

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 11 February 2026  
4th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

## PE2112: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland.

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Carole Erskine on behalf of Pregnant Then Screwed

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent review of publicly-funded early learning and childcare in Scotland, in order to better understand and address the challenges families face when trying to secure and afford childcare.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2112>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 10 September 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 23 August 2024.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 3,715 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee  
February 2026

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

**PE2112: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland.**

### **Petitioner**

Carole Erskine on behalf of Pregnant Then Screwed

### **Date Lodged**

23 July 2024

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent review of publicly-funded early learning and childcare in Scotland, in order to better understand and address the challenges families face when trying to secure and afford childcare.

### **Background information**

The charity, Pregnant Then Screwed, conducted a survey looking at childcare in Scotland. Over 2600 parents responded, with 83.7% of parents saying their childcare costs are the same or more than their income. 71% of mothers, and 50% of fathers, say it doesn't make financial sense for them to work. Our survey also found that 4 in 10 women in Scotland who have terminated a pregnancy say the cost of childcare was the primary reason for their decision.

It is time for the Scottish Parliament to look in depth at the early learning and childcare system in Scotland. Until we have a good understanding of why our childcare system is failing families, we will never have effective solutions.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2112 on 10 September 2025**

**The Convener:** PE2112, which was lodged by Carole Erskine on behalf of Pregnant Then Screwed, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission an independent review of publicly funded early learning and childcare in Scotland, in order to better understand and address the challenges that families face when trying to secure and afford childcare.

We last considered the petition on 30 October 2024, when we agreed to write to the National Day Nurseries Association Scotland; the Scottish Private Nursery Association; the parents group Connect; the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise wrote to the committee on 29 November 2024. In her letter, she reiterated that the Scottish Government does not plan to commission an external review at this point in time and that it intends to learn from an evaluation of the 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare. That evaluation was due in 2025. The minister also referenced the Government's early adopter community work, which is taking place in six local authorities and aims to help the Government to understand what it takes to deliver local childcare systems that support families with children.

The submission from the National Day Nurseries Association supports the aim of the petition and expresses concern that the delivery of the 1,140 hours policy, which, in itself, is beneficial, can lead to the closure of nurseries, due to unsustainable funding and workforce pressures. That is echoed by the submission from the Scottish Private Nursery Association, which states that the failure by some local councils to pass the full funding for the 1,140 hours on to childcare providers leads to nurseries increasing their fees in order to cover the shortfall.

The submission from Connect highlights the results of its 2021 survey on experiences of the 1,140 hours entitlement. Among its conclusions is the lack of variety and flexibility in the range and type of childcare provision, which sometimes leads to many funded hours going unused—because the arrangements make no practical sense for families and their needs.

On the other hand, COSLA's response points us to its publication, "Getting in Early—Local Government's role in Delivering Early Learning and Childcare", which highlights increases in the numbers of children accessing funded ELC and in the proportion of children who are accessing the full 1,140 hours entitlement.

Finally, the committee has received written submissions from our colleagues Liam McArthur and Monica Lennon. They both say that the current approach to childcare provision does not work for families and support the petition's call for an independent review of publicly funded ELC in Scotland.

We are joined by our colleague Meghan Gallacher. I wonder whether she would like to say a few words to the committee before we determine how we might best proceed.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Thank you, convener, and good morning, committee. Before I make my opening remarks, I declare an interest as I sit on the advisory board for Pregnant Then Screwed. It will therefore come as no surprise that I am here to support the petition in the name of Carole Erskine and the fantastic work that Pregnant Then Screwed does to highlight the challenges that many families right across Scotland face with childcare.

The challenges are very evident from the petition that has been submitted and the 2,600 submissions from parents who are struggling to grapple with the current 1,140 hours offering. If I may, I will use my personal experience of applying for childcare for my daughter, who is three. I have just embarked on the application process for the 1,140 hours of childcare, and even filling out the forms is not an easy process.

09:45

The process is usually quite lengthy. You have to number the nursery or childcare provision that you wish your child to undertake 1, 2, 3 and so on, and then you are beholden to local government as to whether you obtain one of those nursery slots or are directed to other nursery provision elsewhere. When the latter ends up being the case, parents have to travel considerable distances just to drop their child off at their childcare provision.

We have not even begun to look at the costs associated with the 1,140 hours provision. The hours will cover roughly two full days and another half-day; if you are a full-time working parent, you will have to cough up the costs for another two full days of provision. That shows the significant financial challenges of not only trying to access a nursery close to home, but the additional costs associated with the current funding model that we have in Scotland.

In the Pregnant Then Screwed survey of 2,600 parents whose submissions I have just mentioned, 83.7 per cent of parents said that their childcare costs were the same as or more than their income. Moreover, anyone listening to the radio this morning will have heard a parent explaining that their childcare costs could amount to £1,600 a month. That shows the stark costs of childcare in Scotland.

