

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	21 March 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Early Learning and Childcare longitudinal study
REPORT NUMBER	CFS/23/076
DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Shona Milne
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TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report presents a proposed scope for a longitudinal evaluation of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 note the preparatory work in the development of a scope; and
- 2.2 instruct the Interim Director Children and Family Services to work with the Interim Director for The Aberdeen Health Determinants Collaborative to formally commission the evaluation.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1. On the 24th January, the Education and Children's Services Committee noted that Scottish Government had identified three overarching aims for the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare. These were to:
 - improve children's outcomes and help close the poverty-related attainment gap;
 - increase family resilience through improved health and wellbeing of children and parents; and
 - support parents into work, study or training
- 3.2 The Committee instructed the Interim Director of Children's & Family Services to report back to the next committee with a scope to evaluate the performance of the ELC service against these three long term aims. Elected Members requested that consideration be given to how to include feedback from staff, parents and children in assessing the extent to which the three aims are being met and that clear timescales be included in the scope.

3.3 Preparatory work to support the development of a scope

National policy documents designed to help shape ELC expansion programme planning focussed on the development of high-quality services in order to support parents to return to work or study. As a result, Scottish Government asked Local Authorities to consider the following organisers in their programme planning:

- Quality;
- Flexibility;
- Accessibility; and
- Affordability.

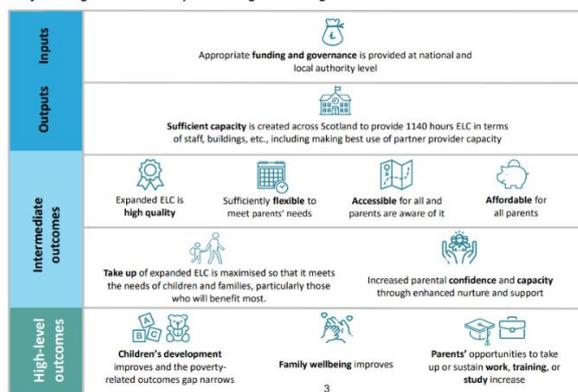
3.4 These organisers shaped the design and delivery of the expansion programme and were used to inform the early evaluation (after 6 months of operating expanded ELC provision) presented to Committee in [January 2022](#). It is recognised that this evaluation represented the situation at a single point in time.

3.5 In October 2022, the Scottish Government published the [Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programme: Evaluation Strategy](#). The national strategy is outcome based and seeks to understand and evaluate the impact of expanded ELC services on children, parents and carers and families. The evaluation work outlined in the national strategy consists of three main inter-related parts:

- evaluating the accessibility, flexibility, affordability, quality and take up of funded ELC;
- evaluating the contribution of the expansion programme to outcomes for children, parents and carers and families, and
- assessing the longer-term economic costs and benefits of the expansion programme.

3.6 In general, the strategy seeks to understand how the ELC policy 'is being, or has been, implemented and what effects it has, for whom and why' through the logic model shown below.

Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programme Evaluation Strategy – Visual Summary
Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programme – Logic Model



3.7 With the exception of information on funding, all of the data proposed in the national strategy to measure inputs, outputs and intermediate outcomes were

used to report progress to Committee in January 2022. An evaluation of the 'high level outcomes' was not included in the evaluation of January 2022, partially due to the infancy of the expansion programme. As a result of this alignment between our local evaluation report and the national strategy, and following discussion with the Improvement Service who helped shape the national evaluation strategy, it is thought most helpful to routinely update the evaluation data from the January 2022 evaluative report and give further consideration as to how best to measure the high level outcomes.

3.8 The events of the last few years present considerable challenges to any evaluation looking at the impact of a single policy on high level outcomes. The downturn in the local economy, the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis have all impacted on children's development, family wellbeing and opportunities to take or sustain work, training or study. Any study comparing high level outcomes from three years ago to now is likely to be heavily influenced by world events which could undermine the findings of the evaluation. Following discussion with the Improvement Service, it was agreed that an on-going evaluation of the impact of the expansion from this point onwards would be most helpful to determine the extent to which the offer of 1140 hours impacts on long term outcomes as taking this approach will reduce the likelihood of world events heavily influencing the findings of the research.

