



REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ON 3 FEBRUARY 2021

SUBJECT: INFORMATION REPORT: UPDATE ON MORAY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE EXPANSION

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

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the progress made in preparing for the statutory duty to offer 1140 hours of expanded Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) provision from August 2021.
- 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 Moray Council provides early learning and childcare to over 1600 eligible two, three and four year old children through 24 Council nurseries, 38 funded providers (private and third sector providers) and 38 childminders of which 20 are currently delivering contracted funded hours.
- 2.2 In contrast to the national profile, where 75% of ELC provision is delivered directly by local authorities, between 60% and 70% of actual funded hours are delivered by private and third sector providers in Moray.
- 2.3 In March 2020, in response to the initial COVID-19 outbreak, the Scottish Government took the decision to suspend the previously agreed statutory duty that local authorities would increase their provision of ELC from 600 to 1140 hours from August 2020.
- 2.4 The intent to almost double universally accessible and high quality ELC provision had been based on the premise that the early years of life are crucial to a child's development. This premise is underpinned by a strong evidence base that shows the lasting impact of quality childcare provision on

lifelong health and well-being outcomes and, crucially, closing the poverty related attainment gap in the later years of life.

- 2.5 In order to ensure that the funded entitlement of increased hours is delivered in high quality ELC settings, a 'Funding Follows the Child' approach has already been implemented in Moray. This approach is 'provider neutral' and is underpinned by a National Standard that all settings who wish to enter into contract with Moray Council will have to meet (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.6 Early Learning & Childcare should therefore be viewed as a legitimate part of the wider education system, sitting alongside primary and secondary schools, with a strong commitment to delivering the first steps in a child's learning journey.
- 2.7 Committee will be aware that prior to this decision to suspend the increased provision of 1140 hours of childcare, Officers had been implementing the Moray Early Learning and Childcare Delivery Plan which, through a phased programme, focused on building infrastructure development, workforce development, recruitment and a quality early learning and childcare experience.
- 2.8 Moray had made good progress in implementing this plan and was in a strong position to deliver the increase of ELC hours by August 2020. However, the national social restrictions that were required to be put in place during the summer of 2020 also impacted on the roll out of the key phases of the Moray ELC Delivery Plan.
- 2.9 The Moray ELC Delivery Plan was subsequently revised and re-calibrated to take into account the unavoidable slippage due to the adoption of the national restrictions and a speculative date for the provision of 1140 hours from August 2021 was identified. The revised delivery plan was underpinned by a project plan and an overview of the key milestones of this plan is attached (**Appendix 2**).
- 2.10 On the 14 December 2020, the Scottish Government announced that the statutory duty to deliver 1140 hours of funded ELC for to three, four years and eligible two year olds would once again be reinstated with effect from August 2021.
- 2.11 Unfortunately shortly after this announcement, COVID-19 Level 4 restrictions were announced by the First Minister on 19 December. At the time of compiling this report, this has resulted in ELC being restricted to the families of key workers and vulnerable children. There are presently in excess of 54 children attending 53 childcare settings.
- 2.12 This has meant that the rollout of 1140 hours of ELC provision has once again been interrupted. However, once social restrictions are lifted, Moray is in a strong position to meet the funding entitlement.
- 2.13 To this end, the purpose of this report is to up-date Committee on the progress that the Moray Council and our private and third sector providers

have collectively made in preparing to almost doubling the amount of ELC funded hours from August 2021.

2.14 This report will focus on the key areas relating to our preparations:-

- Supporting Private and Third Sector Providers During the Pandemic
- Supporting Council Settings During the Pandemic
- Up-date on the Provision of 1140 hours
- Parental Satisfaction Survey
- Supporting the Delivery of the National Standards for ELC
- Supporting Quality Improvement
- The ELC Training & Development Programme

2.15 In the following section each of these key areas relating to our ELC Delivery Plan will be outlined in turn.

3. PROPOSALS

Supporting Private and Third Sector Providers During the Pandemic

3.1 As noted in the previous section, Moray has a significantly higher proportion of private and third sector providers in contract with the Moray Council than other local authorities.