You have received useful responses from the SPNA and the NDNA about the petition's request, setting out their concerns about local government, which has overall control of the budgets, and the requirement to provide funded hours. The fact is that nurseries in local authority areas cannot normally accommodate working parents who, for example, have 9-to-5 jobs. They might have to drop their child off at about 8 o'clock in the morning and might not be able to pick them up until 6 o'clock, and not all local authorities are able to provide that offering. As a result, those parents have to rely on the private sector, which is usually the poor man in the relationship with local authorities when it comes to the 1,140 hours provision.

I believe that it is time for an independent review, because we need to fully understand the costs facing parents and what they are having to front up in addition to the 1,140 hours. In other areas of the United Kingdom, the free funded childcare offering has been expanded from nine months to three years old, and I believe that that should be considered, too. We should be putting childcare back at the top of the Government's agenda.

My request to the committee, therefore, is not to close the petition, but to look at referring it to another committee. I understand that we have roughly 20 weeks left before the end of the parliamentary session, but I would suggest that there are legacy reports. Even if the committee in question could not find time to consider the petition between now and the end of the parliamentary session, the matter could be covered in a legacy report, and it would show that the Parliament is taking seriously the issues that parents across the country are experiencing daily when it comes to providing their children with the best possible start in life.

**The Convener:** Thank you, and I hope that we can do a bit more than that. Colleagues, do you have any suggestions for action?

**David Torrance:** In the light of the evidence that is before us, I wonder whether the committee would consider writing to the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, asking when the evaluation report for the 1,140 hours entitlement will be published; what actions the Scottish Government intends to take in the light of the report's recommendations; what preliminary conclusions the Scottish Government has drawn from the early adopter communities work; and what actions it will take based on that.

**The Convener:** If there are no other comments from colleagues, are we content to keep the petition open and to make that further representation to the Scottish Government?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** I thank Meghan Gallacher very much. We will keep the petition open and act on that basis.

## **Annexe C: Written submission**

### **Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise written submission, 6 November 2025**

#### **PE2112/N: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland**

Thank you for your email of 11 September 2025 regarding petition PE2112: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

The Committee is seeking further information in relation to this petition, following the meeting of the Committee on 10 September. Specifically, you asked for:

- when the evaluation report for the 1,140 hours entitlement will be published, and what actions the Scottish Government intends to take in light of its recommendations;
- what preliminary conclusions the Scottish Government has drawn from the early adopter communities work, and what actions it will take based on this.

#### **1140 Evaluation**

The Scottish Government's Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) expansion programme [evaluation strategy](#) sets out how we are evaluating the impact of the ELC expansion programme to 1140 hours, covering the period 2018-2025. It is an outcomes-based evaluation strategy and the primary focus is on measuring outcomes for children, parents and carers, and families.

We now expect to publish the full report on the ELC 1140 expansion evaluation in early 2026. Evaluation of the 1140 hours expansion is a complex undertaking and it is important that we take the time to ensure the report is as robust as possible.

This report will draw together findings from across all the strands of the evaluation, including the Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare (SSELC) and parent and carer surveys carried out before, during and after the ELC expansion. Reports on each of the main individual elements of the evaluation, i.e. a SSELC final report, a report on the 2025 ELC parent research, together with the final 2018-2025 evaluation report, will be published on the Scottish Government website. It is important that the suite of final reports for the period 2018-2025 are published together to support clear understanding of the evaluation conclusions.

In the meantime, the learning from the baseline and interim evaluation reporting is being used to inform policy development and delivery. Further information about these reports is available on the Scottish Government's [Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\) expansion evaluation](#) web pages.

It is important that we are able to publish the full report before drawing conclusions about the impact of the ELC expansion on child, parent and family outcomes.

## **Early Adopter Communities**

Our six Early Adopter Community (EAC) projects are expanding access to affordable childcare for low-income families from early years through to the end of primary school and evaluating the difference this can make. Through targeted delivery of childcare and related support, the EACs are already improving the lives of over 1,000 children and their families, and are helping to build evidence and understanding of what it takes to provide local systems of childcare that meet the needs of families most likely to be living in poverty.

In 2023, Ipsos Scotland were contracted to undertake independent evaluation of the EAC projects and, in October 2024, we published a [process evaluation](#) and [evaluability assessment](#). The evaluation found that the implementation of EACs has happened as intended and there is evidence that projects are meeting the needs of families. Overall, families interviewed were very positive about their experiences, and there was evidence that the activities at EAC childcare met children's needs, including those with ASN, and that provision was supportive of parents' and carers' needs, including in terms of covering working hours. There were also early indications that some systems-level outcomes are being achieved and enablers included: Scottish Government support; governance structures that facilitate close relationships; a range of partners; committed staff with a common goal; and regular contact with partners.

As well as continuing to support the delivery of childcare and related services to families, we are now proceeding to the second phase of EAC evaluation. This includes evaluation of impact on short- to medium-term outcomes, process, and spend. Gendered and intersectional analysis has also been included as a requirement for phase two of the evaluation. This evaluation will cover the period from Spring 2025 to Summer 2026, with publication planned in the second half of 2026.

Alongside delivery and evaluation, we are supporting the EACs to undertake collaborative co-design work on an ongoing basis, so that their learning can be used to inform the development of future national childcare policy.

I hope this information is helpful. Please do write again if I may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

**Natalie Don-Innes MSP**

**Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise**