

Renfrewshire Council
Scrutiny Board

A Review of Demand
and Need for Nursery
Places for 3 and 4
Year Olds

APPROVED

by Renfrewshire Council
26 June 2003

Report 4: 2002/2003

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**Renfrewshire Council
Scrutiny Board**

**A Review of Demand and Need for
Nursery Places for 3 and 4 Year Olds**

Approved by Renfrewshire Council: 26 June 2003

Convener: Councillor Terry Kelly (Labour)

Depute Convener: Councillor Nan Macgregor (Liberal Democrat)

Board Members: Councillor Ronnie Burns (Labour)
Councillor Brian Lawson (SNP)
Councillor Jean Goldie (Labour)
Councillor Derek Mackay (SNP)
Councillor Robert McGerty (Labour)

Lead Officer: Laura Friel
Head of Resources
Department of Social Work

RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Report
by

Scrutiny Board

Review of Demand and Need for Nursery Places for 3 and 4 Year Olds

1 Summary

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 25 June 2002, approved the proposal that a review of demand and need for nursery places for 3 and 4 years olds be included within its annual programme. The Board at its meeting on 11 November 2002 agreed the process for conducting the review.
- 1.2 The objective of the review was to assess the effectiveness of current practice in meeting parents' needs in the context of the information derived from surveys and practice in other local authority areas.
- 1.3 The scope of the review was to;
- [a]** investigate, consider and comment on the key issues raised in the parental survey in order to assess the effectiveness of current practice in meeting parents' needs principally;
 - y Ensuring that providers are flexible to meet the needs of parents
 - y A review of the services and demand for places within postcode areas PA2, PA3, PA4, PA5, PA6 and PA8.
 - y Continuation of the commitment to increase the numbers of qualified staff within partner nurseries and in particular the voluntary sector.
 - [b]** review best practice relative to other Councils in Scotland.
- 1.4 The scope of the review was extended to include qualitative aspects of service delivery.
- 1.5 Areas of good practice have been identified at section 12 of the report.
- 1.6 The recommendations are detailed at section 13 of the report.

2 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Board is asked to;

- 2.1 note the key findings of the review,
- 2.2 note the good practice identified at section 12

- 2.3 approve the recommendations at section 13.
- 2.4 The Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 25 June 2002 agreed to carry out a review into the demand and need for nursery places for 3 and 4 year olds. The objective and scope of the review was agreed by the Scrutiny Board on 11 November 2002.
- 2.5 The objective of the review was to assess the effectiveness of current practice in meeting parents' needs in the context of the information derived from surveys and practice in other local authority areas.
- 2.6 The scope of the review was to;
- [a]** investigate, consider and comment on the key issues raised in the parental survey in order to assess the effectiveness of current practice in meeting parents' needs principally;
 - y Ensuring that providers are flexible to meet the needs of parents
 - y A review of the services and demand for places within postcode areas PA2, PA3, PA4, PA5, PA6 and PA8.
 - y Continuation of the commitment to increase the numbers of qualified staff within partner nurseries and in particular the voluntary sector.
 - [b]** review best practice relative to other Councils in Scotland.
- 2.7 The scope of the review was extended to include qualitative aspects of service delivery.

3 The Task

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 25 June 2002 agreed to carry out a review into the demand and need for nursery places for 3 and 4 year olds. The objective and scope of the review was agreed by the Scrutiny Board on 11 November 2002.
- 3.2 The objective of the review was to assess the effectiveness of current practice in meeting parents' needs in the context of the information derived from surveys and practice in other local authority areas.
- 3.3 The scope of the review was to;
- [a]** investigate, consider and comment on the key issues raised in the parental survey in order to assess the effectiveness of current practice in meeting parents' needs principally;
 - y Ensuring that providers are flexible to meet the needs of parents
 - y A review of the services and demand for places within postcode areas PA2, PA3, PA4, PA5, PA6 and PA8.
 - y Continuation of the commitment to increase the numbers of qualified staff within partner nurseries and in particular the voluntary sector.
 - [b]** review best practice relative to other Councils in Scotland.

