

Proposed Increase in Pre-school Education Hours to 600 and provision for looked after 2-year olds and 2-year olds from “workless households”

Report by Suzanne Thayne, Schools Group Manager

Background

Between July and September 2012 the Scottish Government undertook consultations related to the proposed changes suggested in the “Children and Young People Bill”. Responses from the consultation process were analysed, amendments made to the Bill and it was passed by the Scottish Parliament on the 19th February 2014, becoming the Children and Young People Act (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/legislation>).

The Act aims to embed the rights of children and young people across the public sector in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). ‘*Getting it right for every child*’ (GIRFEC) will be at the heart of the agenda for improvement and aims to create a single system of service planning and delivery across children's services. One major aspect of this Act is a commitment to improving and increasing high quality, flexible and integrated early learning and childcare which is accessible and affordable for all.

The Government has set out its plans, over the next decade, to achieve this ambition through increasing:

- The amount of funded hours children are entitled to in an early years and childcare provision
- The flexibility of how those hours are delivered to support parents' working patterns, support parents into work and provide greater consistency for children
- The financial support parents receive for early learning and childcare costs through access to an additional 125 funded hours.

The Act requires local authorities to;

- Increase the funded annual provision from 475 hours pre-school education for 3- and 4-year olds to a minimum annual provision of 600 hours early learning and childcare for 3- and 4-year olds, looked-after 2-year olds and 2-year olds from “workless households” from August 2014
- Expand the 2-year old provision from August 2015 to include children whose families would qualify for free school meals
- Make early learning and childcare more flexible and seamless for the child, and better suited to the needs of families.

The Scottish Government's press release on the passing of the Bill is here:

<http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Children-and-Young-People-Bill-passed-979.aspx>

Present Provision

At present Local Authorities are:

- required to secure school education (nursery school or classes) for prescribed pre-school children from the school term following their third birthday, should their parents wish a place
- required to provide 475 hours over the school year commencing 1 August for 12 months, or a proportion of that according to the child's birth date
- In Midlothian, we provide 12.5 hours of pre-school education, on a weekly basis over 38 weeks, within our local authority settings or partnership centres, a total of 475 hours.

Consultation – provision for 3 and 4 year old children, ante pre-school and pre-school

Local Authorities were tasked with consulting locally on the needs of parents and local demand, to ensure that parents were offered a range of agreed options so that they could be guaranteed consistency across different local authority areas. It was suggested that the expanded provision could be delivered in a number of ways. For example:

- 12.5 hours/week extended to 48 weeks to cover non-term times (600 hours pa)
- 15 hours/ week extended over 40 weeks (600 hours pa)
- 16 hours/week delivered through 2 compressed days (9:00-5:00) (608 hours pa)
- 16 hours/week delivered through 5 longer sessions of 3 hours and 20 minutes (608 hours pa)
- 6.5 hours/day (9:00-3:30) over 5 days a fortnight, e.g. Monday, Tuesday, alternate Wednesdays; or alternate Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays (617.5 hours pa)
- 15 hours/week over 38 weeks (570) with the remaining 30 hours allocated through a voucher system which could be redeemed during childcare sessions over holiday periods or arrangements with childminders

Areas for consideration within Midlothian:

- All our local authority centres are staffed with teachers and child care development workers who are contracted to work 38 weeks class contact and 5 days in-service. Extending the number of weeks, or using a voucher system, would mean employing more childcare staff, which would not include teachers out with term time. This would also mean opening establishments over school holiday periods which has implications for janitorial and cleaning staff. In PPP schools, this would also entail changes to contractual agreements.
- Providing longer sessions, using a similar pattern of attendance as is presently in place, could cause difficulties for parents in that the times may not articulate with opening and closing times for Primary schools. For younger children, longer sessions could also be challenging.
- Using a lunch, breakfast or extended day option added onto 'core early learning' sessions could employ different staff but, in so doing, would necessitate a different

ratio of staff to pupils. The staff/child ratio for pre-school education core sessions is 1:10 but for an extended lunch/breakfast session is 1:8.

- If, to provide flexibility, we opted to use Community Learning and Development staff or learning assistants to cover extended, or holiday, sessions we would have to ensure that all staff were SSSC registered as there is now a requirement that anyone working with pre-school children, on a regular basis, have a minimum qualification and become registered by August 2014. Learning assistants are currently sessional workers and, therefore, working during holiday periods would require significant contractual changes.
- If the funding provided by Scottish Government proved to be inadequate, we would need to review our staffing allocation within schools, particularly teacher allocation in order to identify the most cost effective option for Midlothian in providing the required additional hours of early learning and childcare. However, we would also have to consider whether, through changing the teacher allocation, the numbers of teachers within Midlothian would reduce. This would contravene our agreement to maintain teacher numbers during 2014/15 and could incur government penalties.
- The quality of pre-school provision across Midlothian, supported through effective quality assurance processes and high quality professional development, is of a very high standard, as evidenced from inspection reports. Care would have to be taken, should there be any staffing changes, that self-evaluation and staff development should continue to support centres in providing positive educational provision.
- Some authorities have removed teachers from pre-school centres and these are now staffed by managers who have 52 week contracts. However, these are stand-alone centres and we only have two stand alone nursery schools.
- At present we commission partnership centres to provide pre-school education and, as we do not have enough pre-school education places within the local authority, we would still need to retain our partnership working. Partners would expect an increase in funding to cover the increase in hours.
- Providing placements for 2-year old children within our local authority centres is not possible, at present, as we do not have capacity. The ratio of staff to children for this age group is 1:5 and there is a requirement for a larger floor capacity. The Care Inspectorate do not recommend mixing 2-year old children along with pre-school (the year before starting school) and ante pre-school (the year before the pre-school year) children.
- Midlothian will have to explore other partnership options in order to provide places for 2-year old children including: capacity within partnership centres, childminders, playgroups and Surestart centres.
- The government has provided information relating to eligibility criteria for “workless households” but, as there is no agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions regarding sharing information relating to households who are in receipt of these benefits, we may have to use existing information relating to housing benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction (subject to confirming this is an acceptable use of the data) as well as asking households to self-refer. The government has indicated that there will be a national advertising campaign to raise awareness. (*See paper “CYPB – Early Learning and Childcare – 15% 2 year olds – eligibility”*)

