

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL  
AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 August 2020

Report by Clerk

NATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – EARLY LEARNING AND  
CHILDCARE FOLLOW-UP

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide information on the Audit Scotland report *Early Learning and Childcare Follow-Up*.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. It is recommended that the Committee considers the report.

**BACKGROUND**

3. A copy of the Audit Scotland report [Early Learning and Childcare Follow-Up](#), published in March 2020, has already been circulated to all Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members. Under the Committee's specialisation arrangements, the Members leading the review of this particular report are Councillor McLean and Councillor Swift. The Director of Education has provided comments on the Audit Scotland report and a copy of those comments is attached (see Appendix A).

**RECOMMENDATION**

4. It is recommended that the Committee considers the report.

Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

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Background Papers:-

1. Audit Scotland Report – *Early Learning and Childcare Follow-Up*.

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AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 AUGUST 2020

Report by Director of Education

RESPONSE TO NATIONAL EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT:  
EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE

### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To provide information on the Audit Scotland report, Early Learning and Childcare (March 2020) and to comment on such within the context of ELC in East Renfrewshire.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. Elected members are asked to note the department's progress against the national position of delivering 1140 hours of ELC.

### **BACKGROUND**

3. Audit Scotland published 2 reports as part of a series of audits on ELC. The [first report](#) was published on February 2018 and commented on the delivery of the expansion to 600 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC). It also commented on the planning for the expansion to 1140 hours of funded ELC for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds by August 2020. This report was the subject of a [paper](#) to Audit and Scrutiny Committee in June 2018

4. The second Audit Scotland report on [Early Learning and Childcare](#) was published on March 2020 and is in two parts: Part 1 comments on the progress with delivering the expansion to 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC); Part 2 comments on the planning for the evaluation of the policy.

5. This second report sets out key messages and recommendations for the Scottish Government and local authorities and this paper considers these and comments on the findings and implications for East Renfrewshire's delivery of 1140 hours.

6. Audit and Scrutiny Committee may also be aware of numerous reports to East Renfrewshire's Education Committee, relating to the expansion to 1140 hours by August 2020. These are included as background papers.

### **REPORT**

7. The Audit Scotland report sets out five key messages as listed below. This paper comments on these as pertinent to local authorities in general and East Renfrewshire in particular.

## Key Messages

1. *The Scottish Government and councils are making steady progress to deliver the expansion of funded early learning and childcare (ELC). At a national level, progress is broadly in line with plans to deliver the increased hours by August 2020. These plans are critically dependent on achieving much in a short time, particularly over the summer months. This creates a number of significant risks around getting enough people and buildings in place to deliver the expansion. In addition, it is likely that some aspects of the policy, such as delivering flexibility and choice, will not be fully implemented by August 2020.*
2. *There is evidence of a great deal of planning activity taking place at local and national levels. The Scottish Government, COSLA, councils and other stakeholders are continuing to work well together at a national level and there is effective national oversight of the expansion. However, a delay in issuing some guidance increased uncertainty for individual private and third sector providers, including childminders, about their future role in the expansion.*
3. *Important workforce challenges in all sectors remain. In September 2019, councils still needed to recruit about half of the additional staff required for the expansion. Private and third sector providers, including childminders, are expected to deliver funded hours to over a quarter of eligible children but continue to report significant workforce challenges threatening their sustainability.*
4. *Putting in place the necessary infrastructure remains a big risk to the expansion as around half of the work is planned for completion in the final few months before August 2020. Any delays to this will impact on service delivery and families who are planning to use these services. Councils have started to make contingency plans for the projects that are critical for the expansion.*
5. *The Scottish Government's plans to evaluate the expansion of funded ELC are well advanced. Work is under way to capture important baseline information. However, challenges to the evaluation process remain. For example, it is not yet clear how the longer-term economic benefits will be assessed, or how family wellbeing will be measured.*

## The Expansion to 1140 hours for all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds in East Renfrewshire

8. Audit Scotland's report suggests that the Scottish Government and local authorities are making steady progress to deliver the expansion of funded ELC, however the risk around achieving much around a short time, is likely to impact on some of the aspects of the policy such as flexibility and choice.
9. The Scottish Government announced on Tuesday 31 March 2020 that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic they had 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.
10. One major impact on East Renfrewshire's capacity to deliver the programme was the cessation of all construction projects as a result of the pandemic.
11. Prior to this announcement East Renfrewshire Education Department reported to Education Committee (January 2020) the very good progress being made towards full implementation of 1140 hours of ELC.

12. The Scottish Government's decision has impacted on the original plans to deliver flexible and accessible 1140 hours of ELC to all eligible children from August 2020, in particular our infrastructure plans.

13. As part of the Education Department's Expansion Plans, detailed contingency measures were prepared to support delays or challenges.

14. These contingencies have been exercised to enable East Renfrewshire Council to progress with their offer to children and families of 1140 hours of ELC, however flexibility and choice have been reduced. A [report](#) to the Education Committee in June 2020 sought homologation of the Director's decision to offer 1140 hours having consulted with the Emergencies Committee in May.

