

Agenda Item	12(b)
Report No	HC/16/20

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee	Highland Council
Date:	30 July 2020
Report Title:	Review of Keyworker Hub Childcare Provision in Highland
Report By:	Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper is a follow up to the report and recommendations considered by the 25 June Highland Council meeting, in relation to the Revenue Budget 2020/21, and the agreement of that Council meeting to “Review all additional Covid response services unless directly funded by Government at the end of July”.
- 1.2 This report provides Members with an update in relation to Keyworker Hub Childcare Provision in Highland, national context and latest Scottish Government directions, and next steps in relation to review and ongoing provision.
- 1.3 For context, the work of childcare hub provision has been progressed in response to the rapidly escalating Covid-19 outbreak in the spring of 2020, The Scottish Government took the decision to close all schools and Local Authority Early Learning and Childcare settings from Monday 23 March 2020. During this period of closure, the Highland Council opened up to 15 Keyworker Childcare Hubs with additional support from partners, in order to provide emergency childcare for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year, to ensure that key workers had continuing access to appropriate childcare.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. note the current position regarding Council keyworker hub provision;
 - ii. note the context as set out within the report, and latest Scottish Government directions regarding provision;
 - iii. note the proposed next steps with regard to provision and ongoing review; and
 - iv. note that any review would await further clarity from Scottish Government, and the return of schools in August, to allow assessment of implications.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: As previously reported, no additional Scottish Government funding for keyworker childcare provision has been received, with the Council to meet these costs, and can utilise flexibility in other Scottish Government funding streams, including ELC funding, towards such costs. A review of future hub provision would include an assessment of resource implications. As set out in **appendix 1**, to provide a resource impact and cost comparison, an assessment of the potential cost of securing ongoing provision through partners (were such capacity to be available) gives a monthly cost of £0.5m per month to provide for the same capacity as had existed. This is based upon a capacity of 545 places, with the scale of cost reducing pro-rata for a lower number of actual places offered or taken.
- 3.2 Legal: As highlighted within the report, provision of keyworker childcare is covered by legislation and Scottish Government directions in relation to provision.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): No implications to highlight relating to this report, but any subsequent review and recommendations will need to consider any relevant community and other implications.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: No implications to highlight.
- 3.5 Risk: Future Scottish Government direction regarding keyworker childcare is not known and may alter in light of further directions relating to school return in August and operating arrangements within childcare settings. The expected return to full time school in August could be expected to materially alter any requirement and demand for keyworker childcare, and assessment of options and implications would be required once all relevant information is available.
- 3.6 Gaelic: No specific implications to highlight.

4. Context

- 4.1 In response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and in line with direction from Scottish Government, the Highland Council put in place arrangements for provision of childcare for keyworkers across the Highlands. This need was met through use of Early Learning and Childcare funded partner providers and childminders, and also the establishment of Council childcare hubs in 15 locations.
- 4.2 No additional funding has been provided by the Scottish Government for the provision of keyworker childcare, instead the Council has been given flexibility in its use of a number of Scottish Government funding streams in relation to its Covid response, including ELC 1140 hours funding amongst others.
- 4.3 In light of the challenging financial situation facing the Council as a result of Covid 19, the report to the 25 June Council highlighted the implications and affordability concerns for the Council of introducing new Services such as keyworker childcare provision, with it being agreed at the Council meeting to review this provision unless specifically funded by Scottish Government at the end of July.

5. Current Position

5.1 Since the consideration of the report on 25 June, there have been further developments which are relevant to this subject area and are relevant to next steps the Council will wish to consider.

5.2 Scottish Government Directions

5.2.1 Council Hub provision was established as a rapid response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and at that time focused immediately on childcare provision for the summer term. At the point of establishing it was unclear, given the fluidity of the Covid 19 situation, whether this provision would be a requirement for the summer holiday period or beyond.

5.2.2 On 1 July 2020 Scottish Government issued Educational Continuity (No.3) Direction. This direction is given under paragraph 11(1) of schedule 17 (Temporary Continuity Directions etc: Education, Training and Childcare: Scotland) of the Coronavirus Act 2020, which is in force from 2 July 2020. This latest direction continues to advise that *“each education authority is required to provide education and childcare, pursuant to appropriate local arrangements, for.....children of key workers, including NHS and social care staff.”*

5.2.3 As per the legislation, the Continuity Directions lapse after 3 weeks at which point a new or revised direction would be expected. At this time, it is therefore clear that keyworker childcare provision continues to be a requirement on Local Authorities. Requirements beyond the duration of the current direction are unclear and will clearly be informed by the subsequent direction (no 4) which it is expected will be the direction which confirms the position regarding schools and childcare full-time return.

5.2.4 On the basis that all Council planning for schools' return is on the basis of a full-time return being confirmed for August then, subject to further clarity around operational arrangements within childcare settings, it may be expected that the need and demand for keyworker childcare materially alters, as 'normal' education and childcare provision returns. It is however unclear at this time what further direction Scottish Government may give regarding keyworker childcare provision for August onwards.

