

## WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## Report by Chief Education Officer

Education Services Committee: 2 December 2020

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**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 Appendix 1, Early Learning and Childcare Remaining Expansion Projects 2020 to 2021.
- (ii) Notes the contents of Appendix 2, The Early Learning & Childcare Financial Phasing Plan 2018 - 2022.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** The Scottish Government remain committed to increasing entitlement to free early learning and childcare (ELC) to 1140 hours per year for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds. The legal obligation to deliver this has been suspended temporarily. In West Dunbartonshire we are continuing our plan and commitment to deliver 1140 hours where we can. By the end of December 2020, 85% of eligible children will have access to 1140 hours. The remaining projects will provide the final 15% of 1140 hours that remain to be put in place for each geographical area. This is detailed in Appendix 1, Early Learning and Childcare Remaining Expansion Projects 2020 to 2021.
- 3.2** Local Authorities retain the statutory responsibility for ensuring statutory entitlement is available to all eligible children in their area and as the primary guarantors of quality, are responsible for assessing and monitoring compliance with the National Standard.
- 3.3.** The guiding principles of quality, flexibility, and accessibility continue to exemplify our commitment to children and families:

Quality - the expansion of our services will ensure a high-quality experience for all children, which complements other early years activity to close the attainment gap.

Flexibility - increased hours and various delivery models offered by our services, provide parents with choice and flexibility:

- ELC provision - term time (38 weeks)
- ELC provision - full year (50 weeks)
- ELC provision - term time and/ or full year provision

- Funded Providers have various models including some term time and some full year.
- Blended models with childminders.

Accessibility to ensure that ELC capacity is sufficient, is located as conveniently geographically as possible and delivered in fit for purpose settings.

**3.4** Ensuring high quality provision and meeting the National Standard is the cornerstone of the offer of 1140 hours offer for children and families. Inspection activity by the care inspectorate is currently suspended however last session nine ELC settings were inspected by the Care Inspectorate, between August 2019 and March 2020. From those inspections the following evaluations were given:

- For Quality of Care and Support at the 9 ELC: 6 settings rated good and above.
- For Quality of Environment at the 9 ELC: 7 settings were rated good and above.
- For Quality of Staffing at the 9 ELC: 7 settings were rated good and above.
- For Quality of Management and Leadership at the 9 ELC: 7 settings were rated good and above.

The care inspectorate are working remotely to scrutinise services; through telephone phone calls and virtual meetings to ensure that ELC meet the standard expected for reopening. This is supported by the Early Years Team and Care Inspection Improvement Service to bring grades to good and above.

**3.5** For safe reopening of our services the Care Inspectorate arrangements for scrutiny of our ELC is through self-evaluation of a key question related to health and safety; this process has commenced. All services have completed Self-evaluation Key Question 5. Some services have had further scrutiny through telephone conversations. The Care Inspectorate report that all services are meeting the expected standard for safe reopening. We will continue to reassure families that safeguarding the health and wellbeing of children, and adults working with our youngest children is our priority.

## **4. Main Issues**

### **1140 Hours**

**4.1** In Scotland 13 Councils are delivering 1140 hours to all families, 18 Councils are delivering at least 600 hours and 1140 hours to some or most families. Only one Council is delivering at least 600 hours to all and expanded hours to some families. All Councils are working towards 1140 hours universal provision.

**4.2** Further delays to 1140 hours universal provision of ELC in West Dunbartonshire will create uncertainty and anxiety for parents and carers. Further delays will also disadvantage our children. 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. For example, estimates suggest that by age 5, children in more advantaged circumstances are between 11-18 months ahead in their vocabulary skills and between 6-13 months ahead in their problem solving ability. The offer of 1140 hours is designed to improve outcomes for children and to close the poverty related attainment gap. The 1140 hours commitment to addressing and mitigating the impact of adverse childhood experiences for our children is also not to be underestimated.

- 4.3** Families had made plans for the expected timescales for delivery of 1140 hours prior to lockdown at: Dalmonach - January 2020, Braehead – April 2020 and at Carleith - August 2020. Building work at all of these locations is due for completion in December 2020. Staff have been recruited and resources have been purchased to set up provision. If we do not make use of the recruited workforce, resources and buildings, children and families will be unnecessarily disadvantaged. The other projects in our plan are Gavinburn, Dalreoch and Linnvale. These projects are due to complete by April 2021. If further financial flexibilities are necessary in financial year 2021/22 families expecting 1140 hours provision at Gavinburn, Dalreoch and Linnvale will be disadvantaged.
- 4.4** Numbers of parents and carers requesting the blended model from childminders has not changed; parents of nine 3-5 year old children have opted for this model. We continue to meet with, support and provide virtual training opportunities for childminders in partnership and for all other childminders in the area. Information about the childminding grant for reopening has been shared, available through Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA). The Council has set up a one-off grant payment for our funded Childminders we are in partnership with, to aid them in the cost of recovery and to ensure the wellbeing of children.

## **5. People Implications**

- 5.1** As previously reported a high quality, diverse and well-qualified professional workforce is key to delivering the expansion. Recruitment plans for the remaining projects due for delivery in April 2021 will begin in January 2020.

Remaining workforce to be recruited:

11 x 35 hrs early learning and childcare workers  
2 x 30 hrs early learning and childcare workers  
1.58 FTE learning assistants  
2 FTE facilities staff includes janitors and kitchen staff  
0.46 FTE lunch cover

- 5.2** As previously reported there are significant implications for people in WDC. The delay in delivery for families now affects and disadvantages a minority of families who had expected the offer of 1140 hours for eligible two year olds and all three and four year olds. From January 2021, 343, two, three and four year old children are still to receive 1140 hours.

## **6. Financial and Procurement Implications**

- 6.1** 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

**6.2** Proceeding with 1140 hours, in accordance with Scottish Government expectations has altered the projected expenditure on a number of facilities. As reported to Education Services Committee in September, the available financial flexibility from the Early Learning and Childcare Grant for 2020/21 identified £2,169,136 flexible funding. Proceeding with expansion has reduced the possible sum released from the expansion grant from £2.169m to £1.404m. The available flexibility has been reviewed to take account of three ELC projects due for completion by December 2020: Dalmonach, Braehead and Carleith ELCCs. See Appendix 2, The Early Learning & Childcare Financial Phasing Plan 2018 - 2022.

## **7. Risk Analysis**

### **7.1 The key risks:**

- delays in delivery of the re-phased infrastructure expansion of building work if 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 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.

**Laura Mason**  
Chief Education Officer

**Person to Contact:** Kathy Morrison, Senior Education Officer, Education, Learning and Attainment  
Telephone No: 07813 534420  
Email: [kathy.morrison@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:kathy.morrison@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

**Appendices** Appendix 1, Early Learning and Childcare Remaining Expansion Projects 2020 to 2021.  
  
Appendix 2 - The Early Learning & Childcare Financial Phasing Plan 2018 - 2022.

**Wards Affected:** All