15. It is anticipated that the reduction of flexibility and choice will be short term, and improved offers will be available to families on completion of the planned infrastructure programme.

### **Funded Providers**

16. In preparation for the introduction of 1140 hours of ELC, we have continued to build the number of funded providers we commission places from.

17. The annual commissioning exercise was carried out in December 2019 to determine which funded providers would receive partnership status to provide 1140 hours of ELC. All applications were scrutinised using the Scottish Government's National Standard for Quality in Early Learning and Childcare. Evidence was gathered and partnership status granted to 34 providers, 20 childminders and 14 private / voluntary settings.

18. 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 are currently closed for business. We therefore will plan further work with those providers to understand their exact position and recovery plans for August 2020. This will be funded at a rate of £5.31 per hour.

### **Workforce**

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

20. 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 also been recruited to. 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.

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

### **Infrastructure**

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. The delay to the infrastructure programme has had a significant impact on our ability to deliver 1140 hours of early learning and childcare as planned. However as noted above, we have exercised our contingency plans to enable us to provide families with an offer of 1140 hours of ELC from August 2020.

### **Evaluation of the Expansion of Funded ELC**

28. Although a key finding of Audit Scotland was that the economic benefits longer-term, along with the impact on family wellbeing is unclear, in East Renfrewshire we have been able to record improvements to family wellbeing as part of our early phasing of 1140 hours for some children and families. Appendix 1 shows the impact on the families who have been accessing 1140 hours to date.

29. The audit report identified a list of recommendations for the Scottish Government:

- progress the work of the Living Wage Implementation Group to identify potential solutions to stakeholder concerns about implementing the living wage
- continue to work with the UK Government, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to progress the necessary legislation and subsequent data-sharing arrangements to allow councils to access information on families with eligible two-year-olds
- consider alternative ways of capturing baseline information on the equality characteristics of children accessing funded ELC

- continue to develop the outstanding methods to complete the evaluation strategy
- consider how to include children's views in the evaluation of the policy.

30. It also identified a further list that the Scottish Government and councils should do:

- work together to ensure that contingency planning for any delays to infrastructure is complete, including plans for when and how best to inform parents
- continue to work with the Care Inspectorate to consider how best to mitigate the impact of registering temporary facilities
- continue to consider the impact of workforce expansion on other providers of ELC and make plans to alleviate this where possible
- consider how the locally available information on the movement of ELC workers from the private and third sectors into council settings could be used for national monitoring
- continue to progress communications with parents around the way in which 1,140 hours of funded ELC will be available from August 2020 and how the system will work, as well as any changes to how funded ELC is provided as part of the phasing process.

31. As indicated above the Director consulted with the Emergencies Committee in May 2020 on a proposal to progress with an offer of 1140 hours of ELC to all eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds and subsequently decided to do so from August.

32. This decision was homologated at Education Committee on 11 June 2020.

33. All eligible families were issued with their 1140 hours of ELC offer by the end of May 2020.

## CONCLUSION

34. Audit Scotland's March 2020 report on Early Learning and Childcare identifies a number of key messages for the Scottish Government and local authorities, some of which are relevant to East Renfrewshire's delivery of ELC.

35. It also makes a number of recommendations, especially for the Scottish Government. Those for local authorities have been overtaken as we move to implementation of 1140 hours of ELC for all eligible children from August 2020.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

36. Elected members are asked to note the department's progress against the national position of delivering 1140 hours of ELC.

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Background papers

1. Audit Scotland Report: Early learning and Childcare, February 2018 & March 2020
2. Early Learning and Childcare, Audit and Scrutiny Committee, June 2018
3. Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Plan, Education Committee, September 2017
4. Progress of the Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare, Education Committee, June 2018, May 2019, January 2020
5. Early Learning and Childcare Provision from August 2020, Education Committee, June 2020



## Benefits of 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare

(32 responses)

1.

Which nursery does / did your child attend in receiving their 1140 hours?

Arthurlie Family Centre	10
Busby Nursery Class	11
Braidbar Nursery Class	8
Isobel Mair School	3

2.

Have you fully used the 1140 hours you were allocated?

Yes	30
No	1
Not sure	1

4.

Five being the highest and one being the lowest, how beneficial has this been for your family circumstances? (31 responses)



(4.87 Average Rating)

5.

Has taking up the offer of 1140 hours allowed you to explore any of the opportunities listed below?

Employment	13
Training	1
Further education	5
Spending time with other children	1
Some other reason	12

6.

What age was your child when you accessed 1140 hours?

Four years old	28
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Five years old	2
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7.

Can you give some detail of benefits to your four year old child? (29 responses)

*"helped with social skills and communication issues (twins)"*

*"Has helped with social skills and communication issues."*

*"Having extra time and lunch has made her more settled."*

8.

Can you give some detail of benefits to your five year old child? (if applicable) (1 response with no comment)