

Early Learning and Childcare

Consultation Findings 2024



Overview of Consultation

The consultation took place between 26th August – 22nd Sept 2024.

South Ayrshire Council currently deliver funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in 35 local authority settings and 13 funded providers, including 2 childminders, who work in partnership.

Currently 13 local authority settings are open from 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Parents/carers accessing these Early Years Centre's (EYCs) have the option to access funded hours flexibly, term time and full year.

Parents/carers also have the opportunity to purchase additional hours and session, where space and staffing allows, supporting work and family commitments.

South Ayrshire council sought the views of parents/carers to ensure that our future ELC services are available in the ways that support parents/carers and families.

The following information gives an overview of the findings from this consultation and a summary of comments.

418 parents/carers responded to the survey.



1. We asked parents/carers are there any barriers to accessing funded Early Learning and Childcare?

Most parents/carers, 88.7%, indicated there were no barriers to accessing funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

Of the 11.3% of parents/carers stating that there were barriers to accessing funded ELC just less than half, 48.9%, mentioned the eligibility criteria for funded ELC for children under 2 yrs old.

A few responses, 6%, mentioned the timescales for accessing funded ELC when residing out with the boundary of Soth Ayrshire Council.

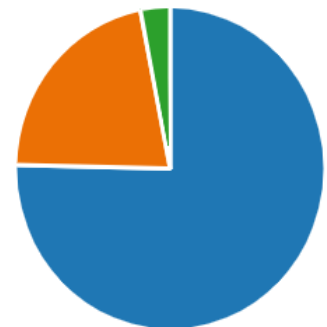
6% of responses stated lack of additional hours and wrap around care was a barrier to accessing funded ELC.

2. We asked parents/carers what Early Learning and Childcare services they currently used/planned to use for accessing funded Early Learning and Childcare?

Most parents/carers, 75.3%, indicated that they used or planned to use a local authority early years provision.

Less than half, 21.5%, indicated they used or planned to use a Funded Provider/private nursery and a few, 3.2%, indicated they used or planned to use a childminder to access funded early learning and childcare.

● Local Authority Early Years Centre	315
● Funded Provider/Private Nursery	90
● Childminder	13



3. We asked parents/carers their preference for accessing funded Early Learning and Childcare.

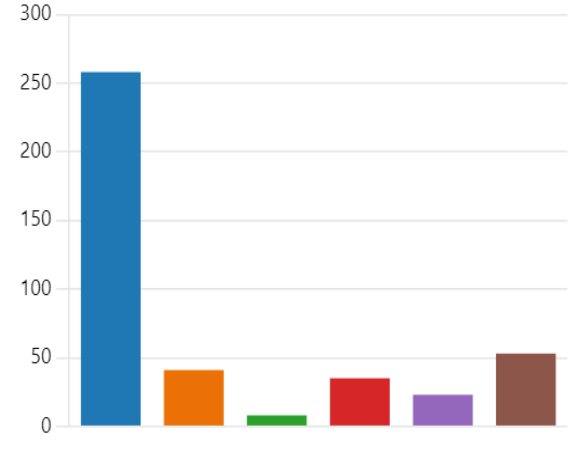
The majority of parents/carers, 61.7%, indicated they would prefer to access funded ELC during term time with the option of 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

A few respondents, 12.6%, chose the flexible option, term time and/or full year with a Funded Provider.

5.5% of parents/carers stated they would choose sessions including school holidays at the end of the week (Thursday and Friday 8am - 6pm and Wednesday afternoon 2.30pm - 6pm).

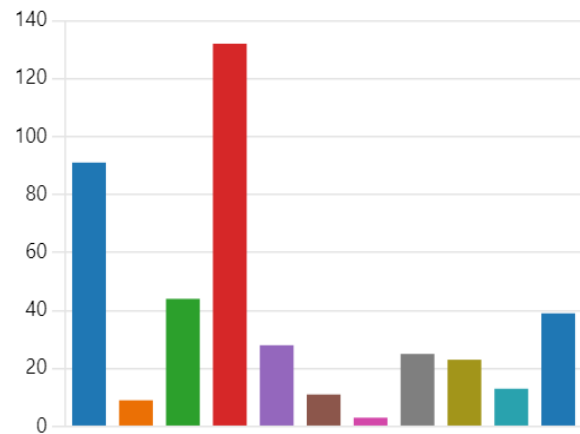
9.8% of parents/carers stated they would prefer full year sessions including school holidays at the start of the week (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday morning).

