
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	5 November 2024
Report By:	Ruth Binks Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/48/24/YG
Contact Officer:	Yvonne Gallacher Quality Improvement Manager	Contact No:	01475 712812
Subject:	Review of ELC Admissions - Including Eligibility for ELC Term after Second/Third Birthday		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The Early Years team undertakes regular reviews of the admission policy and allocation of places. This review was undertaken in September 2024 to inform the admissions process for 2025. The feedback from parents is contained in the appendices. The feedback has resulted in very few changes to the policy itself but on the back of the feedback actions will be taken to improve processes and communications. The review also asked parents about the start date for early years provision.

1.3 In Scotland, all 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds as well as eligible two-year-olds are entitled to 1,140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) per year. Although in Inverclyde, funding is currently offered the month after a child's second/third birthday, Local Authorities are only funded by the Scottish Government for the term after a child's second/third birthday.

1.4 Given the significant financial pressures on the Education and Communities Committee and the pressures on the early years budget, a proposal to consider a review the allocation of ELC 1140 hours for eligible two and three-year-old children to revert to the statutory requirement, rather than the month after their birthday, which is currently in place, was agreed by Committee in September 2024. This is in line with the approach already taken by other nearby authorities.

1.5 If agreed by Committee, the ELC Admissions Policy would be implemented for the 2025 admission process.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Education and Communities are asked to:

- Agree the proposed changes to the ELC admissions policy.
- Agree a change to the allocation of children's entitlement to Early Learning and Childcare in line with Scottish Government expectation that an eligible child starts the term after their second/third birthday.
- Agree that changes to the ELC Admission Policy will be implemented for the 2025 admission process.

Ruth Binks, Corporate Director, Education, Communities & Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 In Scotland, all 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds as well as eligible two-year-olds are entitled to 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare per year. Originally intended to be in operation by 2020, the full implementation of the policy nationally was delayed due to COVID-19 and full roll out was implemented in August 2021.
- 3.2 In the lead up and during the implementation Inverclyde have worked in close partnership with other authorities close by and in particular with Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Councils. This has made sense as they make up part of the West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative but also are the authorities we work with closely if there are any cross-border places. The Early Years team undertake also undertake regular reviews of the admission policy and allocation of places. This review was undertaken in September 2024 to inform the admissions process for 2025. The review also asked parents about the start date for early years provision.
- 3.3 Although local authorities are only funded by the Scottish Government for places starting the term after a child's second or third birthday, the decision was initially taken by authorities to provide additional provision starting the month after a child's first birthday. Local authorities at that time were in a position to cover the costs but increasing financial pressures in early years means that some other authorities have revisited, or are revisiting, this decision and reverting back to allocating places the term, rather than the month after a child's second/third birthday. East Renfrewshire Council implement this change from August 2023 and Renfrewshire implemented this change from August 2024.
- 3.4 A consultation with parents and carers, Heads of Establishment (HOE) and Managers/Childminders of Funded Provider establishments was undertaken in September 2024, to ensure their views were considered as part of the policy development.
- 3.5 The survey for parents/carers was completed by 173 people. The survey for HOE/Manager/Childminders, was completed by 26 providers.
- 3.6 Other representatives who were consulted as part of this review, included an Education Services Inclusion Officer and an Education representative for the implementation of 'The Promise'. These representatives were consulted to ensure that priority banding for children fully considered current legislation for children who are Care Experienced and identified as having Additional Support needs.
- 3.7 A summary of survey findings from parents/carers and HOE/Managers is provided in **Appendix 1 and 2**.
- 3.8 As part of the review Feedback was sought from an Education Services Inclusion Officer and an Education representative for the implementation of 'The Promise', changes identified though this consultation are represented the Priority Banding section of the Admissions Policy.
- 3.9 Feedback from the parent/carer survey reported that 50% of parents/carers felt the change to children's ELC entitlement would not affect their child/family. 26% stated that this would have an impact and 24% were unsure.
- 3.10 Of the 26% of parents who stated this would have an impact, 32% felt that this would result in children 'missing out' out ELC due to their child's birthday.
- 3.11 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 1) Order 2019 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019 defines those children who have an entitlement to 1,140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare as:

- Children in a deferred year- child that is still 4 years old on the date they are eligible to start school (i.e. children with birth dates on or between the day after the school commencement date in August – last day in February)
 - All 4-year-olds.
 - 3 years olds in the term following their third birthday (Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 3.12 The Statutory guidance for deferred entry was reviewed by Scottish Government in August 2023 and now provides the option for children who are born in September – December to start school at either 4 years and 8 – 11 months in the August (autumn) term before their 5th birthday; or, at 5 years and 8 – 11 months the August (autumn) term following their birthday.
- 3.13 The statutory guidance for ELC and the implementation of the changes to deferred entry will ensure that all eligible children are receiving their full entitlement of ELC and offers reassurance that no child is 'missing out'. A full overview of The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 Early Learning and Childcare Guidance. [early-learning-childcare-statutory-guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.scot/early-learning-childcare-statutory-guidance.pdf) (www.gov.scot)
- 3.14 The changes to the policy for when children will be eligible ensures that all eligible children are receiving their entitlement to 1140 hours, from the term after their second/third birthday.
- 3.15 In reviewing the Early Years Admission Policy, Inverclyde Council have also taken account of Local Authority powers for the allocation of discretionary places. Through an ELC Admissions Panel and a process for Priority Banding, children who are referred to the panel will continue to be considered for an early ELC place, irrespective of eligibility. This panel consists of representatives from Education and Health and Social Care.
- 3.16 The feedback from parents/carer and HOE/Managers will be considered moving forward and will be used to develop an action plan with the aim to improve the Early Years Admissions process and the experience for parents/carers. These include (but are not exhaustive), improved communication, clearer guidance, implementation of an online process and flexibility for Children with Additional Needs. A Full summary of themes and actions from the feedback are included in **Appendix 1 and 2**. Where possible these identified actions will be implemented for the 2025 admissions process, but some things like online applications will take longer.
- 3.17 Whilst the Local Authority aims to consider the feedback from all parents/carers and HOE/Managers through this consultation, there have been suggestions received that the local Authority are unable to change. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that all eligible children receive an ELC place, which ensures a range of delivery models are available in each area. This is then aligned to the numbers of applications, ensuring that there are an appropriate number of places available for all eligible children across Inverclyde. This, balanced with the current financial pressure's places responsibility on the Local Authority to ensure these delivery models are financially sustainable. The delivery of ELC is regularly monitored and reviewed by Education, based on the applications received aligned with the allocated budget. An overview of the current provision across Inverclyde is provided in ELC Admissions Policy. **Appendix 3**.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The actions taken as a result of the feedback from parents/cares and HOC/Managers, focused mainly around the ELC Admission Process, rather than the Policy. In summary, feedback identified for improvement in the process include:
- Improved communication and guidance
 - More timely notifications
 - Flexibility for children with Additional Support Needs and deferrals
 - Improved handling of special cases
 - Financial Strain/Working Parents

- Feedback from Educations Officers advised further priority criteria for children who were Care Experienced, Fostered and who had identified Additional Support Needs, they advised Changes to the Early Learning and Childcare Policy which include:
- A new Priority Band to be added to the Banding Criteria, which is now Band 2a) ENTITLED CHILDREN AGED 2-5 YEARS - who have been adopted or are in Foster / Kinship Care and where there is a need to support the “family unit” as a whole in one locality.
- A new Priority Band to be added to the Banding Criteria which is now Band 3c) Children who have previously been identified by a multi-agency team, as requiring a specialist Early Learning and Childcare place or special consideration for a tailored ELC place.

4.2 Given the significant financial pressures on the Education and Communities Committees budget, officers recommend that the service reverts to the Scottish Government expectation that an eligible child starts the term after their second/third birthday.

