

PE2112/J: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland

COSLA written submission, 16 December 2024

Thank you for your letter seeking COSLA's view on PE2112: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland and I would like to apologise for the delay in our response.

Last year, [COSLA published 'Getting in Early- Local Government's Role in Delivering Early Learning and Childcare'](#), which set out an overview of the role of Local Government in ELC and the key successes of the 1140 Hours expansion. Whilst I would encourage the Committee to read 'Getting in Early' in full, I would particularly highlight that we have seen continued increases in uptake of the offer of Early Learning and Childcare as well as highlighting the very high levels of parent/carer satisfaction in the Scottish Government's survey of 8,000 parents, including 97% satisfied with quality, 88% satisfied with flexibility and 97% content with accessibility of provision. This was also reflected in the ['Early learning and childcare expansion to 1140 hours: interim evaluation report'](#), published in August 2024 - which forms part of a wider evaluation strategy.

We believe the positive story around uptake, quality and flexibility, reflects the approach that is set out in [the joint COSLA/Scottish Government 'Funding Follows the Child' document](#). This sees councils consult parents and carers every two years on local ELC needs, preparing a corresponding ELC local delivery plan, and that children can access high quality funded ELC with the provider of their choice if that provider meets the criteria set out in the National Standard, has a space available, is able to offer the funded hours in line with local ELC delivery plans and has or is willing to enter into a contract with the local authority.

There also remains a range of ongoing work that Local Government is undertaking with our partners across the ELC system, including working with the Scottish Government to implement the findings of last year's ['Sustainable Rates Review'](#), support improved uptake of the 2-year-old targeted ELC offer and more effectively monitor outcomes. It is worthwhile noting that this is against a backdrop of councils facing significant financial challenges and broader demand pressures, [as set out in our Invest Locally In Scotland's Future resources](#), resulting in fewer resources to support the delivery of funded ELC.

I would note that the petition and the broader responses received by the Committee also mentioned further expansion of the ELC offer in Scotland. A number of councils are working with the Scottish Government to pilot new approaches to childcare as 'Early Adopter Communities'. COSLA is committed to working with the Scottish Government and partners across the ELC sector to consider any further expansion of childcare, noting the need for times and resources to build capacity to deliver a new offer.

In the context of strong feedback from families, a clear evaluation strategy and with wide ranging work ongoing to further strengthen ELC provision, we would be cautious about launching an independent review - noting that it would likely create

uncertainty for parents/carers, providers and local authorities and has the potential to disrupt work that is underway.