

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Education Officer****Education Services Committee: 14 December 2022**

Subject: Early Learning and Childcare Progress Update**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** This report provides progress made to provide high quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) and summary of the key points of Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26 (www.gov.scot)

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee notes:
- (a) progress to deliver the statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of high quality early learning and childcare and;
 - (b) key points of Appendix 1, Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26.

3. Background**Expansion**

- 3.1** Research suggests that those children, especially those from the least advantaged backgrounds will benefit from expansion of ELC. The policy directive to expand ELC provision was to improve children's outcomes and reduce the poverty related attainment gap. In order to do that high-quality, flexible, affordable and accessible ELC has been provided by WDC. Parents have taken up their child's entitlement to funded ELC. As a result of this universal provision, children's development should improve, the poverty-related attainment gap should narrow and more parents should be able to work, study or train. In WDC the poverty related attainment gap measured through literacy and numeracy shows that the gap is narrowing but work is required to ensure that the gains continue to be maintained between our least and most advantaged children. The extent of the impact on parents which enables them to work, study or train is not yet known in WDC.
- 3.2** Affordable, flexible ELC can improve standards of living and address child poverty; reducing pressures on family income and enabling parents and carers, particularly women, to participate in work, education or training. This also has important benefits for a child's own wellbeing, which is negatively impacted by living in poverty. In the context of the current cost of living crisis this is even more important. The importance of childcare in enabling parents and carers to work, or increase their working hours cannot be underplayed. The international evidence also indicates that ELC

provision can help to address gender inequality in pay, as well as supporting parents and carers to combine caring for their children with seeking or returning to work, or taking part in education or training. The literature has focused on the links between maternal employment and children taking part in ELC, suggesting that the existence of ELC provision helps to support mothers to work. At this stage of 1140 implementation, we do not know how many parents work or study lives have been impacted by expansion but we do know that almost all parents in WDC use the full 1140 offer.

- 3.3** The Growing Up in Scotland Study findings also show that while children benefit from ELC their experience must be of high quality to impact on their development and learning. Quality of provision is influenced by a wide range of factors, including: staffing levels and aspects of working conditions, staff qualifications and development, relationships and interactions between staff and children, the physical environment and the curriculum. Our quality improvement programme this session, is designed to evaluate the quality of our ELC, impact and outcomes for children and to hear the views of staff, children and their families about 1140.

4. Evaluation of 1140

- 4.1** The self-evaluation tools which support ELC to measure progress and plan improvement have been provided and improved over time. The tools are reflective and supportive of the scrutiny and regulation which the sector is subject to by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. Specific self-evaluation tools have been provided to critically reflect on practice and to evaluate the 1140 hours curriculum offer.

- 4.2** This session's quality improvement programme of visits at our ELC provision is underway. The focus of improvement visits is implementation of 1140 curriculum models and outcomes for children and families. During the process leaders share:

- Self-evaluation of curriculum rationale and design
- Leadership of pedagogy and play
- Curriculum learning and development pathways
- Development of skills for life and learning.

The One-ery model of early level learning, curriculum delivery based on play pedagogy and nurturing approaches will be included in this series of improvement visits. Views and experiences in relation to 1140 expansion and One-ery of staff, parents, children, parents and carers will also be gathered.

- 4.3** The Scottish Government Evaluation strategy for 1140 was published in October 2022. The purpose of the evaluation is to understand what is working, whether the policy is making a difference and where any challenges remain. The approach to assessing how the ELC expansion is making a difference for the sector is set out in Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26 (Appendix 1). The focus of the evaluation will be on quality of provision for children, their parents, carers and families. A final report is currently planned for 2025. The evaluation aims to strengthen the existing evidence base by including and assessing how funded ELC can help parents and carers to move closer to the labour market.

- 4.4** The West Partnership 1140 Evaluation Study compliments the work we are doing with our ELC stakeholders on the impact and benefits of 1140. The West Partnership evaluation will include aspects that have not been covered within the Scottish Government's national evaluation of 1140 hours, such as views and experiences of practitioners and parents on perceived impact and children's experience of 1140.

