

Education and Culture Committee
Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future
South Lanarkshire Council

In responses to Theme 2: Early Years, Childcare and Employability

- The benefits to children families and the wider economy of investing in childcare

The benefits of investing in quality childcare include delivering better outcomes for children, enabling parents' access education training and employment thereby boosting household income and releasing human potential, in addition the childcare industry provides valuable employment opportunities. The Council has had significant experience in supporting vulnerable parents access employment, education, volunteering and training through initiatives such as 'Working for Families' and more recently, 'Making It Work'. These initiatives also invested in the growth of the childcare sector by supporting parents in disadvantaged communities to train to become childminders. This approach produced a dual benefit of creating employment opportunities and adding to the local childcare infrastructure by providing working/training parents with choices in relation to their childcare. The fact this Scottish Govt initiative was heavily influenced at local level, had an employability focus and was shaped around local delivery ensured success.

- The planning, training and investment that would be required to bring about a transformation in childcare provision.

As identified, key factor limiting the growth of childcare is affordability. The provision of 600 hours for certain groups is welcomed and the extension to 1140 hours would provide greater support to a greater number of parents freeing more up to return to education training and employment. However, in relation to supporting working parents this provides challenges as accessing this provision has additional costs. The places are usually funded as 'blocks' and often this approach does not fit well with the needs of working parents who then still have to purchase wraparound care to provide full care. It is acknowledged the hours is based on the typical attendance at primary school many parents cannot work school hours or term time. The extension to 1140 hours again would be welcomed as this would provide up 21 hours a week over a year and is more realistic in terms of incentivising parents to take up part time work.

Since October 2012 all stakeholders within South Lanarkshire Council have been provided with a range of opportunities to engage in awareness raising and consultation regarding the expansion to 600 hours of early learning and childcare. This provided opportunities for targeted focus groups, parents either in groups or as individuals, staff groups, managers and owners as well as on-line surveys. All participants in the consultation events were invited to

express their preferred choice for the delivery of the 600 hours of early learning and childcare based on the options provided by the Government. In offering this the necessity to ensure a high quality universal education system based on Curriculum for Excellence 3-18 has been central to the process.

The consultation highlighted that a majority of parents preferred longer sessions during term time either morning or afternoon in term time nurseries which suits their family needs as many have other children who attend primary or secondary schools.

The remaining parents' responses reflected current work, training or study patterns and the demand for places are either full time, full days or 2.5 days per week. Many parents who use private nurseries stated their requirement for very flexible options to accommodate their working patterns. Strong opinions were expressed in relation to children within the one family attending one nursery, e.g., baby, toddler and pre-school children. In addition, some parents felt that further consideration should be given to the provision of out of school care service for older children being available in the same location as the nursery provision. In general, flexibility and costs of childcare were rated as very important as well as sustaining the high quality of the current nursery provision.

Consequently, there are significant implications for the delivery of additional flexible provision for childcare and early learning, including increased revenue and capital costs. There are also workforce planning issues that will require careful consideration to meet any further aspirations.

- Whether the interaction between current UK and Scottish youth employability initiatives could be improved

The CPP, through the Local Authority led LEP, has worked hard to ensure maximise all funding being channelled to support youth employment is targeted to avoid duplication and to add value. This model works well and should continue. The current links with delivery of the UK Govts Work Programme could be improved through the providers offering better information to local partnerships regarding progression, content of delivery etc and better information following Work Programme completers ie what activities they had been engaged in whilst on the programme including training/certification, providing clients exiting with updated CVs and the like

- The extent to which youth employment could be boosted by (a) a constitutional right to the opportunity of education, training or employment; and (b) the bringing together of job matching, employability training and career guidance.

The guaranteed offer of a training place, employment opportunity or education will play an important role in boosting youth employment and employability. The offer will eradicate longterm youth unemployment and the negative personal and social effects that this brings so it is welcomed and it is something all partners have worked together to achieve through Opportunities

for All and MCMC partnerships.. The convergence of the services of SDS with DWP is an interesting development but more importantly it is essential that strong partnerships are retained at a local level, in particular that strong connection is maintained with local authority and the existing CPP structures. These structures ensure the local features and factors are taken into consideration in delivery and support both to young people and employers. The localisation agenda is vital to maintain services that are responsive and address local need and involve local partners who can support the whole employability agenda including health services and the 3rd sector.