



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 10 JUNE 2025
VIA HYBRID MEETING FACILITY**

Committee Members Present:

Councillor Bruce
Councillor Bennett
Councillor Dugdale – Convener
Councillor Findlay
Councillor Gilbert
Councillor Hampshire
Councillor McFarlane
Councillor McIntosh
Councillor Menzies
Councillor Ritchie
Councillor Yorkston
Mr S Gilmour-Jack
Rev D Hamilton
Rev J Sheridan

Council Officials Present:

Ms N McDowell, Head of Education
Ms L Byrne, Head of Children's Services
Ms A Hood, Team Manager, Education & Employability
Mr N Trussler, Quality Improvement Officer – Education
Ms J Boyle, Quality Improvement Manager for Equity and Inclusion
Ms A Ingham, Education Support Officer
Ms K Weir, Senior Officer, Early Years
Ms A Cameron, Service Manager – Early Years and Childcare
Ms B Skirrow, Principal Officer – Education Service
Ms J Allen, Communications Adviser
Mr A Stewart, Quality Improvement Officer – SEIC
Ms A Harrison, Principal Education Psychologist

Teachers Present:

N/A

Pupils Present:

Finlay Thomson – Dunbar Grammar School
Lynette Bell – Dunbar Grammar School
Amy Chatwin – Preston Lodge High School
Delta Sym – Preston Lodge High School

Others Present:

Lynsey Davidson – Skills Development Scotland

Clerk:

Ms M Scott
Ms E Barclay

Other Elected Members present:

N/A

Apologies:

Councillor Trotter

Declarations of Interest:

None

Prior to the commencement of business, the Clerk advised that the meeting was being held using the Council's hybrid system and that the meeting would be recorded and live streamed; and that it would be made available via the Council's website as a webcast, in order to allow public access to the democratic process in East Lothian. She stated that the Council is the data controller under the Data Protection Act 2018; that data collected as part of the recording would be retained in accordance with the Council's policy on record retention; and that the webcast of the meeting would be publicly available for up to five years from the date of the meeting.

The Clerk recorded attendance of committee members by roll call.

Councillor Dugdale welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Education and Children's Services Committee, particularly welcoming Reverend Douglas Hamilton, the new religious rep from the Church of Scotland, Lynsey Davidson attending from Skills Development Scotland and pupils from Dunbar Grammar and Preston Lodge High Schools, Finlay, Lynette, Amy and Delta.

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON 18 MARCH 2025

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting of 18 March 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

2. SCHOOL UNIFORM GUIDANCE

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to allow the S2 and S3 stakeholder group to outline their school uniform proposals based on Scottish Government Guidance, and their consultation process and to note the East Lothian School Uniform Guidance (appendix 1) created by East Lothian pupils in consultation with a range of stakeholders and based on Scottish Government Guidance.

Ms Abby Ingham, Education Support Officer reported this guidance was created in response to the Scottish Government's School Uniform and Clothing Guidance for Schools and Education Authorities 2024 paper and in light of the UNCRC Incorporation Scotland Act 2024. She set out the purpose of the guidance and highlighted the focus on promoting attendance and inclusion in school through fair and equitable dress code which adhered to the principles of GIRFEC. Ms Ingham outlined the consultation process which was extensive and included pupils from every school in East Lothian

who agreed on principles; Affordable, Comfortable, Inclusive, Equitable, Practical and Sustainable. She stated if approved the guidance would be released in August 2025 with schools using it whenever they are creating or updating their own uniform guidance. Ms Ingham drew Members' attention to section 5 of the report which contained a table schools would use in consultation with the whole school community to ensure all issues raised under the agreed principles were addressed and planned for. She added the challenge questions came from the Scottish Government guidance and the ideas of children and young people who helped to create the document. Ms Ingham thanked the children and young people of East Lothian who worked together to create the guidance and found their hard work, insights and desire to contribute to their school communities inspiring.

Responding to questions from Councillor Gilbert, Amy explained it was felt important for pupils to be involved in the decisions made as they know from personal experience of wearing the uniform what changes would be welcomed, Ms Ingham hoped the guidance was supportive of the six principles as it was clear and provided challenge questions to consider all ideas so they could adapt that to suit what works best for them. Lynette stated that she believed the new uniform guidance would help attendance and not cause a barrier as it was more comfortable, especially for pupils with sensory issues. Delta stated exceptions could be made for personal circumstances and also provided information on the preloved uniform options available within schools which was all free for pupils to collect. Ms Ingham explained this guidance was for schools to use when they were updating or creating new guidance, and it was agreed with pupils that this guidance shouldn't be updated too frequently so parents and carers are able to have one clear set of guidance to follow.

Councillor Hampshire asked why what pupils wore to school made such a difference to their school experience. Lynette stated being in school uniform can cause severe discomfort for some pupils due to health conditions and also some pupils do not feel comfortable changing within changing rooms for PE classes as they are cramped and busy. She said school uniform should be something comfortable and practical for that specific day at school.

Councillor McIntosh asked what balance was given between a school uniform and young people being able to express their individuality. Finlay confirmed that topic came up during discussions and it was agreed a general policy could be reached allowing flexibility between schools. Amy stated being able to still express yourself seemed to depend on the school as at Preston Lodge it was not mandatory to wear a jumper with the school logo, but this was the case at some other schools.

Pupils continued to answer questions from Members. Lynette explained schools want to implement a form of uniform policy to prepare pupils for future career environments, but they wanted to ensure it was affordable and practical for everyone. Delta stated her primary school uniform was very relaxed compared with high school and Lynette found the material of primary school clothes better with more range and adaptability. Finlay made Members aware it wasn't well known between pupils that there was a grant for uniform, but he felt a lot of pupils would feel comfortable speaking to their parents to receive this if it was required and Delta shared information on the pre-loved uniform stating it was mentioned in the weekly school newsletter and could be claimed anonymously through one teacher and did not have to be done through parents.

Councillor Menzies asked what the Council was doing to encourage more schools to ensure pre-loved items were an option and how could Members help facilitate that more. Ms Ingham stated this guidance referenced pre-loved items of clothing and

wanting schools to consider that when they are thinking about uniform policy. She also highlighted the work being done on the cost of the school day.

Responding to a follow up question from Councillor Menzies, Amy said she would like the policy to be rolled out as soon as possible with Lynette explaining Dunbar Grammar had just implemented a new uniform policy and some students could be buying these new clothes that it would be helpful to look at what schools have just introduced new policies recently and create timelines based on that to allow newly purchased clothes to be worn down first. Ms Ingham echoed Lynette's point and confirmed reasonable timeframes would be set out with each school. Ms McDowell added that as the young people present today represented themselves so well at Committee, she would like to invite them to also present to Head Teachers as the more young people's voices are heard, the more influence they can have on decisions being made within their schools.

Councillor Ritchie asked how all the information from different schools was pulled together to form the guidance presented today. Lynette confirmed there were different opinions raised from different schools, but they used mind maps to look at those differences and similarities to come to a final decision.

Councillor Menzies thanked Ms Ingham for her report and Lynette, Finlay, Amy and Delta for their help with the report and for attending Committee. She stated their insight proved why we should have the voices of young people in every decision for young people and made the pupils aware they had advocated for there to be pupil voice within every school.

Councillor Hampshire stated young people being involved in the consultation and decision about uniform would make it stronger and he hoped Head Teachers would appreciate the work that had been done by those young people.

Councillor Ritchie said as she regularly asks about UNCRC; it was great to see it in action and she was very grateful to staff, officers, teachers and the young people who helped facilitate this guidance.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Ingham for her work on this report and stated it was the first time young people had brought their own paper and answered questions at Committee. She thanked the pupils for their work and consultation that they had done across all schools to arrive at this guidance and highlight the importance of pupil voice. Councillor Dugdale noted she was really impressed by the depth and consideration given to all sorts of aspects of uniform and was really interested to see affordability and comfort being the two highest priorities. She noted the importance of further discussions on where the views and voices of young people can be incorporated into the work of this committee.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

Note the East Lothian School Uniform Guidance (appendix 1) created by East Lothian pupils in consultation with a range of stakeholders and based on Scottish Government Guidance.

3. NATIONAL THEMATIC INSPECTION

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to inform the Education and Children's Services Committee of the findings and recommendations of the East Lothian Thematic Inspection and the National Thematic Inspection of Local Authorities by Education Scotland.

Nicola McDowell, Head of Education, reported in June 2024 His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education announced a National Thematic Inspection of Local Authorities in Scotland, the focus of which was how local authorities support schools to continue to improve. Inspectors visited all 32 local authorities to learn what was working well, challenges and improvements that needed to be addressed to ensure effectiveness across Scotland. She drew Members' attention to section 3.4 of the report which detailed the visits to local authorities, the engagement with senior officers and central teams to hear about local priorities and approaches to quality assurance and school improvement. There was also engagement with head teachers, school leaders, teachers, representatives of professional associations, elected members and chairs of parent councils. Ms McDowell noted there was no engagement with children or people in any authority and early years was not a focus of the inspection. She also highlighted the recommendations from the National Report and the specific finds and recommendations for East Lothian.

Ms McDowell reported she was delighted East Lothian had been recognised for two specific practices that inspectors thought were worth sharing more widely; self-improving schools and quality assurance of child protection and safeguarding. She also noted the areas for improvement; enhanced evaluative writing skills for head teachers and precision and targeted support for schools where attainment is not yet strong enough. Ms McDowell made Members aware that the school visit programme for 25/26 had now been strengthened to ensure more support for those schools requiring improvement and school reviews would be more targeted to need.

Ms McDowell provided comparative analysis of East Lothian versus national findings and shared challenges in education authorities across Scotland, the main concern being budget cuts and fiscal challenges.

Councillor Hampshire asked how we were going to be able to meet the noted improvement challenges with the financial constraints the Council was facing. Ms McDowell confirmed the fiscal challenges were taken into account and the team have made sure that planning was proportionate to the budget they have. She noted the evaluative writing was done through the South East Improvement Collaborative which upskilled the central team to be able to support schools and they were working with resources they had and building on their own capacity within their team to deliver rather than looking out with the out with the authority at extra cost. Ms McDowell confirmed the Quality Improvement Officers were changing the way they worked to take recommendations into consideration and were looking at a programme of RAGing schools so they can target their time more appropriately.

Responding to a question from Councillor Bruce, Ms McDowell stated there was a very comprehensive system of reviewing schools which had now been done at every school in East Lothian. She said this would allow for a far more proportionate approach to how thematic reviews were done in the future and to target supports. Ms McDowell confirmed the evaluative writing training that was delivered to head teachers would form part of the self-improving school system.

Councillor McFarlane asked if there would be further local authority inspections. Ms McDowell stated we were awaiting further information from Education Scotland as they were working with ADES and Scottish Government to look at what further inspections of local authorities would look like. She added that she welcomed further inspections as the feedback allows us to continue to improve and, in the meantime, East Lothian would continue to work with their quad group of Argyle and Bute, Moray and Angus Councils to work collaboratively to support and challenge each other.

Responding to a question from Councillor McIntosh, Ms McDowell explained the support of Quality Improvement Officers and Education Support Officers had an impact on attainment and achievement as they use equity trackers and discussions with Head Teachers to focus on the young people who may not be attending school or achieving, for whatever reason. She added this report focused on the work of the central team and senior leaders in schools to support and challenge each other to continue to improve.

In a follow up question, Councillor McIntosh asked how the recommendation of improving the evaluative writing for Head Teachers would improve the learning environment for children. Ms McDowell explained the evaluative writing would support Head Teachers to make sure they have measurable outcomes in their improvement priorities to drill down into that exactly needs to improve in our schools to improve the outcomes of our young people. She added they would look specifically at the attainment data at different levels and stages within schools and at different targeted groups to make sure they have a measurable outcome and can challenge each other on a regular basis to make sure these are achieved at the end of the year.

Ms McDowell continued to answer questions from Members. She provided information on the level of resource it took for inspections to be completed and confirmed when further information was provided to her from Education Scotland this would be shared at Committee. Ms McDowell also made Members aware that pupil leadership groups were a part of many East Lothian schools and pupil voice would continue to be a priority within improvement plans. She highlighted work was being done by Education Scotland on how to share best practice across Scotland. She was confident East Lothian had a very good cross-section of Head Teachers represented as associate assessors.

Councillor Ritchie commented it was reassuring to hear there were no surprises within the report, that teams were all working on improvements and there was capacity within teams to take those improvements forward. She added this showed our self-evaluation was where it needed to be and thanked all staff who were involved in the inspections.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms McDowell for her report, all staff, parents and carers who contributed to the inspection and highlighted the two practices inspectors shared more widely. She felt reassured that the areas highlighted for improvement had already been acted on and thanked staff responsible for this. Councillor Dugdale drew out comments from inspectors on the strong collaborative relationships between school leaders and local authority officers which was built on mutual trust and respect.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i. Note the findings and recommendations of the East Lothian specific Thematic Inspection (appendix 1) and the National Thematic Inspection of Local Authorities by Education Scotland (appendix 2).

- ii. Note the actions taken with regards to the recommendations made.
- iii. Note the comparison between the national and local findings.
- iv. Note that East Lothian's Self-Improving Schools System has been cited in the National report as an example of good practice.

4. RAISING ATTAINMENT UPDATE

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to update the Committee on the progress towards raising attainment for all learners and closing the gap for the most disadvantaged children and young people.

Mr Alistair Stewart, Quality Improvement Officer (Secondary) drew Members' attention to the key strategic action in the creation of Principal Teachers of Equity which began on a pilot basis in 2023/2 and under the joint leadership of Head Teachers and the Quality Improvement Manager of Equity and Inclusion they have been identified as a key driver for improvement during annual secondary attainment reviews. These Principal Teachers track, monitor and identify interventions for young people impacted by poverty and care experienced young people and now had access to monthly equity trackers to target interventions to ensure senior phase learners most at risk could be found and supported and noted further improvements had been made with data support extended to include centrally provided in year tracking tools for all secondary schools covering broad general education as well as the senior phase. He highlighted the key successes, summary of progress and next steps and drew Members' attention to progress made in P1, P4 and P7 numeracy and noted East Lothian Council's back to basics approach with excellent learning, teaching and assessment identified as a key lever for raising attainment. Mr Stewart provided information on the Q1, Q5 attainment gap and steps being taken to identify solutions in those areas to ensure all learners left school with at least five qualifications however it was advised that caution is made with regards to those effected by the amendments to assessments caused by COVID. He noted East Lothian Council's continued work to ensure care experienced young people were supported to achieve therefore this cohort was tracked separately.

Councillor Yorkston asked what actions were going to be taken to reduce the poverty related attainment gap within literacy. Mr Stewart stated there had been improvements achieved in attainment in P1, P4 and P7 combined and also made within S3 achievement of third level. He added the service continued to focus on the learning, teaching and assessment through the use of the literacy strategy, laying foundations for future achievement of SCQF Level 5, utilising tracking and monitoring systems and ensuring that data was used to better effect and targeting resources. In addition schools were also working to ensure a positive presentation policy was taken to ensure young people were recognised at the highest level of their potential attainment.

Responding to a questions from Councillor McIntosh, Mr Stewart stated over the last three years there was no correlation between attainment results and the leavers date however he believed she was right to note the impact of COVID on the cohort as they progress through school. He added the best approach was to have accurate data to know young people on an individual level to ensure we are getting it right for every child and he noted data had been enhanced to ensure there was an accurate picture of learners' progress. He highlighted the Positive School Leaver Destinations report was following on the agenda which would answer Councillor McIntosh's questions regarding positive progress made by young people after leaving school. He added in his role he worked alongside East Lothian Works looking at transitions and recently a review was carried out on the 16 plus awards which showed areas of very strong

practice but also areas that can be improved upon. Alison Hood, Team Manager – Education and Employability added that EL Works had a dedicated school to college transitions officer who worked with pupils pre-identified by the school, to support a successful transition to college. She noted work was also being done with Edinburgh College, Skills Development Scotland and their career advisors to ensure that transitions are sustained, and young people can move onward to a positive destination.

Mr Stewart continued to answer questions from Members, providing information on the approaches used to ensure improvement of attainment outcomes for care experienced leavers and how regular planned approaches of reviewing data allowed for the support and challenge of secondary schools. He also made Members aware of the collaborative work of the Principal Teachers of Equity to lead sessions and share good practice. Mr Stewart confirmed data showed there was a correlation with regards to attainment and deprivation however the attainment gap referred to quintile one versus quintile five, so the intention was not to raise attainment at a whole level for all learners but to ensure greater progress for those who are in the lower Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Councillor Menzies was heartened to hear about the work going on and see great strides in some areas. She suggested the introduction of an information tracker to prevent further full reports having to be submitted to Committee to free up some time for officers.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Mr Stewart for his report and highlighted the importance of responding to data on attainment which shows we are making progress on closing the attainment gap. She acknowledged the challenges children faced at important stages in their development and education due to restrictions in response to the pandemic and the importance of closing the poverty related attainment gap. Councillor Dugdale added officers were going all they can to implement interventions to give every child and young person the support and confidence to flourish and thrive.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

Note the progress and next steps identified towards raising attainment for all learners and closing the poverty related attainment gap and the data summary of key measures provided in appendix 1.

