
RESPONSE TO PETITION TITLED: NURSERY PLACE DISCRIMINATION IN PEEBLES 2019

BRIEFING NOTE BY CHIEF OFFICER FOR EDUCATION

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 MARCH 2019

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this briefing paper is to respond to the petition titled “Nursery place discrimination in Peebles 2019”

1.2 Petition statement (dated 21.01.19):

The decision to roll out increased provision of nursery hours by catchment area is discriminatory. Yes, the few streets of more ‘deprived’ families are included but so too are some of the most affluent streets in our small town, rendering the ‘target deprived areas first’ directive as meaningless.

This was pledged in 2014 and due in August 2020, which means there has been ample time to prepare.

In a small community such as Peebles, the roll out would have been fairer to offer all nursery children a partial increase in 2019 rather than a full increase to 1140 hours based on catchment.

The current increase means that some children are losing out on 1 extra year of education (at current levels), and given the proven benefits to children it is unacceptable to deny the rest of Peebles’ children this opportunity and head start to their education.

1.3 Response from Education representatives in Early Years & Childcare (ELC):

Currently all 3 and 4 year old children (and eligible 2 year olds) are entitled to 600 hours Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) a year, depending on their birth date. This entitlement does not change until August 2020. In 2020, the entitlement changes to 1140 hours which will equate to an additional full day during term time. From now until then the Council are phasing in the expanded hours as they have been tasked to do by the Scottish Government.

As set out by Scottish Government in ‘A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland’, Local Authorities are to determine the most appropriate way to phase the expanded hours, reflecting the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation:

“Phasing of the entitlement to 1140 hours

The expansion will require substantial levels of investment in workforce and infrastructure which will be phased in from 2017-18 onwards to ensure that the required capacity is in place by 2020 to enable full roll-out of the expanded entitlement. Given the transformative nature of the expansion, and the potential structural changes that could result in the sector, it is challenging to assume that the system would be able to move smoothly from providing 600 hours to 1140 hours overnight.

Local authorities will have flexibility to determine the most appropriate way to phase entitlement in their local area as they build the necessary capacity to deliver 1140 hours. We have made clear in the expansion planning guidance issued to local authorities that plans for phasing should reflect the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to ensure that the families and communities who stand to benefit most from the expansion also benefit first.”

1.4 Scottish Borders Update/ Actions

In Scottish Borders a priority list was created, based on the Child Poverty Index, using thorough and robust data, which sets out the order of phasing for all catchment communities. It would not have been feasible or appropriate to take this analysis to a more detailed level where individual families could have been identified and the priority list was created using strong local data. This approach was approved by the Executive Committee on the 7 November 2017.

Consideration had been given to a partial increase for all children to 900 hours and then on to 1140 but this was strongly discouraged by the National Improvement Service as it would not allow Local Authorities to benefit from, or learn from the experiences of the full expansion, nor did it satisfy the Scottish Government requirement to reflect the SIMD index in phasing in the expansion.

The programme of expansion was agreed by full Council on 31 May 2018. This sets out the number of catchment communities phasing each year. The number of catchment communities phasing each year is linked to the phasing of funding from the Scottish Government. It provides the opportunity for Local Authorities and providers to embed new ways of working, to establish the needs of families and to ensure that the ELC services in the Scottish Borders provide all children with the best possible experiences regardless of the number of hours they are accessing.

2. CONCLUSION

Therefore, as agreed by Council, only children who live in the phasing catchments are able to access the expanded hours until the increased hours are fully rolled out. This means that in each setting there may be children who access expanded hours and children who continue to access their current entitlement of 600 hours.

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Background Papers: A blueprint for 2020: The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland 2017 -18 Action Plan: Section 2 Scottish Government

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