

To: Education and Children Policy Board

On: 19 January 2017

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and
Childcare in Scotland – Consultation Response

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 from the current level of 600 hours to 1140 hours by 2020 for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds.
- 1.3. The Scottish Government's commitment to the increase in provision of early learning and childcare aims to give Scotland's children the best start in life to enable them to reach their full potential. The increase in provision will also reduce the cost of childcare for parents.
- 1.4. In response to their commitment the Scottish Government launched a consultation, A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland on 15 October 2016. Responses to the Consultation had to be submitted by the 9 January 2017. The Education and Children Policy Board, at its meeting on the 3 November 2016 agreed a draft response to the consultation be submitted and that the response be brought to the next meeting of this board for homologation.
- 1.5. Attached to this report (at appendix 1) is the response that was submitted to the Scottish government on behalf of Renfrewshire. This was prepared following discussions with heads of centres, head teachers and officers from Children's services and colleagues from early learning and childcare partner establishments.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The education and children policy board is asked to homologate the draft response (at appendix 1) to the Blueprint for 2020 consultation relating to the expansion of early learning and childcare that was submitted to the Scottish Government.
-

3. Background

- 3.1. The early years are recognised as a critical time in a child's life. The provision of quality early learning and childcare services can contribute to improved life chances, particularly for those in the most disadvantaged families. Within Renfrewshire the Early Years Strategy was developed to ensure the early years services are a priority and delivered from a family and child support perspective.
- 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.
- 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 views this increase, to almost doubling the level of entitlement, as transformational by giving Scotland's children the best start in life to enable them to reach their full potential. The increase in provision will also reduce the cost of childcare for parents.
- 3.6. The Scottish Government recognises that the proposed increase in entitlement to free quality 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.

- 3.7. Parents who responded to Renfrewshire's consultation during winter 2015 on childcare provision indicated they wanted affordable, flexible, accessible and quality services and parents indicated that they needed to purchase additional hours over and above the 600 hours. It should be noted that just under half of those who responded indicated that current provision in Renfrewshire was not as flexible as they would wish. The proposed increase in the level of entitlement to free early learning and childcare will address the issue of affordability. The flexibility, accessibility and quality of future provision will be addressed as Renfrewshire develops our future plans for the way in which services are provided and delivered.
- 3.8. The proposed expansion will present a number of challenges, including ensuring that the estate is available to meet the increased level of entitlement. The Scottish Government has indicated that there will be some capital resource available to support the delivery of the increased entitlement. However, there is also an expectation that the expansion is planned to reflect and include innovative approaches to delivering services.
- 3.9. The Scottish Government has indicated that examples of innovative approaches to early learning and childcare may include delivering the entitlement via woodland nurseries, a service which operates in the outdoors. The Scottish Government has also suggested that providers make more flexible use of open areas in and outside nursery buildings identifying these spaces to accommodate children. The more flexible use of open spaces in and around the nursery will result in more children being provided with a service from the present accommodation. When planning for the expansion the Scottish Government expects that consideration for delivering early learning and childcare should include a blended approach where children spend some time in nursery and some time in a child minders home.
- 3.10. The approaches outlined in paragraph 3.9 will result in less physical buildings being required to enable the expansion and therefore may reduce the cost on infrastructure developments. Whilst acknowledging that these approaches could result in lower financial pressure for the renovation of existing properties or reduce the need for some new build facilities there will be other challenges to be addressed including recruiting a workforce prepared to work in the open air all year round, parental expectations and the requirements of the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland.
- 3.11. The changes outlined in paragraph 3.9 will require a change to the national space standards for early learning and childcare, and these are currently being reviewed at a national level. The view of the Care Inspectorate on the impact on space standards or other areas of the care standards isn't yet known.
- 3.12. 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 across Scotland to deliver the new entitlement. The Scottish Government hasn't yet indicated the breakdown of the additional workforce including what level of additional management time will be required.

