five years old at the beginning of the school year. From August 2023, new legislation will be implemented which means that all families with eligible children who choose to defer their start date for primary one will be automatically entitled to access funded ELC for a further year. The new legislation will support families to make decisions based on the best interests of their child, without the financial barrier of ELC costs. Aberdeen City Council welcomed the opportunity to be one of 10 pilots across Scotland to implement this automatic deferral from August 2022. There are currently 288 children in the city (born August to February) accessing a further year of funded ELC as a result of automatic deferred entry. This approach is already reflected in our local Delivery Plan.
- 3.11 As part of Priority 2, national work on expanding funded ELC to one and two year olds is at an early stage of development. This will initially focus on research, insights and engagement, to understand what families want and need from an offer for younger children, particularly those in the most disadvantaged communities. The Scottish Government will then map current provision for one and two year olds across Scotland, and work with experts, local authorities and service providers to build an evidence base and learn from existing provision across the UK and other countries. From 2023-24 onwards, the findings from the first phase of the programme will be published and models of provision will be developed, trialled and evaluated. The expansion of services to younger children is already outlined in our current local Plan which will be updated in 2024, in keeping with our statutory responsibilities, to take account of the work undertaken nationally over the next 12-18 months.
- 3.12 Priority 2 also includes building a system of school age childcare by the end of this Parliament, providing care before and after school, all year round, supporting parents and carers – particularly on low incomes – to have secure

and stable employment. Those on the lowest incomes will pay nothing. Aberdeen is well served and has an extremely strong and well supported School Age Childcare network in the city, which has been recognised nationally, including our successful 'In the City' holiday programmes. We welcome the publication of the National Delivery Framework for School Age Childcare later this year. We are well placed to deliver on this priority and will report to Committee on this work when the National Delivery Framework has been published.

- 3.13 Supporting the sustainability of the childcare sector, including our workforce, sustainable rates and diversity is key to Priority 3. Scottish Government intends to legislate to continue the Nursery Rates Relief Scheme, which provides 100 per cent relief on Non-Domestic Rates to eligible day nurseries, there are also plans to develop a business support offer for all parts of the childcare sector. Officers await further details on these plans and will ensure timely communication of them to Funded Providers. Various different models to determine the rates paid to Funded Providers of Early Learning and Childcare have been implemented nationally and locally with mixed success. This area is currently subject to consideration by COSLA and Scottish Government. Diversifying the workforce was a key priority as part of the Expansion Programme and continues to be a focus in collaboration with People and Organisational Development: improving the diversity of our workforce and addressing any areas of underrepresentation, ensuring that there are equal opportunities for all protected groups (with consideration for both internal employees and external applicants), with a particular and prioritised focus on Age, Disability, Race and Sex.
- 3.14 Priority 4 focusses on fair funding, outcomes frameworks and robust data. The Scottish Government acknowledges that it is important that the implementation of 1140 hours of high quality ELC is underpinned by a sustainable, long-term approach to funding with local government and for providers. This will take account of changes in demand, changing costs of delivery and demographic changes since 2018.
- 3.15 The approach to streamlining and simplifying the inspection of ELC and School Age Childcare services is also part of this priority. The findings of a consultation will be published early in 2023. It will set out steps to ensure a new national framework for inspection of ELC and School Age Childcare services is fit for purpose. Any actions arising from the introduction of a new shared inspection framework will be captured in our update ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26.
- 3.16 Following a thorough review of Best Start: Strategic Early Learning and School Age Childcare Plan for Scotland 2022-26, Officers are content that the current local Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan remains fit for purpose. It is likely that the next statutory plan, due for publication in 2024, will take account of national development activity currently being undertaken.

Review of Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Models

- 3.17 One of the key actions in our ELC Delivery Plan 2022-24 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 we currently have an over supply of 'afternoon' places available and Officers have taken this learning into account in planning proposed delivery models for 2023/24. 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.
- 3.18 We know from parent and carer feedback that while a large majority of respondents (72%) 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 are more popular than others.
- 3.19 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 (*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 families making Aberdeen their home.
- 3.20 At the time of the ELC Parent and Carer Consultation in 2021, full-day and term-time placements were most popular. For half day placements, morning places were 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 2).
- 3.21 As a result of this analysis, we have identified four ELC settings across four 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:
- Kingswells School ELC (Bucksburn ASG) – 40 places
 - Milltimber School ELC (Cults ASG) – 60 places
 - Westpark School ELC (Northfield ASG) – 40 places
 - Danestone School ELC (Oldmachar ASG) – 56 places
- 3.22 We also propose to change the delivery model at Skene Square and Middleton Park School ELC settings (currently 600 hours – morning or afternoon term time) to a fully 9am-3pm term time model. This will restrict the number of children who can attend each provision due to registered capacities but will enable children to access their full entitlement of 1140 hours in one ELC setting. The revenue costs of delivery will now be analysed in detail to ensure that any decisions taken which affect these schools, following consultation as part of the School Estate Plan, are able to demonstrate best value.
- 3.23 Sunnybank School ELC currently operates two delivery models: 9am-3pm term time (20 places); and 600 hours morning or afternoon term time (2 classes x 20

