
To: Education and Children Policy Board

On: 3 November 2016

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Expansion of Free Early Learning and Childcare Entitlement

1. Summary

- 1.1. It is recognised that early years are a critical time in a child's life and that the provision of quality early learning and childcare services can contribute to improved life chances, particularly for those in the most disadvantaged families.
- 1.2. The Scottish Government has announced its intention to increase the entitlement to free early learning and child care by 2020. The Scottish Government is proposing that the entitlement be increased from the present 600 hours to 1140 hours on an annual basis.
- 1.3. The Scottish Government recognises that the proposed increase in entitlement to free early learning and childcare is a major challenge. There are challenges in ensuring adequate infrastructure (buildings), workforce and in ensuring that the entitlement is delivered in a flexible manner which meets the needs of the children and parents using the services.
- 1.4. The Scottish Government launched a consultation, A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland, on 15 October 2016. The Consultation ends on 9 January 2017. The consultation document indicates that there will be a need for additional revenue and capital costs to deliver the increased entitlement.
- 1.5. The Head of Early Years and Inclusion has established a working group to ensure that Renfrewshire can deliver the increased entitlement in a way which meets the needs of children and parents. The working group will also review the consultation document and prepare a response which will be submitted as a draft response (due to the timescale of the consultation period). The response will be brought to the next meeting of the Education and Children Policy Board for homologation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the education and children policy board
- [a] note the proposed increase in free early learning and childcare entitlement from 600 hours to 1140 hours;
 - [b] note the increased entitlement is due to be implemented by 2020;
 - [c] note the launch of the Scottish Government consultation on how to deliver the increased entitlement; and
 - [d] agree that the Head of Early Years and Inclusion submit a draft response to the consultation and that the response be brought to the next meeting of this board for homologation.

3. Background

- 3.1. It is recognised that early years are a critical time in a child's life and that the provision of quality early learning and childcare services can contribute to improved life chances, particularly for those in the most disadvantaged families.
- 3.2. Local authorities were granted the power to make provision for pre-school education for children under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Standards in Scottish Schools Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to secure a pre-school education for all 3 and 4 year olds. In 2002 the entitlement level for pre-school education was set at 412.5 hours. The entitlement level was increased to 475 hours in 2007.
- 3.3. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 redefined the local authority responsibility for pre-school education to a broader early learning and childcare responsibility. The Act provided that all 3 and 4 year olds and vulnerable two year olds were entitled to 600 hours of free early learning and childcare on an annual basis. The Act also introduced the requirement that local authorities should provide a range of flexible provision to meet the needs of the children entitled to the provision and their families.
- 3.4. The Scottish Government has announced its intention to increase the entitlement to free early learning and child care by 2020. The Scottish Government is proposing that the entitlement be increased from the present 600 hours to 1140 hours on an annual basis.
- 3.5. The Scottish Government recognises that the proposed increase in entitlement to free early learning and childcare is a major challenge. There are challenges in ensuring adequate infrastructure (buildings), workforce and in ensuring that the entitlement is delivered in a flexible manner which meets the needs of the children and parents using the services.

- 3.6. Parents who responded to Renfrewshire's consultation on childcare provision indicated they wanted affordable, flexible, accessible and quality services. Whilst this report concerns the entitlement to free early learning and childcare many parents indicated that they require to purchase additional hours over and above the 600 hours. The issue of affordability will be addressed via the increase in entitlement however the other three issues will require to be the focus of plans to change the way in which services are provided and delivered
- 3.7. Children in Renfrewshire can access their present entitlement through attending one of the authority's early years centres, a nursery class or a partnership provider. 99% of 3 and 4 year olds and 17% of eligible 2 year olds in Renfrewshire take up their entitlement to free early learning and childcare. Renfrewshire compares positively to the Scottish average where 97% of 3 and 4 year olds and 7% of 2 years olds access their entitlement to free early learning and childcare.
- 3.8. Renfrewshire delivers our present service through 12 pre-five centres and 22 nursery classes. Children and parents can access their entitlement through the local authority provision or via one of our 35 partner nurseries in the independent sector. The ability of the Council to deliver the increased entitlement will offer opportunities to consider the present local authority provision and will also rely on continued partnership arrangements with the independent sector.
- 3.9. The proposed expansion will present a number of challenges including ensuring that the estate is available to meet the increased level of entitlement. At present an audit of the local authority provision is being conducted out to identify the need for refurbishment or extension to the present accommodation or the need for new build. The Scottish Government has indicated it will be making capital resource available to support the delivery of the increased entitlement.
- 3.10. The second area of challenge relates to ensuring that the workforce is available to deliver the increased entitlement. The Scottish Government has estimated that there will be a need for an additional 20,000 workers to deliver the new entitlement. The working group mentioned below will consider workforce development from a Renfrewshire perspective to ensure that we have sufficient confident and qualified staff to deliver our services. There will be some challenges for partnership providers in ensuring that they also have sufficient confident and qualified staff. This aspect will be picked up in the workforce development stream of the group mentioned below.
- 3.11. The planning for the expansion will also require a continued focus on the quality of provision. It is important that as the service grows that the child has access to quality learning and play experiences. The quality of provision will need to take account of child development and meet the requirements of curriculum for excellence. The focus on ensuring quality will have a positive impact on closing the attainment gap for the most vulnerable children. The Scottish Government consultation document recognises that the increase in the quantity of hours must not be at the expense of the quality of the experience.

- 3.12. Renfrewshire's Children's Services, through funding from the Tackling Poverty Commission, is working with Children in Scotland to explore alternative models of childcare. That work will assist in the local preparations to ensure that Renfrewshire is able to deliver the increased entitlement by 2020.
- 3.13. The Scottish Government launched a consultation, [A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland](#), on 15 October 2016. The Consultation ends on 9 January 2017 and work is progressing in the Early Years Team to provide a response from Renfrewshire Council. The consultation document indicates that there will be a need for additional revenue and capital costs to deliver the increased entitlement.
- 3.14. The Head of Early Years and Inclusion has established a working group to ensure that Renfrewshire can deliver the increased entitlement in a way which meets the needs of children and parents. The working group will also review the consultation document and prepare a response which will be submitted as a draft response (due to the timescale of the consultation period). The response will be brought to the next meeting of the Education and Children Policy Board for homologation.

Implications of this report

1. **Financial Implications**
None.
2. **HR and Organisational Development Implications**
The expansion of free early learning and childcare entitlement will have major workforce implications in terms of ensuring that we have sufficient staff and that they are confident and qualified to deliver the new offer to children and parents.
3. **Community Plan/Council Plan Implications**
None
4. **Legal Implications**
The increased free early learning and childcare entitlement is one which local authorities will have a legal duty to deliver.
5. **Property/Assets Implications**
The present early years estate is being audited to allow planning for refurbishment, extension or new build.
6. **Information Technology Implications**
None.
7. **Equality and Human Rights Implications**
None
8. **Health and Safety Implications**
None

9. Procurement Implications

None.

10. Risk Implications

None.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

12. COSLA Policy Position

None.

List of Background Papers

None.

Children's Services

JT

18 October 2016

Author: John Trainer, Head of Early Years and Inclusion, 0141 618 6860
john.trainer@renfrewshire.gscx.gov.uk