



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ON 31 MARCH 2021**

**SUBJECT: MORAY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE - MEETING
FUTURE DEMAND**

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

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the demand for early learning and childcare 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. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- (i) note the pressure for early learning and childcare places in the Speyside, Buckie and Elgin Academy Associated School Group areas;**
- (ii) note the actions taken by Officers and our partners to meet this demand; and**
- (iii) agree that further reports will be submitted to this Committee in relation to the specific plans to address the demand for early learning childcare places.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will recall that an up-date report on the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) was submitted to this Committee on 3 February 2021 as an information report.

- 3.2 The report highlighted the significant progress that Moray Council and our providers had made in implementing the ELC Delivery Plan and thereby being able to meet the statutory duty to deliver 1140 hours of funded ELC for three, four years and eligible two year olds from August 2021.
- 3.3 While the report highlighted increased and high levels of parental satisfaction in terms of the availability and quality of early learning and childcare, the report nevertheless highlighted a pressure for places in relation to 3 Associated School Group Areas.
- 3.4 In the Speyside ASG area over the last 15 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 restrictions we are experiencing a shortage of childcare places in this area.
- 3.5 In the Buckie ASG area, despite almost doubling the number of places at Lady Cathcart Nursery in recent years, we are also experiencing a shortage of childcare places. Although all children were able to be placed for the January and April intakes, we were unable to offer places to the preferred first and second choices identified on the registration form.
- 3.6 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.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 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

- 4.2 Last year, the situation was that Rothes Nursery, Aberlour Nursery and Aberlour and Craigellachie Nurseries were all operating with waiting lists for places.
- 4.3 While the refurbished at Aberlour Nursery (Council) at the Primary School will change from operating on a term-time to a year round 1140 hour model, there will only be a small increase in the number of places being able to be offered at this setting.
- 4.4 Combined with the decrease in the supply of childminder places, there is an indication that in the next 10 years that there will be a small increase in demand for childcare places. This is based on projections from the National Records of Scotland (NRS) who published a 'one off' small area age projection based on the 2012 population broken down to sub-council areas.
- 4.5 It is therefore the expectation that the Council will experience a continuation of pressure on local childcare provision in the Aberlour and Rothes area in the years to come.

- 4.6 Previously, a change management plan was written to TUPE the manager and staff of Aberlour and Craigellachie Pre-School Nursery to the Council, which would have resulted in the private provider nursery being closed. However, this has not been progressed due to forecast data which evidences demand for future places.
- 4.7 Furthermore, it will not possible to operate both the private provider and the Council nursery from the same building after the refurbishment. This leaves the private provider with no premises but still a high level of demand to be met.
- 4.8 When the construction phase begins at Aberlour Primary School, both the Council and private provider nurseries will be temporarily relocated in bespoke mobile units. When this 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.
- 4.9 A new setting for Aberlour and Craigellachie Pre-School Nursery will need to be secured for the provider and, unfortunately, no existing accommodation which would be fit for purpose has been identified in the Aberlour area.
- 4.10 The ELC Programme Board has undertaken an option appraisal and identified that the old library within the Speyside High School grounds would be the preferred option.
- 4.11 The initial cost estimate for a new build at this site has been identified in the region of £750k to £1,250,000. While the development of this proposal is still at an early stage, including if the setting would be term time or year round, it is possible that funding for this development could be sourced from a transfer of Capital from the Current ELC Revenue Budget (CFCR).
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 In the short-term, minor renovation work is being undertaken at Rothes Nursery. This will support a small increase in childcare places for this August.
- 4.14 In Dufftown, The Cabin, which is a private provider nursery, has also reported that they are currently operating at full capacity.
- 4.15 With support from Dufftown and Mortlach Development Trust and community regeneration company Truerlein, The Cabin Management Committee have appointed their own project officer to undertake an options appraisal and identify a possible location for a new nursery in the Dufftown area. The Cabin have set up a registered charity, with a management committee which includes parents, called 'The Kid's Cabin Dufftown' to progress this work.

- 4.16 In addition to identify a possible location, The Cabin Management Committee are also presently developing a Business Case for a new build nursery. The Business Case would include identifying the cost of the new build and the possible sources of capital funding.
- 4.17 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).
- 4.18 All of the above developments would provide additional spaces to the Aberlour and Mortlach Nursery refurbishments.