Officers have consulted with parents/carers and HOE/Managers on the Early Years Admissions Policy and if agreed will implement identified changes based on feedback from the consultation. If the recommendation is agreed, the changes to the ELC admissions Policy would be implemented for the 2025 admissions process. **Appendix 3**

4.3 This change does not remove any statutory entitlement but rather reduces additionality of service and additional costs to the Council, meaning some parents will receive less additional childcare. Removal of early access may delay the start date at which children begin nursery. Those born later in the school session will subsequently receive a smaller amount of funded hours/pro rata, however, this is in line with the Scottish Government’s Statutory Guidance. [early-learning-childcare-statutory-guidance.pdf \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot/early-learning-childcare-statutory-guidance.pdf)

4.4 The total amount saved from this proposal includes the amount paid for lunches for all children in both local authority and partner establishments and the additional fees paid to Funded Provider/Childminders for the time between the second/third birthday and their statutory starting date. This may have an impact on Funded Providers/Childminders because the partnership will start later, however, this may also result in their private income increasing.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk		X
Human Resources	X	
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if Applicable)	Other Comments
00408	Funded Providers	01/04/25	(£70,000)	N/A	Saving of £70,000 per year

5.3 Legal/Risk

N/A.

5.4 Human Resources

This saving will increase the flexibility of staffing within the service to provide cover.

5.5 Strategic

This report means that resources are managed to ensure the continued provision of high quality 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare which meets the strategic aims of both Inverclyde Alliance and the Council.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA will be required prior to the final decision being taken, a copy of which will be made available on the Council website: Equality Impact Assessments - Inverclyde Council
	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

X	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage will be completed prior to the final decision being taken, a copy of which will be made available on the Council website: Equality Impact Assessments - Inverclyde Council
	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA will be required prior to the final decision being taken, a copy of which will be made available on the Council website: Equality Impact Assessments - Inverclyde Council
	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 Consultation out with Parents/Carers, HOE, Funded Provider Managers/Childminder and identified Education officers on the review of this policy.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 **Appendix 1** – Parent/Carer Feedback and Actions from Early Years Admissions Survey – September 2024.

Appendix 2 – HOE/Manager Feedback and Actions from Early Years Admissions Survey – September 2024.

Appendix 3 – Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy (Revised September 2024).

Parent/Carer Feedback from Early Years Consultation– September 2024

Questions	Data and responses
Have you used or do you currently use, Early Learning and Childcare Services in?:	Inverclyde – 98% Other – 2%
What Early Years Establishment does your child currently use? :	All establishments attended except St Columba’s, Kidology and Wellington
Please tell us the age of your child?	79% - 3-4 19% - 0-2 2% - 5 year olds
What month did your child start nursery?	173 responses 11 – January 12 – February 8 – March 2 – April 0 - May 1 – July 95 – August 18 – September 7 – October 5- November 5 – December 7 – not started yet
How old was your child when they started to attend nursery?	62% - 3-4 37% 0-2 1% - not started
How did you first learn about the Early Years Admissions Process?	173 responses 35 - Council Website 6 - Social media 80 - Word of Mouth 23 -Other LA est. 4 -Funded provider 1 - Childminder 24 -Other
How would you rate the clarity of the information provided about the Admission Process?	173 responses 46 - Very clear (27 %) 60 -Clear (35%) 34 -Neutral (20%) 24 - Unclear (14%) 9 - Very unclear (4%)
How easy was it to complete the application form for your child’s admission?	173 responses 55 - Very easy 68 - Easy 31 - Neutral 12 - Difficult 4 -Very Difficult 3 - Not completed yet
How satisfied were you with the level of assistance provided by	173 responses 44 - Very Satisfied 50 - Satisfied

the Inverclyde Council during the Admissions Process?	51 - Neutral 16 - Dissatisfied 9 - Very dissatisfied 3 - Not completed yet
Overall, how would you rate your experience with the Early Years Admissions Process in Inverclyde Council?	173 responses 51 - Excellent 60 - Good 31 - Average 17 - Poor 10 - Very Poor Not experienced yet – 4
Inverclyde Council moving to the term after second third birthday	
Do you think this will affect your child or you as a family?	173 responses No – 86 - 50% Yes – 46 – 26% Don't know – 41- 24%
If yes, what impact will this have on your child or you as a family? response key themes	44 Responses Only a quarter of families responded that the change would have a specific effect on their child or their family. The key themes from the parents' responses who were concerned about the impact of their child starting nursery the term after their second or third birthday, instead of the month after, include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial Strain for Working Parents: Some parents expressed concerns about the increased cost of childcare if their child has to wait additional months to start nursery. They felt that this delay would extend the time they need to pay for private care, adding financial strain and stress. Additionally, some parents indicated that the delay could force them to postpone returning to work, further exacerbating the financial pressure on families. 2. Impact on Child Development: Some parents emphasized the developmental benefits of starting nursery earlier, such as improved social skills, speech development, and general readiness for school. Delaying the start could negatively impact their child's progression particularly if they had a birthday later in the year. 3. Reduced Time in Nursery: Parents worry that delaying the start until the next term would reduce the total time their child spends in nursery, shortening the crucial period of early education and potentially leading to less preparedness for school. 4. Logistical and Emotional Impact: For some families, especially those with multiple children, parents felt that a delayed start could complicate daily routines, with parents juggling drop-offs and pickups at different locations. Others mentioned the emotional toll on children missing out on early bonding and adjusting to a structured environment. 5. Perceived Inequity: Some parents felt the delay could create an unfair system, where children with birthdays just after the term cut-off would miss out on several months of nursery education, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their peers.
Below is a summary of 140 parent/carer responses and actions identified on how the ELC Admission policy and process could be improved:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simplifying the Application Process through an Online Application System: Some parents recommend the introduction of an online process for submitting applications, tracking their status, and receiving confirmations, reducing paperwork errors and improving efficiency. <p>Action to be taken</p>	

- The development of an online application process will begin in January 2025 for annual implementation at admissions in January 2026.

2. **Clearer Communication and Guidance:** There was a request for more information on key dates, deadlines, and how to apply. Parents suggest receiving guidance via health visitors, mailed information packs, or clearer websites. This includes accurate and up-to-date details on admissions and form submission.

Action to be taken

- A review of communication of the Early Years Admission process, which will look specifically at the information available for parents and the accessibility of the information in establishments/ council website and on social media platforms to ensure information is clear and consistent.
- A parent friendly version of the policy to be developed.
- Community information sessions for parents/carers on applying for an ELC place.
- Information sessions for Health and Social care colleagues, to ensure they are familiar with the policy and process, and this supports effective communication to parents/carers.

3. **Earlier and More Timely Notifications:** Some parents asked for faster feedback on admissions decisions and better notice of application deadlines to avoid long waits and uncertainty.

Action to be taken

- Timescale for Post Admissions to be brought forward from August to June to ensure more timely notification for parents on the allocation of places.

4. **Starting at Age 2 or Upon Birthday:** Some parents suggested allowing children to start nursery the month of their birthday or even from age two to better support working parents and children's development. They feel this would give children more time in early education and relieve the financial strain on families.

Action to be taken – No Action

- The content of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Admissions policy clearly outlines the eligibility criteria, application procedures, and prioritisation framework for accessing funded ELC. It specifies the entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds, as well as eligible 2-year-olds, to 1,140 hours of funded ELC in accordance with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

5. **Flexibility for Special Needs and Deferrals:** Some parents of children with additional needs asked for more flexibility in deferring school entry if their child isn't ready, even if their birthday doesn't align with current rules.

Action to be taken

- As part of the ELC Admission Policy review and in consultation with Education Officers a new priority has been included in the policy under Band 2 a) where there is a need to support the "family unit" as a whole or in one locality.
- Paper to Education and Communities Committee in November 2024 for approval.

