

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services Committee
<b>DATE</b>	2 July 2024
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	F&C/24/181
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Shona Milne
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Louise Beaton
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.1

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to report on the progress and outcomes of the improvement activities and actions in the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24 and to seek committee approval for an updated Delivery Plan for 2024-26, in line with our statutory duties to prepare and publish a plan.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes the report on the progress and outcomes of the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24;
- 2.2 Welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with Scottish Childminding Association to deliver Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future (PSCF), a National Partnership Programme on Childminder Retention & Recruitment, in Aberdeen.
- 2.3 Approves the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 and instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to deliver the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan in line with statutory guidance and Best Start: Strategic Early Learning and School Age Childcare Plan for Scotland 2022-26;
- 2.4 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to work in partnership with the Health Determinants Research Collaborative (HDRC) to align the planned Early Learning and Childcare longitudinal study research with the next statutory consultation with Parents and Carers in June 2025; and
- 2.5 Instructs the Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning to report on the progress and outcomes of the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26, and to prepare an updated Delivery Plan for 2026-28, in June 2026, in line

with our statutory duties under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **The National Context**

- 3.1 Since August 2021, all three and four year-olds, and eligible two year-olds have been entitled to receive up to 1140 hours of funded ELC per year. This has meant more funded hours, more choice of where children can go to access their ELC entitlement and more flexible models of ELC are available to support families.
- 3.2 We have a statutory duty to prepare and publish an Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan every two years.

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

- 3.3 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.

- 3.4 The delivery principles which underpin Early Learning and Childcare continue to be:

- Quality
- Flexibility
- Accessibility
- Affordability

- 3.5 Our Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 dovetails with the National Strategic Plan.

#### **Local Context**

- 3.6 Aberdeen City Council successfully delivered the Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Programme in keeping with the Aberdeen City Council Delivery Plan

approved by the former Education and Children's Services Committee on 16 November 2017.

- 3.7 In line with our statutory duties, the Early Years team consulted with parents and carers and future parents in November 2021 and again in June 2023, to seek their views to inform our Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Delivery Plans.

#### **Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24**

- 3.8 The Aberdeen City Council Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan for 2022-24, was presented and approved by the former 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.

- 3.9 A mixed model of ELC provision is offered across the city. We currently deliver ELC:

- In 53 Local Authority settings, including 3 stand alone ELC settings: At the multi-agency Links Hub; and at our 2 Outdoor Nursery provisions at Duthie and Hazlehead Parks;
- In 41 Funded Provider ELC settings;
- At our Gaelic Medium Unit based in Gilcomstoun Primary School; and
- Through 62 Funded Provider childminders.

- 3.10 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. The consultation received a total of 664 responses after 3 weeks (+210 (46%) from 2021).

- 3.11 Key headline data is below:

- 79.4% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the range of ELC providers and models within their local area (Associated School Group (ASG)) (+7.4% from 2021).
- 75.8% have been able to secure a funded ELC place in their local area/ASG.
- 80.6% of respondents were able to secure their first choice of ELC provision.
- 88.4% of respondents were satisfied with the location of their ELC provision. (+5.4% from 2021).
- 76.8% of respondents were satisfied with the times ELC services are available (+9% from 2021).
- 87.1% of respondents stated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their child's experience of ELC to date (+ 4.7% from 2021).
- 73.6% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the snacks and meals their child is offered whilst attending ELC (+4.8% from 2021)
- The majority of respondents, at over 95%, identified Early Learning and Childcare as having a positive impact on their child's development with:

- 87% identifying improved social skills;
  - 81% seeing an improvement in their child's communication skills;
  - 71% identifying improved creativity;
  - 68% identifying improved fine motor skills;
  - 64% identifying improved emotional development;
  - 63% identifying improved physical development;
  - 62% identifying improved listening skills;
  - 60% identifying improved literacy development; and
  - 60% identifying improved numeracy development.
- 39.8% of respondents stated that they had more time for other responsibilities as a result of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (-11.4% from 2021).
  - 29.2% of respondents indicated that they had more money/disposable income as a positive impact on their family (-9.5% from 2021).
  - 24.1% are now considering a return to work or study (-4.4% from 2021).
  - 24.1% stated improved wellbeing/respite as a positive impact from the expansion of ELC (-2% from 2021), with 18.9% of respondents finding they now have more time to themselves (-5.4% from 2021).
  - 73.3% of respondents stated that they are aware that Aberdeen City Council offers Eligible 2's ELC placements.

3.12 The full analysis of the responses has been used to inform the refresh of the ELC Delivery Plan in 2024. Critically, responses do not indicate a need to amend our approach to the provision of a mixed model of ELC across the city.

3.13 Work has been undertaken between 2022 to 2024 to monitor demand across the city and in individual Associated School Groups (ASGs). This is in order to meet the needs of families and to achieve best value. As a result some ELC models have been amended, as approved by Education and Children's Services Committee in January and November 2023 (reports CFS/23/003 and CFS/23/301 respectively). We will maintain a mixed model of ELC across Associated School Groups (ASGs) to ensure families continue to have choice.

