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Clare Adamson MSP
Convener
Education and Skills Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

19th January 2021

Dear Convener,

Following my appearance at the Education and Skills Committee on 9th December 2020, and your subsequent letter of 15th December, I am writing to you with responses to the specific questions raised by Committee Members. I have set out answers in the attached annex.

I hope that the responses outlined here are helpful. Please let me know if you require any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

MAREE TODD

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire
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Questions from Members

Q: In evidence, Ross Greer MSP asked about construction issues arising from the pandemic, including the current position of land purchases for building new facilities. The Committee would welcome confirmation of whether there are any construction projects for which the local authority does not own or has not secured the land that it needs, and if so in which local authority areas these issues have arisen. The Committee would also welcome confirmation of any projects which had not started construction in March, and whether any of these projects have since started.

Land purchases

The Scottish Government does not routinely hold information on the status of land purchase across all projects. In response to the Education and Skills Committee's request, in December 2020 the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) asked the 22 local authorities that had either a new build project or an outdoor facility that was not yet in construction whether all land related matters for such projects had been concluded.

As of 18th January, a response had been received from 20 of these 22 local authorities. From these responses, 9 out of the approximately 900 building projects in the programme involve land transactions that have not yet been concluded. These projects are in East Ayrshire (2 projects), East Lothian (1 project), Edinburgh (2 projects), Highland (1 project), Renfrewshire (1 project) and Midlothian (2 projects). For 3 of these 9 projects the land is already in the ownership of the relevant local authority and the matters to resolve relate to concluding agreements with third parties, such as community interest groups and other occupants on the same site. A further update can be provided to the Committee following the responses from all 22 authorities.

Projects not under construction in March 2020

SFT requests an ELC infrastructure update from local authorities on a quarterly basis. Based on SFT's quarterly infrastructure update of May 2020¹, it has been estimated that in March 2020 there were 333 capital building projects which had not started construction. 82 of these projects have now either started construction or have been completed. It is forecast that of the capital projects required to support the

¹ The figures for May 2020 have been provided as these are the closest to the status of the ELC construction programme in March 2020. The previous progress report was dated February 2020, and would have reflected the position around January 2020.

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delivery of a full 1140 hour service, 81% are currently forecast to be complete by April 2021, increasing to 96% by August 2021.

Q: In evidence, Alex Neil MSP asked about the allocation of capital funding to different local authorities, as well as the split between council provision and PVI provision. The Committee would welcome a reply setting out in detail the share of funding to each local authority, how much has been spent so far, and how much of the allocation to each local authority is for council provision and how much is for PVI provision.

The Scottish Government set out the allocation of capital funding to local authorities in a letter issued to local authorities on 1st May 2018. This followed agreement of a multi-year funding package for the expansion of ELC by Scottish Ministers and COSLA leaders. Annex C from that letter shows local authority capital allocations between 2019-20 and 2021/22 and has been reproduced on the next page.

Funding is provided to local authorities, who take local decisions on the level of capital funding to provide to PVI providers, based on local planning and demand. Therefore, the Scottish Government does not hold information on the split between council provision and PVI provision in agreed capital funding. The local authority ELC expenditure returns discussed in more detail below contained information on capital expenditure as at October 2020. A further update can be provided to the Committee once this analysis is complete.

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Local authority capital allocations for early learning and childcare 2017-18 to 2020-21

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total
Aberdeen City	1.040	7.400	8.600	6.000	23.040
Aberdeenshire	1.770	8.500	10.000	6.900	27.170
Angus	0.640	2.700	3.200	2.200	8.740
Argyll & Bute	0.490	2.100	2.500	1.700	6.790
Clackmannanshire	0.280	1.600	1.800	1.300	4.980
Dumfries & Galloway	0.910	2.800	3.200	2.200	9.110
Dundee City	0.810	3.300	3.900	2.700	10.710
East Ayrshire	0.910	6.900	8.100	5.700	21.610
East Dunbartonshire	0.560	2.300	2.700	2.000	7.560
East Lothian	0.620	4.800	5.600	3.900	14.920
East Renfrewshire	0.570	3.900	4.600	3.200	12.270
Edinburgh, City of	2.580	12.400	14.500	10.000	39.480
Eilean Siar	0.240	1.000	1.200	0.800	3.240
Falkirk	1.250	5.000	5.800	4.000	16.050
Fife	2.280	8.800	10.200	7.100	28.380
Glasgow City	3.330	13.700	16.000	11.100	44.130
Highland	1.690	10.400	12.100	8.400	32.590
Inverclyde	0.380	1.900	2.200	1.500	5.980
Midlothian	0.530	5.400	6.300	4.300	16.530
Moray	0.640	2.400	2.800	1.900	7.740
North Ayrshire	0.740	3.600	4.200	2.900	11.440
North Lanarkshire	0.650	6.600	7.700	5.400	20.350
Orkney Islands	0.140	0.700	0.800	0.600	2.240
Perth & Kinross	0.890	4.800	5.600	3.800	15.090
Renfrewshire	0.910	4.400	5.100	3.600	14.010
Scottish Borders	0.690	2.400	2.800	1.800	7.690
Shetland Islands	0.190	1.100	1.300	0.900	3.490
South Ayrshire	0.560	5.000	5.800	4.000	15.360
South Lanarkshire	1.740	5.900	6.900	4.700	19.240
Stirling	0.300	2.300	2.600	1.800	7.000
West Dunbartonshire	0.580	1.800	2.100	1.400	5.880
West Lothian	1.090	4.100	4.800	3.300	13.290
Scotland	30.000	150.000	175.000	121.100	476.100

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Q: In evidence, Jamie Greene MSP asked how much of the funding given to local authorities for 1140 hours provision had to be diverted to Covid-related expenses (for example, the operation of childcare hubs). We understand that the Scottish Government is still analysing financial returns from local authorities to ascertain this exact figure and would welcome more details on this once this analysis has been completed.

The Scottish Government conducted initial, national-level analysis of ELC expenditure returns supplied by 28 local authorities in October 2020. All local authorities were asked to provide forecast 2020-21 expenditure on ELC, including forecast spend on COVID-related activities. As reported to the Committee on the 9th December, the initial analysis suggested that approximately 7 per cent of revenue funding for 2020-21 had been spent on COVID-related matters.

However, some data were incomplete or required further clarification. Some local authorities had still to finalise budget cover for COVID-related expenses when they submitted their returns in October 2020. The impact of the recent tightening of restrictions may well also impact on local authority costs and decisions to divert ELC budgets in accordance with the flexibilities provided in May 2020.

Scottish Government analysts are working with local authorities to finalise analysis, and to consider the total impact of COVID-19 by reviewing the returns in the context of other financial statistics such as the Local Government Provisional Outturn and Budget Estimates. This work will be considered by the joint ELC Finance Working Group, and a further update can be provided to the Committee once this analysis is complete.

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