Inspection Evaluations

- 4.5** A key focus of the Criteria for the National Standard is inspection evaluations. As previously reported the National Standard Criteria sets a minimum quality threshold for providers delivering the funded hours of 'good'. Embedding quality at our ELC remains our highest priority underpinned by a National Standard that all services have to meet in order to deliver funded ELC. The National Standard criteria include the elements of quality that all children and their families should expect from their ELC experience. External scrutiny by the Care Inspectorate has resulted in evaluative grades at good and above at all inspected settings. All childminders in partnership have evaluative grades at good and above with one inspection providing excellent evaluations.
- 4.6** Care inspections from a sample of ELCs, from August 2021 to November 2022 provided the following evaluations:
- *How good is our care, play and learning?* 4 settings were rated good and 9 rated very good
 - *How good is our setting?* 6 settings were rated good and 7 at very good
 - *How good is our leadership?* 2 settings were rated good and 11 at very good
 - *How good is our staff team?* 3 settings rated good and 10 at very good
- 4.7** Nationally the percentage of funded ELC providers evaluated as good or better in all quality themes remains high but declined between 2014 and 2021 from 93.2% to 89.4%. This trend was reversed in WDC between 2014 and 2021 from 85% evaluated as good or better to 100% inspections in 2022 evaluated at good or better. WDC is the guarantor of quality, providing the support and challenge to ensure that this remains at 100% positive inspections at our ELC.

5. Funding Follows the Child: Admission to early learning and childcare

- 5.1** The Admissions Policy is undergoing updates for the statutory deferred entry policy, including processes and criteria for children aged 3 and 4 years. The current policy for children with additional support needs (ASN) is also being reviewed to ensure that we meet children's needs. This review is being undertaken by a working group who will provide proposals to support our staff teams to provide the service required for families with children with ASN for school session 2023-24. Information for parents, staff and funded providers will also be provided. The Council website continues to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to provide the most up-to-date information for parents/carers. This includes how to apply for funding for early learning and childcare for eligible 2 year olds, 3-5 year olds and deferred entry as well as

additional hours' costs and paid places. It also contains information on Cross Boundary Protocols. The Frequently Asked Questions continue to be updated regularly.

6. Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26

6.1 Appendix 1 summarises the vision for early learning and school age childcare. This plan aims to embed 1140 hours programme, build a system of school age childcare and an early learning and child care offer for one and two year olds who need it most. Three Separate publications to support this strategy will be published later in 2022:

1. Strategy setting out how the expanded entitlement to 1140 hours of high quality funded ELC and its impact will be evaluated.
2. Delivery framework for school age childcare in Scotland.
3. Strategic framework for Scotland's childcare profession.

6.2 Plan on a Page

The plan on a page contained in the strategy provides the key aspects of vision, priorities and outcomes which are:

- Realising the benefits of the expansion to 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare
- Progressing the expansion of the childcare offer, including building a system of school age childcare and developing a new offer for one and two year olds.
- Ensuring that the delivery of priorities is supported by a sustainable, diverse and thriving sector and profession.
- Ensuring that ambitions are underpinned by fair funding and outcomes frameworks, robust data and organisations that work together to regulate services and support quality improvement.

7. People Implications

7.1 As previously reported a high quality, diverse and well-qualified professional Workforce is key to delivering the expansion and the quality of ELC.

7.2 Support is provided for ELC staff teams and leaders identified to support delivery of the high quality ELC and increased expectations of 1140 hours model of curriculum

8. Financial and Procurement Implications

8.1 As reported previously to ensure that it is protected for investment in early learning and childcare, the multi-year funding package for expansion is allocated through a specific grant. There are no changes to the multi-year funding allocation to this authority; figures are cumulative. The multi-year allocations for West Dunbartonshire:

Financial Year	Revenue £m	Capital £m
2018/19	1.410	0.580
2019/20	5.268	2.380
2020/21	8.717	4.480
2021/22	9.723	5.880
2022/23	9.485	0.794

8.2 The outdoor expansion projects at various locations will be completed in the next few months. Projects planned for Linnvale ELCC, St. Mary's Alexandria, and Christie Park Primary School are at various stages of implementation see details below. Budget has been allocated for projects within existing budgeted resources.

- Linnvale ELCC work underway
- St Mary's ELCC Alexandria – planning in place, building warrant and start date required
- Christie Park Primary School – plans have been drawn up.

9. Risk Analysis

9.1 The Key Risks:

- Maintaining high quality ELC at all funded providers to ensure that they meet the National Standard Criteria.
- Failure to deliver 1140 hours curriculum by confident, well-trained ELC staff teams.
- The Christie Park project is required for August 2023 which if delayed will impact our capacity to deliver the number of ELC placements required for deferred entry policy. If delayed this may require contingency planning.

10. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

10.1 An EIA for the Expansion Plan was undertaken previously. There was no requirement to undertake another EIA for the purposes of this report as it is providing an update to Committee on the expansion.

11. Consultation

11.1 Regular consultation with stakeholders including parents and carers, ELC staff, Unions, Council partners in the project and partner ELC providers continues through the various WDC fora and regular meetings.

11.2 Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

12. Strategic Assessment

12.1 This report reflects the Council's aspiration to have a strong local economy, improved employment opportunities and efficient and effective frontline

services that improve the everyday lives of residents. These are strategic priorities for 2017-2022.

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Background Papers: Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26 (www.gov.scot)

Appendix 1, Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26.

Wards Affected: All