

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

20 December 2016

Report by Director of Education

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON A BLUEPRINT FOR 2020: THE EXPANSION OF
EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE IN SCOTLAND

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of the report is to seek approval from elected members for the proposed Council response to the Scottish Government Consultation A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland.

RECOMMENDATION

2. Elected members are asked to comment on and approve the Council's response.

BACKGROUND

3. In October 2016 the Scottish Government developed A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland, to support local authorities who will have responsibility to fulfil the various duties associated with the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 1140 hours.

4. The Blueprint sets out the Scottish Government's high level vision for the expansion in ELC provision in Scotland, a vision underpinned by the principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability.

5. In preparing the Blueprint the Scottish Government was keen to seek views from a range of stakeholders on the range of policy choices that they face as they take forward this commitment.

6. The consultation period for the Blueprint is three months from October 2016 to 9 January 2017.

7. Following consultation with stakeholders the finalised guidance will be published in March 2017.

REPORT

8. A series of engagement forums were established to coordinate the East Renfrewshire response. These were chaired by the Head of Education Services (Equality and Equity), and included representatives from all local authority early learning and childcare establishments, partner providers and the Quality Improvement Team.

9. The response by East Renfrewshire to the consultation is included as Appendix One.

10. As part of the response the representatives highlighted a number of considerations for the authority including:

- Children's voice needs to be heard throughout and be a reminder that quality should be the most important objective of this expansion;
- Workforce planning and the need to recruit a highly skilled workforce with a deep understanding of child development and pedagogy;
- Introducing living wage as a minimum requirement for partner providers;
- Collaboration with colleagues across the Council to make use of community facilities and outdoor areas;
- The demand of administration tasks that flexibility places upon ELC staff as well as those centrally employed;
- East Renfrewshire Council has full ELC settings and schools and as such we do not have capacity to develop provision within these existing establishments;
- East Renfrewshire Council does not have excess land or buildings and would therefore require to purchase land and invest in capital programmes;
- Consultation has to be at a local level as not all families will wish for the same provision;
- A partnership approach between families, education, health and social work to ensure that staff have key information to support all children accessing their ELC entitlement;
- Local Authorities require funding to allow them to lower the cost / subsidise ELC for families; and,
- Option one is our preferred funding model. This would allow the Council to plan strategically for the expansion.

CONSULTATION

11. The response reflects the views of East Renfrewshire Early Learning and Childcare establishments and the Education Department. All East Renfrewshire Early Learning and Childcare establishments have been made aware of the consultation and the opportunity to be involved in the consultation.

12. The Scottish Government has engaged and sought feedback from a wide group of stakeholders including ADES.

FINANCIAL AND EFFICIENCY IMPLICATIONS

13. The consultation response does not have any financial or efficiency implications; however the expansion programme will have significant implications.

RECOMMENDATION

14. Elected members are asked to comment on and approve the Council's response.

Mhairi Shaw
Director of Education
December 2016

Convener Contact Details

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Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

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Background Papers

A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland

A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland

A Scottish Government Consultation

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response.

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

- Individual
 Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response.
Please indicate your publishing preference:

- Publish response with name
 Publish response only (anonymous)
 Do not publish response. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

No

A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland

CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Question 1: How do we ensure children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early-learner journey? What support should be provided to ensure that the ELC workforce and teachers have the skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions?

Comments

- The starting point should be the voice of the child and the family. This should be consistently listened to as children make transitions from home to early learning and childcare and then to school.
- Communication is key, ensuring that important information is shared and used, in partnership to effectively plan for a child's development. Clarification around the full implementation of GIRFEC should take this into consideration.
- The image of the child needs to be shared and understood by all involved with children in their early years, including health, social work and education. This is extremely important if we are to fully engage families and support them with children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. It also allows for a shared pedagogy across points of transition, in particular across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence.
- A consistent pedagogical approach to learning across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence should be visible and understood to ensure that each child's individual stage of development is taken into account at each step of their learning.
- Collaboration between early years settings and schools to ensure a clear understanding of progression during a child's learning journey.
- Further opportunities for joint training should be developed, in particular around child development, parenting and early level pedagogy.
- A highly skilled workforce with a deep understanding of child development and pedagogy.