5.3 Operational Information and Changes

5.3.1 Once schools closed, school-based staff who were fit, well and able to work were encouraged to volunteer to work in one of the Keyworker Childcare Hubs.

5.3.2 An online form was launched on 24 March specifically for Education staff to volunteer to work in the Hubs and throughout the duration of the Keyworker Hub provision we received applications from just over 1,100 volunteers.

5.3.3 These volunteers included teachers, Pupil Support Assistants, Early Years Practitioners, school office administrators and Head Teachers who would go on to form the main body of staff manning the Keyworker Hubs on a rota basis.

5.3.4 An Education Deployment Register was quickly developed to enable Hub Leads to select and allocate appropriate staff from the list of available volunteers to be able to provide as many childcare places to young people as possible.

- 5.3.5 Over 40 volunteers from High Life Highland, and a number of Eden Court staff (before furlough), bolstered the Highland Council body of Education volunteers to support the provision of Keyworker Childcare across the Highlands.
- 5.3.6 At the close of session on July 2, there were 475 Education staff on the Deployment Register with 374 of these staff deployed into one or more of the fifteen Keyworker Childcare Hubs.
- 5.3.7 In parallel with the updates referred to above, for the delivery of the summer programme the Council has also had to continue to operationally revise its hub provision, in light of parental demand, and the need to revisit arrangements as they transitioned into the traditional school holiday period.
- 5.3.8 A total of 49 hubs facilitated by our partners and childminders are continuing to run over the month of July at the same levels in facilitating the summer holiday programme for the children of category 1 key workers. The number of children who have attended these ELC hubs up to end of week ending 17.7.20 is a total of 364 children - 245 under 5 and 119 children aged 5+.
- 5.3.9 Information received from activity provided across the region makes clear that the hubs have been working effectively and have met a range of needs. This wouldn't have been possible without the unmeasured support of the great number of volunteers which included teachers, pupil support assistants, childcare managers, early years practitioners and school administrators.
- 5.3.10 Activities for the children at Hubs included outdoor learning and play, chalk playground art, raising tadpoles, games, arts and crafts, growing vegetables and theme days including a Hogwarts day. Staff from High Life Highland have led sports activities and staff from Eden Court have provided drama and theatre workshops and one of the key themes has been around integrating pupils from different schools, enabling them to make new friends they would otherwise not have met.
- 5.3.11 Many parents have valued the childcare that they have received at this critical time and have provided direct feedback regarding this. A quote from one parent: *"Being a keyworker family if there had not been a hub provided we could not have carried on, especially with our work commitments and the home learning. The love and support provided at the hub to the children has been first class... In fact, it is a struggle to get them to come home at night! The skills [anon] has picked up has been great, fitness and gardening and making many new friends. The staff are so bright and cheerful. I have met such a lot of positive friendly people during this time"*.
- 5.3.12 At the Millburn Hub parents have received a weekly newsletter and parents have appreciated the hard work and dedication of staff at such a difficult time.
- 5.3.13 The Care Inspectorate has commented on the work of staff at the Drakies hub pulling a transition document together for a child who was nervous about coming into an unfamiliar place. It should be recognised that a Highland Council, volunteer and ELC staff have gone above and beyond to try and ensure that every child who has had to access a hub has been welcomed and supported to feel settled and secure.

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

- 6.1 Since this matter was previously considered by the Council on 25 June, there has now been confirmation through direction n° 3 regarding requirement for keyworker childcare over the summer holiday period, and for the 3-week duration of that direction. It can reasonably be anticipated that such provision would also be a requirement through further direction at least until schools return in August. The position for August and beyond, as schools return, is not as yet clear, But is expected to be clarified by further Scottish Government direction later in July.
- 6.2 These Scottish Government directions apply to all Local Authorities, and the Council must comply with the directions contained therein. With regard to keyworker childcare provision, until such time as the direction lapses or is altered, the Council is required to make provision.
- 6.3 As highlighted above, the Council has also undertaken operational changes to provision in light of revised assessment of demand and the transition into the summer holiday period.
- 6.4 In light of these factors, it would not be appropriate nor practical to undertake a formal review of Council keyworker childcare hub provision at this time. Further assessment would be appropriate in light of further Scottish Government direction on this matter, and subject to that, also an assessment if expected implications for demand and supply in light of schools return in August.
- 6.5 With regard to financial implications, the position remains as previously reported with the costs of provision not in receipt of any additional Scottish Government funding, instead the Council to meet these costs and utilise flexibility from other Scottish Government funding streams.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning

Date: 20 July 2020

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Appendix 1 – Costing information

To provide a cost estimate and comparison, the table below models the equivalent partner provider cost using ELC rates. These costs are therefore not reflective of in-house Council provision, but nonetheless provides a useful comparator.

Hubs	Number of children on full capacity basis	Partner Rate Cost per month
Full Capacity in response to local demand and need (as per pre- summer holiday period)	545	£504,670
Alternative levels of placement provision (ready reckoner): -		
	100	£92,600
	200	£185,200
	300	£277,800
	400	£370,400
	500	£463,000