

REPORT TO BUCHAN AREA COMMITTEE – 7th December 2021

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE ADMISSIONS POLICY

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Committee's comments on the new Early Learning and Childcare Admissions (ELC) Policy which takes account of Early Learning and Childcare Expansion and Aberdeenshire Council's commitment to support the best start in life for all those residing in Aberdeenshire.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Provide comments on the proposed new Early Learning and Childcare Admissions (ELC) Policy at Appendix 1 to Education and Children's Committee on 27th January 2022, in particular:**
- 2.1.1 the proposed revised Aberdeenshire Council Early Learning and Childcare admission priorities;**
- 2.1.2 the proposed introduction of a fourth term, to allow children to access ELC funded hours earlier;**
- 2.1.3 the proposed removal of the requirement for parents to re-apply for a second year at the same setting that their child is already attending.**

3 Purpose and Decision-Making Route

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to obtain Committee comments on the proposed new Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and Admissions Policy (see Appendix 1) which will be fed back to the Education and Children's Services Committee on 27th January 2022. The purpose of the proposed new Policy is to create a fourth term, which will start after the October holiday period. This is to allow for children to access their ELC entitlement at an earlier stage, thereby being able to access more funded hours. Additionally, the proposed new Policy will rationalise the priorities for admissions. The revised priorities will ensure continuity and equality of access for all children who are vulnerable or with identified additional support needs.
- 3.2 'A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early learning and childcare in Scotland' The vision for expansion is underpinned by the principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility, and Affordability. Flexibility, accessibility and affordability would all be improved through the introduction of a fourth term.

- 3.3 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 1) Order 2019 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019 increased the responsibility of the Local Authority to provide 1140 hours of Early learning and childcare for all eligible children. Currently, those children that turn three between 1st September to commencement of school after school holidays have to wait until January to be able to access funded hours.

4 Discussion

4.1 Overview

The previous [Early Learning and Childcare](#) priorities were approved by the Education, Learning and Leisure Committee in December 2015.

The priorities and identification of terms give clear guidance to staff and parents/carers about Aberdeenshire Council's Early Learning and Childcare admissions process.

The changes that are being proposed have all been discussed with several Funded Providers and Early Years Senior Practitioners. The consensus is that these would be beneficial and would impact positively on children and families.

4.2 Priorities

In developing the revised priorities, the Early Years' Service took into account the following documents:

- The Funding follows the Child,
- GIRFEC,
- Children and Young People Act 2014,
- UNCRC articles 3,18,20,23,26,28.

There are currently 10 priorities, as agreed at Education, Learning and Leisure Committee in 2015 (see Appendix 2). It is possible to reduce the number of priorities, in part due to [Funding Follows the Child](#), which states '*The choice of setting available to families is not restricted to their own local authority boundary*'. The proposed changes to the criteria/priorities can be seen in Appendix 1.

The change for those children that have been deferred for an additional year or who are returners is because, in 45% of cases, the children are already attending the setting that they apply to for the following academic year. A notification process would still be required but would be far less onerous a task.

In relation to priority the proposed priority 2 (Already placed eligible 2year olds. Looked after children /vulnerable children (supported application) and children with ASN (supported application and MAAPM), it was thought that this would ensure that those who are likely to benefit the most from ELC should be all be prioritised. After placement of priority 1 (returners and deferred and delayed

entry), there would be more enough capacity of places for children in priority 2 to access a place that meets the child's requirements.

The decision to place applications for children with a sibling in the school is to support accessibility. Given the geography of Aberdeenshire and challenges in accessing public transport in the more rural and remote rural locations, if an ELC child is not placed at the same setting or in a setting that is close to that of their sibling, then this can be a barrier to children being able to access their full-funded entitlement.

4.3 Introduction of a fourth term

Currently there are three terms in the academic year for ELC. The dates and eligibility in terms of age are shown in figure 1 below. It is proposed that there are 4 ELC terms in each academic year. The key benefit would be that children would be able to access funded hours earlier. The estimated number of children that would benefit from such a change to the admissions policy would be 443. The breakdown is 178 going to funded providers and approximately 226 going to Council ELC settings across Aberdeenshire.

The estimated number of children who would benefit from such a change in Buchan would be 61.

For a child accessing ELC over term time (30 hours per week), this would translate to on average 240 hours of additional funded ELC. This would improve affordability of childcare while allowing children to have earlier access to Early Learning and Childcare, thus improving outcomes for children. Another advantage would be the reduction in children transitioning into ELC each term, which would assist practitioners in supporting children. This would translate to an additional 14,640 funded ELC hours being accessed in Buchan, which would be a combined saving of £81,837 each academic year for Buchan families.

Figure 1 - Current academic terms and eligibility

Children born between:	They will be eligible from these school terms
Start date of Term April and 31 st August	Start date of term August or when child turns 3 years old
1st September to start of date of term commencing January	Start date of term January (inclusive)
Date after January term starts and date of term commencing April	Start date of term April (inclusive)

Figure 2 – Proposed academic terms and eligibility

Children born between:	They will be eligible from these school terms
Start date of Term April and 31 st August	Start date of term August or when child turns 3 years old
1 st September and start date of term commencing October	Start date of Term October (inclusive)
Date after October term starts and date of term commencing January	Start date of term January (inclusive)
Date after January term starts and date of term commencing April	Start date of term April (inclusive)

4.4 Removal of requirement to re-apply

As, on average 45% (approx. 2830 children across Aberdeenshire and 408 in Buchan) of all ELC applications each year are returners to the same setting, it is thought that the removal of the need to reapply for these families would reduce the workload for not only settings but also for families. The need to reapply can cause confusion for families each year, with approximately 7% missing the application period due to the assumption that ELC provision would simply continue.

