

Report by Chief Education Officer

Education Services Committee: 23 September 2020

Subject: Early Years Implementation Update**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** This report details an update of the plan for expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that committee:

- (i) Notes the contents of Appendix 1, Early Learning & Childcare Phasing Plan 2018 - 2021.
- (ii) Notes the contents of Appendix 2, The Early Learning & Childcare Financial Phasing Plan 2018 - 2022.

3. Background

- 3.1** Members have previously been advised through regular reports to Committee that the WDC Early Learning & Childcare Expansion Plan has developed a service model for delivery of 1140 hours of high quality early learning and childcare (ELC) for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds from August 2020. In the final months before August 2020, progress across the key objectives of our Implementation Plan was on track with target dates set for delivery of each project as agreed with the Early Years Implementation Board. This plan has been revised to take account of delays in the building programme due to lockdown and, financial flexibilities permitted for Councils in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.
- 3.2** Legislation to revoke the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019, has removed the statutory duty on Education Authorities to make 1140 hours of early learning and childcare available to each eligible child from 1 August 2020. This decision was taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. West Dunbartonshire Council developed contingency plans for delivery of the statutory 600 hours for all children which were revised appropriately in response to the updated ELC Reopening Guidance issued on 30 July 2020. The impact of the change to the ELC Reopening Guidance to group size of children permitted to attend ELC, allowed 1140 hours to resume at ELC where it was before lockdown. All of our other ELC have provided 600 hours. Our aim is to ensure that, we can progress as quickly as reasonably possible with our plans for 1140 hours. We will minimise, as far as we can, the impact of not delivering 1140 hours for families. In order to do that our Implementation Plan and Contingency Plan have been revised and projects re-phased.

3.3 The legislation to revoke the implementation of 1140 hours was taken in order that local authorities could respond to the pandemic and to provide the necessary financial flexibility to do so. The Scottish Government letter of 15 May 2020 'FLEXIBILITY IN LOCAL AUTHORITY USE OF EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE FUNDING TO SUPPORT PANDEMIC RESPONSE' sets out expectations for Councils. This letter describes the extent and nature of these flexibilities for education and early learning and childcare grant funding streams to support learning, critical childcare provision for children and families during the emergency response period and beyond this if necessary. The available financial flexibility from the Early Learning and Childcare Grant for 2020/21 is £2,169,136. The Council has the ability to use the financial flexibility for alternative arrangements for the delivery of critical childcare, provision of food, digital access, education and support for the children and families of key workers and education and support for vulnerable children and families for the duration of early learning and childcare setting and school closures and for education recovery costs. Further advice was provided and clarified in May by the Scottish Government Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd, regarding education recovery and the use of use of education and early learning and childcare funding streams for education recovery to best support children and young people.

4. Main Issues

4.1 Delay to the full rollout in August 2020 of 1140 hours has created uncertainty and anxiety for parents and carers. Families have been making plans in anticipation of their children becoming entitled to 1140 hours of ELC from August. Those families who do not have the guaranteed offer are disappointed. Communication with parents and carers for the timing of reopening the remaining ELC which will offer 1140 hours is a priority. Confirmation of delays parents and carers can reasonably expect to the delivery of 1140 hours for children, will allow families to plan the childcare that they need. Accessible, clear and unambiguous information about the delay of the delivery parents and carers can expect will be updated on our website and communicated to individual ELCs involved. Eight ELCs are affected by delays involving 486 children.

4.2 Although some restrictions for reopening have been reduced at our ELC, it is not a return to normal ELC practice but we are ensuring that our plan will deliver high quality ELC. We are managing services and mitigating risks with the age appropriate public health measures that we have in place for our ELC settings. In order to reassure families, safeguarding the health and wellbeing of children, and adults working with our youngest children is our priority. We have reopened in a way that protects the health of children, their families, and staff teams.

4.3 The revised ELC Reopening Guidance means that our youngest children do not require to be socially distanced from staff and with each other. The updated guidance allows increased numbers of children attending who are able to play and learn together in a larger group than we had planned for. This means that those ELC offering 1140 hours before lockdown can continue to do so. The ELC not offering 1140 hours will continue to offer 600 hours until the building programme is complete at Carleith, Dalreoch, Gavinburn, Linnvale and Dalmonach. To deliver our re-phased plan we require a further

482 places eligible for three and four year olds. We also require 65 places for eligible two year olds. Approximately 74 % of 1140 hours places have now been delivered at our West Dunbartonshire ELC and Funded Partner Providers.