3.2 When the closure of ELC settings was announced in March 2020, it was critically important that Moray Council was able to provide financial support to those private and third sector providers that would not re-open until August 2021.

3.3 The following is a list of the forms of the financial support we offered our partners:

- Continued to honoured ELC monthly contract payments to all settings regardless if they were open or closed;
- Council provided a total of 57 outdoor grants to both partner nursery and childminder settings to a maximum value of £500 for partner settings and £200 for childminders. This was to cover the costs of outdoor equipment;
- Facilitated the processing of applications and distribution of awards for the Transitional Support Fund programme sponsored by the Scottish Government for qualifying early years settings in Moray (this did not include childminders). Awards ranged from £1,500 to £8,000 depending on number of registered Care Inspectorate places. All eligible settings in Moray (including 2 settings not in partnership with Council) received grant funds totalling £206,250.
- Ongoing financial support for additional cleaning costs relating to COVID-19; and
- £400 per month as a contribution to the salary costs for additional COVID-19 related cleaning for nursery settings and £150 to childminders.

3.4 Moreover, in supporting private and third sector providers to meet the national standards and deliver the 1140 hours entitlement, ELC grants up to the value of £25,000 for major works, £5,000 for Getting Ready for 2020 and £5,000 for training were awarded to 47 providers (including childminders) from January

to August 2020. The grant applications ranged from training to minor refurbishments; such as renovating kitchen areas. The total award of grants for this period is just under £300,000.

- 3.5 Over the last 12 months, private and third sector early learning and childcare providers, based in Moray, have demonstrated that they are remarkably resilient.
- 3.6 When the Moray Council contract for ELC providers was presented for re-signing in August, 38 childcare nursery settings signed the contract. This is the same number of nursery settings before the pandemic in 2019/20 and Moray Council was delighted to welcome Flexible Childcare Services who are providing childcare in the Keith area.
- 3.7 In addition, with support from the Childminder Development Officer, 38 childminders also entered into contract with the Council. Previously, 5 childminders had been funded by the Council to provide early learning and childcare.
- 3.8 Regrettably, Building Blocks Nursery, a developmental nursery setting based in Buckie, closed during the summer. This was the only childcare provider in contract with the Council that did not re-open in the August.
- 3.9 Following the announcement made by the Scottish Government on 14 December 2020 to re-instate the statutory duty to provide 1140 hours of childcare by August 2021, Moray's ELC private and third sector is in a strong position to meet this challenge. The number of providers already delivering 1140 hours will be outlined in section 4.3 of this report.

Supporting Council Settings During the Pandemic

- 3.10 The ELC Project Plan provides an overview of **(Appendix 2)** of the key milestones that need to be progressed if Council settings are able to fully deliver 1140 hours by August 2021.
- 3.11 Once again Committee will wish to note that despite the challenging state of affairs that Officers have had to contend with over the last 12 months, good progress has been made in realising the milestones outlined in the ELC Delivery Plan.
- 3.12 In terms of the new build programme, Cullen (£1,670,618) and Pilmuir (£1,811,738) Nursery settings were successfully handed over from the contractor in 2020 and were operational from August.
- 3.13 As part of the Linkwood School Estate, Linkwood Nursery (£610,600) has also been handed over from the contractor and will be open from April 2021.
- 3.14 In September, work began on Strathisla Childcare Centre, Keith (£1,670,618) and this setting is on schedule to open in July 2021. In the meantime, Flexible Childcare Services, who will be running the new nursery are successfully operating from Longmore Hall in Keith. This is the last new project identified in the ELC Delivery Plan.