Action to be taken – No Action

- The ELC Admissions Policy currently children prioritise children who are granted a deferred year by the "Additional Support Needs" Monitoring forum for a deferred ELC place in accordance with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 Early Learning and Childcare Statutory Guidance.

6. **Sibling and Catchment Area Prioritization:** Some parents suggested prioritising siblings and considering catchment areas to prevent families from being split between multiple nurseries and schools, making logistics easier.

Action to be taken – No Action

- The Scottish Government has set out its vision for early learning and childcare provision in Scotland. This is a ‘funding following the child’ approach underpinned by the principles of *Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability* and Early Learning and Childcare National Standards. As outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, places a duty on the authority to secure that the minimum amount of early learning and childcare to ensure this made available for each eligible child belonging to its area, this aligned with ensuring a range of options for childcare is offered in each area ensures all children receive an ELC place. ELC places and School places have no connection. ELC defined areas do not align to existing school catchment areas and attendance at a particular establishment is not a priority.
- Some establishments and models will be oversubscribed based on capacity and, the ELC Admissions Policy Banding criteria prioritises higher priority children and these children are allocated a place first. Where there are more applications than places available, children who have the same priority level will be balloted to establish the order that placements will be allocated. Once all available placements have been allocated in accordance with application details, a waiting list will be established for any remaining applications, based on the ballot order. This process will continue with any higher priority level applications until a full waiting list is established.

7. **Better Handling of Special Cases:** Some parents requested clearer guidance for special cases, such as applications for children with additional needs (e.g., Looked After Children) or families moving between areas, ensuring these cases are properly managed.

Action to be taken

- The ELC Admissions policy has include a new band which will consider children who have been Care Experienced or are in Foster Care. Band 2 a) ENTITLED CHILDREN AGED 2-5 YEARS - who have been adopted or are in Foster/Kinship Care and where there is a need to support the “family unit” as a whole in one locality.
- Paper to Education and Communities Committee in November 2024 for approval.

8. **More Nursery Places and Support for Working Parents:** Some parents requested more availability of places, especially for local and catchment area nurseries, would help parents manage their work schedules and reduce the stress of finding alternative care.

Action to be taken – No Action

- A full list of establishments available across Inverclyde are listed in the Early Learning and Childcare Admission Policy. Establishments are required to be registered with the Care Inspectorate to ensure meet regulations for capacity and staff to child ratio. Every area in Inverclyde has a ‘suite’ of ELC options for parents which include Local Authority Establishments and Funded Providers, including Childminders. All areas offer a range of opening times and hours over 50 weeks a year or term time, with a range of attendance patterns. All local authority establishments offer the option of ‘Chargeable Childcare, which offers parents the option to buy additional time at the beginning and end of each day. Funded providers and childminders in all areas, offer a flexible range of childcare options over both full year and term time and a range of attendance patterns. As part of Inverclyde Statutory Requirements to consult parents on the delivery of 1140 hours, a review was carried out in November 2023, this reported that 83% of parents who took part in the survey felt that the ELC services in Inverclyde met their needs.

9. **Financial Strain/Working parents:** Some parents expressed concerns about the increased cost of childcare if their child has to wait additional months to start nursery. They felt that this delay would extend the time they need to pay for private care, adding financial strain and stress. Additionally, some parents indicated that the delay could force them to postpone returning to work, further exacerbating the financial pressure on families.

Action to be taken –

- Improved communication to parents to include options available, this should include the ELC team working alongside Community Learning and Development on the Affordable Childcare Pilot,

to provide information for parents/carers on the availability of Tax-Free Childcare, Tax Credits/Universal Credits, Care to Learn (Currently attending school, Learner Support (further Education), childcare Grant (Full time Education).

6. **Impact on Child Development/ Perceived Inequity:** Some parents emphasized the developmental benefits of starting nursery earlier, such as improved social skills, speech development, and general readiness for school. Some parents felt the delay could create an unfair system, where children with birthdays just after the term cut-off would miss out on several months of nursery education, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

Action to be taken

- Improved Communication on the availability of community events such as 'Book Bug', 'Thrive to 5', Baby Massage etc. to ensure parents have access to community events that can support children's development and social skills.
- Improved communication for parents regarding changes to deferred entry eligibility implemented for August 2023, this will ensure that all eligible children have the option to defer their school start and automatically access an additional year of funded early learning and childcare.

HOE/Manager Feedback from Early Years Admission Consultation – September 2024

Questions	Data and responses
Name of Establishment/Provision	16 out of 23 LA establishments completed the Survey 8 out of 8 Funded providers completed the survey 2 out of 5 Funded Provider Childminders completed the survey
How would you rate the clarity of the information provided by Inverclyde Council regarding the Admissions Process?	Of 33 ELC HOE/Managers/Childminders 26 responded: Very Clear - 14 Clear - 10 Neutral – 2 Unclear - 0 Very unclear - 0
How easy is it for parents to complete the application form for your establishment?	Of 33 ELC HOE/Managers/Childminders 26 responded: Very Clear - 6 Easy - 14 Neutral - 5 Difficult - 1 Very Difficult - 0
How would you rate the support provided to you by the council during the admissions process?	Of 33 ELC HOE/Managers/Childminders 26 responded: Very supportive - 13 Supportive - 9 Neutral - 3 Unsupportive - 1 Very Unsupportive - 0
How timely is the confirmation of placements after applications are submitted?	Of 33 ELC HOE/Managers/Childminders 26 responded: Very timely - 11 Timely -12 Neutral - 2 Untimely - 0 Very untimely - 1
From your experience of the Early Years Admissions banding policy, have you experienced any specific categories/groups that are not currently considered ?	Of 33 ELC HOE/Managers/Childminders there were 24 responses a summary of responses were: Felt that all groups were considered - 23 Responded that there is no option to prioritise families that have already attended our nursery with an older sibling - 1
What challenges, if any have you encountered with the current Admissions process? (Please specify) Key point s	Of 33 HOE/Managers there were 22 responses a summary of responses is – The responses from the Heads of Early Years Establishments highlight several challenges and suggestions regarding the current admissions process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online Application: Some parents suggested that the ability to apply online could improve the process. 2. Communication Issues/Administrative issues: There is a need for better communication. Delays in responses, difficulty reaching staff can cause confusion and frustration. Paperwork for admission can be difficult to read. 3. Catchment Area Issues: Challenges arise due to differences in catchment areas for school and nursery. 4. Sibling Priority: There are concerns from parents about not receiving a 3-year-old place when they already have a sibling in the school, although they often eventually receive a pre-school place. However, this results in an additional transition.

