
THE EXPANSION OF FUNDED EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE TO 1140 HOURS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Committee on plans to implement 1140hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in Argyll and Bute per year by 2020 as required within the new Scottish Government National Policy Imperatives. In order to ensure successful and sustainable implementation, several key elements will require to be considered both at a national level and at an Argyll and Bute level:
- **Affordability** – funding for implementation and to ensure affordability for parents;
 - **Accessibility** – ensuring that funded ELC is accessible to all regardless of where they live;
 - **Flexibility** – where possible ensuring there are options for parents to choose from, and
 - **Quality** – a key element within the learning environments and within the ELC workforce- to ensure all children are getting the best start in life.

1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee Services Committee:

- a) Note the significant capital and revenue funding which will be required in order to ensure Argyll and Bute Council is able to fully implement 1140 hours of ELC by 2020;
- b) Note that Partner Providers play a key role in the expansion of ELC in Argyll and Bute, therefore support and investment will be required to ensure their continued partnership in providing ELC across each of the localities;
- c) Note that the expansion of the Early Years Workforce will be a significant challenge within Argyll and Bute, therefore will require continued investment and partnership working both within the council and with wider partners to ensure a high quality workforce is in place by 2020, and
- d) Request the Executive Director of Community Services to bring a progress update on the implementation of 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare to a future meeting of the Committee.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Scottish Government has pledged to increase the provision of free Early Learning and Childcare provision to 1140 hours per year by 2020, for children who are 3 or 4 years old, as well for 2 year olds whose parents/carers are on qualifying benefits and are eligible for the 600 hours free entitlement through the Children & Young People's Act 2014. This expansion in ELC entitlement will be one of the most important and transformative changes made in recent years. (Appendix 1)
- 2.2 Currently, free provision of Early Learning and Child care is offered to all 3 and 4 year olds as well as eligible 2 year olds. As of August 2014, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act increased this free provision to 600 hours per year. This equates to around 16 hours per week during school term time. This free provision is delivered by a mixture of local authority nurseries, nursery classes attached to schools, partnerships offered by private or non-profit nurseries, and some child-minders. The 16 hours provision per week can be taken in sessions of between 2.5 hours per day and up to a maximum of 8 hours.
- 2.3 This Scottish Government's ambition for children and families across Scotland will require significant resourcing and planning within each local authority in order to ensure successful and sustainable implementation by 2020.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

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- b) Note that Partner Providers play a key role in the expansion of ELC in Argyll and Bute, therefore support and investment will be required to ensure their continued partnership in providing ELC across each of the localities;

- c) Note that the expansion of the Early Years Workforce will be a significant challenge within Argyll and Bute, therefore will require continued investment and partnership working both within the council and with wider partners to ensure a high quality workforce is in place by 2020, and
- d) Request the Executive Director of Community Services to bring a progress update on the implementation of 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare to a future meeting of the Committee.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 A scoping exercise has been carried out within each of the areas of Argyll and Bute in order to identify potential solutions to the challenge of expansion of ELC within each locality.

In addition to this, parents have been consulted on their preferred pattern of ELC provision, should they have the opportunity to access 1140 hours of funded ELC. This has provided a 'snapshot' of the current provision and the current demand within each locality. As a result an action plan has been drawn up to prioritise the capital funding spend as it is released to local authorities. To ensure provision meets the needs of children and their families parents will continue to be consulted each year to allow consideration of changing needs and wishes.

- 4.2 At this stage an additional £30 million of Scottish Government capital funding is being made available to local authorities ready to begin expansion of their ELC capital provision. Argyll and Bute has expressed an interest in accessing funding as part of its 1140 hours action plan, however there has been significant interest shown by local authorities across Scotland and as a result the initial capital funding will not be sufficient enough to meet all of the demands expressed. In addition to this, the Scottish Government has been working with the Care Inspectorate to produce an 'ELC Design Guide' for the development of future ELC buildings. This will ensure greater consistency in capital provision across Scotland, as well as producing ELC settings which are fit for purpose.

- 4.3 The First Minister announced that a series of trials would be run to test a variety of models for delivering the ELC expansion to 1140 hours, with Scottish Government providing £1million of investment to support the delivery of the trials. The overall programme of trials for delivering 1140 hours of entitlement is structured to enable as many different types and models of childcare to be trialed as possible, and should include a range of both local authority and partner providers. Argyll and Bute Council has been successful in its bid to run a trial over two islands: Mull and Tiree. These have been selected to support the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare funded hours which may have a positive impact on Parents/Carers' ability to work and a further positive impact on children's lives. Both islands currently have no private or voluntary providers of childcare and limited numbers of childminders. (Appendix 2)