Action taken within Midlothian

Increase in Early Learning and Childcare hours for 3 and 4 year old children

1. Consultation with parents

- Between November 2012 and February 2013 a parental consultation was undertaken. This included focus group meetings and an online and paper survey.
- Parents were asked consider which option would best suit their needs: increased session times or the same pattern of sessions along with holiday provision. Parents were also asked to suggest additional options that they would wish to be considered.
- Information was collated and the result of the consultation was that over 86% of parents requested an increase in the length of pre-school sessions over the school year.
- Very few parents requested holiday provision as this would not assist with childcare for older/younger children and the holiday provision would not necessarily take place in their present setting with the same staff.
- Some parents suggested that full days would support their working patterns.

2. Working Group

- The Schools Group Manager (SGM) with responsibility for pre-school education is a member of an ADES working group that is considering various increased hours options. A working group, comprising of staff from schools, partnership centres and key personnel within the authority, was convened and tasked with considering responses from stakeholders, evaluate the various options and provide recommendations on the way forward for Midlothian.
- Four potential design models of implementation were produced and approximate costings generated. (See attached "*The Options for CDWs and teachers handout*")

3. Financial settlement

- On 31 October, 2013, the Scottish Government provided more detailed information regarding the breakdown, by authority, of the additional costs in relation to implementing the Children and Young People Bill (now Act).
- Midlothian's revenue settlement to implement the increase in Early Learning and Childcare for 2014-15 was identified as £763,000 and its capital allocation as £471,000. (See attached "*Distribution of funds letter - Midlothian Council*")

4. Consultation with unions and parents

- Between November and December meetings with unions took place and the four design models refined.
- Four meetings were held in January for teaching and support staff. There were also consultations with school management and partnership centres.
- An individual paper survey, detailing the four options and providing all Childcare and Development Workers and teachers with the opportunity to comment both generally and individually in relation to their own circumstances, was undertaken during February.
- Head teachers discussed the four options with parents and that information was collated centrally.

- Information from the staff survey and the parent consultation was evaluated.

5. Preferred option

- The preferred option identified was to provide five afternoon and five morning sessions each of 3 hours 10 minutes duration.
- A new role, Senior Childcare and Development Worker, was identified to support the implementation of the 600 hours. Each local authority centre will have a senior childcare development worker with additional responsibility as there will be three of the ten sessions where teachers will not be included within the staff/pupil ratio.
- Additional childcare development workers will be recruited to ensure appropriate staff/pupil ratios.

6. Next steps for implementation

- Advertise for additional support staff and the senior childcare development workers.
- Identify costs relating to additional resources such as ASN support, materials and quality assurance.
- Work with Resources to ensure all centres have appropriate telephone and entry systems to support the longer hours of the nursery.
- Work with Resources to ensure that planned use of capital build funding supports implementation of increased provision.
- Meet with partnership centre owners to further consider models of implementation for their centres and financial costs.
- Update admissions' policy to reflect early years and childcare provision changes.
- Review Partnership Centre contracts to reflect early years and childcare provision and financial details.
- Review and develop processes and procedures for nursery staff to ensure that the additional hours for children effectively deliver early learning and childcare.
- Provide effective training opportunities for early years staff to support tracking pupil progress through further development of observations, planning and use of individual pupil folios.

Provision of 600 hours of Early Learning and Childcare for looked after 2-year old children and 2-year old children from “workless households”, session 2014-15 and 2-year old children from families eligible for free school meals, session 2015-16

Action to be taken

- Consult with partnership centres, playgroups, childminders and Surestart to identify capacity to support placements for 600 hours of early learning and childcare hours for looked after 2-year olds and 2-year olds from “workless households”, session 2014-15 and 2-year old children from families eligible for free school meals, session 2015-16.
- Identify what additional support is required and can be provided to partnership centres, playgroups and child minders to recruit and train staff, adapt or increase facilities etc to take on 2 year old children.
- Work with the Scottish government, corporate staff and partners to identify children eligible for placements for session 2014-15.

- Ensure effective communication across Midlothian to support the self-referral process for session 2014-15.
- Review the capital building programme to support provision of places for 2-year old children.
- Work with the Scottish government, corporate staff and partners to identify children eligible for placements for session 2015-16.
- Put in place appropriate administrative support to deal with the eligibility checks and decision making required to support the provision for 2014-15 and amend it as required for the revised 2015-16 provision.
- When guidance relating to the definition of early learning and childcare is produced, ensure that this is disseminated across the authority and appropriate training provided.
- When guidance relating to the definition of early learning and childcare is produced, ensure that Midlothian guidance is reviewed to reflect this information.

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