3.4 The scope of the review was extended to include qualitative aspects of service delivery.

4 Context

4.1 To set the review in context it is essential to understand the national agenda and how services are provided.

4.2 The Scottish Executive set a target that all 3 and 4 year olds should have access to a nursery placement by 2001/02. To achieve this objective Renfrewshire Council established the "Renfrewshire Child Care Partnership", its role being to ensure the provision of high quality pre school education, and entered into partnership with a number of independent sector providers to achieve this objective.

4.3 Evidence was submitted which highlighted the growth in service provision since introduction of the policy and confirmed that Renfrewshire Council had met the policy target within the timeframe.

4.4 The range of nursery provision includes;

[a] Pre-school education and care for children aged 3-5 years provided by local authority nursery schools, nursery classes and extended day establishments and through partnership arrangements with the private and voluntary sector.

[b] Child care provision for children aged 0-3 provided by local authority extended day establishments and partner providers, this area of provision is outwith the scope of the review.

[c] Specialist and integrated provision for children with additional needs.

5 Evidence

The service is provided by the education department with significant input from a number of partner agencies. It was agreed that evidence would be heard from each of these agencies. The list of witnesses, including the organisations they represent, is detailed at Appendix 1.

6 Evidence relating to ~~effective~~ current practice in meeting parents needs and informing the flexible use of services provided through local admission panels.

6.1 The key points arising from the director of education's report in respect of flexibility of services were that;

[a] In 92% of cases children received services in the nursery of first choice of their parents in relation to 3 to 5 places, with 97% of parents being satisfied with the service provided although it was recognised the element of choice in some panel areas was limited,

[b] more flexible services were required for a small number of parents, this included full time, lunch time and 52 week placements, this demand principally

came from parents, particularly those in employment and training, using local authority nursery classes and schools.

6.2 Other evidence presented confirmed that;

- [a]** Nursery heads are proactive, through consultation, in identifying and responding, where possible, to the provision of flexible services
- [b]** The most flexible services are provided by local authority extended day establishment and partner providers.
- [c]** Local authority schools and classes are not as flexible in terms of the types of places available. A recent report issued by the Scottish Executive comments on the need for local authority nurseries to be more flexible in the provision of the 12.5 hours per week of pre school education entitlement.
- [d]** There is a need for additional service provision for a small number of parents in the form of breakfast, lunch and full day placements.
- [e]** The government entitlement is for 12.5 hours, however for some parents this is not sufficient in terms of their work, training or education requirements. Access to services in excess of this is funded by parents. Previous survey results show that in the vast majority of cases needs are met.
- [f]** The local authority has carried out significant consultation with parents through telephone and questionnaire surveys, this was highlighted by the Accounts Commission as an area of good practice. The issue of consultation with children is being considered with individual establishments.

6.3 Evidence was submitted which identified proactive action being taken across the sector to identify and address gaps in service provision:

- [a]** The service has responded to the increase in the number of children with communication disorders. A number of measures have been put in place to address this, including, the development of specific provision within local authority nurseries, an intensive training programme for parents and the appointment of a home visiting teacher.
- [b]** In terms of children with complex needs it was felt that there was a need to develop interagency support to the child and his / her family. A successful bid has been made to the Changing Childrens Services fund and Childcare Strategy funds to develop this aspect of service provision.

6.4 Submissions were received by the Board from RENVER PCT and psychological services that there was a shortfall in the number of special needs places within specialist and mainstream nurseries together with insufficient supports within mainstream nurseries to support special needs children. The director of education has confirmed that there is not a shortfall in special needs provision.