- 3.15 In terms of the refurbishment programme, Mortlach Nursery, Dufftown (£189,873) was completed in October 2020 and the refurbishment of Mosstodloch Nursery (£240,800) is scheduled to start in February 2021.
- 3.16 The final refurbishment is Aberlour Nursery (£366,000). The 4 month construction period is now scheduled to begin in May 2021 and temporary accommodation for both Aberlour Nursery and Aberlour and Craigellachie Pre-School Nursery, who currently run their settings at the Primary School, will be located in temporary mobile units. The pressure for places in the Speyside ASG area is outlined in the following section of this report.
- 3.17 Committee will also note that a minor refurbishment programme is also being implemented. This includes the refurbishment of kitchen areas at some settings, such as Hythehill Nursery, to meet the need for extended catering provision.
- 3.18 The significant cost in both the new build and refurbishment provision demonstrates the Council's commitment to providing high quality early learning and childcare provision throughout Moray.
- 3.19 In addition to increasing the physical provision for ELC places, Committee will also note the success in expanding the Council ELC workforce.
- 3.20 Based on the ELC Delivery Plan, recruitment of childcare staff was undertaken in 3 phases. This related to the timeframe when each setting would be able to offer the enhanced hours.
- 3.21 Phase 1 and most of the recruitment of phase 2 was completed before March 2020. Phase 3 recruitment, which included the recruitment of 5 nursery managers, was largely able to be completed in the Autumn of 2020.
- 3.22 The significant progress made in terms of the new build and refurbishment programmes and the phased recruitment of the Council ELC workforce also means that the Council is in a strong position to deliver 1140 hours by August 2021.

Up-date on the Provision of 1140 hours

- 3.23 Prior to the announcement by the First Minister on 19 December 2020 that level 4 restrictions would be imposed, the majority of both Council and private and third sector providers were in position to offer the enhanced 1140 hours from January 2021.
- 3.24 Once the Level 4 restrictions are lifted then it will be possible to resume the delivery of 1140 hours. **Appendix 3** provides an overview of all Council and private and third sector providers in Moray and when they are planning to offer 1140 hours.
- 3.25 Committee will note that excluding the Ladybird Development Playgroup, of the 61 settings listed, 52 settings (88%) would have been able to offer 1140

hours of childcare as of 1 February 2021 if level 4 restrictions had not needed to be imposed.

- 3.26 However, by August 2021 officers anticipate all 61 settings will be able to offer the full entitlement of hours to parents.
- 3.27 Nevertheless, through the registration process for the August and January intake, officers are aware of pressure for places in 3 Associated School Group (ASG) areas.
- 3.28 In the Speyside ASG area over the last 12 months, an estimated 15 places have been lost due to childminders choosing to no longer operate. Compounded by a small reduction of places at settings due to COVID-19 restrictions we are experiencing a shortage of childcare places in this area.
- 3.29 In the Buckie ASG area, despite almost doubling the number of places at Lady Cathcart Nursery, we are also experiencing a shortage of capacity. Although all children were able to be placed for the January intake, we were unable to offer places to the preferred first and second choices identified on the registration form.
- 3.30 While the eventual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions will increase the capacity of Lady Cathcart Nursery, officers anticipate continuing pressure for places which will be further exacerbated by new housing developments.
- 3.31 In the Elgin Academy ASG, a combination of the recent announcement of the deployment of 300 additional RAF personnel along with the building of Findrassie housing estate, will place pressure on ELC places. While it is the expectation that these pressures will be alleviated through the proposed new nursery at Findrassie Primary School, short-term solution childcare solutions may need to be found.
- 3.32 It is proposed that officers will submit a future report to this Committee outlining the initial plans in terms of how the pressure for places within these ASG areas can be addressed.

Parental Satisfaction Survey

- 3.33 In light of the significant challenges experienced in the last 12 months, Officers undertook a parent satisfaction survey. The survey monkey questionnaire was promoted via settings and through social media and ran from 9 December 2020 to 6 January 2021.
- 3.44 A total of 166 responses (10% response rate based on 1600 families) were received and the summary findings report is attached (**Appendix 4**).
- 3.45 The key findings of the survey are as follows:-
- 166 responses were received from all ASG areas. The lowest response was from Milne's ASG (1), the highest responses were from Lossiemouth (35) and Elgin Academy (34) ASG's;

- The proportion intending to use 1140 hours is 77%. This compares to 62% when parents were last surveyed in 2019;
- The proportion not intending to use the full 1140 hour entitlement is 13% with 10% undecided.
- Scored on a scale of 1-5 (5 being 100% satisfied) - averages: 78% are satisfied with the hours offered. This compares to 51% when parents were last surveyed in 2019; 85% are satisfied with outdoor learning opportunities offered; and 83% are satisfied with the ELC service provided.