3.9 Officers are pursuing a collaborative approach for this evaluation, and have liaised with the Improvement Service and the local Director of the Aberdeen Health Determinants Research Collaboration (AHDRC). *The AHDRC is an initiative, funded initially for 5 years by the National Institute for Healthcare Research, with the aim of supporting Aberdeen City Council to develop a research-led approach to help improve the health and well-being of Aberdeen's communities, particularly reducing current and preventing future health inequalities. The AHDRC is led by the Council, working in partnership with the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, NHS-Grampian, Public Health Scotland, The James Hutton Institute, our community partners and members of the public.* Both the Improvement Service and the AHDRC are keen to collaborate in the development of a longer-term study and this support and expertise is welcomed by Officers. Opportunities are being explored for possible funding of bespoke, collaborative academic research. This local evaluation work will give us greater insight into the impact of our local system on longer term outcomes but will complement the work being undertaken nationally in keeping with the national strategy which will be first reported in 2025.

3.10 Proposed scope

It is proposed to update the data used to report progress to Committee in January 2022 and to work with finance colleagues to include information on finance. Taking this approach will provide comprehensive coverage of the inputs, outputs and intermediate outcomes included in the national logic model contained in the National Strategy and help provide longer term trend on inputs, outputs and intermediate outcomes data.

- 3.11 It is proposed that Officers work with the Improvement Service and AHDC to agree a small suite of questions to elicit data round the high-level outcomes from families accessing the service. It is proposed that a small group of parents are ‘recruited’ to a research study as part of our ELC admission process and followed from initial entry to funded Early Learning and Childcare through to the end of Primary 1. This local approach would enable Officers to look for participation across both the protected characteristics and the groups most likely to be impacted by poverty. Families involved in the study would be invited to engage with the ‘researcher’ every 6 months so that longitudinal data could be gathered, tracked and reported to Committee.
- 3.12 The high-level outcomes outlined in the logic model look for the impact of the expansion on children and families. Although engagement with staff supporting families who agree to participate in our research study may be helpful, widespread staff surveys are unlikely to inform the longitudinal study of the impact of the expansion on children and families.
- 3.13 As a result, it is proposed that widespread surveys of all parents, carers and staff continue to be undertaken to support the development of the statutory Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan. It is thought that aligning the reporting of the ELC Delivery Plan and ELC longitudinal study to Committee would be helpful as learning from the study can directly influence the delivery models proposed within the Statutory ELC Delivery Plan and vice versa.

3.14 Proposed timescales

Action	Proposed timescale
Liaise with the Improvement Service and HDRC to agree research questions	April 2023
Ethical considerations	June/July 2023
Update core data sets reported in January 2022 to start to establish baseline trend data	May/June 2023
Recruit parents and carers to the research study (and contact on a 6 monthly basis thereafter)	August/September 2023
Survey parents, carers and staff as part of the development of the Statutory ELC Delivery Plan 24-26	October/November 2023
Present an updated ELC Delivery Plan to the Education and Children’s Services Committee in line with statutory guidance (and every two years thereafter)	June 2024
Present the first report on the impact of ELC on longer term outcomes to the Education and Children’s Services Committee (and then yearly thereafter)	June 2024

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Resource will be secured through the HDRC to support the research.

Any potential bids for further research grants will be subject to their own assessment for any financial implications, if any.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Ethical considerations will be undertaken prior to the start of the research.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No negative environmental impacts have been identified.

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	Risk of not changing our local system to achieve long term outcomes	The yearly evaluation will help ensure that local research informs local delivery.	L	Yes
Compliance	Risk of not complying with national policy	Taking this approach to research will enable more effective oversight of the extent to which our local model is improving long term outcomes.	L	Yes
Operational	Risk we do not identify and address emerging risks	Aligning the reporting of research with the development of the ELC Delivery Plan will mitigate this risk.	L	Yes
Financial	Risk that we don't have sufficient resource	Including financial data in this evaluation will help inform decision making in the short and longer term.	L	Yes
Reputational	Risk that our local model does not improve outcomes	Mitigated by undertaking the detailed evaluation being advocated in this research.	L	Yes

Environment / Climate	No risks identified			
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8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p style="text-align: center;">Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p>Ensure the Council follows best practice as a corporate parent to get the best outcomes for looked-after young people, those in kinship care and those with additional support needs such as autism, developmental disorders or mental health problems</p> <p>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 recommendations in the report will ensure that ELC delivery is well placed to improve the long term outcomes of children.</p>
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>LOIP stretch outcome 4: <i>95% of children (0-5 years) will reach their expected developmental milestones by the time of their child health reviews by 2026</i></p>	<p>The delivery of high quality services will help improve the number of children reaching developmental milestones</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Regional and City Strategies</p> <p>Prevention Strategy</p> <p>Children's Services Plan</p> <p>National Improvement Framework Plan</p>	<p>The delivery of ELC is aligned to the prevention strategy. The Children's Services Plan prioritises improving the quality of ELC provision and includes this research project, this is aligned with the National Improvement Framework Plan.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	No

Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not at this stage
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

None.

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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