

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILEDUCATION COMMITTEE11 JUNE 2020Report by Director of EducationEARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PROVISION FROM AUGUST 2020**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek elected member approval of the statutory offer of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in all East Renfrewshire settings from August 2020 in light of the impact of the COVID19 pandemic.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. Elected members are asked to:

- a) homologate the Director of Education's decision to continue to progress with plans to deliver 1140 hours of early learning and childcare for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year old children from August 2020; and
- b) approve the allocation of ELC places based on 1140 hours, recognising however that whilst social distancing remains children and families will not be able to access this full amount given the impact of COVID-19 on nursery attendance patterns.

**BACKGROUND**

3. The Scottish Government set a transformational agenda for Early Learning and Childcare by 2020 which was published in March 2017. The vision was to almost double the entitlement to free ELC from 600 hours to 1140 hours per year by 2020 for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds and is underpinned by the key principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability.

4. In September 2017 Education Committee approved East Renfrewshire's expansion plan including the 1140 hours models of delivery for early learning and childcare. The Council has a reputation for providing high quality early learning and childcare, which is flexible, affordable and accessible to all families in their local community. Families have valued such over the years and our expansion plan built upon these principles.

5. Elected members will recall that East Renfrewshire's early years provision is organised into 4 communities: Barrhead/Neilston/Uplawmoor; Busby/Clarkston/Eaglesham; Giffnock/Thornliebank; and Newton Mearns with the

agreed planned delivery model offering choice and flexibility within the community area.

6. Subsequent reports have been taken to Education Committee outlining progress, the most recent of which was on January 2020. This report detailed the very good progress

East Renfrewshire had made towards full implementation of 1140 hours of early learning and childcare with all 4 key work streams; Quality, Workforce, Delivery Models and Infrastructure being on track to deliver this transformational agenda for East Renfrewshire's children and families from August 2020.

7. The Scottish Government announced on Tuesday 31 March 2020 that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic they have taken the decision to remove the statutory duty on education authorities to make 1140 hours of early learning and childcare (ELC) available to each eligible child from August 2020.

8. The Education Department has considered the implications of this decision, in particular the delay to our planned infrastructure programme and the impact on our 'grow our own' workforce completing their necessary qualifications.

9. This committee report details what provision can be made from August 2020 and the proposed plan moving forward.

## **REPORT**

10. In assessing the impact of the pandemic on operations, the key considerations at this stage are workforce and infrastructure which are considered below.

11. Other work streams have continued to make progress during the lockdown period with for example the Quality Work Stream comprising officers from Education, School Staff, HSCP, Further and Higher Education partners and Funded Providers assessing that our settings are well prepared to provide all children with a high quality early learning and childcare experience over 1140 hours. In addition our educators have been utilising a suite of online training materials as part of their Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) while schools and ELC settings have been closed in preparation for the return of children, keeping quality at the forefront.

### **Workforce**

12. A key strategy of our recruitment process was to 'grow our own' workforce within East Renfrewshire Council.

13. Our final recruitment exercise took place in March 2020, with us successfully recruiting the child development officer element of the workforce. Other key posts including the head teacher post at Overlee Family Centre and play worker posts have been recruited too. Recruitment of facilities management staff now required for our August plans is underway. The remaining posts will be recruited on a needs basis as plans progress.

14. Many of our successful candidates were working towards their qualifications with a June 2020 graduation date. The impact of Covid-19 has interrupted their learning and the planned completion date of their qualification. We are in discussions with the Further Education establishments to re-establish their training as part of a remote learning model.

15. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) allow staff working in care settings to take up permanent positions with the understanding that their qualification will be gained within an agreed time period. This arrangement will allow us to deploy our new recruits and support them whilst in employment to complete their relevant qualification.

16. Our workforce is therefore in position to deliver 1140 hours from August 2020.

## Infrastructure

17. Members will recall that a fundamental part of East Renfrewshire's expansion plan was the provision of additional physical places for early learning and childcare. New and extended facilities are required to meet the increase in entitled hours for eligible children and to address population growth and the flexibility in models to suit parental needs. Investment of circa £25 million is included in the Council's Capital Plan of which £12.27 million is funded by the Scottish Government.

18. To date we have opened two new nursery classes at Maidenhill and St Cadoc's primary schools and have extended the nursery class at Braidbar Primary School. These facilities are all operating successfully.

19. The main phase of our early year's expansion is dependent on the construction of new facilities that were planned to be available for August 2020. This comprises a new family centre within the grounds of Eastwood Park to replace the existing Glenwood Family Centre building as well as providing more places; two new build larger replacements for Busby and Eaglesham primary school nursery classes; two new build family centres in the sites of Crookfur and Overlee pavilions; and a new extension at Cross Arthurlie Primary School to establish a nursery class. These projects were all well underway having commenced construction in summer 2019 and were on schedule to open for August 2020.