6.5 A number of issues were identified by RENVER in respect of services provided by them for children with special needs with particular reference to therapies; speech and language and occupational therapies. These are detailed below:

- [a]** therapy provision is more limited than they would wish to ensure all children fully participate in the nursery curriculum. Evidence suggests that this reflects the national shortage of such skills.
- [b]** Ethical difficulties and confusion to parents where therapies are purchased from sources external to health,
- [c]** Lack of designated OTs for children in specialist nurseries,
- [d]** Lack of clarity in respect of specialist equipment.

6.6 In the course of the review it was confirmed that;

- [a]** Responsibility for the provision of therapy services rests with RENVER PCT and that partners would work together to minimise the impact of the shortfall and identify any unmet need.
- [b]** Additional services were purchased from a source external to health by education to pilot an initiative which provided additional support to parents, the outcomes of this pilot have been integrated into the work of the nurseries.
- [c]** Equipment purchased for a child belongs to the child until no longer required.

6.7 In the course of the review some gaps in the current service were identified.

- [a]** Some witnesses identified issues with the provision of transport to children attending nursery. Evidence was presented by the directors of education and social work on their respective policies. Education has specific criteria which applies in respect of this with the balance of provision being met from social work resources.
- [b]** Children on the child protection register are subject to integrated planning through child protection conferences and core group meetings. This practice should be considered for those children identified as being 'in need'.

7 Review of Services and Demand for places within Postcode areas, PA2, PA3, PA4, PA5, PA6 and PA8.

7.1 The early years plan for the delivery of pre-school education ensured a range of provision within each area admissions panel.

7.2 Allocation of nursery provision is managed via geographical Admissions Panels which have representation from all relevant agencies with an interest in the service. From the evidence submitted it appears that the Admission Panel operates successfully. It was however noted that the attendance of a social work representative was not always possible due to shortage of social workers with some difficulties being experienced where input from other professionals is required to support a placement.

7.3 The director of education's report identified availability and demand for places across the Council area. This identified a small number of areas where there is a difference between supply and demand. The issues within specific geographical areas are;

- [a]** surplus capacity within the Ferguslie Park area
- [b]** higher demand for places in Houston with some families having to accept places outwith their first choice, but within the admissions panel area.
- [c]** the number of pre school places in the Linwood area, which includes Houston, and in Renfrew and Erskine closely matches the number of available places. Renfrewshire trends indicates a reduction of 14% of 3 - 5 year olds by the year 2010. Careful monitoring should continue to assess the impact on the number of places required in these areas.
- [d]** Central Paisley which appeared to be approaching capacity. The director of education has confirmed that due to the demography of this area there are no anticipated difficulties.

7.4 In addition to the above evidence was presented by the Johnstone Social Work Area Team which indicated that within the geographical area of Johnstone, (which includes Linwood) vulnerable clients did not always receive the services required in the location which best meets need. Education and Leisure Services recognise this and are intending to deploy additional Sure Start funding to address this.

7.5 Despite the issues above it should be noted that in the vast majority of cases services were provided at the location of first choice.

7.6 The director of education confirmed that the local authority responds to demand for placements by increasing the number of places purchased from partnership nurseries or increasing capacity within the local authority sector. Confirmation was received that they do not purchase places beyond those required and that staffing levels within the local authority sector are managed to ensure we secure value for money.

8 Continuation of the commitment to increase the numbers of qualified staff with partne

8.1 To ensure the quality of service provision the Scottish Executive has stated that all staff within the childcare sector should be qualified or working towards qualification by 2004. To facilitate this a Training Challenge Fund has been established, this has been extended to 2006. In addition to the Training Challenge Fund, Renfrewshire Childcare Partnership has been successful in attracting other external sources of funding.

8.2 Detailed information was presented to the Board on the training which is available together with the means by which it is delivered. Partner nurseries and independent sector nurseries have access to the same sources of training as the local authority nurseries.

8.3 Evidence submitted confirmed that significant progress has been made towards achieving the training target.

8.4 The issue of 100% staff qualification was identified as a potential difficulty by the independent sector whereby they had a number of very experienced staff who although they would be unable to undertake further qualification, they made a very significant contribution to the services provided.