1.9% stated they would prefer afternoon session including school holidays (1.15pm - 6pm - Monday to Friday).

	Term time session times (6 hours per day - Monday to Friday - 9am - 3pm)	258	
	Full year morning sessions including school holidays (8am - 12.45pm - Monday to Friday)	41	
	Full year afternoon session including school holidays (1.15pm - 6pm - Monday to Friday)	8	
	Full year sessions including school holidays at the beginning of the week (Monday and Tuesday 8am - 6pm and Wednesday morning 8am - 12.30pm)	35	
	Full year sessions including school holidays at the beginning of the week (Thursday and Friday 8am - 6pm and Wednesday afternoon 2.30pm - 6pm)	23	
	Flexible option, term time and/or full year with Funded Provider	53	

4. We asked parents/carers to indicate in which area in South Ayrshire they would like their child to attend Early Learning and Childcare:

- **Troon** - This includes - Barassie ... 91
- **Prestwick** - This includes - Spac... 9
- **Ayr North** - This includes - Che... 44
- **Ayr South** - This includes - Allo... 132
- **Maybole/Carrick** - This include... 28
- **Girvan** - This includes - Girvan E... 11
- **Monkton** - This includes - Mon... 3
- Tarbolton Primary School, Annb... 25
- Coylton Primary School and Coy... 23
- Symington 13
- Other 39



Summary of Comments

We offered parents/carers the opportunity to comment on the current and future delivery of funded ELC in South Ayrshire. A summary of the comments are as follows:

- More flexible options in the use of funded hours.
- More flexibility in rural areas.
- More school based Early Years Centres (EYC), particularly where there are older siblings in primary.
- Priority for working parents/carers.
- Review of cross boundary funding.
- Streamline process for applying for additional hours.
- Process and timeline for applying for funded ELC for 3–5-year-olds are complicated.
- Happy with provision and staff in local authority and funded provider settings and also the central support team.
- More spaces for children aged 2-3 years to support working parents.
- Funding for babies and children 2-3 years.
- Some EYCs are too big, need for more council provision.
- Full year options support consistency for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN).
- More options to purchase wrap around care.
- Access to sensory rooms in all EYCs.
- Support for transport in rural areas.
- Levels of staffing and the training particularly for ASN.
- Local authority funding for private providers.
- Learning should be recorded during school holidays where child is in full year.



You Said	We Do/Did
Funding for Children Under 3 Years Old, Including Babies	
<p>Expansion of the 2-year-old funded hours would make a massive difference to families that return to work after maternity leave. Lower the age to include 1- and 2-year-olds to help working parents.</p> <p>It would be great if nursery funding could start before 3 to allow parents to go back to work and not have financial difficulties.</p> <p>Would make a huge difference to working parents if 2-year-old got funded.</p> <p>Extremely disappointing that England have introduced funded childcare from 9 months for working families, but this is not available in Scotland.</p> <p>It is too difficult to get 2-year-old placements. Whilst those who are not working are able to uptake these placements. Referrals through HV are difficult to obtain even though family struggling</p>	<p>The statutory entitlement to Scottish Government funded ELC starts the term after a child's 3rd birthday. In South Ayrshire children can access funded ELC the week after their 3rd birthday. Some children aged 2-3 years may be eligible for funded ELC. The criteria for eligibility is set by Scottish Government. At the moment there is no Scottish Government funding for children under the age of 2 yrs. Details of government eligibility criteria for 2 yr olds and link to the application form can be found here: Eligible 2 year old - South Ayrshire Council (south-ayrshire.gov.uk)</p> <p>In South Ayrshire we have 24 EYCs with provision for 2-3 year olds. In these settings there may, at times, be spaces available to purchase for families who do not meet the government eligibility criteria. Spaces to purchase are limited. For more information on purchase of sessions please visit our web page here: Eligible 2 year old - South Ayrshire Council (south-ayrshire.gov.uk)</p> <p>Many of our Funded Providers, including 2 childminders, who work in partnership with South Ayrshire, deliver services for children from birth. You can find details of Funded Providers here: Early Years Centres and funded providers - South Ayrshire Council (south-ayrshire.gov.uk)</p>



Applying for Funded Early Learning and Childcare and Wrap Around Childcare

The process where you apply for the hours you want is confusing and it's not clear what options are available. For example, I didn't realise I could split funded hours between centres. I would also have liked to top up by paying for extra hours at a council centre, but this isn't an option when you are applying and leaves too much uncertainty for working parents.