	<p>5. Language Barriers and Multiple Applications: Families with English as an Additional Language face language barriers, and there are also issues with parents misunderstanding deadlines or submitting multiple applications.</p> <p>6. No Issues or Positive Feedback: A significant number of responses indicated no challenges with the process, praising its centralization, clarity, and timeliness.</p>
What is your experience of the transition process for children who start the month after their second/third birthday?	<p>Of ELC HOE/Managers/Childminders there were 26 responses:</p> <p>Very Smooth – 10 Smooth - 9 Neutral - 3 Difficult - 2 Very Difficult - 2</p>
What specific challenges have you observed for children starting the month after their second/third birthday? (Please specify)	<p>Of 33 providers there were 22 responses, a summary of responses were – The responses from Heads of Early Years Establishments highlight the following challenges and observations for children starting the month after their second or third birthday:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continuous Settling In 2. Young Age and Developmental Readiness 3. Impact on Staff and Environment 4. Differences in Transition Experiences 5. Parental Involvement 6. Comparisons with Other Locations/Local Authorities 7. Positive Feedback
Inverclyde moving to the term after second third birthday	
What do you think the impact would be on children if they started the term after their second/ third birthday instead of the month after?	<p>Of 33 HOE there were 25 responses, a summary of responses were –</p> <p>Positive Impact – 11 No impact – 1 Negative impact – 10 Unsure – 4</p>
What positive impact do you think it would have? Key points	<p>Of 33 HOE there were 10 responses, a summary of responses were - The responses from Heads of Early Years Establishments highlight the following positive impacts of children attending 1140 hours of early learning and childcare starting the term after their second or third birthday:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More Structured Transition 2. Improved Emotional Wellbeing 3. Better Focus on Learning and Teaching 4. Enhanced Maturity and Readiness 5. Efficient Use of Resources 6. Consistent Access to Early Learning and Childcare 7. Time for Additional Preparation
What negative impact do you think it would have?	<p>Of 33 providers there were 9 responses, a summary of responses was: The responses from Heads of Early Years Establishments highlight the following negative impacts of children attending 1140 hours of early learning and childcare starting the term after their second or third birthday:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delayed Access to Nursery Experience 2. Loss of Funding Entitlement 3. Impact on Settling and Transition

	<p>4. Negative Impact on Learning and Development</p> <p>5. Financial and Staffing Challenges</p> <p>6. Potential for Disruption</p>
<p>What additional support or resources, if any, do you think would be necessary if children started the term after their second or third birthday? (Please specify)</p>	<p>Of 33 providers there were 17 responses, a summary of responses was - The responses from Heads of Early Years Establishments highlight the following additional support or resources that would be necessary if children started the term after their second or third birthday:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Additional Staffing 2. Information Sharing 3. Support for Speech, Language, and Social Skills 4. Funding 5. Improved Communication with Parents 6. Home Visits 7. Managing Staff Workloads
<p>Overall, how would you rate the current Early Years Admissions process in Inverclyde Council?</p>	<p>Of 33 HOE there were 26 responses:</p> <p>Excellent - 9 Good - 14 Average - 3 Poor - 0 Very Poor - 0</p>
<p>What improvements, if any, would you suggest for the Early Years Admissions process? (Please provide your suggestions)</p>	<p>Of 33 HOE there were 20 responses, a summary of responses was:</p> <p>The suggested improvements for the Early Years Admissions process from Heads of Establishments include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Admissions Meetings and Involvement 2. Online and Simplified Processes 3. Improved Communication and Timeliness 4. Admissions Timing and Process Changes
<p>Do you have any additional comments or feedback regarding the early years admissions process?</p>	<p>Of 33 providers there were 13 responses, a summary of responses was - The responses from Heads of Early Years Establishments regarding additional comments or feedback about the early year's admissions process highlight the following points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive Aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Releasing all admission letters at the same time has made the process easier. • Many heads appreciate the support provided by the early years team, finding them helpful, approachable, and responsive. • The central admissions system is considered fair, and recent resources such as timelines and payment schedules have been found valuable. • The support received as a partner nursery is exceptionally good, keeping establishments informed and up to date. 2. Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents struggle to understand that choosing a nursery outside their catchment area places them on the lowest banding, leading to confusion. • Administration of the process can be challenging as forms are handed into the nursery, this results in increased administrative tasks. • Term after a child's third birthday, as it could be detrimental to the child's learning and development and impact staffing levels.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for all staff involved in the admissions process as changes occur, offering step-by-step video support for parents, and improving the clarity of the nursery information on the Inverclyde website. <p>Overall, the feedback was largely positive, with suggestions aimed at improving clarity, training, and communication for both staff and parents.</p>
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Below is a summary of 25 HOE/Manager responses and actions identified on how the ELC Admission Policy and Process could be improved:

1. **Online Application:** Some parents suggested that the ability to apply online could improve the process.

Action to be taken:

- The development of an online application process will begin in January 2025 for annual implementation at admissions in January 2026.

2. **Communication Issues/Administrative issues:** There is a need for better communication. Delays in responses, difficulty reaching staff can cause confusion and frustration. Paperwork for admission can be difficult to read.

Action to be taken:

- A review of communication of the Early Years Admission process, which will look specifically at the information available for establishments and the format in which this is issued to improve the process for establishments and administrative staff.
- Further training for staff in ELC establishments which includes an update of changes from the review of the ELC policy and processes.

3. **Catchment Area Issues/Sibling priority:** Challenges arise due to parents reporting concerns about not being able to receive a place when they have a sibling in the school.

Action to be taken:

- Improved communication to establishment regarding the ELC process and Policy and guidance to support communication with parents.

No Action:

- As outlined in the parents' actions due to Inverclyde's commitment to ensure that every ELC child received a place in the defined area that they live, places are allocated aligned to this.
- ELC places and School places have no connection. ELC defined areas do not align to existing school catchment areas and attendance at a particular establishment is not a priority.

4. **Language Barriers and Multiple Applications:** Families with English as an Additional Language face language barriers, and there are also issues with parents misunderstanding deadlines or submitting multiple applications.

Action to be taken:

- The development of an online application process should be explored and developed for implementation in January 2026, this will prevent duplicate applications. This process should any language barriers for parents and the availability of the application in different languages.

5. Impact of Delayed Access to Nursery /Negative Impact on Learning and Development/settling and transition:

Action to be taken:

- Communication of the admissions process to parents to be reviewed and any changes made. This should consider social media communication and communication by establishments to ensure this is clear and consistent. This should include information for parents regarding eligibility of an ELC place and also communication for parents of their child's eligibility for deferred entry.
- Implementation of the Early Level tracking tool in August 2024 will ensure all staff have a very good understanding of child development and all children who attend will have clear targets for Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing which are planned for when they start ensuring a key focus on child development and learning for all children.
- Further implementation of a home to Nursery transition Pack in August 2024 will continue to support the home to nursery transition process, providing a clear focus on children's individual needs and ensuring effective planning for settling in and transition.
- Implementation of new transition procedures in April 2025 to be communicated to all ELC establishments to ensure a continued smooth transition from home to nursery/ nursery to school.

6. Loss of Funding Entitlement /Financial and Staffing Challenges

Action to be taken:

- For funded providers, ongoing consultation regarding uptake of non-eligible children and potential increased income.
- Ongoing engagement with funded providers on any financial impact and staffing challenges

Overview of Policy Updates

Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy		
PAGE	TITLE	PROPOSED CHANGE
Throughout		Use of new policy template
10	Policy Content	Change to start date for eligible children
12	Policy Content	Gibshill Children's Centre for 0-3 Provision has been moved from Area 2 to Area 1.
12	Policy Content	Gibshill Children's Centre for 3-5 Provision has been moved from Area 2 to Area 1.
13	Policy Content	Additional Priority Band added to Band 2 to include 2a).
14	Policy Content	Additional Priority Band added to Band 3 to include 3c).

Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy

Version No 2

Produced by:

Inverclyde Council
Municipal Buildings
GREENOCK
PA15 1LX

2024

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document Responsibility		
Policy Title	Corporate Group	Service
Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy		Education and Communities

Change History		
Version	Date	Comments
1	August 2020	Implementation of 1140 hours of ELC.
2	November 2024	Implementation for 2025 admissions process.