20. Of particular note is the new family centre at Crookfur Pavilion which extends and replaces the existing nursery class at Crookfur Primary School and comes under the leadership and management of the head teacher of Crookfur Primary School. Members will recall that there is pressure on primary school places in Crookfur Primary and with the relocation of the nursery from August this year provides much needed additional space for primary children. This arrangement must still stand to meet the demand for non-denominational primary children.

21. Also under construction was the small extension at Carolside Primary School Nursery Class which commenced on site at the beginning of February this year and was also on progress for August 2020.

22. The decision by the Scottish Government to close all building sites has necessarily impacted on all projects under construction. The Council has been working with all parties to review the impact of the downtime on our programme and planning for recommencement on site once it is appropriate and safe to do so taking national advice and guidance, social distancing in terms of working practices and other matters into account. What is definite is that the buildings will not be ready for August 2020 and at the time of writing there are no proposed dates for completion and there will be significant delays before we can occupy and operate them. We are seeking to open the facilities as soon as practically possible realising they are a key part of our original intended delivery model.

23. In addition to the new and extended facilities, a programme of minor works at existing ELC centres to provide meals to children during their sessions was also underway. A number have already been completed and those in progress / not yet scheduled to commence could be delayed; however officers are also looking at when these works can (re)commence and if they will not be ready for August 2020 what alternative measures can be made to ensure children receive snacks / meals.

24. The delay to the infrastructure programme has had significant impact on our ability to deliver 1140 hours of early learning and childcare as planned. However as noted above, we do have sufficient staffing to take forward 1140 hours.

**Offer for August 2020**

25. In contrast to primary schools, which have one intake of new P1 children in August, the applications in early learning and childcare are spread across the school year. Elected members will be aware that children's entitlement to early learning and childcare is from the term after their 3rd birthday, however in East Renfrewshire we provide a place for the child the day after their 3rd birthday. This means at the beginning of each term we have some capacity as we wait for the children to turn 3 and take up their place at their allocated early learning and childcare setting.

26. Those suspended construction projects are essential to meet the accumulating demand throughout the school year, in addition to delivering our planned delivery model offering choice and flexibility within geographical communities and as our nursery roll increases.

27. It is widely recognised there is benefit for children receiving good quality early learning and childcare and the increase from 600 to 1140 hours will help our youngest children develop strong foundations for their future success in learning and life.

28. The Education Department is aware that families will have been depending on the offer of 1140 hours from August 2020 both in terms of childcare needs and reducing family expenses. We are mindful that during this period of unexpected financial stress and concern for many families, it is ever more important that they are able to plan ahead with knowledge of how their early learning and childcare needs will be met and without additional financial concerns.

29. The department had considered contingencies in the event of a delay to infrastructure. Whilst contingency did not envisage the whole scale cessation of the full programme that is a consequence of the pandemic, our plans included a change to our operating models (i.e. radically reducing choice and flexibility given fewer physical places available) and registering additional outdoor space where possible.

30. Members may recall that in preparation of East Renfrewshire models of delivery, the department surveyed parents in July 2017. This showed that almost all families said they did not want an outdoor provision as their choice of early learning and childcare provision; however they were keen for their children to experience regular outdoor learning experiences. In response to this our new settings are located in areas with the potential for excellent outdoor learning.

31. The department is now looking at existing settings with considerable outdoor areas and temporarily seek permission to register this.

32. Whilst we will now have less physical capacity than planned for, and given that there is adequate staffing, it is still possible to offer 1140 hours from August 2020 to all

33. families across East Renfrewshire within our available resources, but there will necessarily be a change of the models on offer in each setting and geographical community.

34. The following points should be noted in this regard:

- The department will move forward with its plans to introduce 1140 hours to all children.
- The existing workforce will be able to support this revised model.
- Parents will receive the equivalent of 30 hours of early learning and childcare per week (term time). Family centres will offer 1140 hours over a 48 week period.
- Parents will benefit financially from the increased offer of ELC and will also support their own learning / work.
- Most children will have increased access to ELC with the opportunity to attend for almost double the hours they attend at present.
- When new facilities are open, parents will be provided with the opportunity to select a model of ELC which offers more flexibility and choice in line with the department's original planned model and their own needs.
- There are concerns regarding capacity with 1140 hours, with only some of our settings able to support the revised model for all residents; therefore parents and children will be allocated different models and potentially displaced to other settings and communities to access their early learning and childcare.
- A number of places will be dependent on outdoor registration.
- There will be very limited capacity for families to purchase additional hours over and above their 1140 hours entitlement, especially for those children who are not eligible (under 3s).