Question 2: What support is required to ensure that the ELC workforce have the skills, knowledge and capacity to deliver high quality provision for two year olds? How can the ELC sector best meet the specific learning, developmental and environmental needs of two year olds? What approach should be taken on the transition for these children when they turn three?

Comments

- Improve initial training – HNC/SVQ/ BEd content needs to more robustly address 0-5 yrs development and include up to date research and have a strong focus on child development and how children learn. This includes formal assessment of student teachers during their placements in ELC settings and the acceptance that Newly Qualified Teachers can undertake their probationer year as part of it.
- Requirement for Head Teachers to have undertaken and to continue to undertake, professional learning in ELC.
- Removing chronological restrictions and focusing on the stage of development, rather than the age. This would include a focus on nurture, child development and parenting. It would also ensure that transitions are appropriate and children are ready for their next challenge.
- Environments and staffing ratios need to be flexible to be able to respond to children's needs rather than the number of children by age.
- Extending the entitlement to 2 years ELC for all (i.e. irrespective of whether children are 2 or 3, they would start ELC 2 years before Primary 1) would support transitions and improve equity and equality.

Question 3: How can the qualification routes and career paths that are open to early learning and childcare practitioners be developed to ensure that the ELC sector is seen as an attractive long-term career route?

Comments

- Align terms and conditions of ELC workforce to that of the teaching profession to ensure terms and conditions allow for time for Continuing Professional Learning, collaboration, planning, self-reflection etc.
- Establish National Pay Scales.
- Introduce living wage as a minimum requirement for partnership providers.
- Introduce a varied training and career path to encourage a broader range of society to join the workforce, i.e. Foundation Apprenticeships, Modern Apprenticeships, mature students, males, part-time workers.
- Initial training programmes that are relevant to current practice, fit for purpose and have a requirement for placements to be undertaken in the ELC setting.
- Mandatory ongoing professional development which is encouraged by a clear career structure.

Question 4: How can we increase the diversity of the ELC workforce, in particular increasing the gender balance in the sector?

Comments

- National promotion campaign to highlight ELC as an attractive profession with career pathways for both genders.
- Funding to support workforce development, in particular to support the ambition of a graduate workforce.
- Attractive salaries and career prospects linked to levels of qualifications.

Question 5: How can payment of the Living Wage and wider Fair Work practices be encouraged across the ELC sector?

Comments

- Increased funding to Local Government would allow to pay the living wage to be introduced as a requirement in Partner Provider contracts.
- Work life balance would need to be considered to support the ELC workforce which is mainly female.

Question 6: What actions should be taken to support increased access to outdoor learning, exercise and play?

Comments

- The importance and benefits of learning, whether indoors or outdoors must be more clearly emphasised in the Blueprint. It is about children making choices about where and how they want to learn and play. Moving forward the ELC Design guide should take this into consideration.
- Care Inspectorate to recognise that outdoor areas in ELC settings are part of the 'play area' and as such should be considered when determining capacity of settings. They should also consider adult / child ratios, particularly when the children are within the ELC settings grounds.
- Funding to support existing establishments, which were perhaps not purpose built or part of a school estate, to ensure this opportunity and choice is still being provided.
- Good quality training to allow staff and parents to gain an understanding of the benefits of outdoor play.
- Collaboration with colleagues across Councils to make use of community facilities and outdoor areas.
- Explore opportunities for quality assurance systems to be developed as part of inter-authority partnerships which complement the role of Care Inspectorate and HMIE.
- National promotion for parents / carers on the benefits of outdoor learning and the commitment to increased provision of.

Question 7: How could accountability arrangements for early learning and childcare be improved?

Comments

- Opportunity to develop Inter-Authority Partnerships to provide support and challenge to Partner Providers across a larger geographical area. This would be a more efficient model as the sector potentially expands and local resources diminish. It would also ensure a consistent approach and would reassure that cross-border arrangements are based on the same quality standard.
- There is a real opportunity as part of the Governance review to streamline external scrutiny of ELC. At the moment the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland both play a part in the inspection of ELC establishments. It would be more effective and efficient if they were to combine into one body with a dual purpose to regulate and inspect from Birth to 5 yrs. This would ensure inspection processes are consistent and reports more easily understood by parents.

Question 8: What factors must be considered in delivering flexible ELC provision, while continuing to ensure a high quality service? To what extent could funded ELC support parents and carers with non-standard working hours, such as working shifts and weekends?