Should this proposal be approved, then a far simpler process would be discussed with Council Early Years Senior Practitioners and Funded Provider settings prior to implementation.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 Early Learning and Childcare is cross cutting and as such should impact positively on all three Council pillars and all six priorities.

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Education Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Infrastructure Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economy & Enterprise Estate Modernisation

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.

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 potential financial implications in relation to the introduction of a fourth term. The financial implications relate specifically to the children that will be able to access their ELC funded hours earlier via a Funded Provider. Local Authority staffing will be in place and so there will be improved the use of staffing across the Council ELC settings.

The cost implications of the fourth term are £240K for all of Aberdeenshire and approximately £32,837 for the Buchan area. There is capacity within the ELC funding from the Scottish Government that allows for this additional cost to be met without there being any budgetary pressures on the ELC budget.

5.5 An IIA has been completed for the proposed new policy. No negative impacts have been identified. These include earlier access to funded entitlement for children, improved educational and developmental outcomes, reduced outgoings for families, increased options with regards to learning and childcare options for families at an earlier stage, improved accessibility to ELC and improved flexibility of provision.

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

- [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](#)
 - o Reducing child poverty
 - o 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 had no comments to make 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 B.1.2 which allows the Area Committee to consider, comment on, make recommendations to Services and any other appropriate Committee on any matter or policy which impacts its Area.

Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services

Report prepared by James Martin, Early Years' Service Manager
Date 5th November 2021

Appendix 1 – proposed new Early Learning and Childcare Admissions (ELC) Policy

Appendix 2 - Current Priorities for ELC Admissions

Appendix 1 - proposed new Early Learning and Childcare Admissions (ELC) Policy

Context

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) is a vital stage in a child's learning and development and helps children to learn through play. A high-quality early learning and childcare experience builds on the rich learning from home and wider life experiences. It promotes the development of other essential skills that children will rely on in later life.

Scottish Government have committed to 1140 hrs of funding per year of Early Learning and Childcare for all 3- and 4-year-old children and eligible 2-year-old children who meet the criteria.

Aberdeenshire Council has a duty to provide funded ELC places for all 3- and 4-year-olds and for eligible 2-year-olds. Parents/carers will be entitled to up to 1140 hours of ELC.

In Aberdeenshire we provide high quality, flexible ELC that is accessible and affordable for all families. We provide a variety of settings across Aberdeenshire for families to access up to 1140hrs of funding every year.

There is a variety of settings providing different models of ELC for you to choose from. These include Local Authority schools and Funded Providers, our Funded Providers include private nurseries, playgroups and childminders.

All providers of government funded early learning and childcare are currently inspected by the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland. Practitioners follow national guidelines for the learning and care of children aged 0-5 years that encourage learning through play.

Policy Purpose and Aims

The Admission Policy ensures that early learning and childcare places are allocated fairly and equitably in accordance with national legislation and policy.

In Aberdeenshire we have developed our approach to expansion of early learning and childcare in line with the Scottish Government's key themes by ensuring:

- flexibility
- accessibility
- quality
- affordability

In addition to the above, general principles also apply:

- All ELC provision is non-denominational.
- An ELC establishment must have at least eight children who attend on a regular basis before it is deemed viable to ensure an appropriate educational experience.

Three to five year olds and eligibility

Children born between	They will be eligible from
The date of the start of the Easter Term to the 31 st August	The date of the start of term in August or when a child has had their 3rd birthday.
1 st September and start date of returning after October break	The date of returning after October break (inclusive)
The date of returning after October break and the date of the start of term in January.	The date of the start of term in January (inclusive)
The date of the start of term in January term and the date of start of term in April.	The date of start of term in April (inclusive)

2 Nurture Funding (Eligible two year olds)

2-year old's who meet the following criteria can access funded Early Learning and Childcare:

1. Children who are looked after and accommodated or are under a kinship or guardianship order. (Applications are to be made by the relevant Social Worker)
2. Children whose families are in receipt of one or more qualifying benefits.

Allocation of Early Learning and Childcare places

Early Learning and Childcare places are allocated using Aberdeenshire Early Learning and Childcare Policy for Admissions.

Priority 1

All children returning for another academic year.

All approved delayed Entry to P1 (supported application) (born Aug –Dec)

All entitled delayed entry (born Jan-Feb)

Priority 2

Already placed eligible 2-year-olds (this needs to be indicated on the online application)

Looked after children /vulnerable children (supported application)

Children with ASN (supported application and MAAPM)

Priority 3

All new applications for preschool children with siblings in the school.

Priority 4

All new preschool applications.

Priority 5

All ante preschool with siblings in the school

Priority 6

All ante preschool applications

Priority 7

Non-Aberdeenshire residents

Appendix 2 – Current Priorities for ELC Admissions

Priority One

Two-year old children eligible under Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Priority Two

Children deferring entry from Primary One and staying at an ELC setting, where an additional year of funding has been agreed by Aberdeenshire Council.

Priority Three

3 and 4-year old children who are resident in Aberdeenshire, who have a significant additional support needs.

Priority Four

Children who are returning to the same ELC setting, including those who were eligible from aged two.

BY DATE OF BIRTH

Priority Five

Four year olds from the local children's services network

Priority Six

Three year olds from the local Children's services network who have a sibling already within the ELC setting and/or school.

Priority Seven

Three year olds from the local children's services network

Priority Eight

Children whose childcare is within the local children' services network

Priority Nine

All other eligible children residing in Aberdeenshire

Priority Ten

Children residing out with Aberdeenshire