Distribution

Policy Review		
Updating Frequency	Next Review Date	Responsible Officer
Every Two Years	April 2027	Yvonne Gallacher

Policy Review and Approval			
Name	Action	Date	Communication

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2	BACKGROUND
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8.8	ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AGED 3 - 4 YEARS
8.9	3.5 EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE DEFINED AREAS
8.9.3	<i>LOCAL AUTHORITY ELC DEFINED AREA 0 - 3 years</i>
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8.12	ALLOCATION AND BANDING EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PLACES
9	DISCRETIONARY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PLACES
10	UNHAPPY WITH DECISION MAKING
11	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
12	IMPLEMENTATION
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15	APPENDICES

1	INTRODUCTION - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
1.1	The following document sets out the Education Service policies and procedures for receiving applications and allocating places to all eligible children who reside within the Inverclyde Council area.
1.2	As outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the authority has a duty to secure that the minimum amount of early learning and childcare is made available for each eligible child belonging to its area. This 'minimum amount' is known as the 'funded entitlement'.
1.3	The above Act requires the authority to consider the method in which it makes early learning and childcare available in ensuring it is flexible enough to allow parents an appropriate degree of choice when deciding how to access the service. The service provision remains under review, subject to regular ongoing consultation, as outlined in the Act, and will be updated as required.
1.4	The Scottish Government has developed a 'Funding Follows the Child' approach which provides families with choice on how they wish to access their funded entitlement. This approach enables families to access their child's funded entitlement from any establishment (including local authority, private, voluntary and independent providers and childminders) who meet the National Standard, has a place available and is willing to enter into an agreement with the local authority. Any offer of a place will be subject to physical and financial capacity being available, in line with the Council's approach to ensuring best value.
2	BACKGROUND
2.1	This policy sets out Education Services, policies and procedures for receiving applications and allocating early learning and childcare places to all eligible children. Eligibility is defined in more detail in section 3. It also sets out the allocation of discretionary ELC places when a child is not entitled to an Early Learning and Childcare place.
2.2	Inverclyde Council is committed to providing high quality early learning and childcare for children across the area and the purpose of this policy is to ensure that early learning and childcare placements are allocated in a consistent way. It sets out the main principles and criteria used to allocate placements.
3	STRATEGIC CONTEXT
	The strategic context for an Early Learning Centre (ELC) admissions policy and process is rooted in the broader goals of ensuring equitable access to quality early childhood education, promoting social inclusion, and supporting community needs. At a foundational level, the Admissions Policy aligns with National and local Education priorities, such as improving school readiness, fostering lifelong learning, and addressing achievement gaps for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups. The policy also plays a crucial role in managing demand for limited places in a fair and transparent manner, balancing the needs of families while ensuring that the Local Authority maintains its educational standards, staff-child ratios, and diversity goals. Strategically, the admissions process reflects ELC's aim to provide accessible, high-quality early education and care, supporting both the developmental needs of children and the socio-economic dynamics of the surrounding community. Additionally, it integrates with broader frameworks such as inclusion, sustainability, and support for families with diverse needs, ensuring long-term viability and a strong partnership with stakeholders.
4	LINKS TO LEGISLATION

4.1	The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 1) Order 2019 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019.
4.2	The above Act requires the authority to consider the method in which it makes early learning and childcare available in ensuring it is flexible enough to allow parents an appropriate degree of choice when deciding how to access the service.
4.3	The Education (Scotland) Act 1980
4.4	The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
4.5	The Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010
5	AIM
5.1	The aim of our Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) admissions policy in Inverclyde Council, is to ensure that every eligible child has fair, equitable, and timely access to high-quality, funded ELC, in line with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We are committed to supporting the wellbeing, learning, and development of all children by providing flexible and inclusive childcare options that meet the diverse needs of families. Through a transparent and efficient admissions process, we aim to prioritise those who would benefit most, while offering flexibility and choice to all families.
6	LINKS TO CORPORATE GROUPS
	The ELC Admissions Policy reflects and actively supports the values and legal requirements outlined by the Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that no applicant is discriminated against based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. By embedding these principles into the admissions process, the policy ensures fairness and inclusivity, allowing equal access to quality early childhood education for all families. Additionally, the policy addresses the Fairer Scotland Duty, aimed at reducing inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, by prioritising access for vulnerable groups and those experiencing hardship. Educations Services are commitment to promoting social equity aligned with the broader strategic goals set by the Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023-2033, which focuses on community empowerment and reducing inequality, and the Council Plan 2023-2028, which emphasises improving outcomes for children and young people. Together, these frameworks ensure that the ELC Admissions Policy supports both legal compliance and strategic objectives, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment within the community.
7	SCOPE
	The scope of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Admissions Policy, aligned with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and relevant statutory guidance, outlines the framework for ensuring universal and equitable access to high-quality early learning and childcare services. The policy reflects the entitlement of all 3 and 4-year-old children, as well as eligible 2-year-olds, to 1,140 hours of funded ELC annually, as per the Act. It prioritises a non-discriminatory approach, ensuring fair access regardless of socioeconomic background, disability, or additional support needs. Furthermore, the policy ensures the inclusion of provisions for flexibility to meet the diverse needs of families, while maintaining the overarching goal of

	<p>promoting the welfare, learning, and development of children. It also is inclusive of Local Authority discretionary powers for children who do not meet the eligibility criteria for an ELC place. The policy will be regularly reviewed to comply with any updates in statutory guidance or local government priorities.</p>
8.0	POLICY CONTENT
	<p>The content of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) admissions policy clearly outlines the eligibility criteria, application procedures, and prioritisation framework for accessing funded ELC. It specifies the entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds, as well as eligible 2-year-olds, to 1,140 hours of funded ELC in accordance with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The policy details how families can apply for a place, including key dates and documentation required, and explains the process for allocating spaces, particularly where demand exceeds capacity. It provides clear criteria for prioritisation, which may include considerations of vulnerability, additional support needs, and socioeconomic factors. The policy outlines the procedures for utilising local authorities' discretionary powers to offer ELC to children under the age of three, where appropriate. Additionally, it addresses how flexibility is offered to meet the varied needs of families, such as different patterns of attendance and provides information on complaints procedures in cases where admission decisions are contested. The policy ensures transparency, fairness, and consistency, and aligns with statutory guidance, national standards, and local authority priorities.</p>
8.1	Policy Statement
	<p>Inverclyde Council is committed to providing high-quality, equitable, and accessible Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) for all eligible children in line with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Our ELC admissions policy ensures that all 3 and 4-year-olds, as well as eligible 2-year-olds, are entitled to 1,140 hours of funded ELC annually, delivered in a way that supports their wellbeing, development, and learning.</p> <p>We strive to create an admissions process that is transparent, fair, and responsive to the diverse needs of our families and communities. Where places are limited, priority will be given to children and families who meet specific criteria, such as those with additional support needs, vulnerable circumstances, or socioeconomic disadvantage. In addition, we recognise our discretion to offer funded ELC to children under the age of three in circumstances where this would benefit their development or family situation.</p> <p>Our goal is to provide flexible options that support parents and carers in balancing work, education, and family life, while ensuring that all children receive the nurturing and stimulating environments necessary for their growth. We are dedicated to continuously reviewing and adapting our admissions process to meet national standards, statutory guidance, and local priorities, ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and families in our community.</p>
8.1.1	<p>The Act defines those children who have an entitlement to 1,140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in a deferred - child that is still 4 years old on the date they are eligible to start school (i.e. children with birth dates on or between the day after the school commencement date in August – last day in February) • All 4-year-olds. • 3 years olds in the term following their third birthday (Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000). <p>Eligibility for 2-year-old children is currently determined by a range of different criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • Job Seekers Allowance (income based)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any income related element of Employment and Support Allowance • Incapacity or Severe Disablement Allowance • State Pension Credit • Child Tax Credit (CTC), but not Working Tax Credit (Earning threshold applies) • Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit (Earning threshold applies) • Support under Part V1 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 • Universal Credit Statement (Take home pay threshold applies) <p>Or if the child is age 2 or over and is or, since they turned 2 has been (in terms of legal status):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Looked After’ by a local council • The subject of a ‘Kinship Care Order’; or • The subject of a ‘Parent Appointed Guardianship Order’; or • Has a care experienced parent - (Parent has been in residential care, foster care, kinship care, or has been looked-after at home with a supervision requirement at any stage in their life) • Have graduated from the Family Nurse Partnership Programme. <p>Once a child is identified as eligible their entitlement to early learning and childcare will remain, regardless of changes to parental/family circumstances.</p>
8.2	INTRODUCTION / KEY PRINCIPLES
8.2.1	The Scottish Government has set out its vision for early learning and childcare provision in Scotland. This is a ‘funding following the child’ approach underpinned by the principles of <i>Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability</i> and Early Learning and Childcare National Standards
8.2.2	Inverclyde Council is committed to providing high quality early learning and childcare for children across the area and the purpose of this policy is to ensure that early learning and childcare placements are allocated in a consistent way. It sets out the main principles and criteria used to allocate placements.
8.2.3	As outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the authority has a duty to secure that the minimum amount of early learning and childcare is made available for each eligible child belonging to its area. This ‘minimum amount’ is known as the ‘funded entitlement’. Funded early learning and childcare entitlement is calculated on a pro-rata basis in line with the intake date to determine the correct amount of ELC hour.
8.2.3	The above Act requires the authority to consider the method in which it makes early learning and childcare available in ensuring it is flexible enough to allow parents an appropriate degree of choice when deciding how to access the service. The service provision remains under review, subject to regular ongoing consultation, as outlined in the Act, and will be updated as required.
8.2.3	The Scottish Government has developed a ‘Funding Follows the Child’ approach which provides families with choice on how they wish to access their funded entitlement. This approach enables families to access their child’s funded entitlement from any establishment (including local authority, childminders, private, voluntary and independent providers) who meet the National Standard, has a place available and is willing to enter into a contract with the local authority. Any offer of a place will be subject to physical and financial capacity being available, in line with the Council’s approach to ensuring best value.

