

**REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE –
26th AUGUST 2021**

**UPDATE OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE
EXPANSION PROGRAMME**

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress of 1140 and additional planned actions up to June 2021.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Acknowledge work to date and actions and provide any comments, observations or recommendations.**

3 Purpose and Decision Making Route

- 3.1 1140 funded ELC hours became a statutory entitlement from August 2021. This paper highlights the progress to date in key areas.

As a result of Covid and the scale of the expansion programme, the amount of change has been significant.

4 Discussion

4.1 Workforce

There has been significant progression in relation to the workforce development, since the 1140 journey started in April 2018.

- Progression opportunities within the Council ELC service through introduction of Early Years Senior Practitioner in 2018. Now 75 Early Years Senior Practitioners in post (64FTE). The EYSPs are also there to allow for increased capacity for quality improvement, nurture and increased engagement with families.
- Opportunities for school leavers to adults looking for a career change, through the introduction of the Modern Apprenticeship, Assistant Early Years Practitioner and Early Years Support Workers.
- A total increase in the workforce from 348 FTE to 492 FTE (703 staff).
- Review of staffing model from 9am to 3pm and 8am to 6pm (term time and all year settings) has been taking place. Increase in staffing for 9am to 3pm settings and 8am to 6pm settings, to allow for meeting Care

Inspectorate requirements and allowing opportunity for care and quality improvements.

- Introduction of 6 Early Learning Excellence and Equity Practitioners. They deliver a high level of expertise and input to those young children and their families who face the greatest disadvantages and where additional support will assist in closing the attainment gap.

4.2 Funded Providers

Aberdeenshire Council Early Years' Service has continued to work to increase the number of funded providers commissioned to deliver ELC.

Aberdeenshire Council have followed a 'Funding Follows the Child' approach since 2015, in that those childcare providers that met criteria were able to apply to become a funded provider. There was an ongoing application process in place to ensure timeous procurement of services and increased accessibility and flexibility of offering to families residing in Aberdeenshire.

Since April 2018, Aberdeenshire Council has increased from 74 funded providers to 180 funded providers.

In April 2019, funded providers were able to offer up to 1140 hours. There has been significant increase in uptake of hours beyond 600 hours from families since April 2019, as can be seen in table 2 below.

Table 1: Overview of change in funded providers and ELC offering through comparison of the last three academic years.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21*
Number of Providers	74	132	180
Number of Children accessing ELC with Providers	2,006	2,348	2,467
Total number of ELC hours delivered	291,948	533,125	1,891,808
Total number of lunches provided	87	23,000	166,108

*20/21 data relates to information sent from funded providers for the previous two ELC terms and the current term.

Sustainable Rate

In April 2019, Aberdeenshire Council increased the funded rate from £3.94 to £5.31 for three and four-year olds and from £4.22 to £6.00 for two year olds. The lunch rate also increased from £2.30 to £2.50.

In 2020, Aberdeenshire Council and Moray Council commissioned Ipsos Mori to review childcare costs across each local authority. The final report (October 2020) showed that Aberdeenshire Council was providing a sustainable rate.

A Working Group (Funded Provider Forum) was established in November 2020. Currently work is under way to review rate, as a result of Covid and to consider inflationary increases to ensure that Aberdeenshire Council is supporting viability of funded partners to deliver the Real Living Wage for their staff.

Two enhanced ASN rates have been introduced for funded ELC placements with funded providers. Funded Providers will also have access to a grant to support purchasing of equipment and resources for children with additional support needs.

4.3 Covid and ELC Capacity

Aberdeenshire Council has taken steps since March 2020, to manage capacity across the ELC sector (Local Authority and Funded Providers), to reduce the impact of Covid on the ELC Expansion, thereby improving the chances of families being able to access their funded entitlement in their area/cluster of choice.

Aberdeenshire Council are progressing towards August 2021 with the mindset that the current restrictions due to Covid will remain in place, at least for the start of the 21/22 academic year. This has been discussed with the Scottish Government. Steps that have been taken are as follows:

- Significant investment and development in outdoor provision, both in terms of infrastructure, training and engagement with families. This has allowed LA settings and Funded Providers to reduce the impact of the public health guidelines, particularly in relation to 'bubble' sizes of no more than 25 to 33.
- LA ELC settings expanding into additional available space in order to maintain meeting demand. Increase in staffing to allow for changes to model of delivery.
- Working with Flexible Childcare Services to provide 'pop-up' ELC delivery, where LA capacity is impacted on for the provision of eligible two-year olds. Currently 'pop-up' provision is being delivered in Banchory, Huntly and Peterhead to support capacity.
- Increase of Funded Providers to allow for increased accessibility and flexibility.
- Changes to the 1140 offering for those LA ELC settings that have significant demand in terms of places and 1140 uptake. There has been a communication provided by Early Years' Service and Early Years Senior Practitioners have been in direct contact with families regarding the model and impact on flexibility. Changes to the model and communication/engagement with families, has been successful.
- The Care Inspectorate guidance for Covid 19 is still in place and has an ongoing impact on the size of groups/mixing groups. These restrictions will continue to limit flexibility until relaxed. As there has been an announcement

by the Scottish Government that further relaxation is not imminent, we have planned for a return with the same restrictions. As soon as the restrictions change our settings will be able to offer increased flexibility. Split placements continue to allow parents to take the entitlement to 1140 hours between 2 or more settings.