Buckie ASG

- 4.19 As previously noted in para 3.5 of this report, the number of spaces at Lady Cathcart Nursery were doubled when the building was refurbished.
- 4.20 However, due to COVID restrictions the number of places at Lady Cathcart has had to be reduced from 50 to 42 which has resulted in this setting being full to capacity.
- 4.21 Similarly, Millbank, St Peter's and Portgordon nurseries are operating at full capacity. This has meant that many parents were unable to secure their first choice of setting for the January and April intakes and some parents had to register their child at Cullen nursery.
- 4.22 Members will be aware, that while the Council will always in endeavour to support parents to secure their first choice; this isn't always possible. Consequently, the registration form asks parents to provide their second and third choices.
- 4.23 While the eventual lifting of COVID restrictions will increase the capacity of Lady Cathcart and the other settings noted above, Officers nevertheless anticipate continuing pressure for places which will be further exasperated by new housing developments in the Buckie town area.
- 4.24 As an immediate step to relieve this pressure, a minor works programme is being progressed at the following Buckie settings.
- 4.25 In relation to Lady Cathcart Nursery, it is proposed that alterations to one of the kitchen areas could create more space and therefore allow a small increase of children.
- 4.26 At Portgordon Nursery, it is proposed that space could be better utilised if the nursery was located elsewhere within the school. In principle, the Head Teacher is agreeable to this proposal and discussion are ongoing.

- 4.27 Officers are progressing these plans as quickly as possible with the aim that the minor refurbishment works can be completed this year leading to more capacity at these settings.
- 4.28 In the medium term, further childcare capacity can be secured in the Buckie area by locating the temporary mobile unit which will initially be located in Aberlour, and used by Aberlour Nursery, while the refurbishment work at Aberlour Primary School is being undertaken.
- 4.29 Once the refurbishment is complete, it is proposed that this temporary unit can be located in Buckie. A possible site has been located for this unit and discussions are ongoing.
- 4.30 While the timescale for re-location of this unit is still to be confirmed, it is considered that January 2022 would be a realistic timescale.
- 4.31 As noted below under d) Risk Implications, increasing the capacity of ELC provision will also require an increase in ELC staffing for this unit and other possible developments referred to in this report. The risk section notes that this cost would be met from the Scottish Government ELC grant revenue award.
- 4.32 In the long-term, ELC Officers considered that in light of the new housing developments in the Buckie ASG area there will be an eventual need for an additional childcare setting.
- 4.33 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 agreed. The options appraisal will also need to consider if the nursery would be operated directly by the Council or if a private and third sector provider would be commissioned to run the nursery on the Council's behalf.

Elgin ASG

- 4.34 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.
- 4.35 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.
- 4.36 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.

- 4.37 With both Bishopmill Pre-School Centre and VIP Childcare considering their options for a move to new premises, an important consideration is that future ELC provision, as part of this development, will not only need to improve the quality of the physical environment but also increase the number of ELC places.
- 4.38 Finally it should be highlighted that with support from the Childminder Development Officer, 38 childminders also entered into contract with the Council in 2020/21. Previously, 5 childminders had been funded by the Council to provide early learning and childcare.
- 4.39 The increase in the number of childminders entering into contract with the Council is a positive development and will also help to meet demand for quality childcare across all areas of Moray.

5 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 and 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.

The further expansion of early learning and childcare in Moray will impact not only on the elc capital budget but will also increase the number of childcare practitioners and will therefore have an impact on the revenue budget. There is therefore a risk if future plans are affordable.

(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

Depute Chief Executive, Education, Communities and Organisational Development, Members of the ELC Programme Board including ELC Service Manager, Senior Officers in Education, Communities and Organisational Development, Estates Manager, Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance, Head of Financial Services, Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer, Principal Accountant – Education and Social Care and Equal Opportunities Officer, ELC Continuous Improvement Officer, ELC Early Years Officer

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 While members will be aware of the good progress in preparing for delivery of 1140 hours of early learning and childcare by August 2021, the purpose of this report is to make committee aware of the pressure for places experienced in 3 ASG areas in Moray.

6.2 It is the intention that further reports will be brought to this committee which will provide further detail on how this demand for places will be met.

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Background Papers: Available from the above Officers on request.
Ref: SPMAN-1315769894-34