

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Education Officer****Education Services Committee: 15 June 2022**

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

- 1.1** This report provides progress made within the framework developed to provide high quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee notes progress to ensure delivery of the statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of high quality early learning and childcare.

3. Background – Framework for High Quality ELC

- 3.1** The report provides an update for Committee on activity and progress we are making to deliver 1140 hours of high quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).
- 3.2** The framework is impacting the quality of our ELC provision and improving outcomes for our children and families. In this recovery period our focus has been on embedding our ELC models, leadership, outdoor learning, nurturing children, focusing on their wellbeing and providing learning through play. Evidence from our ELC improvement framework and external scrutiny by the Care inspectorate this session, provides evidence of impact in this regard. For example, the care inspection at Levenvale Primary School & ELCC in May 2022 was evaluated at very good. This ELC is one of our newly opened services which opened then closed for lockdown and has been fully operational for less than 2 years. Inspectors praised the caring learning environment where children were supported to reach their potential with strong evidence of child centred, responsive play and a focus on nurture, wellbeing and mindfulness. The ELC has also developed outstanding outdoor learning environments, showcased on the Nurture case studies' map of inspiring outdoor practice across Scotland.
- 3.3** As previously reported the evaluative study of the impact of 1140 hours commissioned by the West Partnership local authorities will evaluate outcomes for children and families and the experiences of stakeholders including practitioners, parents, children, and wider/consequent stakeholders such as primary school practitioners. Of particular interest to this work is the impact of extending ELC entitlement on children's development and their attainment. This aligns to the primary aim of the policy at a national level; to improve outcomes for children and reduce the poverty-related gap. The wider themes to be explored in the research questions are themes which align to our Education Delivery Plan e.g. family learning and engagement, developing

literacy and numeracy skills, curriculum development and pedagogy, transition and workforce development.

4. Main Issues

Providing High Quality ELC

- 4.1** The ambition of universal increased hours of ELC is to improve outcomes for children and to close the poverty related attainment gap. The increased hours of early learning and childcare in WDC are having a positive impact on children's learning and progression. Children are achieving well in literacy and numeracy with a positive impact on their attainment evidenced through literacy and numeracy progress data which shows that children are on track to achieve ambitious benchmarks which were set prior to the pandemic. The early level baseline assessment is benchmarked across the authority to highlight performance levels.
- 4.2** The early intervention strategy for children and families who need it most is beginning to have the impact on numbers of families taking up the offer of ELC for eligible 2 year olds. We have increased our capacity to do this by realigning our ELC models, providing Funding Follows the Child placements with funded providers including childminders, partner providers and WDC ELC settings. Our 2 year olds in the eligible category make up 38% of the 2 year old population in West Dumbarton which is approximately 300 children. Our percentage uptake of eligible 2 year old placements is currently 60%. As previously reported, the national plan for vulnerable one year olds is delayed but those plans will also provide early intervention to support our most vulnerable families.

Deferred Entry to School

- 4.3** The Provision of Early Learning and Childcare (Specified Children) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 was approved by the Scottish Parliament on 3 February 2021. The purpose of this amendment is to provide parents with the choice to defer their child's primary one start and to benefit automatically from an additional year of funded ELC from August 2023. Preparation for this policy is well underway. Our admissions policy and registration information has been updated to ensure that deferred entry policy change is clear for parents. This session the numbers of parents choosing to defer their child's entry to school has stabilised with just under 100 parents asking for deferral and agreement given. Just over 60% are children with January and February birthdays which are automatically approved. The expected rise in September to December birthdays has not happened with no increase from last year to this.
- 4.4** There is no discernible impact of our early adoption of this policy on our ELC capacity to provide deferred placements in almost all of our communities except the Alexandria area. As reported at March 2022 Committee additional ELC capacity in the Alexandria area will be created at Christie Park Primary School with the addition of a nursery class. Our ELC and schools are aware of the policy change which will impact curriculum rationale and delivery as the composition of P.1 could change with age range up to six years. Likewise our ELC will have older children who will require an appropriate curriculum model.