- 4.4** Our Early Learning & Childcare Phasing Plan 2018 – 2021 (Appendix 1) has been revised to take account of delays due to lock down and resulting building delays. It is not a return to normal as social distancing measures are in place for our staff. This has reduced numbers of children able to attend at our ELC and at Funded Providers but this is not as significant as we had thought. Sessions of 600 hours ELC have been offered to families which are flexible enough to ensure that when the restrictions are lifted and as building work completes, we can increase hours to 1140. All children attending regardless of 600 or 1140 hours attendance will be provided with a free school meal. This ensures that part of the 1140 hours offer is in place for all children.
- 4.5** Construction projects which were delayed have resumed with updated completion dates confirmed by Asset Management. As these projects are scheduled to complete before or by April 2021, eligible 2 year olds and all 3 and 4 year olds could be guaranteed their entitlement by April 2021. We are continuing to recruit for building completion dates, however, financial flexibilities has delayed recruitment for three projects; Gavinburn, Dalreoch and Linnvale. At present 17 FM staff are required and 30 ELC practitioners. If further financial flexibilities are necessary in financial year 2021/22, recruitment for 1140 hours at these projects may be delayed.
- 4.6** Interim Guidance for the implementation of the National Standard has been published. In preparation for Care Inspectorate inspections to resume, we have continued to target our resources at those ELC with Care Inspection grades below good. The Care Inspectorate has suspended all inspection activity in response to the pandemic. We continue to provide intensive support for those settings to achieve good or better. The Care Inspectorate's Early Learning and Childcare Improvement Programme has resumed and our ELC below good, have attended their on line sessions. Our focus on improvement continues with virtual meetings with heads of ELC, Google classroom, individual support and on line training.
- 4.7** Our programme of professional learning designed to improve quality and close the poverty related attainment gap will be provided for our ELC practitioners and leaders including, Froebel and Childhood Practice (University of Edinburgh), leadership courses (Early Years Scotland), learning through play, and early years pedagogy. Focus on 'Realising the Ambition' will be our main focus for practitioners this session with planned professional learning on this guidance which is a revision of Building the Ambition. All courses will be on line. The range of learning has promoted practitioner enquiry, reflective practice, professional dialogue and collaboration to improve outcomes for children and leadership of change.
- 4.8** Our Equity and Excellence Leads (EELs) working in our ELC with the greatest numbers of children in SIMD 1 and 2 provide additional support for children at risk of missing out. As they are not a peripatetic group of staff, EELs to are not affected by the re-opening guidance as they are allocated to individual ELC.

Unlike our Early Stages Teachers who work to the peripatetic model which has been revised to comply with the ELC re-opening guidance. The Early Stages teachers are currently in one setting as well as supporting ELC virtually.

5. 1140 Hours Re-Phasing and Recovery

- 5.1** We have worked with partners in Asset Management, Finance, HR, Staffing and Facilities Management to assess the current delivery and what remains to be done. We have re-phased our Implementation Plan to deliver 1140 hours for every child as soon as is practicable. The building works at all remaining projects in the plan has been rescheduled.
- 5.2** Our contingency plan, previously agreed by Committee to ensure that we have alternative capacity to mitigate the risk of not delivering 1140 hours on time at some locations, has been revised to take account of re-phasing projects in our plan. There is alternative provision developed at Dalreoch Primary School for a nursery class which is required for numbers in the Dumbarton area; before the planned ELC opens which will not deliver on time for this school session. See Appendix 1, Early Learning & Childcare Phasing Plan 2018 - 2021
- 5.3** Childminders are impacted by Scottish Government's, Childminding Services Re-opening Guidance. Parents who opt for a blended model are made aware of the risks for their children i.e. meeting different groups of children. Numbers of parents requesting the blended model from childminders has not changed; nine 3-5 year old children have opted for this model.

6. People Implications

- 6.1** There are significant implications for people in WDC. The ELC Expansion has benefited our communities and provided employment for a range of staff beyond qualified early learning and childcare workers. There is little change to recruitment figures since the last report or the uptake by men of the posts required for expansion. The delay in delivery also impacts families as they had expected the universal offer of 1140 hours for eligible two year olds and all three and four year olds.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1** The multi-year funding package for the expansion of early learning and childcare is allocated as a specific grant to ensure that it is protected for investment in early learning and childcare. As previously reported the financial template submitted to Scottish Government in February 2018 has been reviewed and used in deciding the multi-year funding allocation to this authority; figures are cumulative. The multi-year allocations were announced in May 2018 and are as follows 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

7.2 The multi-year funding for the expansion plan which guarantees capital and revenue funding for delivery of 'Funding Follows the Child' for the entitlement to 1140 hours of ELC for eligible two year olds and all three and four year olds by their eligible start date in school session 2020/2021, has been impacted by the financial response to the pandemic. Financial flexibility from revenue funding of £2,169,136 has been identified. Further delays may be necessary if financial flexibility is required in the new financial year 2021/22. See Appendix 2, The Early Learning & Childcare Financial Phasing Plan 2018 - 2022.

8. Risk Analysis

8.1 The key risks to the project:

- delays in delivery of the re-phased infrastructure expansion if building work is delayed for any reason: virus resurgence, resulting in closure of ELCs will add further delays to the expansion plan;
- delays in delivering the entitlement to all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds which is expected by parents and carers will impact the childcare that they have planned for;
- if financial flexibilities continue beyond 31 March 2021, there is a risk of the final expansion being further delayed, depending on whether the Council requires the flexibilities identified; and
- ensuring that all ELC settings meet the criteria for the National Standard.

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 forums 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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Appendices Appendix 1 - Early Learning & Childcare Phasing Plan 2018
- 2021.
Appendix 2 - The Early Learning & Childcare Financial
Phasing Plan 2018 - 2022.

Background Papers: [Guidance](#) for early learning and childcare services
[Guidance](#) for childminding services
[Guidance](#) for out of school care services
[Guidance](#) for fully outdoor childcare services
Public health and scientific [advice](#)
Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard
[interim guidance](#)
[Guidance](#) for schools reopening
Parent Club's new [campaign](#)

Wards Affected: All