

# West Dunbartonshire Council

## Report by the Director of Education and Cultural Services

Children's Services Committee: 18 April 2007

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**Subject: Rationalisation of Pre-School Places Within the Dumbarton Area**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1** To present for approval the further rationalisation of pre-school places within the Dumbarton area through the restricting of new entries to the Dumbarton Academy Early Education & Childcare Centre.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1** Due to the falling birth rate, there is spare capacity in many of the Early Education & Childcare Centres across the authority. As a result, there is an ongoing process of review and option appraisal to provide the service in an efficient way while maintaining high quality and accessibility for children and families. To date this process has resulted in Vale of Leven EE&CC and Renton EE&CC being brought under joint management, the Dumbarton Mobile Creche being located in St Peter's EE&CC and managed by the head of that centre and the Clydebank Mobile Creche being located in Auchnacraig EE&CC to be managed by that Head of Centre.
- 2.2** As the pre-school population shrinks further, it is envisaged that there will be further opportunities for both management and locational amalgamations to be taken forward.
- 2.3** With particular respect to the Dumbarton Academy EE&CC, it started life as a crèche for the children of adults returning to education at Dumbarton Academy and was established with urban programme funding.
- 2.4** As the number of adults studying declined, the facility was duly adapted to provide nursery places for children living locally.
- 2.5** During its existence as a nursery, it was managed by the Depute Head Teacher of the school. In 2005, however, as it remained the only EE&CC managed by a school, the management was taken over by the Head of Centre at Meadowview EE&CC which is nearby.

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** The pre-school provision within Dumbarton Academy is restricted primarily by the available accommodation. Unlike other centres it can only provide 5 morning sessions for children and two afternoon sessions for a total of 15 children. There is no opportunity to provide childcare for parents in addition to the pre-school and ante pre-school year entitlement due to the limited toilet facilities and lack of appropriate lunch arrangements.

- 3.2** The programme for the regeneration of the Schools Estate has within it provision for Early Education & Childcare places within a new centre to be located on the Dumbarton Academy Campus. This would bring together the Meadowview Early Education & Childcare Centre places and the small number currently located within Dumbarton Academy.
- 3.3** As with all Early Years Centres, the provision in Dumbarton Academy is registered under the regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 and is inspected by the Care Commission on an annual basis. The Care Commission routinely comment on the accommodation available within Dumbarton Academy. They have agreed however that although the facilities are limited, it would be disproportionate for the local authority to incur substantial costs to improve accommodation when there are proposals for a new build.
- 3.4** The entitlement for pre-school and ante pre-school year provision is five sessions of 2½ hours over 33 weeks. As noted above, there is spare capacity in other Early Education & Childcare Centres in the Dumbarton area and in St Peter's EECC in particular. All of the children who would remain at the Dumbarton Academy facility after August 2007 could potentially access their full entitlement in other Early Education & Childcare Centres in the local area.
- 3.5** A decision on the future use of the Dumbarton Academy Early Education & Childcare Centre requires to be made at this stage to ensure continuity of service for children and families while taking account of the limited service provided and the impact of the proposed development of the Dumbarton Academy Campus site leading to the building of a new nursery facility.

#### **4. Proposals**

- 4.1** There are four possible options to address the issues outlined above.
- 1) Close the Early Education & Childcare Centre in June 2007 by offering the children currently attending there who are in their ante pre-school year, places in other centres within Dumbarton. All of the children could be accommodated in St. Peter's Early Education & Childcare Centre for example and could move there with the two members of staff familiar to them.
  - 2) Continue to provide a service in the Early Education & Childcare Centre until June 2008 to allow the current children in their ante pre-school year to remain in the centre until they are ready to transfer on to school in August 2008. Those children on the waiting list for ante pre-school places would be offered a place in another centre.
  - 3) Continue to offer the service until June 2009. This would allow the children on the waiting list for an ante pre-school place to be admitted and remain in the centre for two years until they are ready for school in August 2009. No three year olds would be admitted in August 2008.

- 4) Continue to offer the service without restriction until such time as the Dumbarton Academy building is closed for demolition. The children accessing the centre at that time would require to be 'bussed' to another centre to complete their nursery education.

- 4.2 Informal consultation at a meeting with parents of children currently in the ante pre-school year indicated over-whelmingly that they wished their children to remain in the centre for their pre-school year and then move on to school in August 2008.
- 4.3 They acknowledged the space restrictions and poor toilet facilities but they value the centre for its small size and convenient location. Option 2 would therefore be their strong preference.
- 4.4 Option 2 would disappoint the parents of the 14 children who are currently on the waiting list or hope to access the centre from August 2007, for the ante pre-school year (2 afternoon sessions). As the demand exceeds the available places however every year there are a number of parents who have to access places elsewhere by necessity.
- 4.5 Options 3 and 4 would involve pre-school children receiving their nursery experience during the period when the Dumbarton Academy site is being developed for the new secondary school. Option 4 would then involve children being decanted to another facility in the course of the year to allow for demolition of the existing building.

## **5. Personnel Issues**

- 5.1 The 2 staff currently in place, 1 full time and 1 part time, will continue to be employed either at Dumbarton Academy or at other centres.
- 5.2 The Head of Meadowview Early Education & Childcare Centre will experience a reduction in the management time which is currently involved in the split site arrangement when the centre closes.

## **6 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 When the centre closes there will be a small saving on accommodation costs at Dumbarton Academy. If the existing staff are transferred into vacant posts there will be a saving of 1.5 FTE nursery nurse costs.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

- 7.1 There is no risk to service provision in these proposals.

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1 Given the spare capacity across Early Education & Childcare Centres, there is no requirement to continue to operate a small Early Years provision within Dumbarton Academy which is unable to meet the standard required under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 which is available elsewhere.

- 8.2** The parents of children currently accessing the centre have a strong preference for their children to have continuity of provision for a further year.
- 8.3** The impact of the proposed development of the Dumbarton Academy site requires to be considered in relation to the experience of 3 and 4 year olds who would be attending the centre after June 2008.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1** Elected members are asked to approve the adoption of Option 2 as outlined in this paper ie:

### Option 2

Continue to provide a service in the Early Education & Childcare Centre until June 2008 to allow the current children in their ante pre-school year to remain in the centre until they are ready to transfer on to school in August 2008. Those children on the waiting list for ante pre-school places would be offered a place in another centre.

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**Wards Affected:** Ward 15