It takes quite some time for the council department to respond and confirm whether the child has received a place with an EYC which can be a bit confusing and stressful.

Nothing available before 9 a.m.

Parents would benefit from wraparound childcare to allow them to go to work (before 9am and after 3pm)

I have a blended placement between XX and XX. As a working parent, half days are pretty useless to me hence I've split the funding. I would much rather have paid for an extra half day and had my daughter at XX primary 3 days a week but it's not clear how to do this.

I would like to have the option of continued 52 week provision for my children & my younger child about to turn 2 years old, or the option to pay for morning sessions during school holiday periods as my Parents are retired and unable to provide childcare for long periods of time.

Rural options 9-3 only don't help working parents.

For admissions 2025-26 we will review how we share information with parents/carers on when and how to apply for funded ELC. We will work with parents/carers to ensure that information is clear and easily accessible.

Applications for funded ELC are normally February/March prior to the session starting in August. Places are usually confirmed at the beginning of May.

Our statutory obligation is to provide funded ELC for children aged 3-5 years and for children who meet the eligibility criteria aged 2 years. For a number of years parents/carers in South Ayrshire have had the opportunity to purchase additional hours and sessions in local authority EYCs. Parents/carers applying for places in term time settings the option to purchase 8.30 a.m.- 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.- 4 p.m. can be guaranteed. In our full year EYCs additional hours/sessions available can only be released once all places have been allocated, this will usually be end of May beginning of June. We will make sure this information is clearly communicated at the time of registration.

Additional hours and sessions are available to apply for in all of our EYCs including term time. In our term time settings additional hours are available 8.30 – 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m. Details of additional hours and sessions available and link to application form can be found here: [Purchase of additional early learning and childcare - South Ayrshire Council \(south-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/purchase-of-additional-early-learning-and-childcare).

Blended places between two providers are offered as an option when making an application for ELC.



Cross Boundary Funding and Admissions Priorities

My child's cross boundary placement and doesn't receive funding until January, 3 months after her birthday.

We stay outside local authority but work in the area however this means we are bottom of the priority list.

The statutory entitlement to Scottish Government funded ELC starts the term after a child's 3rd birthday. For children residing in South Ayrshire, they can currently access funded ELC the week after their 3rd birthday.

For children who live out with the boundary of South Ayrshire and pay Council Tax in another local authority they are entitled to funded ELC in line with their resident authority. For example, where children reside in North and East Ayrshire who choose to make an application to a South Ayrshire EYC or Funded Provider, they will be entitled to funded ELC the term after their 3rd birthday.

Admissions priorities in South Ayrshire support access to funded ELC for children residing in South Ayrshire. Children who reside out with the boundary of South Ayrshire are a lower priority. You can find details of our admissions priorities here: [Register for Early Learning and Childcare - South Ayrshire Council \(south-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/register-for-early-learning-and-childcare)

For children who reside in another authority there may be options available to purchase sessions prior to the start of statutory funding. Parents and carers can contact the central team edservicesELC@south-ayrshire.gov.uk.



Funding Follows the Child and Funded Provider Rates

Funded providers don't seem to get the same level of support and publicity as local authority eyc. They don't get the same financial support and often lose staff to local authority eyc, which seems really unfair.

The funding for 30 hours does not seem to 'follow the child'. I have used both a private provider and local authority provider and it's clear the private providers are being underfunded, driving costs up across the board and reducing flexibility for parents.

Funding for each child needs to be consistent. Private nursery providers are not equitably funded, and as such my child is being discriminated against and is missing out because my work life means I cannot put them in a school time only nursery. Be fair and fund each child equally.

I would like to see more options for childminders, it seems to be a very long complex process for Childminders to get registered. I would much prefer my child to be in a home environment for some or all of the allocated hours.

Details of all providers, local authority and funded providers, can be found on our website here: <https://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/early-years-centres>.

Funded providers can often offer parents/carers more flexibility in the use of their funded hours and this is highlighted to parents at the time of application for ELC.

