

EE24. Early Learning and Childcare

The Education Executive considered a report by the Director of Children's Services providing details on the outcome of a recent consultation exercise to assess views on the introduction of 600 hours early years provision. The report also set out the impact and future challenges for Children's Services to the Scottish Government's plans to expand this provision to 1140 hours per annum.

Provision was made in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 that the amount of free early learning and child care be increased from 475 to 600 hours per annum for eligible 2, 3 and 4 year olds. The Act also placed a duty on local authorities to consult with parents and service users once the increased provision has been introduced.

This provision has now been established in the Falkirk area and the required consultation exercise was undertaken during March and April 2016. It concluded that the majority of service users were pleased with the current service being offered. A detailed summary of responses was appended to the report.

Information was also provided on the Scottish Government's consultation document "A Blueprint for 2020 – The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland". The expansion proposals include increasing the amount of childcare provision to 1140 hours per annum and giving parents increased flexibility. These proposals will have significant financial, planning and infrastructure challenges for Children's Services however work is currently ongoing to assess the additional infrastructure and financial resources required.

Decision

The Education Executive agreed to:-

- (1) note the responses from the consultation exercise;**
- (2) note the Children's Services' responses to the feedback from the consultation exercise and the challenges to be faced in the future regarding the Scottish Government's plans to expand early learning and childcare provision to 1140 hours per annum by 2020, and**
- (3) instruct the Director of Children's Services to bring a further report to Education Executive which provides –**
 - an update on the financial position and infrastructure challenges**

- **options for consideration around offering parents increased flexible choices of early years provision as further details and information are known regarding the Scottish Government's plans to expand provision within the early years sector.**