



**REPORT TO: SPECIAL EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON 27 MARCH 2024**

**SUBJECT: BRIEFING REPORT: RECEIPT OF PETITION TO REQUEST A
REVIEW OF THE POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR THE
ALLOCATION OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PLACES
IN MORAY**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. PETITION DETAILS

1.1 Title of Petition: To request a review of the policy and procedures for the allocation of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) places in Moray.

1.2 Petitioner: Clare Stables, who has submitted the petition on behalf of the Buckie Community and over 150 residents, in support of opening a new nursery in Buckie.

1.3 Petition Statement:

We, the undersigned, call on The Moray Council to review the policy and procedures for allocation of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) places in Moray to ensure:

- a) there is adequate provision within each secondary school area to enable families living in that area to access appropriate ELC within their 20 minute neighbourhood.
- b) that, where reasonably practicable, children can receive their funded entitlement at times and locations that best support their learning and development, and fit with the needs of their parents/carers.
- c) that the criteria used to allocate places takes particular account of the needs of vulnerable families and children with additional support needs, including minimising travel time and cost, enable siblings to attend the same provision, and ensuring smooth transition to Primary School.

- 1.4 Reasons for the petition/concerns raised by the petitioner: These are contained in the petition, a copy of which is attached as **APPENDIX A** and are summarised as follows:
- Travel distance for families that do not have access to their own transport.
 - Cost of public transport
 - Co-ordination of drop off/pick up if siblings are not at the same ELC provision
 - Concerns around continuity of provision, particularly when children transition into Primary 1

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Buckie Associated Schools Group (ASG) currently has ten ELC settings, including Teddy Bear Developmental Group, that offer a mixture of term time and year round models to support families accessing up to 1140 hours of funded ELC. ELC settings differ from school in as much as there are no “catchment” areas and instead parental choice is the reasoning for place allocation, where there is capacity.
- 2.2 Alongside the ten ELC settings we also have nine childminders that support the Buckie ASG.
- 2.3 Six of the ELC settings are run by the local authority and the other four are private providers in contract with Moray Council to offer the funded hours. The childminders all run as private business with three of them being in contract to offer funded hours to eligible 3-5 year olds.

3. **CURRENT POSITION**

- 3.1 Currently funded childcare places are allocated with priority given as follows:
- Child with existing attendance in the nursery
 - Child resident in secondary catchment area and sibling in the nursery
 - Child resident in secondary catchment
 - Child with [Co-ordinated Support Plan \(CSP\)](#), and/or assessment by the Education Authority
 - Child outwith secondary catchment area and sibling in the nursery
 - Child outwith the secondary catchment area

Priority within any of the six categories above, where it is necessary to be determined, will be given to older children first and then to those resident closest to the setting (distance being calculated by the straight line method)

- 3.2 This [allocation process](#) was originally published in 2000 and was last reviewed in 2010. At the time the policy noted Moray Council will attempt, where possible, to match admissions to parents' wishes.
- 3.3 The current policy complies with the Scottish Government requirements as per the [Funding follows the child guidance](#).

3.4 Currently, both in Buckie High ASG and across Moray, there is sufficient capacity to accommodate all of the children that are eligible for funded 3-5's places. Capacities are reviewed on annually based on Community Health Index (CHI) data.

4. PETITION PROCESS

4.1 In terms of the process for considering petitions this is the preliminary hearing and the Committee may decide as follows:-

- Direct that the petition (in whole or part) proceed to a full hearing, at the next available date of that service committee, another appropriate service committee or full council, at which a further report will be presented by officers detailing the full background to the petition and addressing any issues of particular interest to members.
- Reject the petition (in whole/part) stating reason
- For simple issues instruct immediate action by the council without any further hearing or report
- Pass the petition to the relevant director and chairperson to look into, with or without any specific direction as to action.

5. CONSIDERATIONS AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 It is clear that there are different and potentially conflicting views around the availability and allocation of ELC places across Moray and more specifically in Buckie High ASG. However it should be noted currently there are sufficient ELC spaces across the ASG.

5.2 The ELC service has a clear policy for allocation of spaces and this reflects similar approaches to allocations of funded places across Scotland.

5.3 Consideration would need to be given to whether a review of policy is warranted, however, this would not be the officer recommendation due to there being sufficient capacity already within the ASG. While it is recognised that it is not always possible to meet parental preference, the practical reality is that although ELC provision is made in a number of locations within the ASG it is not always possible to ensure this matches with local demand for particular settings and adequacy of provision must be considered across the whole ASG. The current policy already makes provision to accommodate parental preference as far as possible. If the Committee directs that petition should proceed to a full hearing, a further report would be required to provide more detailed background and information in respect of any particular points from the Committee.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 It is clear that there is a concern from local people as reflected in the petition regarding allocation of ELC services in Moray. However, when the CHI data is reviewed it illustrates that there are sufficient ELC places to accommodate the number of eligible children in the Buckie ASG. Consideration should be given to a proportionate response to these concerns and it may be that action to ensure there is a shared understanding around the existing policies and procedures could be considered as a response.**
- 6.2 Consideration should also be given to the key points noted in 3.2, 3.4 and 5.1 as the service advice is that there are sufficient ELC spaces in Buckie ASG, that the policy already reflects parental choice as far as possible, and therefore the recommendation is to reject this petition on that basis.**

Author of Report: Hazel Sly, Early Years' Service Manager

Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-1315769894-509 / SPMAN-1315769894-507