Comments

- There must be a commitment to putting the early learning needs of the child first.
- The level of flexibility described in the Blueprint would not be sustained once children begin formal education; therefore there is a danger that this is a temporary solution for families. It should be recognised that the issue of childcare and flexible working will not be solved with adaptations to working patterns of only one service provider. Employers may also need to vary working patterns / expectations to suit the childcare requirements of families and provide the transformational change that the policy is designed to bring.
- It will be important to remember that flexibility might impact negatively on quality. For instance, the number of parents working shift patterns with small children who they need to access ELC for may be scattered and not concentrated, making the numbers of children accessing a place quite small. This impacts on the viability of experiences a child may experience and therefore have a negative impact on learning outcomes.
- With 98% of the ELC workforce female, it may be a real challenge to ask for staff to change their working terms and conditions. It is also concerning that at a time when all local authorities will have to undertake a considerable recruitment exercise, the role of ELC may be not as attractive as before with the different hours, working patterns, etc.
- Managing expectations of parents in terms of flexibility needs to ensure that parents understand this is within a framework of flexibility that local authorities are working towards. The consultation every 2 years increases parental expectation that needs to be regulated.
- An understanding of the administration demand that flexibility places upon ELC staff as well as those centrally employed.

Question 9: How can we ensure fair and sustainable funding for all providers offering the ELC entitlement?

Comments

- There is currently a very diverse provision of ELC across Scotland, with local authority, partner provider, voluntary groups, childminders, etc offering a service. Funding must reflect these diverse delivery models. There is not a one size fits all model and neither therefore should there be a fixed funding rate.
- Within the contracts for Partner Providers, a requirement to pay the living wage could be included as a condition of being in partnership however would require significant funding from Scottish Government.
- Local geographical contexts and challenges must also be taken into consideration. East Renfrewshire Council has full ELC settings and schools. We do not have capacity to develop provision within these existing establishments. East Renfrewshire does not have HE or FE establishments and few private businesses, thus we are restricted to expand within these areas. We also do not have excess land or buildings, and would therefore need to purchase land and invest in capital projects. This would be expensive and a blanket funding model may not take cognisance of this local dilemma. We would be looking for **'equity'** not **'equality'** of funding.
- Long term financial investment would allow strategic planning for the expansion.

Question 10: What more can we do to promote and support the involvement of childminders in the entitlement to ELC? What are the barriers, if any, to becoming a childminder? How can we ensure quality while preserving the unique value of home-based care?

Comments

- Childminders provide a valuable service for many families; however they can become isolated as a service. It would be worthwhile exploring models of delivery that involve closer working relationships between ELC settings and childminders. This may take the form of support and challenge and would also provide comfort regarding 'early learning'.
- A blended approach should also be considered, and may be a more attractive option for parents who do not wish their child to be a formal ELC setting for 1140 hours. It can also be a more appropriate approach for our most vulnerable children.
- Childminding is an employment opportunity for those wishing to re-enter / enter the workforce.
- A careers pathway for childminders is welcomed, as although qualifications are not compulsory for this role, it is important that opportunities are available for those who wish to take this route.
- There needs to be a continued focus on the regulation and inspection of all ELC providers.

Question 11: How do we ensure that the voice of children and their families is heard as we plan this expansion?

Comments

- Consultation has to be at a local level as not all families will wish for the same provision. Again expectations need to be carefully managed during and through this process.
- Proper dialogue between families not just service providers to ensure a real understanding of childcare issues.
- Children's voice needs to be heard throughout and be a reminder about quality being the most important objective of this expansion.
- Discussion with partners – health visitors, social workers, etc to raise awareness of the provision and the benefits for children and families.
- Simplifying the process for people to apply and gain an early learning and childcare place. This may be a challenge if different models of delivery are available. Parents / carers can become overwhelmed with the choice.

Question 12: How can we ensure equality of access for all children? What barriers do children with disabilities and additional support needs currently face in accessing early learning and childcare? What further action is required to address these barriers?

Comments

- A partnership approach between families, education, health, social work etc to ensure that staff have key information to support all children accessing their ELC entitlement.
- Investment in staff training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to support the child's development.
- Investment in ELC buildings to ensure that they are fit for purpose and provide equal opportunity for children to access early learning and childcare.
- Funding for appropriate adult/child ratios and other necessary equipment and resources.
- Consistency of care.