- 3.13. Locally a workforce development group has established to consider and address the delivery of sufficient confident and qualified early learning and childcare staff available to deliver our services.
- 3.14. Whilst there are challenges in preparing local authorities to meet the new responsibilities these are also replicated in the independent sector. The challenges in that sector include ensuring they also have a confident and qualified staff group. The decision of the Scottish Government to ensure that staff in adult social care are paid the Scottish Living Wage is a positive development however could have an impact on the recruitment and retention of early learning and childcare staff in the independent sector. The Scottish Government has acknowledged this challenge and are seeking views on how best to achieve the Scottish Living Wage in the independent sector.
- 3.15. 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 children continue to have access to quality learning and play experiences, which takes account of child development and the relevant curriculum guidance, in order to have a positive impact on closing the attainment gap for the most vulnerable children.
- 3.16. The attached draft response was submitted to the Scottish Government on the due date of 9 January 2017 and is now provided for the consideration of elected members. The responses to the questions should be read in conjunction with the consultation documentation.

Implications of this report

- 1. Financial Implications**
The expansion to 1140 hours of early learning and childcare will require funding from the Scottish Government.
- 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.

There will be implications for cleaning, catering and business support, including a need for additional staff.

Infrastructure / staff / admin
- 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.

Early learning and childcare provision will also require to be procured from 4

providers in the independent and third sector.

5. Property/Assets Implications

The present early years estate is being audited to allow planning for refurbishment, extension or new build.

Other Council properties, areas of land may also require to be explored as possible sites for new builds nurseries.

6. Information Technology Implications

Improved systems for data management.

7. Equality and Human Rights Implications

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. Health and Safety Implications

None

9. Procurement Implications

Services from providers in the independent and third sectors will require to be procured.

10. Risk Implications

The risk implementations in delivering the 1140 hours includes: securing the required number of suitable qualified staff; securing the required refurbishments/ new builds by 2020; and maintaining the required number of commissioned places in the independent sector.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

List of Background Papers

- (1) Expansion of free early learning and childcare entitlement, education and policy board, 3 November 2016.

*Children's Services
KMcD
12 December 2016*

Author: Kathleen McDonagh, Education Officer, 0141 618 9196
Kathleen.mcdonagh@renfrewshire.gov.uk



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

Renfrewshire Council, including representation from ELCC partner providers

Phone number

0141 618 7196

Address

Children's Services
 Renfrewshire House
 Cotton Street
 Paisley

Postcode

PA1 1TZ

Email

Kathleen.mcdonagh@renfrewshire.gov.uk

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

- There is already a strong commitment to supporting transitions during all stages including from home to nursery, playroom to playroom and from nursery to school. Within nursery the ideal would be for the staff to follow the child across each of the stages, however the difficulties in achieving this due to staff changes and staff teams skill mix were noted.
- Home visiting was identified as being extremely beneficial in supporting children and families in their transition from home to nursery or school. It was noted that some flexibility in staffing is required to enable this. Support staff, such as the Families First locality teams (created under the Renfrewshire Early Years Strategy to provide speedy services for children and families) and Home link workers could support the home visiting process and in ensuring a focus on the needs of the whole family as well as supporting the child.
- Maximising the knowledge and information of the family as a whole and by providing the opportunities to support the children and family on an ongoing basis, for example by providing follow-up visits to the family home, effective settling in process by allowing the parent to spend time in the service, Play and Stay sessions to enable parents to be more involved in their child's learning.
- Maximise opportunities to develop relationships between staff and children/families, for example being flexible in the allocation of key workers to meet the needs of the child and the family.
- Ensure parents are kept informed and are knowledgeable of the range of support services, such as speech & Language and of how to assess these.
- Consideration to physical environments by pursuing opportunities for children to move across rooms, including the varying stages of development. This level of flexibility of mixing age groups will be especially important when children are attending for longer days as planned by the introduction of 1140 hours, in allowing siblings to see each other.
- Ensuring opportunities for dialogue / effective communication between establishment base staff and peripatetic staff such as early years teachers.
- Establishing effective arrangements for sharing information on children from nursery into primary and by ensuring that the protocol is clear and is effectively followed and understood by primary and nursery staff, thus ensuring information on children is appropriately shared (transition records, children's plans, discussions and visits) and there is a continuum in children's learning. Keep parents informed and involved in the processes.
- Ensuring staff are appropriately equipped and skilled to assess and write reports which accurately reflect individual children.

- Regular opportunities for whole staff teams to be trained on key subject matters at the same time instead of 1 or 2 going at a time i.e. in-service days as it is difficult to cascade it to the whole staff.
- Provide staff with the opportunity to share and experience good practice through visit to other establishments and by shadowing staff.
- Ensuring ongoing professional development opportunities for staff, through offering flexible deliver options such as evening or weekend training session and encouraging staff to up skill themselves by accessing resources such as Education Scotland Hub.
- Provide opportunities for all early years level (nursery and primary) to access shared training sessions.
- Early years methodology should be adopted and shared across the early level (nursery and P1 level), thus ensuring more of a nurturing/ play based approach to learning.

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 the initial training for nursery and teaching staff to ensure a deep understanding of child development from 0 to 5 years. One year training for nursery staff is not sufficient to ensure breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding across all stages of child development.
- By ensuring a focus on children's development stage and ensuring the environment, resources, routines and interactions are appropriate to meet the needs of the children.
- By providing a nurturing approach in relationships work with children and families, where staff work closely with parents and other agencies to support individual children.
- Provide ongoing training and support to up-skill primary school senior management staff and nursery staff working in nursery classes, and other staff to ensure they have the appropriate knowledge and skills, by providing content based training sessions, sharing of practice and buddying.
- Work closely with parents to encourage and support them and by offering guidance and advice on resources to support their children as required.
- Use assessments based on stage of development
- By ensuring a mix in the skill base of staff working in establishments.
- Increase the number of qualified teachers working in nurseries.

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

- Review the initial training routes to become an early years worker with a view of re-introducing a two year qualification for early years practitioners to ensure appropriate time to gain a depth of knowledge meaningful opportunities to undertake work place experience.
- There is a need to continue to consider the range of entrance routes including qualification routes, from 'on the job training' or directly into college or university. Appropriate ongoing CPD opportunities are required to ensure appropriate skills and knowledge.
- Improving access to BA qualification for staff, through funding support and the number of places available.
- The introduction of a national pay scale that is higher than the living wage and is in line with other professional bodies, which will help to promote early learning and childcare as a professional career option and encourage males into the profession.
- Ongoing work with staff to support them to value themselves as competent professionals. This should be reinforced during initial training and on an ongoing basis.
- Increase the entrance level for early years staff to increase the opportunities of achieving high quality staff and services.
- Improve the progression routes to ensure increased opportunities.
- Consideration needs to be given to the balance of early years teachers and child care graduates across the sector.

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

Comments

- Improve the working conditions across the whole service.
- Promote the benefits of having males working in the service.
- Need to promote as a profession with High Schools, careers, etc to raise standards of quality of staff into the profession
- Promote as work experience opportunity for male students.
- Introduce a national pay scale that is above the living wage for all staff working across 0 to 5 years.
- Consider the introduction of salary scale linked to the level of qualifications.
- The Scottish Government to fund the Scottish Living Wage across the sector in the way it has committed to doing so in adult social care.

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

Comments

- Renfrewshire Council is committed to ensuring that staff providing services on our are paid the Scottish Living Wage. Work has commenced to consider how this can be delivered via procurement arrangements however there will be significant financial implications in delivering this ambition.
- Funding to allow local authorities to contract with the Scottish Living Wage as a condition would require adequate funding from the Scottish Government.
- To achieve consistency across the country the payment of the Scottish living wage would need to be a requirement of a tender arrangement with partner providers. It is recognised that the rate paid per place in partner providers should reflect the true cost of providing an early learning and childcare place.
- Work will be required to calculate the cost of providing early learning and childcare in the independent sector taking into account the payment of the Scottish living wage.
- National benchmarks on payment to partners and national pay scales would be beneficial.
- The establishment of a consistent level of salary and conditions of service across the sector to achieve equity and reduce the risk of a high turnover of staff in the voluntary and private sectors.
- If an appropriate level of funding is not provided then this could result in an increased cost to parents.

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

Comments

- Actively promotion of outdoor learning as a means of supporting children's development. The inclusion of a statement about the importance of access to free flow outdoor learning to be included in national guidance.
- A review of the national space standards and new design guide to include outdoor outdoor areas which are adjacent/ connected to nursery buildings and within the spacing requirements.
- As part of the capital allocations to be made available to Councils this should include financial support to enhance existing outdoor areas to maximise opportunities for this to be incorporated within the required space standards.
- The provision of clear guidance on the required adult to child ratio on woodland / outdoor trips.
- Liaison with park and other relevant departments to explore opportunities for early years services accessing park and other outdoor areas.
- Enhance the adult to child ratio to promote/enable the provision of woodland nursery provision.
- Active publicity for parents and promotion of the benefits of learning outdoors, including in woodland areas, to reduce the current levels of risk aversion to such learning opportunities.

- Access to outdoor learning, exercise and play is an area for development however it is unrealistic to expect that this model of delivery will provide the capacity within the early years sector to deliver the proposed increase in entitlement.

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

Comments

- Streamline standards used during external inspections, which could include specific standards to be used by either Care Inspectorate / HMIE
- Improve the consistency of practice with inspectors.
- Establish the one Inspectorate body and possibly introduce more frequent inspections.
- Enabling inspectors to have a support focus as well as the role of regulator.
- Monitor the implementation of the new self evaluation tool to ensure it is having an impact on improving practice.
- Increase the regularity of Education Scotland inspections.

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

- In order to ensure quality there needs to be consideration to providing 'core hours' to ensure the needs of children are met by continuing to ensure an educational focus as well as care, particular in ensuring our children have the best start an in addressing the attainment gap.
- Support for staff in the management and tracking of children's learning if there is no limit to level of flexibility.
- Clarification on what is meant by flexible early learning and childcare – does this mean providing services into the evenings and weekends. This level of flexibility will offer further support to vulnerable children and parents working outwith the usual Monday to Friday pattern.
- The costs of delivering a flexible provision isn't yet clear but to deliver the Scottish Government's ambition it needs to be backed by appropriate funding allocation to local government.
- There will need to be an understanding at a local level on parental needs and expectations in relation to the expansion.
- Further consideration into the management of placement allocations that continues to ensure a level of efficiency and an ability to respond parents working shifts.
- What will models look like? Ideas and information on a range of suitable models would be helpful.
- A review of staffing contracts and conditions would be required. If service to be completely flexible – ie evenings and weekends how can we continue to meet the needs of the existing workforce, particularly given it is predominately female and who will have their own family commitments to manage.

- If more males were attracted to profession this could assist in managing a much more flexible service.
- Employing additional and new staff will assist with delivering flexibility. There will however be a need for Councils and other employers to consider / review existing contractual conditions.
- Guidance on a minimum and maximum number of hours per day would be beneficial – will this be 6 hours per day or more? A criteria for prioritising and allocating places will require to be established.
- In order to ensure quality the models developed will need to continue to ensure opportunities for staff to have collegiate time for joint planning and evaluation.
- Additional staff will be required during lunch (meal) times to ensure a quality experience for the children and enable staff to have a lunch break. Employing staff for a small number of hours per day/week may result in a high turn over of staff and therefore a lack of stability.
- It isn't clear from the Blueprint if the provision of free meals for all children has been included in the costing of the service. It will be important to ensure the provision of free meals for all children in the early years service given the present commitment to free meal entitlement for all children in primary 1 to primary 3.