9 Qualitative Aspects of Service Delivery

Education has in place a number of mechanisms to develop and monitor the quality of service. These have been recognised by a number of external bodies within the Scottish Executive and Audit Scotland. Positive comments were made on the following;

- [a] The audit of training requirements / development of training plans to achieve 100% staff qualification, which was carried out by the authority;
- [b] The clear contracting arrangements, which are in place;
- [c] The performance monitoring and establishment and planning mechanisms;
- [d] The development of the early years plan;
- [e] The input from Pre 5 development officer / staff tutors and adviser;
- [f] The audit of service provision;
- [g] The annual review of heads of establishments;
- [h] The Inservice Training programme;
- [i] The monitoring arrangements for uptake and demand of places;
- [j] The monitoring of minutes of admissions panels.

10 Review of Best Practice Relative to the Council's Standards and Quality

- 10.1 Renfrewshire Council carried out benchmarking with other local authorities via information available from the HMIE and Accounts Commission.
- 10.2 The most recent evidence from the HMIE report "Standards and quality in Scottish Pre School Education 1997 - 2000", related to inspections carried out over the period 1997 to 2000. This report highlighted that performance within the local authority nursery sector exceeded that of the partner nurseries.
- 10.3 Evidence submitted by the independent sector and verified by the director of education confirmed that a number of inspections were carried out at a very early stage in the partnership and that performance within the independent sector had improved significantly since then due to a number of supports which had been put in place to assist partners in the delivery of quality services. These include establishment planning, individual supports to partners, the pre 5 partnership development officer, staff tutor support, annual audits and creation of training opportunities. Prior to the creation of the Partnership partner nurseries did not have access to local authority in service training.
- 10.4 Although this improvement could not be evidenced in the form of an HMIE report it could be verified through inspections carried out by the Care Commission and Children Act inspect reports.
- 10.5 In addition the report highlighted that performance in local authority and partner nurseries within Renfrewshire Council largely exceeded the average of other Councils

in all areas except, within the local authority sector “expressive and aesthetic development” and “provision of accommodation and facilities” and in partner nurseries “relationships with parents” and “staff teamwork” .

- 10.6 Expressive and Aesthetic development has been included within the in-service programme during 2001/02 and 2002/03.
- 10.7 Information presented to the panel in respect of the accommodation and facilities confirmed that there had been investment totalling £2.2m since 2000 when the HMI report was produced. There was a recognition that further investment was required and that this would be addressed within the resources available.
- 10.8 Individual work with partner nurseries to improve performance is detailed at 10.3.

11 Contracting Arrangements - Audit Scotland

- 11.1 The Audit Scotland report “Performance Review : Managing Pre School Education “ audited compliance with contracting arrangements. The auditor noted that a number of examples of best practice had been highlighted during the course of the review and only one identified a few areas for action.
- 11.2 Partner nurseries submitted evidence in respect of current contracting arrangements and confirmed they were satisfied with this.
- 11.3 The rate of payment for pre school commissioned places has been set within the guidelines and previous specific grant funding issued by the Scottish Executive. The term a “fully loaded” places relates to 5 sessions of 2.5 hours per week delivered over 33 weeks. The reintegration of this grant into GAE is based on this working formula. This has caused problems for some partner nurseries as local authority nursery classes and schools are funded for 38 weeks per year. Consideration is being given to supporting partner nurseries to match the local authority provision through support from other funding sources.
- 11.4 The partner nurseries acknowledged the significant support provided by Renfrewshire Council, that they are listened to when they make suggestions and are included in all relevant aspects of child care.

