Glasgow City Council Education Services

Nursery Expansion Planning – Yoker Sports Centre

1.0 Background

In 2016, Scottish Government announced their intention to expand the nursery entitlement of all 3 and 4 year olds and some 2 year olds, from 600 hours of funded nursery provision per year to 1140 hours of funded nursery provision per year from August 2020.

This announcement was followed in March 2017 by the publication of a blueprint policy document instructing local authorities to put in place plans to almost double the level of nursery services in their area by August 2020. This necessitated a major citywide planning exercise which measured existing capacity, demand for services, expected uptake and pragmatically, sought opportunities for capital projects to support that expansion.

The statutory entitlement of 1140 hours of Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) is delivered through a mixed market model of public, private (inc. childminders working from their own homes), 3rd sector and independent school providers. The non-Council providers are known collectively as funded providers. Councils were expected to plan across all of the sector including considering opportunities for funded providers to contribute to the overall expansion programme by growing their existing businesses or establishing new businesses where suitable spaces could be found.

Although it is statutory that local authorities provide access to nursery places for families who wish it, it is not statutory that children must attend – that is a matter of parental choice. This makes planning for nursery provision particularly complex as it is not always possible to gauge what decisions parents may make in terms of which nursery, if any, they access.

At nursery stage parents are also permitted under the legislation to access places wherever they choose, including in other parts of the city (perhaps close to where they work) or other local authority areas. For example, parents in the Yoker area may choose to access services in Clydebank which sits within West Dunbartonshire Council. Unlike schools there is no placing request process which can present a barrier to this type of movement.

2.0 Planning for Nursery Expansion 2017 - 2020

The planning exercise for the city identified the Scotstoun/Yoker area as an area where expansion of nursery places would be needed to meet the government targets.

In 2017/18, using a general planning metric of considering areas no more than 3 miles in radius, there were 11 existing nursery services in the geography. This included 5 local authority services and 6 funded providers.

The total capacity of those services for eligible children (all 3 and 4 year olds and some 2 year olds) came to 799 registered spaces. The population data for the area measured against the number of spaces and their existing usage at that time meant that a number of opportunities for expansion were needed.

Conversations with Glasgow Life around the future for Yoker Sports Centre identified the potential to create a nursery space for 2-5 year olds on the ground floor of the building as one of those opportunities. Early plans were in development when the Covid pandemic stopped progress and

Scottish Government subsequently made the decision to delay the implementation of the increased entitlement from August 2020 to August 2021.

3.0 Revised Planning

As well as the potential development in the sports centre, other nursery expansion was scheduled for the area and two additional funded provider services opened between 2018 and 2021. The registered capacity of one of the existing Council services was also expanded. This took the registered capacity for eligible children across all services from 799 to 936 spaces – a 17% increase in capacity.

Although initial planning had indicated that this increase would be insufficient to serve the needs of the population in the area, over the passing of time between 2018 and the implementation of expansion date in 2021, significant changes took place.

The Covid pandemic had a significant impact on numbers of families seeking nursery provision in 2020 and 2021. Despite all Covid restrictions having been lifted in 2021, nursery numbers generally have continued to be lower than anticipated and Scottish Government has confirmed this as a national trend. It is possible that population data has shifted and there may also be some unmeasured impact on demand as a result of Brexit.

A recent review of demand across the nurseries in the area, showed that across the 8 funded provider settings there was capacity for 507 eligible children, however, only 356 places were being used – 70% occupancy. For the 5 local authority nurseries, there is capacity for 429 eligible children and they are sitting collectively at 79% occupancy.

Numbers of eligible 2-5's in nursery in November 2022 (12,967) are 4.7% higher than they were in November 2019 (12,380) before the pandemic. (Important to note we were already delivering 1140 hours across 87% of the city's nurseries by November 2019, a year before the original implementation date.)

There was a 4.1% dip in numbers in November 2020 to 11,867 presumably as a result of Covid, however, by November 2021 numbers had recovered to 12,405 – 0.2% higher than November 2019 levels suggesting that parents had returned to using nursery as normal by November 2021.

Numbers have continued to grow since November 2021 especially in terms of 5 year olds (deferred entry pilot) and eligible 2 year olds.

4.0 Current Data

Service provision data gathered on 30 November 2022 identifies that within a less than a 3 mile radius of the Yoker Sports Centre site there are 64.4 places (322 blocks) available for eligible children within the area. The largest intake of eligible children is in term 1 of the academic year (August) where approximately 70% of children are allocated a place. Therefore, it is a reasonable assumption that the remaining places will be sufficient for any children becoming eligible during term 2 or term 3.

National Records of Scotland Population data identifies within the Garscadden/Scotstounhill area the birth rates in 2020 were recorded as 350, in 2019 330 and 2018 324. This presents a relatively stable position in terms of population.

5.0 Conclusion

Given the increase in capacity across the area, measured against the demand for services and the reasonably high level of as yet unused nursery capacity, it now appears that 5 years on from the original planning exercise, there is no longer sufficient demand to require another nursery expansion project to be delivered in Yoker Sports Centre.

To progress with the original plan to create another 87 place nursery would potentially endanger the future of the existing nurseries in the area as there is a finite local population of eligible children seeking places.

A new nursery in Yoker Sports Centre is, therefore, no longer required.