8.2.4	<p>Eligible children will have access to early learning and childcare regardless of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex or sexual orientation in line with the protected characteristics listed in the Equalities Act 2010:</p> <p>https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents</p>
8.2.5	<p>Eligible children are entitled to a funded early learning and childcare place in line with the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August Intake – child’s qualifying birthday must be on or before 31 August. • January Intake – child’s qualifying birthday must be on or before 31 December. • April Intake – child’s qualifying birthday must be on or before last day in February. <p>The funding year is deemed to start on the first day of each academic year. Funded early learning and childcare entitlement is calculated on a pro-rata basis for children starting in January and April intakes.</p>
8.2.6	<p>Securing a place in a school nursery class does not entitle a child to a place in the corresponding primary school. The provision of early learning and childcare in early years establishments is not governed by primary school catchment areas.</p>
8.3	APPLICATION AND ADMISSION OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN
8.3.1	Eligible Children
8.3.2	<p>Those currently eligible to receive funded early learning and childcare are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children aged 2 who meet the Scottish Government’s eligibility criteria • All children aged 3 and 4 (ante- and pre-school years) <p>Children will receive their full entitlement for each school year in which they are eligible and a pro-rated amount for each part-year in which they are eligible</p>
8.3.3	<p>In terms of starting dates, eligible 2-year-olds and all 3-year-olds are eligible for funded early learning and childcare from the beginning of the first term after the child’s 2nd or 3rd birthday</p>
8.3.4	Application Process
8.3.5	<p>Parents must submit an application form in order for an ELC place to be allocated.</p>
8.3.6	Types of Provision
8.3.7	<p>Funded early learning and childcare (ELC) places can be accessed in a number of different early years settings / providers across Inverclyde. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inverclyde Council Child / Family and Early learning Centres • Inverclyde Council nursery school / classes • Childminders contracted by Inverclyde Council to deliver funded ELC <p>Private Nurseries contracted by Inverclyde Council to deliver funded ELC</p>
8.3.8	<p>The local authority will only enter into partnership with Partner Providers if they are:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered with the Care Inspectorate • Staff are SSSC (Scottish Social Services Council) registered where appropriate. • Meet acceptable standards of provision when inspected by the Care Inspectorate (grades of good or better) • Meet the National Standard • Meet Inverclyde Council's scrutiny financial standing
8.3.9	<p>Parents/carers must provide satisfactory documentary evidence of the age of their child and their residing address. This evidence must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's birth certificate • Council Tax Notice • A recent letter from DWP/HMRC outlining benefit qualification • Evidence of qualifying benefit / criteria (2-year-old ELC place) <p>The list above is not exhaustive, and the Council retains the right to ask for further information when proof is not satisfied. In the event that the required documentation is not available, the Education Department can provide further guidance.</p>
8.4	LOCAL AUTHORITY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE DELIVERY MODELS
8.4.1	Local authority establishments offer a range of different operating models within each local authority ELC defined area. The delivery models offered will be determined by its opening times and whether the service is term time or extended year.
8.4.2	Model delivery times will be reviewed annually to ensure the maximum number of entitled ELC hours are delivered.
8.4.3	Any blended or split place for an entitled ELC place will only be delivered in equal amounts to ensure places are maximised. This will be either be over 2 ½ days or 5 Am or 5 Pm sessions only.
8.4.4	The operating models available for families to access their child's funded entitlement remain under regular review, subject to the statutory consultation to understand the needs of families and will be updated as appropriate to best reflect changing service demands.
8.5	APPLYING FOR A CHILDMINDER / PRIVATE NURSERY ELC PLACE
8.5.1	Applications for a Childminder / Private Voluntary or Independent Nursery can be made to any provider as they do not come under defined area within the authority. Parents must contact the provider to discuss their availability and the service model they deliver to ensure that it meets their needs before applying.
8.5.2	Childminder, Private / Voluntary / Independent Nurseries (Approved Funded Providers) are private businesses and manage their own operating models. Inverclyde Council has no locus on how the operating models will be delivered other than to ensure that an eligible child receive their entitled ELC, and that the entitlement is free at the point of delivery. Childminder, Private / Voluntary / Independent Nurseries will have their own terms and conditions / operating models, and it is the parent's responsibility to ensure they are aware of this information.
8.6	APPLYING FOR A CROSS BOUNDARY EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PLACE

8.6.1	A Cross Boundary application is when an application is received from a parent who does not reside within the Inverclyde Council area, however, wishes to apply to that Council.													
8.6.2	Cross Boundary Application for a LOCAL AUTHORITY ESTABLISHMENT													
8.6.3	Parents who wish to access funded early learning and childcare for their child within another Local Authority area, and within and within a local authority establishment then they should make the application directly to their 1 st preference of choice. This is classed as a Cross Boundary Application (local authority) and will be allocated in line Inverclyde Council's admissions policy													
8.6.4	Cross Boundary Application for a CHILDMINDER / PRIVATE / VOLUNATAY INDEPENDENT PROVIDER													
8.6.5	Parents who wish to access funded early learning and childcare for their child within another Local Authority area, and with a Childminder, Private, Voluntary or Independent Nursery should contact the relevant Local Authority directly for information on how to apply for a placement in their preferred nursery. This is classed as a Cross Boundary Application and would be subject to the West Partnership's Cross Boundary Protocol and in line with Funding Follows the Child guidance.													
8.7	APPLICATION TIMELINE													
8.7.1	2-Year-Old Entitled Early Learning & Childcare Application and Admissions Timeline													
8.7.2	Applications for children who meet the eligible 2-year-old criteria must be made to their 1 st choice preference of provider. The application and evidence timeline below applies:													
8.7.3	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Birth Date</th> <th>Application and supporting Universal Credit Evidence must be within the month of</th> <th>Intake Month</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 March – 31 August</td> <td>Term Time establishments – Application form can be submitted in June and then submit qualifying evidence in July Extended Year establishments – July</td> <td>August (autumn term) occurring in that year</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 September – 31 December</td> <td>December</td> <td>January (spring term) following their birthday April (summer term) following their birthday</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 January – last day February</td> <td>March</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Birth Date	Application and supporting Universal Credit Evidence must be within the month of	Intake Month	1 March – 31 August	Term Time establishments – Application form can be submitted in June and then submit qualifying evidence in July Extended Year establishments – July	August (autumn term) occurring in that year	1 September – 31 December	December	January (spring term) following their birthday April (summer term) following their birthday	1 January – last day February	March		
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1 January – last day February	March													
8.7.4	Children accessing 2-year-old placements must complete a new application form when applying for a 3-4 year old placement, as this is a separate process. Securing a place in a funded 2-year old provision does not entitle a child to a place in the corresponding 3 to 4 year old provision in that setting.													