3.46 An analysis of the comments received identified a number of themes. This includes:-

- An area for improvement is the communication with parents from the ELC Central Team. There was a good suggestion for a leaflet for each ASG;
- Learning logs/progress reports are valued by parents;
- While COVID-19 restrictions has for many settings restricted the hours that are able to be offered, parents want both more hours and greater flexibility of provision;
- For some settings, improvements can be made in relation to the communication with parents. COVID-19 has meant that effective communication has become more challenging and yet never more necessary.

3.47 Committee to note the overall satisfaction rate across both Council and Private Partner Providers of 83%. This particularly gratifying in the context of how challenging the last 12 months has been for the ELC workforce.

Supporting the Delivery of the National Standards for ELC

3.48 Although levels of parental satisfaction are high, within Moray there are 9 ELC settings that are not meeting the National Standard.

3.49 The Scottish Government is keen to ensure, as part of the Blueprint for 2020 and the aim to provide high quality ELC services across the country, that each local authority has a robust plan in place to raise the grades to 4 (good) or above.

3.50 There is a risk that if settings do not delivering the national standard and secure grades of 4 or above then they may be unable to enter into contract with the local authority.

3.51 Out of these 9 settings, 8 are receiving intensive support from the ELC central team. This support has been ongoing, throughout COVID-19, and through collaboration with the Care Inspectorate. Due to this support from the Care Inspectorate and HMiE, we are satisfied that the St Thomas Nursery, the 9th setting, no longer requires intensive support. A summary of the 8 settings receiving the intensive support is attached to this report (**Appendix 5**).

3.52 All ELC services across Moray will also be piloting Early Level progressions from January 2021. Officers consider that this will support transition into

Primary 1 and also ensure ELC Practitioners are cognisant of the Education wide Learning and Teaching strategy and the drive to improve attainment.

Supporting Quality Improvement

- 3.53 Regardless of their Care Inspectorate grading, all settings receive regular support from the Council's Continuous Improvement and Early Years Education Service to improve the quality of provision and learning outcomes for children.
- 3.54 The Early Years Education Service is a team of Teachers who work together with all Early Learning and Child Care staff centrally and in the nursery and partner provider settings to support the quality of experience for all of our youngest learners.
- 3.55 The Service comprises of two different sections managed by a Principal Teacher and based at Beechbrae Education Centre. This is providing a new service for Moray and includes members of the original Early Years' teaching team and the new members of the team selected for their wide ranging experience in either nursery provision or Additional Support Needs and Early Level curriculum.
- 3.56 The purpose of this Service is to offer a consistent support which is tailored to the needs of each particular setting and the families who access them. Staff share their approaches and interventions within the team to create an equitable approach across the Moray Council Area.
- 3.57 One of the key areas of work has been to provide extra support to those settings which are working with the Care Inspectorate to improve their National Standard grading and the feedback from settings and from the Early Years Continuous Improvement Officers has been very positive. The Team are also working with other agencies on the development of further Inclusive Practice Modules which will offer a rolling programme of training to settings and would cover the main aspects which are identified in National Standard reports.
- 3.58 The Early Years' teams use their visits to enable identification of gaps in provision and staff work with other services to achieve better outcomes for learners and their families. The support offered is then put in place and followed up in a timely manner.
- 3.59 The Early Intervention Team have been able to offer advice and strategies to all settings in Moray. This is not attached to a single referral so advice can be up scaled to include benefits for all children. The introduction of the Learner Profile and Strategies (LPS) document will become a key part of the transition process for any learner who needs extra support or understanding to be successful. This was trialled in June 2020 and has met with very positive feedback from ELC and school staff. This links with Primary school documents and can be updated regularly saving time and duplication.
- 3.60 The Learning and Teaching Team work closely with the Central Early Years Team to identify and support good and improving practice, to work individually

with settings to address their concerns and also promote Education Scotland and Northern Alliance Initiatives. Their focus at the moment is to develop training in Early Level Literacy and Numeracy progressions which are being trialled with all settings to link with the transition to Primary 1 so that teachers receive the information they need to continue developing the child's early level experience.