Play Pedagogy

- 4.5** We continue to align all training and professional learning to deliver the high quality expected of the 1140 hours offer to the national practice guidance realising the Ambition: Being Me. This is the framework for all education practitioners at early level in ELC and primary one to provide the pedagogical approaches through play expected at both stages. Our improved approaches and investment in play and learning at early level also continues to support children to transition successfully from ELC to P.1. If more parents defer their child's learning the curriculum design at ELC and P.1 will adapt to meet the needs of a wider age range.
- 4.6** The One-ery model approach to learning is a model of curriculum delivery based on play pedagogy and nurturing approaches at P.1 and ELC. The model was piloted in our campus schools and ELC this session. This model of curriculum delivery has also generated a great deal of interest in our learning communities which has resulted in plans to introduce this model, next session, at an increased number of schools with ELC. Our professional learning programme and forums will continue to support education practitioners and leaders next session as we develop and refine the One-ery model of learning approach.

5. ELC Improvement Framework and External Inspection Scrutiny

- 5.1** Our Improvement Framework has been designed to build capacity for high quality ELC and continuous improvement. This is supported by two external inspection frameworks; HMle and Care Inspectorate who each have their own inspection framework. Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education, Professor Muir's report was published in March. His recommendation for the early years sector stated: As a matter of urgency, the new independent Inspectorate (HMle) should re-engage with the Care Inspectorate to agree a shared inspection framework designed to reduce the burden on ELC practitioners and centres. The Scottish Government has announced that they will come forward with specific proposals to consult with the ELC sector on the dual inspection regime.
- 5.2** HMle has not undertaken inspection of ELC since before the pandemic. The Care Inspectorate has continued to inspect services using a hybrid model of inspection with observation and discussions on site and interviews conducted remotely. Five ELC settings were inspected by the Care Inspectorate between August 2021 and May 2022. From those inspections the following evaluations were given:
- For Quality of Care and Support at the 5 ELC: 5 settings rated good and above.
 - For Quality of Environment at the 5 ELC: 5 settings were rated good and above.
 - For Quality of Staffing at the 5 ELC: 5 settings were rated good and above.
 - For Quality of Management and Leadership at the 5 ELC: 5 settings were rated good and above.

ELC are supported by the central Early Years Team and Care Inspection Improvement Service to achieve grades of good and above. The central team of Early Years officers work closely with Care Inspectorate and Education

Scotland to support ELC improvement; to develop the skills, knowledge and expertise of our ELC leadership teams to self-evaluate and plan for improvement. This session the central team have focussed on learning and teaching and children's progress at visits undertaken at all ELC. This improvement model was closely linked to the National Standard Criteria. As a result of this visit programme a small number of ELC continue to be supported to make improvements.

6. Partner Provider Sustainable Rate

- 6.1** The Ipsos MORI ELC Cost Collection Exercise, as indicated previously, a report has been provided for West Dunbartonshire and for the Regional Improvement Collaborative (The West Partnership). This study was commissioned by the Improvement Service on behalf of local authorities. The aim was to produce up to date estimates of the actual costs to providers of providing an hour of ELC, in order to inform planning, modelling and discussions about rate-setting. Councils each set their own rates to reimburse partner providers for the funded ELC they deliver which is £5.31 per hour in almost all local authorities. This review was necessary due to increased operating costs and to ensure business sustainability following the pandemic.
- 6.2** The current study followed a model developed by Ipsos MORI for an earlier Scotland-wide exercise conducted on behalf of the Scottish Government in 2016, and repeated for the West Partnership councils in 2019 and Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils in 2020. Where there were less than 10 returns, RIC level information was provided but not local authority level data (to preserve confidentiality). We have 11 private funded providers of ELC, from which there were 8 usable responses, this means that local level data could not be provided. We will continue to work with our funded providers to agree the hourly rate.

6. People Implications

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

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1** 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

- 7.2** The final ELC projects for the expansion model have been agreed. The projects are: outdoor projects at various locations, Clydebank ELCC, Linnvale

ELCC, Dalmonach ELCC, St. Mary's Alexandria, and Christie Park Primary School. Budget has been allocated for these projects within existing budgeted resources.

8. Risk Analysis

8.1 The Key Risks:

- The quality of ELC at all funded providers to ensure that they meet the National Standard Criteria.
- Agreeing a sustainable rate with Funded Partner Providers.
- Completion of our projects to improve quality and compliance of our ELC assets.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

9.1 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.

10. Consultation

10.1 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.

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

11. Strategic Assessment

11.1 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: None

Wards Affected: All