places). Based on current capacities, we propose to retain the 9am-3pm term time delivery model and also 1 x 600 hours class morning and afternoon. Some of the children who attend Sunnybank School ELC use specialist services at the Language Unit or School for the Deaf, so this enables them to take up their full 1140 hours ELC entitlement, including the ability to access specialist support, in one setting.

- 3.24 There is a need to carefully monitor uptake at the remaining 600 hour ELC settings. The physical environments in each setting do not afford sufficient flexibility to offer alternative delivery models and uptake can be limited in the afternoons.
- 3.25 In the Hazlehead ASG, the new Countesswells School ELC will open in August 2023, creating 60 x 9am-3pm term time ELC places.
- 3.26 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 3). Our ELC Funded Providers also offer funded ELC across the city and can meet the needs of families who require wrap around care and additional hours.
- 3.27 It is proposed that the amended delivery models outlined are implemented from August 2023 and that applications for ELC placements be opened before the end of January, in keeping with established practice.
- 3.28 There will be no staffing changes in the remainder of the current 2022/23 session. Officers will work with P & OD and Trade Union colleagues about 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 2023.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Aberdeen City Council, as primary guarantor of quality and key enabler of flexibility and choice, is currently funded by a specific grant from the Scottish Government to deliver ELC.
- 4.2 Officers continue to work with finance colleagues to ensure that our plans work towards realisation of a sustainable ELC provision. Detailed analysis of the revenue costs of each model and setting will be used to inform work around the School Estate Plan.
- 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 quarterly basis. This ensures equity and Best Value for both Authorities, whilst offering flexibility and choice to families from both Authorities.

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 ELC Delivery Plan helps us to manage the actions necessary to continue to deliver and develop 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	L	Yes

		and demand of ELC places.		
Operational	Risk of not attracting enough new practitioners into the workforce.	Mitigated through the ongoing activities being undertaken to support workforce development as approved in Aberdeen City: Workforce Delivery Plan – Early Learning and Childcare approved by Education Operational Delivery Committee on 6 December 2018.	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 in order to maximise resources.	M	Yes
Reputational	Risk of not delivering on legal obligations	Mitigated through delivery of the Expansion Programme and subsequent monitoring of supply and demand of ELC places.	L	Yes
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 “Work with the Scottish Government to expand free early learning and childcare to one and two year-olds from low-income households.”</p> <p>The provision of free Early Learning and Childcare has the potential to be transformational for many families, but especially for those with the lowest incomes in the city.</p>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>Prosperous Economy - 500 Aberdeen City residents upskilled/ reskilled to enable them to move into, within and between economic opportunities as they arise by 2026</p>	<p>The Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24 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 have also recruited 110 Early Learning and Childcare Support Workers.</p> <p>In addition, we have 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 37 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>Prosperous People - 95% of all our children, including those living in our priority</p>	<p>The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has contributed positively to supporting positive destinations.</p>

<p>neighbourhoods, will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026</p> <p>95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026</p>	<p>We have 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 37 Modern Apprenticeships working across the city.</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>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The provision of high quality Early Learning and Childcare will help to deliver the LOIP.</p> <p>The increase in funded ELC will enable more families to take up employment and training opportunities, thus reducing poverty. More hours are now available in Local Authority ELC settings and Funded Provider ELC settings are now an option for many families who could not afford this previously.</p> <p>Furthermore, every child who attends Early Learning and Childcare 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>Regional and City Strategies</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the Strategic Development Plan by supporting the workforce. The</p>

Strategic Development Plan Children's Services Plan National Improvement Framework Plan	<p>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 2022-24 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>
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9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Required and submitted.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
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)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24 RAG Status
- 11.2 Appendix 2 – Analysis of uptake of ELC Placements - December 2022
- 11.3 Appendix 3 – Early Learning and Childcare Models Proposed from August 2023

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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