

Deputation

Ms Sharon Fairley spoke to the Committee about the delivery of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare. She welcomed the progress West Lothian had made to date but raised concerns regarding the sustainability of some nurseries as Council-run ELC settings provided more free hours.

Ms Fairley raised questions on the extent to which consultation had been undertaken with private sector providers, the proposed £5 hourly rate and how this had been calculated, and whether private sector providers not currently in partnership with the Council would be given an opportunity to enter a partnership to assist in the delivery of the additional hours.

Members then put questions to Ms Fairley. The Chair acknowledged the questions raised and requested that officers respond to these following the meeting.

The Chair thanked Ms Fairley for her presentation.

Report by the Head of Education (Learning, Policy and Resources)

The report (copies of which had been circulated) provided an update on the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Expansion Plan and the Council's progress towards delivering 1140 free annual hours of ELC within West Lothian by 2020.

The report noted that local authority expansion plans were working documents which would evolve over time. Local authorities were required to address capacity challenges by making best use of existing assets through supporting a wide range of partners including childminders and third sector partners and building where needed.

Local authorities in Scotland were expected to provide the increase in free hours by 2020, using funding provided by the Scottish Government. Since August 2018, 30 of 61 council-run ELC settings in West Lothian provided up to 760 hours of free ELC. The Council had also successfully created and recruited to ten new management positions to support staff in the delivery. The next phase of the programme for August 2019 was to offer two full days over 50 weeks of the year in a number of settings which were noted in the report.

Consultation had been undertaken with parents and carers in August and September 2018, the results of which were attached at Appendix 1, and it was proposed that further consultation be carried out with staff in each location. The proposal to increase the hourly rate paid to partner providers to £5.00, and the requirement to provide free school meals to eligible children were highlighted.

Officers responded to questions from members regarding further consultation with private providers on the expansion and whether the

Committee would have sight of the details of the capacity assessment and the hours currently offered by providers. In relation to the proposed hourly rate paid to private providers, it was noted that this was an incremental process that would further increase in future years.

The Education Executive was recommended to note the progress made to date and to agree:

1. To provide additional free hours (up to 1000 hours) of ELC in establishments which currently offered flexibility from August 2019;
2. To provide additional free hours (up to 760 hours) of ELC in establishments which did not currently offer flexibility from August 2019;
3. To offer additional free hours (up to 1000 hours) of ELC in private partner provider settings from August 2019;
4. To undertake a pilot scheme to offer additional free hours (up to 1140 hours) of ELC with a child minder from August 2019 for eligible two, three and four year olds;
5. To increase the hourly rate paid to partner providers to £5.00 from April 2019;
6. To note the requirement to provide free school meals to all eligible ELC children from August 2020; and
7. To note the publication of the Funding Follows the Child guidance and National Quality Standard on 18 December 2018.

Decision

- 1) To note the points raised in the deputation by Ms Fairley.
- 2) To request that officers respond to the questions raised with regard to consultation which had been undertaken with private sector providers; information on how the £5 hourly rate was calculated; and whether private sector providers which were not currently in partnership with the Council would be given an opportunity to enter a partnership to deliver the additional hours.
- 3) To agree to receive a further report on consultation with private providers not already in partnership with the Council, when this could take place and if more providers would be considered as the expansion plan developed.
- 4) To provide information to members on the details of the capacity assessment and the hours currently offered, broken down by providers.
- 5) To approve the terms of the report.