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**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ON 11 AUGUST 2021**

**SUBJECT: INFORMATION REPORT - MORAY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE-MEETING FUTURE DEMAND UP-DATE**

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

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform Committee on meeting demand for Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision in the Speyside, Buckie and Elgin Academy Associated School Group areas.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this committee the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Children and Young People Services, Governance, Strategy and Performance, (para 9 of the minute refers).

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Reference is made to the report that was submitted to this Committee on 31 March 2021 (para 8 of the minute refers) which noted that good progress had been made in meeting the statutory duty to offer 1140 hours of ELC from this August, however, there was also pressure for places in the Speyside, Buckie and Elgin Associated School Group areas.
- 2.2 The previous report highlighted that last year in the Speyside ASG area, an estimated 15 places had been lost due to childminders choosing to no longer operate. Compounded by a small reduction of places at settings due to COVID restrictions, parents were experiencing a shortage of childcare places in this area. For this August, the Aberlour and Craigellachie Pre-school Nursery Manager has reported particular pressure for spaces for 2 year olds, with all spaces for this age group currently full.
- 2.3 In the Buckie ASG area, despite almost doubling the number of places at Lady Cathcart Nursery in recent years, a small number of parents were finding it difficult to secure childcare places within walking distance of their homes. This meant that the Council was unable to offer places to the preferred first and second choices identified on the registration form from this August.

- 2.4 In the Elgin Academy ASG, a combination of the deployment of 300 additional RAF personnel along with the building of Findrassie housing estate, will also place future pressure on ELC places.
- 2.5 At the Committee meeting on 31 March 2021, it was agreed that a further report in relation to these three ASG areas should be submitted to this Committee on 11 August 2021.
- 2.6 The announcement by the Scottish Government on 21 June 2021 is that the revised ELC planning assumption for this August is that all local authorities will be in level 0. This will mean that the only restriction on the number of children being supported at each setting is the Care Inspectorate registration capacity.
- 2.7 This announcement has a positive impact on relieving pressure on childcare provision in Moray and Officers are able to confirm that the entitlement of 1140 hours of childcare will be offered at all settings referred to in this report.
- 2.8 Nonetheless, the purpose of this report is to provide an up-date in relation to how the pressure for places within these ASG areas will be met from this August.

### **3. PROPOSALS**

The steps taken to address demand in each of the above 3 ASG areas will be outlined in turn in this section of the report.

#### **Speyside ASG**

- 3.1 Planning consents and building warrants have now been secured for the refurbishment of Aberlour Nursery with the 4 month construction period due to commence in mid-November 2021. This means that the refurbished Nursery will be scheduled to be operational from March 2022.
- 3.2 One of the benefits of this refurbishment is that the nursery will change from operating on a term-time basis to a year round 1140 hour delivery model.
- 3.3 While the original plan was for Aberlour and Craigellachie Pre-School Nursery, which also operates from the Primary School was to close, the private provider will continue to operate and thereby assist in meeting future demand for places.
- 3.4 When the construction phase begins at Aberlour Primary School, both the Council and private provider nursery settings will be temporarily relocated in bespoke mobile units and during this period, both settings will be able to provide 1140 hours of childcare.
- 3.5 The temporary location for Aberlour Nursery will be the grounds of the Primary School while the location for Aberlour & Craigellachie Pre-School Nursery will be Speyside High School.

- 3.6 When the 4 month construction phase is complete, only the Council nursery will return to the Primary School and Aberlour and Craigellachie Pre-School Nursery will remain in the temporary unit.
- 3.7 To help ease congestion within the grounds of Speyside High School, an Active Travel Plan will be developed. This will be aimed at parents and staff who are accessing the mobile nursery located within the School grounds. The plan will include encouraging parking outwith the school grounds. It is the expectation that there would be no additional costs in terms of infrastructure.
- 3.8 As reported to this Committee on 31 March 2021, the ELC Programme Board has undertaken an option appraisal in terms of identifying a permanent future setting for Aberlour and Craigellachie Nursery. The old library within the Speyside High School grounds was considered preferred option for the provider.
- 3.9 Since the last report in March, initial design concept work has being undertaken and meetings are on-going with the nursery staff.
- 3.10 This proposal and the means of funding this development do require further work and it is the intention to bring a more detailed report with recommendations to this Committee at a later date.
- 3.11 In Dufftown, The Cabin, which is also a private provider nursery, is presently able to meet demand for 3 to 5 year old children but due to a lack of space, has a waiting list for 2 year old children which are not eligible for ELC funding support.
- 3.12 Presently, the group is exploring the use of Dufftown Community Centre as location for a 2's group and possibly a breakfast and after schools group.
- 3.13 If all goes to plan, The Cabin Management Committee report that this additional setting would be open from October this year.
- 3.14 In relation to the long term plans, The Cabin Management Committee are continuing to work with Dufftown and Mortlach Development Trust and community regeneration company Truerlein in terms of developing a new build nursery.
- 3.15 The Business Case is at the stage of being developed and possible grounds in the Dufftown area have been identified.
- 3.16 It is the aspiration that the new nursery will be open for 50 weeks of the year, include 3 play rooms and would offer a community meeting space. In total, the new nursery would increase childcare provision from the current 24 to 40 places (subject to confirmation).

- 3.17 All of the above developments would provide additional spaces to the Aberlour and Mortlach Nursery refurbishments.