Funded Providers in partnership with South Ayrshire receive an hourly rate in line with the guidance from Scottish Government. Funded Providers in South Ayrshire receive one of the highest hourly rates of the 32 local authorities across the country. In addition, Funded Providers in South Ayrshire also receive a daily amount for the provision of a meal, this is also one of the highest rates across Scotland. Funded Providers in South Ayrshire are also in receipt of Scottish Government funding for the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme (SMHSS) which supports provision of a serving of milk and portion of fruit/veg for each child each day.

South Ayrshire works closely with all our Funded Providers and provide support 'in kind' in a number of ways. Staff in Funded Providers are able to access training and development opportunities in line with local authority staff. Funded Providers have access to a Principal Teacher supporting quality and provide management support. Our Funded Providers also receive support from central team officers including quality assurance and pre and post inspection support.

Local authority EYCs in South Ayrshire are experiencing similar challenges in staffing as the Funded Providers. Local authority staff



have moved to other settings and often other local authorities who offer enhanced salaries.

All providers, including childminders, wishing to work in partnership with the local authority are required to make application through Public Contracts Scotland Tenders and must meet the conditions of the National Standard for delivery of ELC.

More Flexibility in Use of Funded Hours

I firmly believe a "Pay As You Go" flexible option needs to be available. Shift patterns change, contracts end, care needs change. Some people don't need/want their child away from them all day every day on a regular basis, so the option to "book" as and when.

Having more flexibility on when you can use the funded hours would be beneficial. I would rather spread the hours over 4 days than 3 or 5.

Families want more place at EYC centres within school settings. They don't want remote centre places as they need to deal with drop offs in different locations from siblings already at school.

We currently have a funded place in a private nursery as we need the wraparound care, would have loved to move child to a local authority early years centre however not having full year care/option for wraparound care made this impossible.

There are 35 Local Authority EYCs across South Ayrshire. 5 are standalone EYCs and 30 are based within primary schools. 13 local authority EYCs offer full year provision 8.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m. There is the option for this more flexible approach in each locality across South Ayrshire. South Ayrshire work in partnership with 13 Funded Providers, including 2 childminders, located in Ayr, Prestwick and Troon.

Funded providers can often offer parents/carers more flexibility in the use of their funded hours and this is highlighted to parents at the time of application for ELC.

In local authority settings offering full year provision there are 5 options, including term time. The exception is Troon Primary EYC who currently do not offer the term time option. The offer of full flexibility or a 'pay as you go' system would not allow us to plan for staffing to the appropriate legal ratios. We are, however, reviewing how we deliver the flexible options and will work towards increasing flexibility where we can.



General Comments

Transport to nursery from rural areas, I don't have a car.

The options currently offered concerning childcare are fantastic for parents. The issues South Ayrshire faces is the levels of staffing and the training the staff receives. More training on neurodiversity's, allergies and up to date child development is what is truly needed in this area.

The cutting of staff is appalling and the change of staff and using short cover staff has had such a negative effect on my child's nursery. If anything, it makes me want to go private and not use the school's nursery.

Huge staff turnover which makes it hard for children to form relationships.

Make sure all nurseries have a sensory room and not taken away regardless of the playroom being inclusive there should always be an option for a quiet area.

It would be good to have the summer provision live up to the provision given during term time. For example, no learning recorded over the summer holiday. Given that the hours are spread over the 52 weeks my child should warrant the same amount of education as those who attend 9-3 term time.

There is ELC provision across all localities in South Ayrshire, including rural locations. Transport is not provided for children accessing ELC.

Staffing in local authority EYCs continues to meet the requirements of the ratios set by the Care Inspectorate. For children aged 3-5 years this ratio is 1:8 and for children aged 2-3 the ratio is 1:5. In some circumstances there is additional support in place provided by School Assistants.

There have been no staff cuts.

All staff working in local authority settings are qualified to meet the requirements of their role to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Practitioners are qualified to at least HNC Childhood Practice at SCQF Level 7 or equivalent. Senior Early Years Practitioners hold or are working towards a BA Childhood Practice or equivalent. Other promoted posts including Equity and Excellence Leads and both Depute Managers and Managers require a relevant degree qualification.

All staff have access to a range of professional learning including additional support needs. The early years conference October 2024 focused on ASN with a range of workshops for staff to attend including nurture, neurodiversity and language delay.

All our settings have areas within the playrooms where children can rest and relax. There are also opportunities for children to access spaces out with the playroom.



Children accessing their entitlement over the full year should experience the same learning opportunities as they do during term time. We will work with our settings to ensure this is the case.