8.8	ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AGED 3 - 4 YEARS	
8.8.1	3 and 4-Year-Old Entitled Early Learning & Childcare Application and Admissions Timeline	
	Birth Date	Intake Month
	1 March – 31 August	August (autumn term) occurring in that year
	1 September – 31 December	January (spring term) following their birthday
	1 January – last day February	April (summer term) following their birthday
8.8.2	Applications for children who will become eligible for their funded ELC entitlement over an academic year (August onwards) should be submitted during the application the 2-week window which opens at the start of term in January each year. Application submitted within this window will be presented at the Annual panel. The exact details of the application window are published annually.	
8.8.3	Applications submitted after close of the application window will be classed as a late application and will be presented at a Post Admission Panel to allocate ELC places.	
8.8.4	Applications received after the Post Admissions Panel has concluded will be considered on a one-to-one basis thereafter for allocation.	
8.8.5	Only one application per child may be submitted. Parents/carers will be asked to indicate preferential choices based on the specific models available at specific establishments. The only exception to this is where is an application is for a blended place (between two providers) an application must be submitted to both providers.	
8.8.6	Parents are asked to list several choices (to include the choice of early learning and childcare establishment and sessions) on their application form, in order of preference. This is so these choices can be considered during the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel process, we will always try and place the application with the choices provided, however, there is no guarantee. If we have exhausted all choices indicated on the application form, we will offer an ELC place from within the ELC defined area based on your residing address.	
8.9	EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE DEFINED AREAS	
8.9.1	Local Authority Establishments:	
8.9.2	Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision in an Inverclyde Council local authority establishment for allocated (children aged 0 – 3 years), eligible 2-, 3- and 4-year-old places and discretionary ELC places are divided in to defined areas, with the only exception being Whinhill Gaelic Nursery Class. Each local authority establishment and residential property is aligned to a ELC defined area. Parents are encouraged to apply for an ELC place in their area. The location of the property of the parent/carer with whom the child resides shall be used when determining the local Early Learning and Childcare defined area for the child. Personal childcare	

	arrangements in place cannot be used as a residing address. It is important to safeguard the right of local children to attend their local nursery as far as possible.	
8.9.3	LOCAL AUTHORITY ELC DEFINED AREA 0 - 3 Years	
	ELC DEFINED AREA	LOCAL AUTHORITY ESTABLISHMENT ALIGNED TO AREA
	AREA 1	Port Glasgow / Kilmacolm
	AREA 2	East End
	AREA 3	Central / West Central
	AREA 4 / 5	South West / Inverkip / Wemyss Bay
	AREA 6	Gourock
8.9.4	LOCAL AUTHORITY ELC DEFINED AREA 3 – 5 Years	
8.9.5	ELC DEFINED AREA	LOCAL AUTHORITY ESTABLISHMENT ALIGNED TO AREA
	AREA 1	Port Glasgow / Kilmacolm
	AREA 2	East End
	AREA 3	Central / West Central
	AREA 4	South West
	AREA 5	Inverkip / Wemyss Bay
	AREA 6	Gourock
	All areas	All Inverclyde areas

8.9.6	ELC places and School places have no connection . ELC defined areas do not align to existing school catchment areas and attendance at a particular establishment does not afford any additional priority or right for subsequent primary school registration or the consideration of placing requests.	
8.10	CHILDMINDER, PRIVATE / VOLUNTARY / INDEPENDENT PROVIDERS DEFINED AREAS	
8.10.1	Childminder, Private / Voluntary / Independent Nurseries are not aligned to specific local authority establishment ELC defined areas and can receive applications from residing addresses from across the whole of the Inverclyde area.	
8.11	ELIGABILITY OF ELC PLACE FOR CHILDREN DEFERRING ENTRY TO PRIMARY 1	
8.11.1	Children who would not yet five years old on the day the new school term starts in the August will have the right to start school, however, they can also defer entry to school until the following year and will automatically be able to access an additional year of funded early learning and childcare.	
8.11.2	The additional year of ELC year, will be guaranteed at the current provider. If a parent chooses to change provider for the additional year, an additional year of ELC will be guaranteed, however, we cannot guarantee an ELC place at the new requested provider. A transfer form requires to be completed and considered in line with the Early learning and Childcare admission policy.	
8.12	ALLOCATION AND BANDING EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE PLACES	
8.12.1	All Early Learning and Childcare places are prioritised in line with Inverclyde Council's Admission Policy Bandings.	
INVERCLYDE COUNCIL – Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy BANDING		
BAND 1	Children aged (0 - 5 years)	
	a)	Children referred in emergency situations by Social Work who have been identified through Child Protection procedures.
	b)	Children born to mothers under the age of 18 years or in full time education provided within a secondary school to allow the mother to return to education.
BAND 2	Entitled or discretionary ELC place (0 - 5 years)	
	a)	ENTITLED CHILDREN AGED 2-5 YEARS - who have been adopted or are in Foster/Kinship Care and where there is an identified need to support the “family unit” as a whole in one locality.
	b)	ENTITLED 2-YEAR-OLD PLACE - whose parents meet the Scottish Government criteria for an entitled ELC place.
	c)	Children referred to “as being in need” (as in Children (Scotland) Act 1995) aged 0-2 years who are referred by a professional agency.
	d)	Children referred to “as being in need” (as in Children (Scotland) Act 1995) aged 2-3 years who are referred by a professional agency.
BAND 3	a)	Children who turn 5 years after 1 st day of new term in August – end of February whose parents wish deferred entry to primary school.
	b)	Children who are granted a deferred year by the “Additional Support Needs” Monitoring forum

	c)	Children who have previously been identified by a multi-agency team, as requiring a specialist Early Learning and Childcare place or special consideration for a tailored ELC place.
BAND 4	Children in their pre-school & ante pre-school year, residing within an ELC defined area (3 - 5 years)	
	a)	Pre-school children residing within the establishment's ELC defined area
	b)	Children who have attended the same establishment for an entitled 2-year-old place and reside within the establishment's defined area.
	c)	Children who have attended a different establishment for an entitled 2-year-old funded place and reside within the establishment's defined area.
	d)	Children with a sibling in a deferred year / pre-school ELC place, residing in the establishment's defined area.
	e)	Children who attended in a discretionary 0–3-year place and a review of the place has confirmed a priority in the same establishment.
	f)	Ante pre-school children residing within the establishment's defined area.
BAND 5	Children in their pre-school & ante pre-school year, residing out with an ELC defined area	
	a)	Pre-school children residing out with the establishment's defined area
	b)	Children who have attended the same establishment for an entitled 2-year-old place who reside out with the establishments defined area.
	c)	Children who have attended a different establishment for an entitled 2-year-old funded place who reside out with the establishment's defined area.
	d)	Children with a sibling in a deferred year / pre-school placement residing out with the establishment's defined area.
	e)	Ante pre-school children residing outside the establishment' defined area
BAND 6	CROSS BOUNDARY 2 – 5 years - Children residing out with Inverclyde area / Entitled ELC place	
	a)	Children in their pre-school school year from out with Inverclyde for an entitled ELC place.
	b)	Children in their ante pre-school year from out with Inverclyde for an entitled ELC place.
	c)	Children in their entitled 2-year-old place.
BAND 7	Private ELC place residing in the Inverclyde area (0 - 3 years) – No priority – for recording purposes only	
	a)	Children aged 0-3 years attending in a private place
8.12.2	Some establishments and models will be oversubscribed based on capacity and, in this situation, places will be allocated in priority order, with higher priority children being allocated first. Where there are more applications than places available, children who have the same priority level will be balloted to establish the order that placements will be allocated. Once all available placements have been allocated in accordance with application details then a waiting list will be established for any remaining applications, based on the ballot order. This process will continue with any higher priority level applications until a full waiting list is established.	