12 Good Practice

- 12.1 The review has identified a number of areas of good practice which should be noted.
- 12.2 The key areas to note are;
 - [a]** Renfrewshire Council met the target for 100% service provision within the Scottish Executive time frame.
 - [b]** The vast majority (92%) of children receive services from the nursery of their first choice.
 - [c]** Proactive consultation procedures are in place to meet service users expectations.
 - [d]** Flexible services are provided through local authority extended day nurseries and partnership arrangements.

- [e]** Service developments which have been put in place to meet gaps in provision.
- [f]** Good progress in moving towards national targets for staff qualifications.
- [g]** High performance of local authority and partner nurseries within Renfrewshire relative to the average of other Scottish Councils.
- [h]** Satisfaction by partner nurseries with current contracting arrangements.

13 Recommendations

Some of areas have been identified where action could be taken to improve services. These actions can be progressed with current resources.

- [a]** Review flexibility of services, particularly in local authority nursery schools and classes, and in respect of breakfast, lunch and full time provision. This review will be taken forward and reported through the Childcare Strategy proposals for 2003-2006.
- [b]** Review availability of service provision for “children in need” as defined in the Childrrens Act. This will be taken forward through proposals relating to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill.
- [c]** Evaluate interagency support arrangements in terms of special needs provision following the allocation of additional resources from the Changing Childrens Services Fund.
- [d]** RENVER, Renfrewshire Childcare Partnership and Education to review issues in respect of specialist therapies.
- [e]** Review current transport arrangements to ensure a more integrated approach and better value for money.
- [f]** Achieve wider representation of other agencies/departments, on the Admission Panels and the Renfrewshire Childcare Partnerships.
- [g]** Monitor service provision in the Houston and Linwood areas. Undertake a review of service provision in Ferguslie Park. Address the concerns relating to the allocation of places to vulnerable children in the Johnstone area.
- [h]** Review funding arrangements to consider whether pre school provision within partner nurseries can be offered for more than 33 weeks to bring it into line with what is generally offered within Council provision.

APPENDIX 1 □ LIST OF WITNESSES

Education and Leisure Services, Psychological Services, Mary Shields, Senior Educational Psychologist,

Social Work, Johnstone Area Manager, Jim Haggerty

RENVER PCT, Elizabeth Woodhouse, Head Paediatric Occupational Therapist

Renfrewshire Child Care Partnership, Dorothy McAvoy, Childcare Partnership Officer

Renfrewshire Independent Nursery Association, Rosemary Elliot, Vice Chair of RINA, Owner of Cairelott, a Private Partner Nursery Sector

Renfrewshire Voluntary Sector Forum, Nan McBride, Volunteer Sector Development Officer

Cecilia Kerr, Head of Springbank Nursery (Renfrewshire Council Nursery)

Elizabeth Williams, Head of Maxwellton Park Nursery (Partner Nursery - Voluntary Sector)

Kathleen McDonagh, Pre 5 Partnership Development Officer, Renfrewshire Council

IDENTIFICATION OF REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Renfrewshire Child Care Partnership Forum

Representation on the forum derives from the following organisations who regularly attend meetings; Renfrewshire Council's Early Years Service, Social Work, Renfrewshire Early Years Forum for the Voluntary Sector, Renfrewshire Independent Nursery Association, Renfrewshire Out of School Network (representing the private and voluntary out of school care providers), Childcare First (focussing on the development of childcare across the SIP areas), Reid Kerr (key training partner), a representative from the childminding group, Health. In addition there are a number of other bodies invited to attend who do not so or do not do so on a regular basis; Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire, Jobcentre Plus (anticipated to change in 2004 with the appointment of a childcare co-ordinator), Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce, Scottish Independent Nursery Association.

Renfrewshire Independent Nursery Association

Association which is open to all private and independent nurseries within the geographical boundary of Renfrewshire Council

Renfrewshire Early Years Forum for the Voluntary Sector

Membership of the Renfrewshire Early Years Forum for the Voluntary Sector is drawn from playgroups, voluntary sector partner nurseries and toddler groups. The forum provides support to its members on management, play development, recruitment and training.