35. When construction work resumes at each of the sites, the department will consider carefully transitioning children to their original choice of early learning and childcare setting.

36. It is possible to provide our families 1140 hours with the caveat that early learning and childcare settings will be open and allowed to operate at full capacity from August 2020. Any national advice linked to social distancing will impact on operating capacity and attendance patterns for children and families; therefore it is highly unlikely that any family will receive their full allocation of 1140 hours next school session, but they will receive more than the 600 hours to which they are entitled.

### **Allocation of 1140 Places for August 2020**

37. Elected members approved the priority criteria for allocation of 1140 places at Education Committee on 31 January 2020 (Appendix 1). To ensure fairness and consistency, this criteria will be used to prioritise application forms during the allocation process. In addition to the approved criteria, the following principles will be adopted to respond to the uniqueness of this situation:

- All allocations for returning children, who were previously informed of their 1140 hour place, will be honoured (although some settings may change as they are not complete).
- All new applications where families are requesting term time experiences for their children will be honoured (although the model may alter).
- All new applications where families are requesting all year round experiences will be honoured (although the days requested may alter).
- All new applications where the chosen nursery cannot be offered will be looked at sensitively, with alternative offers taking into account second & third choices as

well as geography, but we will make strenuous efforts to place children within their ELC communities, thus supporting the continuity of learning in the early years.

38. We have analysed the number of applications, the nurseries and models of choice and who will be displaced to another setting within their own community. This will affect 12% of applicants and the department will seek to engage with those families.

39. Allocation letters have been issued to families in the week beginning 25 May, with parents / carers asked to accept or decline their early learning and childcare offer within a 2 week period.

40. Allocations will be made for the whole academic year, however if buildings are complete for occupation later in the year, we will begin to plan the process of transition for children to access their new setting and for parents to increase the flexibility and choice they require.

### **Private and Voluntary Providers**

41. The annual commissioning exercise was carried out in December 2019 to determine which funded providers would receive partnership status to provide early learning and childcare in session 2020/21. All applications were scrutinised alongside the Scottish Government's National Standard for Quality in Early Learning and Childcare. Evidence was gathered and partnership status granted to 14 providers.

42. In January 2020 an additional scrutiny exercise took place with our childminding community to determine who would gain partnership status to provide funded early learning and childcare in session 2020/2021. Evidence was scrutinised with 20 childminders receiving partnership status.

43. For those children who access their entitlement to preschool education through one of our private or voluntary partner providers, the authority will continue to fund 1140 hours of early learning and childcare. This will be funded at a rate of £5.31 per hour.

44. Funded providers have indicated that they are ready to deliver 1140 hours from August 2020, however as a direct consequence of Covid-19, all but one provider is currently closed for business. We therefore will plan further work with those providers working in partnership to understand the exact position prior to August 2020.

### **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY IMPLICATIONS**

45. As noted in paragraph 17 capital investment of some £25m has been approved to take forward the infrastructure requirements of the expansion programme.

Colleagues in the Environment Department are working closely with contractors/project design teams and legal services to identify the additional costs associated with the delay due to the impact of COVID-19 lockdown measures on construction activity. Whilst at this stage it is too early to apprise the extent of additional expenditure required to complete the planned works, they have advised that it could be significant based on initial discussions. They have also advised that these additional costs will be logged and reported via COSLA as part of the wider ERC COVID-19 financial impact and we await details of the allocation of additional Scottish Government funding to support local authorities in this regard.

46. In terms of revenue expenditure, elected members will recall the report to Education Committee in June 2018 which noted an anticipated and annual shortfall in Scottish

Government funding from 2021/22 (i.e. the first full financial year of delivering 1140 hours). Since then the department has utilised the flexibility associated with this funding to maximise the amounts carried forward each year as well as continuing to lobby the Scottish Government and COSLA to review the distribution methodology. Whilst we await the outcome of any national review, we will continue to seek to manage the costs of expansion closely through the annual budget setting exercise.

