

PE1630/C

Children in Scotland and Parenting across Scotland joint submission of 15 March 2017

Many thanks for your request to provide advice on the Committee's response to the above Petition. This response is provided jointly by Children in Scotland and Parenting across Scotland.

We welcome Reform Scotland's commitment to amending the current guidance. We believe their research highlights the increasingly outdated aspect of this guidance which appears to have been the means of rationing and managing childcare places within the public sector, for example aligning admissions with the school term timetable.

However, over time and in particular with the expansion of free childcare to 600 hours a year, local authorities have taken a pragmatic approach. Where the parent believes the child is ready for nursery from their 3rd birthday, their request will be accommodated if there is capacity in the nursery of their choice. Indeed, we know from many local authorities that spaces are kept empty to accommodate children who turn three but where parents want to delay their start date.

The Committee will be aware that local authorities, their partners and the Scottish Government are working towards expansion of childcare for 3,4 and eligible 2 year olds to 1140 free hours a year by 2020. Local authorities will plan their expansion around all children who are/will be three and the number of required places.

By 2020, capacity should not be a credible reason for setting any definitional boundaries around a third birthday start date. In our view, a more important consideration should be the impact this would have on a child's wellbeing and on their transition process to primary school. Currently, funding is a factor in considering a child's access to two years (defined by the school year as opposed to their age). We would call on families, local authorities, their partners and Scottish Government to set aside any marginal financial considerations in sticking to a rigid two year entitlement and ensure that the date of transition to primary school is based on the child's best interests.