

Agenda Item	<i>Additional Report</i>
Report No	

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee** Highland Council

**Date:** 30 July 2020

**Report Title:** Education and Childcare Continuity in Highland

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer - Education and Learning

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report advises Members of the content of the latest Educational Continuity Direction issued by the Deputy First Minister on 22 July 2020, and its implications for the provision of key worker childcare. It addresses the Council's decision, at its meeting of 25 June 2020, to "Review all additional Covid response services unless directly funded by Government at the end of July", and should be read alongside the report entitled "Review of Keyworker Hub Childcare provision in Highland".
- 1.2 Copies of the latest Direction from the Scottish Government, the accompanying Guidance and the covering letter, are attached to this report via links as background papers appendices 1-3. The Direction requires Education Authorities to plan and prepare for children to resume attendance at schools at the earliest time it is safe to do so, with the intended start date of the new school year across Education Authorities being standardised to 11 August 2020. No re-opening of schools may however take place unless and until this is permitted by a further Educational Continuity Direction. The Direction also requires education authorities to provide ongoing critical childcare for children of keyworkers and vulnerable children until Friday 31 July (inclusive of that date) and allows them to provide this service after this date. The expectation is that critical childcare will wind down during the week commencing 3 August with a specific end date decided at a local level, before the return to school. The expected return to full time school in August will significantly alter the demand for keyworker childcare.
- 1.3 In line with the Direction, and the Council's decision to review all additional Covid response services by the end of July, it is proposed to cease the provision of key worker childcare in Highland on 10 August at the latest. This is the last date of operation for the Council-run key worker hubs, which were open from Monday to Thursday of each week. Partner providers had already been operating under the expectation that funding for key worker childcare would cease on 31 July, and several had planned to close on that date, with staff going on leave.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1 Members are asked to:**

- i. note the context as set out within the report, and latest Scottish Government Direction regarding provision;
- ii. agree that the Council ceases its support for key worker childcare on 10 August 2020 at the latest, in line with the Direction at Appendix 1; and
- iii. note that the re-opening of schools on 11 August is subject to final confirmation from the Scottish Government.

## **3. Implications**

3.1 **Resource:** As previously reported, no additional Scottish Government funding for keyworker childcare provision has been received. The accompanying Council report on the Review of Key Worker Childcare Hubs contains an assessment of the potential cost of securing ongoing provision through partners (were such capacity to be available) which gives a monthly cost of £0.5m per month to provide for the same capacity as has existed to date. Withdrawing the service in line with the Scottish Government's Direction will allow the Council to avoid these future costs.

3.2 **Legal:** As highlighted within the report, the proposal to withdraw the key worker childcare hubs is in line with Education Continuity (No.4) Direction, copied at Appendix 1 in the background paper section of this report.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural):** On the face of things there appears to be inequity between the withdrawal of partner centre funding on 31 July and the continuation of the Council's own provision until 10 August. However, over the summer holidays, in response to local area demand and need, the Council's own Hubs have only operated for 4 days per week, whereas children attending the partner centres have been offered 5 days per week. The additional 5 days offered by Council run centres for 3-10 August would therefore help to equalise the number of days offered in total.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** No implications to highlight.

3.5 **Risk:** A sudden recrudescence of the COVID-19 outbreak could result in a postponement of the re-opening of schools, and a consequent Direction from Ministers to continue with the provision of key worker childcare.

3.6 **Gaelic:** No specific implications to highlight.

## **4. Context and Current Position**

4.1 The accompanying report "Review of Key Worker Childcare Provision in Highland" provides the full context and background to how the Council responded to the need to provide care for the children of key workers.

## **5. Conclusions and Next Steps**

5.1 Most parents whose children attend partner providers are aware that the funded places will no longer be available after 31 July. Partner centres were also made

aware of the content of this report after it appeared on the website. Subject to the Council's agreement of this paper, managers of partner centres will be asked to again advise their parents of the position, to make sure everyone is clear. Managers of the Council run hubs will notify parents that the key worker childcare service will be withdrawn on 6 August.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning

Date: 23 July 2020

Author: Ian Jackson, Education Officer (Resources)

**Appendices:**

[Appendix 1](#) Educational Continuity (No.4) Direction given under paragraph 11(1) of schedule 17 (Temporary Continuity Directions etc: Education, Training and Childcare: Scotland) of the Coronavirus Act 2020

[Appendix 2](#) Educational Continuity (No.4) Direction, 22 July 2020: Guidance note

[Appendix 3](#) Letter from Deputy First Minister – COVID-19 response – Critical Childcare Update