3.14 Key highlights from our Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2022-24 Review of Improvement Activity and Actions for 2022-24 include:

- Ensuring a good mix of 8am-6pm all year round ELC provision and 9am-3pm term time provision across all ASGs. Our ELC Funded Providers also continue to offer fully flexible funded ELC across the city meeting the needs of families who require wrap around care and additional hours;
- Reviewing of Local Authority ELC delivery models to meet demand and maximise resources;
- An upward trend of improvement in inspection evaluations, including Very Good and Excellent evaluations at a number of ELC settings;
- Participation in Collaborative Improvement process which has validated our own self-evaluation and endorsed our long-term ambition;
- Delivering a highly successful Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Learning festival which took place in February 2024. Over 500

practitioners from across the city, from both Local Authority and Funded Provider ELC settings attended. The event included opportunities for collaborative working as well as three keynote speakers;

- Working in partnership with ABZworks to provide 12 week internship placements for various groups of people looking to return to work or indeed start off their career. Recent internships included LTU (long term unemployed), Care experienced young people and parents who wanted to return to work;
- Continuing to grow our own workforce by offering Modern Apprenticeship opportunities;
- Increasing the number of ELC staff undertaking accredited qualifications through annual Workforce Development and Expansion funding opportunities; and
- Increasing the uptake of ELC provision for Eligible 2 year olds.

3.15 The full report can be found at Appendix A.

### **Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26**

3.16 The Local Authority has a statutory duty under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to prepare and publish an Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan to set out the strategic direction for the delivery of ELC in the city.

3.17 The Plan has to respond to local need and reflect the diversity of communities in Aberdeen.

3.18 The 2024-26 Delivery Plan will follow on from the 2022-24 Delivery Plan and includes the views of key stakeholders, including parents, carers, staff voice and Community Planning partners.

3.19 A one-page infographic has been produced (Appendix B) which sets out the proposed direction of travel for the next two years. It was shared widely with key stakeholders, including ELC staff, Funded Providers and Community Planning partners, to show how the ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26 (Appendix C) will set out:

- How will we deliver ELC?
- How will we ensure quality?
- How will we communicate, engage and consult?
- How will we support and develop our workforce?

3.20 The underpinning principles continue to be that ELC should be:

- High quality
- Flexible
- Accessible
- Affordable

3.21 Based on our consultation with parents and carers, and our engagement with key stakeholders, including staff voice, triangulated via staff survey, Collaborative Improvement and ELC Learning Festival, we suggest that our key

priorities for development over the next 2 years continue to be:

- Workforce Support
- Transitions
- Community Partnerships
- Family Support

3.22 Improvement activity and actions for the next 2 years are detailed in the Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 in Appendix C.

3.23 Within the Delivery Plan 2024-26 is an action to increase the number of childminders in the city by 25 per year. The Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future (PSCF), a National Partnership Programme on Childminder Retention & Recruitment was launched on 5 June 2024. This aims to grow the childminding workforce across Scotland by 1,000 and support the retention of existing childminders. Aberdeen City Council is one of 16 Local Authority areas delivering the programme, in partnership with Scottish Childminding Association. A start-up grant of £750 will be available for newly registered childminders who complete the programme to help set up their new business.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Aberdeen City Council, as primary guarantor of quality and key enabler of flexibility and choice, is funded via GAE from the Scottish Government to deliver ELC. Ringfencing of a specific grant to deliver ELC was removed from April 2024.

4.2 Officers continue to work with finance colleagues to ensure that our plans work towards realisation of a sustainable ELC provision.

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?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Compliance</b>	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	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Operational</b>	Risk of not attracting enough new	Mitigated through the ongoing activities being undertaken to support workforce	L	<b>Yes</b>

	practitioners into the workforce.	development as outlined in ELC Delivery Plan 2024-26.		
<b>Financial</b>	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 continue to monitor supply and demand in order to meet demand and maximise resources.	M	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Reputational</b>	Risk of not delivering on legal obligations	Mitigated through delivery of the Expansion Programme and ongoing monitoring of supply and demand of ELC places.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u></b>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of Policy Statement “Work with the Scottish Government to deliver free Early Learning and Childcare for families on the lowest incomes”.</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>
<b><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></b>	



<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 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 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 34 Modern Apprenticeships positions in ELC settings across the city.</p> <p>Most recently, the Early Years Team have worked in partnership with ABZworks to provide 12 week internship placements for various groups of people looking to return to work or indeed start off their career. Recent internships included LTU (long term unemployed), Care experienced young people and parents who wanted to return to work. On successful completion of the programme, the participants are encouraged to seek a career in ELC. They are guaranteed an interview for ELC Support Worker posts or Modern Apprenticeships, and, if recommended by school staff, can be placed on the relief ELC Support Worker pool. These internships have been a great success and will continue for as long as funding allows.</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 neighbourhoods, will sustain</p>	<p>The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare has contributed positively to supporting positive destinations.</p>

<p>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 34 Modern Apprenticeships positions in ELC settings 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><b>Regional and City Strategies</b></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"> <li>1. Support families to take up employment and training opportunities;</li> <li>2. Develop the Young Workforce; and</li> <li>3. Support business to recruit and retain staff.</li> </ol> <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>
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## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the provision of Early Learning and Childcare has been reviewed and no changes are required.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	None

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 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 – Report on Review of Improvement Activity and Actions  
11.2 Appendix 2 – Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26 Infographic  
11.3 Appendix 3 – Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan 2024-26

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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