47. In terms of the COVID-19 impact on revenue costs, the following points should be noted:

- Given most of the workforce has been recruited as planned for August 2020, there are no significant impacts in terms of costs/savings in staff costs; which is by far the biggest revenue cost. In terms of our 'grow your own' strategy, there may be some minor additional backfill costs if some of our staff who are in the earlier stages of training need longer to complete their studies.
- There will be some moderate savings in 2020/21 in property costs associated with those new establishments which are now delayed.
- As noted in paragraph 33, there will be very limited capacity for families to purchase additional hours over and above their entitlement to 1140 hours. The department had anticipated a significant reduction in wraparound income from August 2020 when setting the budget for 2020/21 given less demand/capacity, even with the new centres fully operational and under our originally planned delivery model. The loss of wraparound income in the current academic session is being captured as an additional COVID-19 cost and therefore not directly attributable to the revised 1140 hours delivery plan noted in this report. The projected loss of wraparound income as a result of COVID 19 is £380,000 and is included in COVID 19 reporting to COSLA and the Scottish Government.
- There is an expectation from Scottish Government that additional costs associated with the provision of emergency childcare for the children of key workers during the pandemic will be met from ring-fenced funds such as the ELC expansion resources. This would include, for example, the additional cost incurred for such provision over the recent Spring Break/Easter holidays as well as public holidays during May. At present we project this to be approximately £28,000, but this may rise.

48. Whilst the wider financial impact of COVID-19 continues to emerge and we await details of any potential additional funding to support this from the Scottish Government, the specific impact of the recommendations within this paper can, for revenue, be met from existing ELC expansion revenue resources, at least in financial year 2020/21.

## CONSULTATION

49. The Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity) consulted with funded providers on their readiness to deliver 1140 hours from August 2020, who confirmed that they would be, depending on the country's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic which will naturally impact on the number of children who will be able to be accommodated in all ELC settings due to the need for social distancing.

50. The Director of Education consulted with the Emergencies Committee on Thursday 14 May prior to taking the decision to proceed with the proposals as set out in this paper.

## CONCLUSION

51. The statutory duty for provision of early learning and childcare remains at 600 hours for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

52. The revised model for August 2020 enables the department to not only fulfil its statutory duty to provide 600 hours of early learning and childcare, but go beyond that and support families financially by almost doubling the offer of early learning and childcare to 1140 hours.

53. The department will have to implement contingency measures to implement this and the initial offer to parents will provide limited flexibility and choice, however the financial benefit to families will be significant and could support additional learning/work.

54. It will allow the department to provide a limited offer of 1140 hours with a view to increasing flexibility and choice when the new nurseries are complete.

55. To ensure equity the department will, as planned, increase the funding of early learning and childcare for children who attend a funded provider working in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council from 600 hours to 1140 hours.

56. All offers of early learning and childcare will be dependent on the early learning and childcare settings highlighted above and funded providers re-opening and operating to full capacity from August 2020.

57. It should be noted that any national advice linked to social distancing will impact on operating capacity and attendance patterns for children and families. The impact of this would be subject of future communications with parents who have been allocated a place.

58. It should be stressed that because of the need to follow national advice linked to social distancing, it is highly unlikely that any school or ELC setting will be fully open throughout session 2020 – 2021, due to COVID-19. As such it is also highly unlikely than any child will receive a full 1140 hours next school session. However, and as stated above, they will receive a minimum of 600 hours, which it remains our duty to deliver and this approach will deliver more than that minimum entitlement.



## RECOMMENDATION

59. Elected members are asked to:
- a) homologate the Director of Education's decision to continue to progress with plans to deliver 1140 hours of early learning and childcare for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year old children from August 2020; and
  - b) approve the allocation of ELC places based on 1140 hours, recognising however that whilst social distancing remains children and families will not be able to access this full amount given the impact of COVID-19 on nursery attendance patterns.

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May 2020

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Local Government Access to information Act 1985

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## Appendix 1

## Priority Criteria

A set of criteria is used to make sure that early learning and childcare places are allocated fairly. All places will be allocated using the priority criteria below:

<b>Priority 1</b>	Child Protection, Prevention, Looked After and Additional Support Needs.
<b>Priority 2</b>	Deferred Entry to Primary School granted by the local authority.*  <i>*Where the local authority has granted funding for an additional year of early learning and childcare.</i>
<b>Priority 3</b>	Pre-school children within their allocated community as indicated by address.
<b>Priority 4</b>	Ante pre-school children within their allocated community as indicated by address and a) who have an older sibling attending the same nursery.
<b>Priority 5</b>	a) Pre-school children applying out with their community as indicated by address. b) Ante pre-school children applying out with their community as indicated by address.
<b>Priority 6</b>	Deferred Entry to Primary School where the local authority has not approved funding for an additional year of early learning and childcare and the costs will be met by parents.
<b>Priority 7</b>	Admission will be given to children resident out with East Renfrewshire whose parents make a request for: a) A pre-school place. b) An ante pre-school place.  <i>Due to the high demand by residents of East Renfrewshire Council for nursery places, parents who fall into this priority band are advised to also apply for a nursery place within their own local authority.</i>

Priorities 1 - 3 will be allocated first. A ballot may be necessary if the number of applications received is greater than the number of places available. Likewise, a ballot will be held for any available places for ante pre-school children living in the nursery community.

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