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

Comments

- The introduction of the living wage or national pay scale would possibly reduce the high turnover of staff in the sector.
- The level of funding allocated to partner providers would require to be increased to enable providers to pay a living wage. To enable Councils to do this additional funding from the Government would be required.
- The level of funding to be allocated to providers in the independent sector requires to be at sufficient level that reflects the cost of a place to enable them to be financial viable given that there will be less hours for them to sell. It is essential that any deficit does not result in increased costs for parents.
- Recognition of the cost of varying models and settings.
- Ensuring that parents can utilise the 1140 hours flexibly, for example over a 50 week period as well as term time.
- By offering a blended approach to delivering early learning and childcare flexibly.
- There is an expectation that, if the same level of quality early learning and childcare is to be provided by a childminder and a private / third sector provider, then the procurement and inspection arrangements should be the same.

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

- There needs to be clarification on whether childminders will provide early learning and childcare.
- A recruitment and marketing campaign would be required at a national and local level.
- Use social media to promote childminding by highlighting the benefits and promotion as an equal choice of provision. This could assist in the current shortage of childminders to cover the increase in demand.
- By promoting a blended approach to delivering 1140 hours of early learning and childcare. If parents choose an establishment then the need for a childminding service will be greatly reduced.
- There is a need to address the imbalance in the provision of childminders, as there are often more available in areas that are less populated (rural areas and villages) and fewer in urban areas.
- By ensuring childminders are subject of the same model of external scrutiny as other providers, for example Education Scotland inspection, this would help to raise the profile and confidence of childminders as delivers of early learning and childcare. However the feasibility of this questionable.
- Childminders requiring to meet the same qualification requirements as other sector staff to avoid educational / childcare disparities.
- By providing clarification on the expectations around procurement processes.
- By promoting childminding as a career pathway into other services.
- Financial support to meet the required standards when setting up to register as a childminder, including providing training.
- Balancing the increased expectations and maintaining the balance which enables childminders to continue to meet their own family needs.
- The level of support required to assist childminders keep up to date with policy changes such as Building the Ambition.

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

Comments

- Market research and face to face contact with parents.
- Managing the number of consultations for parents, as lately parents have been asked to respond to a number of childcare audits which were circulated via the Scottish Government, local authorities, establishments and other interested bodies.
- Use social media as a more effective mechanism for surveying parents.
- Ensure that any publicity is spread widely as a number of parents that will benefit from the increased provision will not be current users of early learning and childcare services.

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 blended approach may be beneficial for some children as they may struggle to cope with the longer day in a nursery environment, due to capacity in room, noise level.
- Waiting list for children to get help from specialist services such as speech and language therapists can be a barrier.
- Additional specialist support staff / ASNAs may be required to support children attending for longer periods of time.
- At times there is not appropriate provision available due to an increasing number of children presenting with ASN, this impacts on resources as there is a need to ensure appropriate staffing and support for children.
- The provision of specialist training for the existing and new workforce to support children.
- The provision and cost of transport to support children to access specialist placements.
- Disparity between provisions in the allocation of ASN support, additional support is often not allocated to support children attending partner nurseries.

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

Comments

- Improving local links with health visitors, family worker, DWP and other agencies to promote the entitlement.
- Enabling parents the opportunity to access their entitlement flexibly and to purchase a top-up provision.
- Use social media / leaflet drops to raise awareness. Highlight parents don't have to take full entitlement.
- By visually advertising nursery environments and highlighting the benefits of a nurturing provision – either a nursery class or centre - to help parents understand the positive impact for young children.
- Ensuring that the provision is local to encourage take up.
- Ensuring continuity of provision for children by enabling children to attend the same service for their 2 year old place and beyond.
- Offer a blended model of choice of provision that includes the use of childminders that meets the needs of families

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

Comments

- The option would need to be attractive with an appropriate level of resource and support available.
- Voluntary (parent managed) nurseries can be overwhelming for the parents due to the level of regulation. A significant level of support is required to prevent this model of provision from becoming unsustainable.
- There is a need for local networks of support for voluntary and third sectors providers.
- Sufficient market research is required to ensure services can be sustained.
- There has to be professional status for early learning and childcare.
- The level of resource required to provide quality assurance support to an expanding range and number of providers.