- Increased support and guidance from Early Years to LA ELC settings to manage split placements. Currently there are 350 split placements in place.
- Aberdeenshire Council catering services have worked with over 15 ELC funded provider settings over the last year, to provide lunches so that they could expand their offering. This allowed for an increase in capacity of 194 1140 places.
- Once it was finalized, the Capital Programme was shared with the Care Inspectorate, and there has been regular catch ups to ensure that all variations are on schedule. Variations allow for increasing the number of children that can access Funded ELC in a setting. These have been prioritized for those settings that require them to be in place for August 2021.

4.4 **ELC Expansion of Hours and uptake of ELC by eligible two-year olds**

Local authority settings started to increase ELC offering beyond 600 hours, from April 2018. Funded Providers have been able to offer up to 1140 hours from April 2019. The percentage of ELC funded children, aged 3 to 5, taking up more than 600 hours, has increased from 45.3% in April 2019 to 73.5% in April 2021.

Uptake of number of two-year olds accessing funded ELC has increased from 184 in April 2019 to 245 in March 2021. The uptake of more than 600 hours by two-year olds has increased from 48.4% in April 2019 to 66.5% in March 2021.

Early Years Strategy Group where there is a focus on improving outcomes for children from 'hard to reach' families. A presentation from the group highlighted ways to improve the uptake of places for eligible 2 year olds. This is being actioned as a result of agreement by the group about the benefits to making the changes.

4.5 **Holiday provision**

- Buchanhaven Early Years setting opened as the first holiday trial site over Easter 2021. Extremely positive feedback from parents, one in particular being delighted that the summer opening would mean that she would not go into debt through pressure to provide activities and experiences for her child during this time.
- 17 settings across 16 clusters will be open over the summer.

- The Early Years Team have worked alongside other services (Cleaning, Janitorial, Catering and Learning Estates) to ensure that the services are appropriately supported.
- Line management responsibility and a duty officer rota will ensure that staff have access to the support they need.
- Visits to all settings are planned to assess the quality of provision.
- Evaluation of the holiday opening will be undertaken with staff, children and parents before schools restart in August.

4.6 Early Years Estate

- The 1140 Infrastructure Programme is delivering a total of 81 identified projects to enhance and modernise the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) estate, to ensure that provision at Local Authority settings is appropriate to meeting the demands of the ELC expansion. Despite the challenges faced over the last year in relation to Covid-19 and associated lockdown periods, delivery has remained fast paced and 75 projects have been fully completed as part of the 1140 Infrastructure Programme since July 2019. This represents an overall completion rate of 93%. These projects have ranged from small scale internal upgrades, to the creation of new outdoor learning and play spaces through to the establishment of new build provision at Fishermoss School in Portlethen and Gordon Primary School in Huntly.
- Two further new build projects are currently onsite and are progressing well. These projects are the replacement provision for New Machar School Nursery, which will open in August 2021 and Dales Park School Nursery, which will open in September 2021.
- A refurbishment project which will enhance and modernise the ELC provision based at Inch Primary School, is being scoped by design teams currently. Initial survey and feasibility work has been started, in partnership with School and Nursery staff, with a view to delivery in Summer 2022. This project will be the final refurbishment project delivered through the 1140 Infrastructure Programme.
- The remaining two projects identified for delivery through the 1140 Infrastructure Programme is the replacement and enhancement of ELC facilities at Dunnottar School Nursery in Stonehaven and St Andrew's School in Fraserburgh. These projects are currently going through the initial design and feasibility process, with a view to both being available and operational in the 2022/2023 session

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 5.1 This report helps to deliver the following Council's Priorities: -
- Education
 - Health and Wellbeing

- Resilient Communities
- Economy & Enterprise

5.2 This report helps deliver against Aberdeenshire Children’s Services Plan Priorities – Early Years and Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing

This report helps deliver on the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) Priority – Reducing Child Poverty in Aberdeenshire

5.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation is agreed.

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Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		x	
Staffing		x	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland		x	
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing		x	
Climate Change and Sustainability		x	
Health and Wellbeing		x	
Town Centre First		x	

5.4 There are no financial implications identified as this is an update on the 1140 Expansion.

5.5 An integrated impact assessment is not required because the reporting on the progress of 1140 Expansion does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

5.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- ACORP003 - Workforce (attracting and retaining the right skills, performance, reward package)
- ACORP005 - Working with other organisations (e.g. supply chains, outsourcing and partnership working)
- ACORP006 - Reputation management (including social media).

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- ECSSR002 – ECS Directorate Risk – To secure continuous improvement in outcomes for children and young people
- LOIP Priorities
 - Reducing child poverty
 - Connected and cohesive communities

6 Scheme of Governance

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated into the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the [Scheme of Governance](#) and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section E3.4 and E3.7 of the [List of Committee Powers in Part 2A](#) of the Scheme of Governance as the report refers to the provision of early years child care to provide the service either internally or externally through commissioning of services in terms of Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

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