- 3.61 Early Years Teachers are at the moment supporting settings through working groups developing Home Learning resources, supporting online training resources for staff and planning for the next stages in transitions for learners.
- 3.62 Advice can also be given to support challenging our brightest learners and this is an area which will be further developed, linking the work of both sections of the service. Staff continue to develop links with partner agencies in health at the moment to identify the impact of the lockdown period on families' health and wellbeing and children's resilience and learning needs
- 3.63 This Spring, the Early Years Education Team along with Children & Families Social Work and Health and Social Care Moray colleagues, will be participating in a Scottish Government programme called Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) Learning Together. This initiative aims to improve the parenting skills of some of the most disadvantaged parents in Moray. Before being evaluated, the test of change will initially be rolled out at East End (Elgin) and Lady Cathcart (Buckie) Nursery settings.
- 3.64 If deemed to be effective, it is the intention that the PEEP programme will then be rolled out across Moray.

The ELC Training and Development Programme

- 3.65 The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted on both the content and form of the provision of training and development opportunities for the ELC workforce.
- 3.66 A key element of this change is a focus on the outdoors. Even before the pandemic, the benefits of outdoor learning and play were being strongly encouraged by the Scottish Government and Moray ELC has been keen to support this focus.
- 3.67 Because COVID-19 is spread more easily within an indoor area, more ELC activities have been undertaken out-of-doors. Committee will note the provision of outdoor grants for the purchase of equipment to facilitate outdoor play were offered to both Council and private and third sector settings.
- 3.68 Committee may also be aware that the Moray area has 2 well established outdoor nurseries; Earthtime and Stramash.
- 3.69 On the whole, this shift in the location of activities has been well received with 85% of parents satisfied with outdoor learning opportunities offered.
- 3.70 Encouraging this change of approach and acknowledging that it is safer to deliver training and development opportunities out-of-doors is integral to the

revised and up-dated Moray ELC Training and Development Programme. The evaluation report of this programme is attached (**Appendix 6**).

3.71 The Executive Summary of the report highlights that:

“Between September and December 2020, 48 practitioners will have been trained in Outdoor Paediatric First Aid and 90 practitioners will have taken part in formal Outdoor Play and Learning opportunities. Additionally, basic on-line courses have been extended to all practitioners and childminders including child protection training.

The creation of Moray Council’s Outdoor Learning and Play Toolkit, which was designed to help nursery settings and childminders embrace the outdoors confidently, was a foundation to build on training opportunities as a direct result of the Outdoor Workstream. The work from this toolkit has been recognised and cited by the Scottish Government as an example of good practice. Long term plans are also underway to assist settings in developing their outdoor play spaces and make use of local green spaces as well.”

3.72 With its abundant natural beauty, open spaces and relatively mild weather, childcare providers in Moray are in a fantastic position to continue to take advantage of our natural assets once the COVID-19 pandemic has been vanquished.

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”.

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.

(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. However, a future report will be presented to this Committee in relation to determining a sustainable financial rate for private and third sector providers.

The risk is that if the rate is set too low, then this will impact on the viability of our contracted partners to operate and deliver early learning and childcare in Moray. If the rate is set too high, then there is a risk of an unsustainable cost pressure for this authority.

(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.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as this report is for Committee to note progress in delivering the enhance provision of early learning and childcare.

(h) Consultations

Member of the ELC Programme Board including Senior Officers in Education & Social Care, Estates Manager, Legal & Democratic Services Manager, Head of Financial Services, Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer, Principal Accountant – Education & Social Care and Equal Opportunities Officer, Head of Education, Communities and Organisational Development, Principal Teacher Early Years, ELC Continuous Improvement Officer, ELC Early Years Officers, Childminder Development Officer and the Commercial/Marketing Officer.

5. CONCLUSION

Preparing for the expansion of early learning and childcare has been undertaken by both council and private & third sector providers during these most challenging of times.

This report acknowledges the continuing challenges in terms of meeting future demand for childcare places in some areas in Moray and setting a sustainable hourly rate. A further report will be presented to a future meeting of this Committee in relation to these issues.

Committee will however note the significant progress in preparing for the delivering of 1140 hours in Moray for eligible two, three and four year old children from this August.

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Background Papers: Available from the above Officers on request.
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