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

Comments

- There would need to be a level of flexibility to respond to the very unique models and situations. External inspectors would require to have some understanding of such unique services.
- Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate should offer advice and support as well as regulation.
- Consideration on how to efficiently manage the range of specialist / small scale community led provision without increased resource allocation.

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

- The registering and allocation of places via local establishments and admissions panel was identified as best practice, as this approach enables a better understanding of family needs and circumstances. The involvement of Health visitors and other professionals such as social workers enhance this approach.
- Entitled places are allocated on an annual basis to ensure equity no matter when the eligible place is due to begin. This approach can have financial implications for partner providers as they will not receive the funding until the child is eligible to take up the place.
- Whilst a centralised approach to admissions could be beneficial for data management this would be problematic in managing the complex system of flexible provision and would be resource intense. Some partners felt that a central approach could be detrimental to them. This approach would require an extremely strong understanding of the needs of a local area or children

could be inappropriately allocated places, such as the distance to travel to a service should a preferred choice not be available.

- Adopt a change in the terminology used to advise parents of the types of places available by stopping referring to morning and afternoon sessions and referring to a flexible place that meets the needs of the child and family.
- The language of 'deferred year' should be changed

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

- An inequality in the rate for a funded place between providers can be a barrier for parents.
- Deposits / payments in advance for childcare can be a barrier, particularly for a parent new to employment.
- Ensuring that information about childcare tax credits and other childcare benefits are widely publicised and support and advice on accessing these needs to be assessable to parents.
- Transportation costs between an early learning and childcare service, work location and home can be a barrier.

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

Comments

- There needs to be clarity on the funding to be made available to enable providers to plan for the future. The level of funding needs to be fair and reflect the true cost of an early learning and childcare placement, including administrative processes for managing complex placement allocation and fees to be charged for places beyond the entitled provision.
- Partners are concerned about the cost for paying staff the living wage and the implications this could have if the funding was not available to pay all staff within a nursery / company the living wage, including those staff working with age groups that are not yet eligible for funded early learning and childcare.
- Services are not all on the same footing and running costs vary, with some located in Council buildings and others owning their own buildings.
- There is concern that the increased free provision will result in a loss of income from wraparound provision.

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

- The preferred option is to continue with the local government block grant option. Information on future funding allocation and time to plan/ develop

services that ensure quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability for all is essential.

- A focus on supporting the needs of the most deprived / vulnerable children is essential, and therefore adequate resources must be provided to enable the development key services in identified SIMD.
- Data information on local populations requires to be more robust to enable accurate planning – the NAMS/ SEEMIS systems requires to be further developed and systems for tracking cross border places need to be more robust.
- The proposals relating to funding following the child / childcare accounts are viewed as problematic in terms of planning the expansion and the risk of the funding not being used for early learning and childcare provision resulting in high levels of debt and perhaps resulting in the most vulnerable children losing out on an entitled place.

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

- Early information about the funding available, including capital, is required to enable effective planning to roll out the expansion.
- Recruitment of staff and training of staff to a high standard should be priority before full implementation. Partners are concerned that they will be unable to recruit and retain staff as they will lose staff to the local authority due to the higher levels of pay.
- Phasing in the entitlement by targeting those children who are most in need, using SIMD to determine this.
- Understanding the needs of families is crucial as it is difficult to plan provision of these extra hours without this knowledge – e.g. should more of the entitlement be provided across 50 weeks instead of the current school year.