

Early Learning and Childcare Expansion in Aberdeen City

Consultation and Engagement Workstream - Phase 2 Report

Background

The Scottish Government will expand the offer of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 1140 hours per annum for eligible two year olds and all three and four year olds, whose parents want such a service, by 2020.

The four guiding principles of the Government's expansion plans are:

- Quality
- Flexibility
- Affordability
- Accessibility

In order to deliver the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare by 2020, it is very important that we gather information from parents, carers and potential future parents regarding how best services can be provided and delivered in Aberdeen. We have a statutory duty, under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, to consult with parents and carers on a regular basis.

Introduction

The Early Years Team, in conjunction with Locality Planning colleagues, undertook Phase 2 of the consultation and engagement programme on the Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in May and June 2017, linked to the Scottish Government's Blueprint for 2020: The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland.

Phase 2 focused on the 3 Community Planning Partnership priority areas:

1. Torry
2. Tillydrone, Woodside and Seaton
3. Northfield, Middlefield, Cummings Park, Heathryfold and Mastrick.

The outcomes of the consultation and engagement will inform our ELC Service Delivery Plan which will be submitted to the Scottish Government by end of September.

Context of Consultation

Phase 1 of the consultation and engagement programme helped to shape a more personalised approach being taken in Phase 2, with the onus on meeting parents and carers in situations and settings familiar to them and at times best suited to their needs rather than asking them to travel to engage with us at set times. The process

also highlighted the need for an on-going engagement and communication strategy to ensure that families are aware of the increased flexibility available.

Expertise from across Aberdeen City Council was used to help shape the questionnaire which contained a number of key themes in order to gain more insight into the needs of communities and a number of engagement approaches were used, including:

- Using existing community groups, forums and networks
- Engaging with parents at school nursery / Me2 / community settings
- Engaging with parents at community events, e.g. Tillydrone Gala, Play on the Longest Day.
- Engaging with parents via Parent Councils
- Engaging with parents via Family Learning Away Days (Attainment challenge schools)
- Engaging with parents via Aberdeen Childcare Services
- Engaging with parents in playgroups via Early Years Scotland
- Engaging with parents via childminders
- An online ELC Questionnaire / Survey
- City Voice Questionnaire
- Promotion via Library Service
- Using telephone enquiries to Early Years Team and Family Information Service to signpost to consultation questionnaire.

In most cases questionnaires were populated by members of the Early Years Team during the course of individual and small group conversations. Social media and on-line options were also provided. The consultation was designed to support parents and carers to reimagine service delivery and establish:

- To what extent not accessing childcare limits access to employment
- How parents and carers would take up their offer
- How local the ELC offer should be

Analysis of the engagement from each of the three communities was carefully monitored during the consultation to ensure active engagement from all three areas and to allow the Phase 2 consultation plan to be amended as appropriate.

A total of 460 parents and carers responded with 75% of these being directly from the three targeted priority areas and a very even representation from all three areas. 25% of the responses were received from localities across the city.

Analysis of the responses shared a clear desire for ELC to be delivered at the most local level and close to home rather than close to work.

The approach to Phase 2 was far more effective and will be used as a blueprint for Phase 3 which will start the practical planning in our three priority areas, and Phase 4 which will extend the consultation to other localities across the city.

Outcomes of Phase 2 Consultation and Engagement

- Over 80% of the total number of respondents currently use ELC or are planning to in the future.
- The majority of respondents use a school setting for ELC for between 15-19 hours per week.
- Current use of ELC is mostly to support the child's learning and development.
- Most respondents (75%) said they would use the additional hours / entitlement to return to work as well as continuing to support their child's learning and development.
- This notable swing is very important to highlight as this confirms that the majority of parents could use the additional hours ELC to seriously consider and enable them to return to employment or education.
- Almost all respondents (80%) were satisfied with the current location of ELC services and said it is most convenient to take their child to a location near their home.
- The majority of respondents from the 3 priority localities said they were satisfied with the times ELC services are currently provided.
- However, more respondents from across the city said they were not satisfied with the times ELC services are currently available and cited that the hours were not long enough, the start and end times were unsuitable and that the hours do not fit in with parents who work.
- In terms of the hours and times provided, the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that the expansion of ELC should focus on more hours during working hours (75%) and more flexible hours (60%).
- In terms of improving the locations of ELC services and making use of co-location, the most preferred option was a Local Community Hub with 43% of responses. The next most popular option with 25% of responses was an independent building for ELC.
- It should be noted though that during discussions with parents, school buildings were a very popular option, especially for those families with more than one child.
- One fifth of respondents answered the question about services or amenities which they think should not be provided close to or in the same venue as ELC services. Of these, 50% cited Addiction Rehabilitation services.
- The responses from each of the 3 priority localities to all of the questions were very similar.
- A minority of parents and carers who completed this survey (both in priority localities and city-wide) were not in favour of the expansion of ELC and felt that the increase in hours would be too much for children of this age range. It was emphasised to parents throughout the consultation that the additional free hours of ELC was an entitlement and they had the choice whether or not to take it up.

Snapshot of Comments

- I think the idea of increasing hours is a good one. Well done to the team ensuring better childcare services to residents in the area (Torry).
- More hours should be provided – private nursery is too expensive (Torry).
- Implement further ELC asap (Torry).
- Open ELC's earlier so working parents can get to work in time and also open later so can get home to collect in time from work (Torry).
- More childminders in the area (Torry).
- Longer nursery days instead of a morning class and afternoon class. To help parents who work or to get parents back into work. (Torry).
- I think it is really good at the moment but full days would help the likes of myself – single mothers – to be able to get part-time work. (Torry).
- Providing bigger nurseries / building wise will ensure spaces for more children. Increasing the rooms and space designed for children and play areas (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- Currently unaffordable for families with only one working parent (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- Additional hours is a great idea to support working families (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- Will be good all day as currently no afternoons (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- Services in this area are fantastic, keep up the good work (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- Actually, I'm happy with the current service. (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- I am so happy with Me2, my son has come on so well with going to Me2. I think Me2 should be bigger so that more kids can go to it (Seaton, Tillydrone, Woodside).
- Having enough hours to make people able to work is a good thing as the government are making people look for work when it's often impossible for them to do so (Northfield, Middlefield, Cummings Park, Heathryfold and Mastrick).
- I am really happy to be part of the services I can use with being a working parent (Northfield, Middlefield, Cummings Park, Heathryfold and Mastrick).
- My worry is extended hours, which would help, but it would decrease number of spaces for children. My daughter's nursery takes 40 children both sessions, extend the hours and then what? (Northfield, Middlefield, Cummings Park, Heathryfold and Mastrick).
- I feel that Family Learning has helped me become a more confident parent (Northfield, Middlefield, Cummings Park, Heathryfold and Mastrick).
- This will make it much more affordable for families on average incomes (city).
- Need more help with affordable childcare so that I can work (city).
- Ensure provision is inclusive for children with additional support needs and that wrap around care does not cost extra for those families. Invest in training of the workforce to support children with ASN (city).

Next Stages / Plans for Further Consultation

- The approach to Phase 2 of the consultation on expansion of ELC was far more effective and engaging and will be used as a blueprint for Phase 3 which will start the practical planning in each of our three priority areas, and Phase 4 which will extend the consultation to other localities across the city.
- Some comments from parents and carers highlighted that more information on ELC, hours and options etc, would be helpful.
- Engagement and consultation with children.

The Expansion of ELC consultation summary report is appended for further information and individual locality reports are also available.

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