



The Scottish Parliament Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Neil Rennick
Director-General Education and Justice
Scottish Government

Public Audit Committee
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

By email only

Email:

publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot

24 October 2023

Dear Director-General,

Early learning and childcare: Progress on delivery of the 1,140 hours expansion

Thank you for giving evidence to the Public Audit Committee at its meeting on [5 October 2023](#) alongside representatives from COSLA on the joint Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) and Accounts Commission report, [Early learning and childcare: Progress on delivery of the 1,140 hours expansion](#) (the report).

The Committee welcomes the progress made by the Scottish Government, councils and partners to increase early learning and childcare (ELC) provision to 1,140 hours a year per child, despite the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee also welcomes the plans that are in place to evaluate the impact of the expansion. However, it remains very concerned by the extent of data gaps that exist around the delivery of funded ELC, which makes it extremely difficult for the Scottish Government and councils to plan and manage ELC services. The Committee is clear that these data gaps must be addressed as soon as practically possible.

The report highlights that some data gaps relate to areas where data is likely to be available at a local level but is not gathered consistently to provide a national picture. The report further explains that this lack of consistency “is often a result of the delay to the new software for councils to record more detailed administrative data on

funded ELC through a standard approach”. The Committee notes that this software was due to be in place by August 2020, but is now estimated to be completed by March 2024. This is a substantial delay, with the go live date still to be determined by councils.

During the evidence session, reference was made to improvement work currently underway as part of the software project to improve the consistency of the data available at a national level. **The Committee understands the new software to be vital to be able to determine a national picture of performance for the delivery of ELC services. The Committee seeks further information about this improvement work, including who is leading this work and whether it will have an impact on the project budget. The Committee also seeks an update on the progress of the project overall, including whether a go live date for the new software has been determined.**

As you will recall, the Committee sought to establish how the Scottish Government is able to assure itself that employers in the voluntary, private and public sectors are paying their staff the real living wage. In your response, you referred to data that had been collected during summer 2023 indicating that “84 per cent of private and voluntary sector providers were paying the real living wage either to all their staff or to those staff who were delivering funded early learning and childcare.” **The Committee seeks further information regarding how this information was gathered, including the number of ELC providers used to inform this assessment.**

It is encouraging to note that during the evidence session, the Scottish Government made a commitment to implement the recommendation in the report regarding capturing and considering children’s views as part of future evaluation of its ELC policy, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. **Despite pursuing this line of questioning during the evidence session, the Committee remains unclear how the Scottish Government intends to undertake this work. It therefore asks for further information on its plans in this area, as part of the Scottish Government’s evaluation of the policy.**

On a separate note, during the meeting, you committed to provide the Committee with further information on the estimated cost to retrofit relevant ELC public buildings to become net-zero compliant. The Committee looks forward to receiving this information as part of your response to this letter.

I would be grateful for a response by **22 November 2023**.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Leonard

Richard Leonard MSP
Convener