

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Chief Education Officer****Education Services Committee: 16 March 2022**

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

- 1.1** This report provides progress made and 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:

- (i) Notes the framework that has been developed to ensure delivery of the statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of high quality early learning and childcare.

**3. Background - Providing High Quality ELC**

- 3.1** Members have previously been advised through regular reports to committee progress to deliver ELC service model for delivery of 1140 hours of high quality early learning and childcare. Our delivery plan for 1140 hours expansion was aligned to the Scottish Government Blue Print for 2020. This included actions to ensure and plan for quality at our ELC, recruitment, workforce development and training, improving physical capacity and providing the highest quality resources, process/technologies and administration changes and implementation of the delivery model.
- 3.2** The increased hours of early learning and childcare has transformative potential to raise the attainment of all children with our focus on narrowing the poverty related attainment gap and to give our children the best start in life. Our ELC service has exceptional learning environments and resources which were carefully designed to motivate children to learn and develop. Ensuring high quality education provision and meeting the National Standard through our expanded ELC provision is central to service delivery planning.
- 3.3** The infrastructure to deliver ELC entitlement is in place, including the framework to support a highly trained skilled workforce. Our leadership models at our ELC are impacting and improving the quality of the provision and education provided for our children. Professional learning and funding for appropriate degree level qualifications which is known to impact high quality ELC delivery is also in place. A steady increase in degree qualified early educators is evident at officer and lead officer level.
- 3.4** The Scottish Government will evaluate the outcomes of the 1140 hours expansion policy in the coming years. The Scottish Government provided three 'principal outcomes' for extending ELC entitlement:

- Children's development improves and the attainment gap narrows;
- Parents' opportunities to take up work, training, or study increase; and
- Family wellbeing improves through enhanced nurture and support.

**3.5** The West Partnership local authorities have commissioned an evaluative study of the impact of 1140 hours. The planned longitudinal study will evaluate and focus on two primary areas:

- Outcomes for children (development and attainment)
- Experiences of stakeholders (practitioners, parents, children, and wider/consequent stakeholders such as primary practitioners).

## **4. Main Issues**

### **Providing High Quality ELC**

**4.1** Our expansion of ELC supports the vision of an education system that delivers both excellence and equity in equal measure for all children, with regard to the development of physical, cognitive and social skills. Research has shown that good quality ELC can have a positive effect on the educational, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes for children in both the short and long term, including those who are most deprived in terms of household income. At this time it is too early to measure the impact of the extended hours but the ambition is to change and improve outcomes for children.

**4.2** The socio-economic gap in cognitive development opens up well before children start primary school which is evident at our ELC from the very youngest children in our care. Many of our children experience disadvantages from birth onwards which impacts adversely on their life chances, resulting in poor health, employment, educational and social outcomes. The ELC plan for our most vulnerable children to provide placements for eligible 2 year olds is part of our early intervention strategy for children and families who need it most. Our capacity to do this is increasing as we realign our models and provide Funding Follows the Child placements with funded providers including childminders, partner providers and WDC ELC settings. Plans for one year olds are delayed due to the pandemic but those plans will support our most vulnerable families.

### **Deferred Entry to School**

**4.3** In August 2023 our families may make the choice of deferring sending their children to school. 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 is to entitle all children who defer their primary one start to benefit automatically from an additional year of funded ELC from August 2023. Five local authorities are piloting this offer from August 2022. Educational Services are preparing to deliver this policy across areas such as planning, marketing to parents and capacity. Our admissions policy and registration information has been updated to ensure that deferred entry policy change is clear for parents.

- 4.4** Prior to the pandemic the number of deferred applicants was steady at approximately 30 children annually. A steep rise occurred in 2019/20 to over 50 applications, which is a continuing trend. This session just over 100 parents chose to defer their child's entry to school. There is a spread of applications across all areas including our most deprived communities.
- 4.5** Capacity created for 1140 hours at our ELC will allow us to provide places for deferred entry children in most geographical areas. We are working on a plan for additional ELC capacity in the Alexandria area at Christie Park Primary School. Our ELC and schools are aware of the policy change and how this could 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**

- 4.6** Realising the Ambition: Being Me, national practice guidance is the framework for all education practitioners at early level in ELC and primary to provide the play pedagogy expected at that age and stage.
- 4.7** Our improved approaches and investment in play and learning at early level has supported children to transition successfully from ELC to P.1. The extended hours must improve outcomes for children. These extended hours provide children with the opportunity to deepen and broaden their learning and development, rather than progressing through the curriculum quickly, without depth of learning. If more parents defer their child's learning the curriculum design at ELC and P.1 will change to meet the needs of a wider age range.
- 4.8** Through the attainment challenge, approaches to learning using play methodology, is well established in our schools and ELC. Shared pedagogy across early level is a key priority. The importance of play at early level and the continued approach at P.1 and its place in our approaches to learning are embedded. Practitioners at early level P.1 value play; they understand its importance for young children to develop their cognitive, social, emotional and physical capacities.
- 4.9** At our campus schools with ELC we have introduced the One-ery model approach to learning, which is a model of curriculum delivery based on play pedagogy and nurturing approaches at P.1 and ELC. Our aim is to provide a universal and targeted approach to support children in our One-ery classrooms. This blended approach will increase the reach of nurturing approaches at this early stage and provide the early intervention required for some children. This blended approach of Enhanced Nurture within One-ery classrooms means that we can retain the best of nurturing approaches and move forward with the pedagogy of play which we know children at this stage in their development and learning benefit from.

## **5. ELC Improvement Framework**

- 5.1** A central team of officers works 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.
- 5.2** Our Improvement Framework has been designed to build capacity for high quality ELC and continuous improvement. Self-evaluation is well embedded in our schools and ELC however, this ELC improvement framework brings together the core self-evaluation areas which Care Inspectorate, the National Standard Criteria and Education Scotland self-evaluation documents and their focus quality indicators when inspecting and quality assuring ELC. This is key support for new ELC and leaders to deliver Funding Follows the Child.
- 5.3** A Framework for Critically Reflective Practice, developed by Education Services for our ELC, brings together the criteria for the National Standard, the Health and Social Care Standards and How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare. As well as the research from the national practice document Realising the Ambition: Being Me which is referenced for ease. The intention is to provide reflective questions which will help practitioners to focus critically on practice in order to improve learning for children.

## **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:

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Revenue £m</b>	<b>Capital £m</b>
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: Linnvale ELCC, Dalmonach ELCC, St. Mary's Alexandria, 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