- 4.4 In addition to releasing £30 million of capital funding, the Scottish Government has also released £30 million of funding to support expansion of the Early Years workforce. As part of this funding the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that by 2018, early learning and childcare settings in the most deprived areas will benefit from an additional graduate – either a teacher with early years expertise or a graduate practitioner with the BA Childhood Practice award. Argyll and Bute has been allocated three additional graduates, who will begin training in 2018. This will support current Argyll and Bute workforce developments such as providing funding for ELC practitioners who need additional qualifications as part of Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) requirements. It is clear from both qualitative and quantitative data that there will be a shortfall in the number of ELC practitioners across Argyll and Bute. It is therefore important that the role of a Childcare and Education Worker is promoted as a worthy and valued career across the local authority, as well as a clear emphasis made on the importance of a high quality workforce, with the right qualifications and skills to support our children and families. (Appendix 3).
- 4.5 In order to provide a more flexible ELC provision and also to build capacity within each locality, there has been a recruitment drive to attract more childminders to work in partnership with the local authority to provide ELC for eligible 2 year olds. The local authority currently provides a ‘start-up grant’ as well as support in the registration process through partnership working with the ‘Scottish Childminding Association’ (SCMA).
- 4.6 Argyll and Bute currently offers ELC through 54 local authority pre5 units and 24 partner providers. Our partner providers are made up of private nurseries and voluntary groups and they provide a vital role in the provision of early learning and childcare within Argyll and Bute. Some partner providers offer ‘wraparound’ childcare to working parents, as well as flexible models of funded ELC. However, there are pressures on partner providers to comply with recent legislation which is having an impact on the sustainability of services.

The local authority can provide support with funding for qualifications and professional development training, as well as supporting the quality of settings. However, only voluntary groups can access funding through the Early Years Grants and other funding bodies. In order to consult partner providers on how they see 1140 hours being implemented, each partner provider will be offered a meeting to discuss potential challenges and opportunities. These meetings will take place between April and June 2017.

The national organisation ‘Early Years Scotland’ is also providing help and support to partner providers across Argyll and Bute specifically focused on ensuring sustainability of ELC.

- 4.7 When planning for the expansion of ELC, it is vital not only to consider expansion of capital provision and the workforce, but also to ensure that the increased provision offers high quality ELC. As part of the Education Strategy 'Our Children, Their Future' an Early Years 'Learning and Development Framework' has been developed to provide strong and consistent guidance on learning and development from birth through to a child starting school. Every setting and childminder is being issued with this guidance and providers are encouraged to use this tool as part of their self-evaluation, along with 'Building the Ambition' and 'How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare?' Members of the central support team will continue to use the Framework as a key document as part of their support visits, focusing on 'Environment', 'Experiences' and 'Interactions'. Data is also used to analyse the quality of provision with progress being tracked through 'Care Inspectorate' and 'Education Scotland' inspections. Twice a year the local authority gathers data in relation to 4 year old children's progress within their developmental milestones, and this is used to target resources more effectively. The use of improvement methodology is being developed with ELC establishments which will support their own improvement journey. There continues to be a challenge around recruitment and retention across the workforce, with some settings trying to improve provision whilst coping with a constantly changing team. Some practitioners also learn whilst they are working, which can lead to mixed quality of provision until they are fully trained. Funding is available for new practitioners to visit more experienced practitioners and to learn from their practice.

The local authority also offers a comprehensive professional development calendar for all providers to access free of charge.

There will be a continued focus on improving the quality of provision, as a vital part of the success of 1140 hours will be to ensure that all children experience high quality ELC so that they have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Argyll and Bute Council is making progress in identifying what will be needed to comply with the requirement to expand to 1140 hours of funded ELC by 2020.

In order to ensure that the local authority is ready to implement the increase in hours, the following points will need further consideration:

- Ensuring that ELC capital and revenue funding which will meet the needs of each local authority should be made available as soon as possible;
- The need to raise awareness of and the importance of the Early Years Workforce in order to ensure sufficient capacity and quality by 2020, and
- The need to provide appropriate funding and support to ELC partner providers in order to ensure accessible, affordable and flexible ELC within each of the localities of Argyll and Bute.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1	Policy	Supports the 2014 SOA outcome 4 – children and young people have the best possible start.
6.2	Financial	Expansion is dependent on capital and revenue funding from the Scottish Government.
6.3	Legal	Compliance with the Children and Young People Act (Scotland).
6.4	HR	Consultation and support from HR in expanding the workforce.
6.5	Equalities	Support equality of provision for children and families.
6.6	Risk	Without sufficient funding there is a risk that implementation will not be complete by 2020
6.7	Customer Service	

Ann Marie Knowles
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Additional ELC Hours - <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/ELCTrials>

Appendix 2

Early Learning and Childcare Trials - <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/ELCTrials/ELCTrials>

Appendix 3

Additional Graduate Commitment- <http://news.gov.scot/news/early-years-workforce-expansion>