Question 13: How can we support higher take-up rates amongst eligible two year olds, and other groups less likely to access entitlement?

Comments

- More attractive terminology than 'vulnerable' 2s. Learn from other authorities by rebranding and giving it a more positive focus. A PR campaign to support this.
- Partnership with Health Visiting colleagues, to identify those children who would benefit from such a provision and to ensure that they are aware of how to support access to this.
- Explore blended models of home care and group settings.

Question 14: How can more social enterprises, and third sector providers, be encouraged to enter the early learning and childcare sector?

Comments

- Partnership working has to be integrated and valued. Incentives need to be available for those providing a high quality service.
- Funding needs to be available to provide support and challenge to those working with partners.
- Resilience of partners needs to be considered in light of the increasing flexibility and choice being offered by local authority ELC settings.

Question 15: How can the governance arrangements support more community-led ELC provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

Comments

- The regulations of the Care Inspectorate have led to many community led provisions closing their doors. This would have to be reviewed if we were to consider expanding this in the future.
- The requirements of SSSC should also be considered.

Question 16: How can the broader system for promoting, accessing, and registering for a place in an ELC setting be improved? Please give examples of any innovative and accessible systems currently in place?

Comments

- Increased publicity on how and when to apply for places.
- Central application point for parents, to allow monitoring of allocations, uptake and trends.
- Online application system.
- A developed NAMS system to meet the requirements of the expansion, which would allow monitoring of partner provider applications as well as cross-border placements.

Question 17: Do parents and carers face any barriers in accessing support with the costs of ELC provision (beyond the funded entitlement)? What more can we do to ensure additional hours are affordable?

Comments

- Ensure parents are aware regarding hours and flexibility and work related benefits such as tax free childcare.
- Work with employers to provide incentives to employees around childcare.
- Fund Local Authorities to allow them to lower cost / subsidise the cost of ELC beyond the 1140 hours of entitlement.

Question 18: How can ELC providers, particularly private and third sector providers, be encouraged to extend capacity?

Comments

- The payment to partner providers needs to be fair and consistent to allow them the ability to set up a viable organisation. This would ensure an appropriately skilled workforce as well as provide an opportunity to increase their capacity.
- Partner providers can be part of the choice for parents within a local authority's delivery model.
- A model of peer support, collaborative working and sharing practice with local authority establishments.

Question 19: What funding model would best support our vision for high quality and flexible ELC provision, which is accessible and affordable for all?

Comments

- Almost all the options listed would cause a real challenge to local authorities and partners to strategically plan. Vouchers have been tried before and we could not plan and parents could not access places where they wanted them, therefore caution needs to be taken with this suggestion.
- Local Authorities have delivered on 600 hours and provided a flexible package for parents. They must be trusted and provided with the capacity to plan for the expansion of 1140 hours accordingly.
- Services on offer must be planned, sustainable, financially secure and viable to avoid any ambiguity for families.
- In order to protect the most vulnerable families, they must easily access high quality provision and must not be burdened by any funding model that is demand led i.e. parents receive the funding and have to somehow access services of their choice which may or not exist.
- The current model of funding ensures best value within a coordinated and well governed system and we believe therefore that the funding should continue to be provided to Local Authorities to be able to effectively plan and coordinate high quality services for all.
- East Renfrewshire Council believe **Option 1** would be the best funding model moving forward.

Question 20: If it were possible for aspects of the entitlement to be phased in ahead of the full roll out by 2020, how should this be implemented?

Comments

- Workforce planning- revenue funding must be released as soon as possible to begin training for the required workforce.
- A training programme for existing staff must commence with a focus on leadership and managing change to ensure that we have the necessary leaders to take this forward.
- Information regarding funding for infrastructure and resources must be made available as soon as possible. Local Authorities will not commit to a Capital Plan for 2017-20 based on a one year funding commitment by Scottish Government as this is too high risk.
- The scale of this expansion must be acknowledged with all partners realising / accepting the substantial associated risks.
- Time must be given to learn from the trials which will begin in 2017 before the full programme begins.
- Consideration must be given to a phased approach by initially targeting those who need this support most, rather than a universal approach.