

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Education Officer

Education Services Committee: 11 March 2020

Subject: Funding Follows the Child: Admission to Early Learning and Childcare Policy Guidance for Parents and Carers

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report details the guidance for admission to early learning and childcare to help parents and carers to make an informed choice about their child's entitlement. This guidance complies with the Scottish Government policy: Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare: Operating Guidance.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee approves the contents of Appendix 1, Funding Follows the Child: Admission to Early Learning and Childcare Guidance for Parents and Carers.

3. Background

- 3.1** The current admissions policy guidance for early learning and childcare does not reflect Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare: Operating Guidance.
- 3.2** Our policy guidance for parents and carers requires to be updated for the entitlement to 1140 hours. Funding Follows the Child and the statutory roll out of 1140 hours to provide high quality, flexible early learning and childcare, accessible and affordable for all families is built into the new guidance. The approach is provider neutral; families will access early learning and childcare at funded providers. This includes local authority nurseries, private nurseries and childminders who are in partnership with the Council. Funding Follows the Child allows parents and carers to access their child's nursery place where they choose to take it; if there is a place available.
- 3.3** In West Dunbartonshire we allocate places for three and four year olds for two years which, according to our surveys is what most parents and carers want before children make the transition to school. This gives families the opportunity to plan and make choices about early learning and childcare which fits around their family life and gives them the security of knowing that their early learning and childcare does not need to change from one year to the next.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The current guidance for parents and carers was updated when the last increase to the entitlement for three and four year olds was introduced: known as 600 hours which is the current entitlement. It is essential that the new

guidance helps parents and carers make an informed choice of ELC which is central to Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare: Operating Guidance.

- 4.2** In order to implement Funding Follows the Child, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is a place available for all eligible children. Currently children aged three years of age become eligible for a government funded place at the start of the term following their third birthday.
- 4.3** It is proposed that the entitlement will now begin the month after the child's third or second birthday whichever applies. This change will allow parents the accessibility, affordability and flexibility which Funding Follows the Child is designed to do. It also is in line with the policies applied across councils within the West Partnership.
- 4.4.** A range of models is available to ensure that all children can access their entitlement to 1140 hours of early learning and childcare. Parents and carers can apply for the ELC which suits their family best. This is made clear in the guidance allowing parents and carers to make that informed choice that they should expect.
- 4.5** We will continue to allocate places for entitled three and four year olds using set criteria which have been revised and simplified to cover the main priorities for admission. This was necessary as parents and carers have told us that the current guidance is complicated and difficult to understand. This revision to the criteria will ensure that early learning and childcare places are allocated fairly to families. All places will be allocated using the priority criteria as outlined in table 1 below.

Table 1.

Priority 1	Child Protection, Prevention, Looked After and Additional Support Needs
Priority 2	Deferred Entry – January and February birthdays
Priority 3	Pre-school children within their allocated ELC community as indicated by address
Priority 4	Ante pre-school children within their allocated ELC community as indicated by address
Priority 5	Parents who live outside West Dunbartonshire

5. The Offer of 1140 Hours Entitlement

- 5.1** The guidance makes it clear that parents and carers can apply for a place at a funded provider: local authority nursery or a private nursery in partnership with the Council or a child minder in partnership with the Council. The guidance provides clarity on how parents and carers can take the entitlement hours and with which providers.

- 5.2** Parents and carers will be encouraged to apply to settings within their local community which provides the model they would like for their child. Nursery settings do not have defined catchment areas however parents and carers have traditionally applied for ELC within their local community. In response to this we have developed a range of provision which will meet the needs of families within each community. Parents and carers can choose, in order of preference which settings they would like to be considered for. All West Dunbartonshire early learning and childcare settings are organised into six communities, based on area and address. Gartocharn is a community on its own, in recognition of its rural demographic and the needs of the families and their children to use a service within that community. If a parent or carer wants a place out with their local community they can apply for this but a child in the local community will be considered first as outlined in table 2 below.

Table 2

Community
1. Duntocher / Hardgate / Faifley
2. Clydebank
3. Dalmuir/ Old Kilpatrick /Bowling
4. Dumbarton / Milton
5. Balloch / Renton / Vale of Leven / Alexandria
6. Gartocharn

6. People Implications

- 6.1** There are no people implications for WDC in relation to this report.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1** There are no additional financial or procurement issues relation to this report.

8. Risk Analysis

- 8.1** The key risk to the project:

- Failing to meet the appropriate ELC placement needs of children, parents and carers; this risk will be mitigated with the introduction of this updated guidance and application of revised criteria.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

9.1 This guidance enhances the quality of service provided for families to help them make an informed choice about their child's ELC and therefore can be seen to have a positive impact in terms of fairness.

10. Consultation

10.1 Regular consultation with parents and carers about the expansion has taken place through the various WDC forums and regular consultation 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 – Funding Follows the Child: Admission to Early Learning and Childcare Policy Guidance for Parents and Carers

Background Papers: Funding Follows the Child and the National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare: Operating Guidance.

Wards Affected: All