

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 29 JANUARY 2019

EARLY YEARS EXPANSION – NEW ADMISSIONS CRITERIA AND APPLICATION PROCESS

REPORT BY PAULINE STEPHEN, HEAD OF SCHOOLS AND LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This report provides committee with details of the proposed new admissions criteria and application process for early learning and childcare (ELC) placements, and seeks approval to implement the new process from April 2019.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes the background information and proposals for the implementation of new admissions criteria for ELC placements;
- (ii) approves the proposals set out in Section 5.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS LOCAL OUTCOMES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:

The best start in life for children
Improved physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing
More opportunities for people to achieve success

3. BACKGROUND

Reference is made to Committee Report No 128/18, approved by the Children and Learning Committee on 19 April 2018, which provided committee with details of local plans to implement the Scottish Government's commitment to expand the provision of ELC to 1140 hours per child per year by August 2020.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Local authority ELC settings admit new children in four intake periods each year in January, April, August and October, with a paper-based application window several months in advance of each intake. Parents and carers have the right to request a place within any local authority or contracted partner ELC setting across Angus, however priority is currently given to children living within primary school catchment areas.
- 4.2 Additional criteria currently used for prioritising applications include the child's age and whether or not they have siblings who attend the chosen nursery or primary school.
- 4.3 The Scottish Government's commitment to expand the provision of funded ELC from 600 hours to 1140 hours per year by August 2020 includes a number of additional requirements for local authorities, one of which is to ensure flexibility of choice for parents or carers in how they can access their funded entitlement. The use of catchment areas may be considered a barrier to flexibility, therefore a review of the application and admission process has been undertaken.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 To end the use of school catchment areas as a priority category for the allocation of ELC placements. Catchment areas for primary schools will remain in place.

5.2 To prioritise local authority ELC applications on the basis of the following ranked criteria with effect from April 2019:

| | |
|------------|--|
| Category 1 | Existing children remaining in the setting who will be in receipt of funded early learning and childcare, including funded deferrals* |
| Category 2 | Children placed through Additional Support Needs projections meetings who will be in receipt of funded early learning and childcare |
| Category 3 | Children who have had their primary school admission deferred* with funding, who are not currently attending a setting in their catchment primary school requesting the additional funded year of early learning and childcare within their catchment primary school |
| Category 4 | Children who will be in receipt of funded early learning and childcare with siblings already in attendance within the setting or school |
| Category 5 | All other children who reside in Angus who will be in receipt of funded early learning and childcare |
| Category 6 | Deferral* requests not funded, being self-funded by the parent or carer |
| Category 7 | Children living outwith Angus |

*A deferral process exists for when a parent or carer feels that their child would benefit from an additional year of ELC prior to enrolment at primary school. Depending on the age of the child and an assessment of the reasons for the deferral application, a discretionary additional year of ELC funding may be agreed. The outcome of this assessment will help to determine which priority category applies to the child.

5.3 To allocate placements to children within the prioritisation categories of 4 to 7 above on the basis of category and then chronological preference within each category, which is the recommendation from the options appraisal summarised in Appendix 1.

5.4 To end the use of paper applications for ELC placements, launching a new online process from April 2019 which will incorporate applications for both local authority and contracted partner settings. Support to complete the online process will be made available to anyone who requests it and the duration of the application open periods will remain at approximately one month.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The multi-year funding package allocated to Angus includes funding for all elements of the expansion. There is therefore no expected impact on council budgets.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The new admissions criteria will not be applicable to ELC provision which is funded through contracts with private and voluntary partners, however these providers are contractually and legally obliged to comply with current equalities legislation.

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is appended to this report.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Options appraisal for prioritisation of applications within categories 4, 5, 6 & 7

Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 1 – Options appraisal for prioritisation of applications within categories 4, 5, 6 & 7

| Option | Description | Advantages | Disadvantages | Costs | Rank |
|---|---|--|---|--|-------------|
| Option 1 Ballot System | Applications classified within categories 4, 5, 6 and 7 are first prioritised into categories and are then entered into a ballot, with names drawn at random until all of the available places within each setting have been allocated. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective. • Administratively efficient if software used. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administratively inefficient if a manual process is used. • Could be seen as inappropriate for ELC placement decisions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable staff costs where physical ballots are undertaken, or some systems costs if software is used. | 2 |
| Option 2 Chronological Preference | Applications who are classified within categories 4, 5, 6 and 7 are first prioritised into categories and are then allocated the remaining places within each setting in order of the date and time that the application was submitted. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administratively efficient. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be seen as unfair where applicants may not be computer literate or do not have easy access to the online application system. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal. Online application system records the date and time of submission automatically. | 1 |
| Option 3 Nearest Setting | Applications who are classified within categories 4, 5, 6 and 7 are first prioritised into categories and are then allocated a place at the nearest setting to the child's home address which has a space available. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer to current process, so a less radical change for some. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not constitute flexibility for parents, e.g. where a setting is required near a workplace rather than a home address. Flexible choice is a requirement of the expansion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff costs where a manual allocation is undertaken, or systems costs where software is used. | 3 |