### **Buckie ASG**

- 3.18 Since the last up-date report, the proposed easing of COVID restrictions announced by the Scottish Government will allow Lady Cathcart Nursery to offer 1140 hours of early learning and childcare from this August if Moray has entered Level 0, as planned, by this date.
- 3.19 In a further welcome development, the demand for child care places in the centre of Buckie will be met by the establishment of a new nursery within the town centre.
- 3.20 Cullen Play Centre Management Committee recognised the need for further provision in Buckie and are currently renovating and transforming a retail unit on West Church Street into a nursery setting which will provide 24 new childcare places for 3 to 5 year olds.
- 3.21 The new nursery is called Rainbow Days and will be a sister nursery to their current nursery operated by the Group in Cullen which will continue to operate and offer places for eligible 2 year olds.
- 3.22 At the time of preparing this report, the Cullen Play Centre Management Committee have reported that good progress continues to be made in refurbishing the building and the Group expect to be operational and able to offer 1140 hours of early learning and childcare from this August. The Care Inspectorate are also working closely with the Management Committee to help ensure this goal is achieved.
- 3.23 In the short and immediate term, these developments will help to ensure that parents can secure early learning and childcare within a reasonable distance of where they live.
- 3.24 In the long-term, and as previously reported, ELC Officers consider that in light of the new housing developments in the Buckie ASG area there will be an eventual need for an additional childcare setting.
- 3.25 The progression of any plans will require to be in-line with the Council's Learning Estates Strategy which also identifies a growth for school places in Buckie from now until 2035. As noted in the Strategy, the option appraisal will include new builds and the potential for merging and campus models. ELC provision will need to be considered as part of this options appraisal.

### **Elgin Academy ASG**

- 3.26 Also between now and 2035, The Learning Estates Strategy identifies pressure on the school estate in the North of Elgin. In particular, the Findrassie Housing Development. Demand for primary and secondary school places will also be reflected in the need to increase ELC provision in this area.

- 3.27 Further demand for childcare places is expected with the announcement in December 2020 of the deployment of 300 additional RAF personnel to RAF Lossiemouth. Many of the families of these personnel will locate to this area of Elgin.
- 3.28 It is the expectation, that this demand will be addressed through the development of the new Findrassie School campus which will also incorporate a nursery. The current date for the completion of this new build is the summer of 2025.
- 3.29 ELC Officers will be working closely with the Council's Learning Estates Team to help ensure that the design brief for the new nursery is fit for purpose and meets future demand.
- 3.30 In particular planning of this new nursery will need to bear in mind that both Bishopmill Pre-School Centre and VIP Childcare are exploring their options for a move to new premises.

### **Childminding**

- 3.31 Finally during the summer, the Council's Childminder Development Officer will be undertaking a recruitment campaign in collaboration with the Care Inspectorate.
- 3.32 The aim of the evening sessions planned for the Buckie, Speyside and Milne's ASG areas is to encourage more people to choose childminding as a rewarding career.
- 3.33 Last year, 38 childminders entered into contract with the Council in 2020/21. In the previous year 5 childminders were in contract and it is hoped that the number of childminders entering into contract can continue to be increased.
- 3.34 Increasing the number of childminders in contract with the Moray Council is a positive development and will continue help to meet demand for quality childcare across all areas of Moray.

## **4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

The Early Learning Childcare Delivery Plan is aligned to the priorities within the Corporate Plan and LOIP. In particular Our People: Provide opportunities where young people can achieve their potential to be the best they can be.

Funding for ELC links to the priority of working towards a financially stable council that provides valued services to our Communities as referred to in the Moray Council Corporate Plan 2023.

**(b) Policy and Legal**

This report should be read in the context of the Scottish Government national framework “A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland”.

Committee will note that the Scottish Government has pledged to extend the ELC entitlement to 1 and 2 year old children as well as providing funding for wrap around support (e.g. breakfast clubs). The timescale for implementing this pledge is still to be announced. However, the steps outlined in this report to meet future demand will also help support the further future expansion of early learning and childcare in Moray.

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

**(c) Financial implications**

For 2020/21, the Scottish Government grant revenue funding to be paid to Moray Council for ELC provision is £10,792,000.

The Scottish Government capital allocation for Moray from 2017 to 2021 is £7,740,000.

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report and any future capital funding commitment will be subject to a future report to this committee.

**(d) Risk Implications**

Emerging risks and issues are monitored by the Moray ELC Project Board.

There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

**(f) Property**

There are no property implications arising directly from this report. Specific property issues will be addressed in future reports to this Committee.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as this report is for Committee to note progress in meeting demand for early learning and childcare.

**(h) Consultations**

Member of the ELC Programme Board including ELC Service Manager, Senior Officers in Education & Social Care, Depute Chief Executive, School Estates Manager, Legal & Democratic Services Manager, Head of Financial Services, Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer, Principal Accountant – Education & Social Care and Equal Opportunities Officer, ELC Continuous Improvement Officer, ELC Child Development Officer.

**5. CONCLUSION**

**The Council and our partner providers will be able to meet the statutory duty to deliver 1140 hours of ELC by August 2021.**

**Moreover, working with our partner providers, the immediate pressure for ELC places in the Speyside and Buckie areas has been addressed and future plans for these ASG areas and in addition Elgin are also being developed.**

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Background Papers: Available from the above Officers on request.

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