8.12.3	Applications for children who are identified as Band 1, will always take priority regardless of when they are received. We will never remove another allocated place; however, we will place at the top of any waiting list at that establishment.
8.12.4	Applications that come under a Band 6 applying for a local authority establishment – (Children residing out with Inverclyde area) will only be considered after the Post Admission Panel and after Band 5 applications. There must be capacity across the ELC defined area and not based on an individual establishment. If after the post admissions panel there is more than 5 places available across an ELC defined area, then area applications will be allocated. Priority is always given to applications who reside within the ELC defined area.
8.12.5	Following the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel process, parents are informed of the outcome of their application (date set annually). Parents will then be required to confirm if they are accepting the placement offered by the date indicated in the offer letter. If parents do not confirm acceptance of the placement, within this time, then the place may be withdrawn and offered to another child.
8.12.6	If parents wish to change the agreed allocated ELC placement at any point following acceptance of the place, then an amendment / transfer form would need to be submitted, however, there is no guarantee that changes can be granted. Requests will be processed in the same way as any other application form and in line with policy bandings.
8.12.7	Late applications for all other priority levels will be allocated places on a first come, first served basis, into any remaining places once the panel process has been completed. If a waiting list is in place at the preferred establishment, then applications will be placed at the bottom of any established waiting list.
9	DISCRETIONARY ELC ALLOCATION
9.1	The Local Authority has discretionary powers to provide Early Learning and Childcare under section 1(1C) of the 1980 Act to deliver; but are not under a duty to provide.
9.2	The 1980 Act refers to a child in need as being in need of care and attention because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the child is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development unless these services are provided by the local authority. the child's health or development is likely significantly to be impaired or further impaired unless such services are so provided. the child is disabled. the child is affected adversely by the disability of any other person in his/her family; and the child is looked after by a local authority as per Section 17(6). <p>This duty does not solely fall on Education Services to tailor a package of support to any child in need, this would be developed through a multi-agency approach.</p>
9.3	Discretionary ELC places can only be allocated by the Discretionary allocation panel through an interagency referral – request for assistance form.

9.4	This Discretionary Panel exists to prioritise and ensure the allocation of places are based on the need(s) of the child / families.
9.5	Parents must consent to the referral form and be made aware that their application will be discussed at an admission panel. Referral forms submitted that parents have not given their consent, will not be presented at panel.
9.6	In exceptional circumstances a child's application can be accepted and banded before birth e.g. schoolgirl mothers whose education must lawfully continue; a child whose name will be on the Child protection Register following birth.
9.7	The core membership of the panel, should remain constant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head(s) or their representative from their Senior Management Team of Local Authority early years establishment. • CHCP representative(s). • Health Visitor(s). • Early Years Development Officer Additional representative from supporting agencies may be represented on the panel.
9.8	Members of a panel have a responsibility to conduct business so that a consensus is reached.
9.9	All referrals for 0-3 years place must be sent to the Interagency referral mailbox by the agree dates. Referrals received after these dates will be taken to the next scheduled panel.
9.10	The Early Years Development Officer will chair admission panels. Education Services will distribute the register of applicants and minutes to all panel members.
9.11	Discretionary ELC panels take place throughout the year to allocate.
9.12	The panel is responsible for confirming proposed bands. It is important that all relevant documentation is available for panel members so that fair decisions can be made. Should a panel find it impossible to arrive at a consensus, advice should be sought from the Quality Improvement Manager - Early Years.
9.13	Children who are not eligible under the entitled ELC place criteria, would be classed as a discretionary ELC place (Band 1a, 1b 2b, 2c of Inverclyde Council Banding)
9.14	There is no entitlement to a discretionary place, therefore, there is no guarantee that a place will be allocated. Any place allocated will be decided by the Discretionary panel members and will be solely based on the information received by the professional and focused on the current level of support by agencies to the child / family, the needs of the child / family and how all professionals will work co-operatively to meet this need.
9.15	Discretionary ELC places have no mandatory entitlement of ELC hours and if granted will be offered sessions (AM or PM to a maximum of 3 hours in any one session. There is no mandatory number of sessions, only in exceptional circumstances and only with agreed by the Quality Improvement ELC Manager, will any other pattern be offered) in line with their identified need within an Inverclyde Council establishment. Only in exceptional circumstances will a discretionary place be granted at Funded Provider establishment.

9.16	Any discretionary place offered, will be based on needs or circumstances and will only be allocated for a period of time, all places offered will be subject to regular review. Any allocation of a place can be increased / decreased or withdrawn if circumstances change. Any change will be verified through the review process.
9.17	Children accessing any 0-3-year-old placements must complete a new application form when applying for a 3 - 4-year-old nursery placement, this is a separate process. Allocation of a discretionary place does not entitle a child to a place in the corresponding 3–4-year-old provision in that setting.
10	UNHAPPY WITH DECISION MAKING
10.1	There is no formal process for parents/carers wishing to appeal the decision making process and allocated establishment and operating model for early Learning and Childcare places. Should applicants remain dissatisfied with the way in which their application has been processed, the authority's formal complaints process should be followed. Further details on the Council's complaints procedure are available from the Council's website.
11	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
11.1	Chief Executive – Louise Long
11.2	Directors – Ruth Binks
11.3	Heads of Service – Michael Roach
11.4	Service Managers – Yvonne Gallacher
11.5	ELC Officers
12	IMPLEMENTATION
12.1	Training N/A
12.2	Communication of the policy Inverclyde Council are committed to ensuring that the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) admissions policy is communicated clearly and effectively to all parents and carers. The policy will be made accessible through a variety of channels, with the council's website serving as the primary source of up-to-date information. The policy and related guidance will be easy to navigate, with clear instructions on eligibility, application processes, key dates, and how to access support if needed. In addition to the website, we will distribute information through local nurseries, schools, community centers, and partner organisations to reach families who may not access the internet regularly. Feedback from consultation with parents has been invaluable, and we will continue to engage with families through surveys, parent forums, and other consultation methods to ensure that the policy meets their needs and that our communication remains clear, inclusive, and user-friendly. Where necessary, we will provide translations and alternative formats to ensure accessibility for all.

	We are committed to listening and responding to parent feedback, making ongoing improvements to how we communicate, and ensuring parents feel supported throughout the admissions process.
13	RISK
13.1	Legislative risk
	N/A
14	EQUALITIES
	An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out as part of the Early Learning and Childcare Admssion Policy review. A Children Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assesment (CRWIA) has been carried out as part of the Early Learning and Childcare Admssion Policy review.
14.1	Consultation and Engagement
	A consultation with parents/carers for the implementation of 1140 hours was undertaken in November 2023. A consultatiation with parents/carers and Education Officers for the review of the Early Years Admission Policy was undertaken in September 2024.
14.2	The service provision remains under review, subject to regular ongoing consultation, as outlined in the The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 1) Order 2019 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019 and will be updated as required.
14.3	Equality Impact Assessment
	An Equalities Impact Assesment (EIA) has been carried out as part of the Early Learning and Childcare Admssion Policy review.
15	APPENDICES
1	EIA
2	CRWIA