5. POSITIVE SCHOOL LEAVER DESTINATIONS 2023/24

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to update the Committee on the current School Leaver Destination Return report (SLDR) and Participation Measure, including an overview of the interventions implemented to sustain and improve East Lothian Council (ELC) positive destinations.

Alison Hood, Team Manager – Education and Employability provided Members with information on the positive destinations of school leavers between winter 2023 and summer 2022 and noted East Lothian's participation measure decreased to 94.6% but remained above the national average of 92.7%. She highlighted a reduction in the gap between most and least deprived areas and an increase in positive statuses across all age ranges from 16 to 19.

Lynsey Davidson, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) provided highlights of the 2023/24 academic year which included the highest return of school leavers in the past five years, the highest levels of young people entering Higher Education and Training in the past three years, above national average levels of young people entering employment as an initial destination and an increase in 'unemployed not seeking' young people from 14 to 37. She also informed Members of the 2024 highlights of the Annual Participation Measure which included the overall 94.6% participation rate for 4612 individuals in East Lothian which was the highest rate in five years and East Lothian had less unconfirmed young people than the national average.

Responding to questions from Councillor Hampshire, Ms Hood reported in terms of tracking and monitoring of 16 year olds, there are very close connections as they have just left school but by the time young people reach 18 or 19, they could have had multiple transitions in and out of work. She added this cohort was further complicated as anyone claiming Universal Credit would be recorded as a claimant but may have had periods of employment whilst being in receipt of Universal Credit. It was fair to say statistics for that age group were harder to unpack. Ms Hood also provided information on work being done by the Local Employability Partnership to look at external grant funding that comes into East Lothian to best support young people into employment.

Councillor Yorkston asked how the external funds were being used to support employability not just for school leavers especially given the financial constraints the Council was facing. Ms Hood reported that the Bridges Project in Musselburgh, Interwork, the Amisfield Preservation Trust and Heavy Sound had all received grant funding. Funding for painting and exploring the arts was also used as a therapeutic intervention for individuals who are not ready to enter the workplace and require additional support to build skills such as self-confidence and self-worth. She added they continued to look at key performance indicators, data through the SDS portal and DWP to ensure the services we procured were meeting the needs and aligned with labour market intelligence.

Responding to a question from Councillor McIntosh, Ms Hood stated the work of East Lothian Works and Skills Development Scotland was not time limited so both services would work indefinitely with individuals, assuming they wished to continue engaging. She added that all participants had personal plans which were worked up between the designated officers from retrospective organisations and the client themselves. Ms Hood reported EL Works used a management information system called Helix, which covered the whole of the south east region, to track individuals if they move geographic area and shares which employer they've gone to, the hours they are working and if they are with a real living wage or national living wage employer.

Councillor Menzies asked if we were moving away from gendered outcomes as previously there had been a tendency to look at the beauty industry for young women and construction for young men. Ms Hood did not have statistics to hand but was happy to provide them post meeting. She provided an example of work undertaken by EL Works which targeted young females to visit Torness Power Station. The visit was to showcase the sector and their apprenticeship programme. Ms Hood confirmed all those applying for spaces on EL Works managed programmes and school college partnerships courses were considered on individual suitability and not on gender.

Responding to further questions from Councillor Menzies, Ms Hood confirmed if individuals between age 16-19 were identified as not being in a positive destination, then they would be contacted by text or phone by Skills Development Scotland. If they could not be reached, then staff from EL Works and SDS would be deployed for a joint

visit to the young persons home and if they are not available then a pre-prepared letter would be dropped off. She said this approach had been really successful as it often allowed officers to meet parents who were encouraged by the support offered. Ms Hood also confirmed that both outcomes and interventions were reported to the Scottish and UK Government.

Councillor Ritchie asked how we compared national figures and if the Scottish-wide definition of a positive destination was the same as what we used locally. Ms Hood stated the definitions used in East Lothian were exactly same as the definitions used by the Scottish Government.

Responding to a second question from Councillor Ritchie, Ms Hood explained the decision making process for individuals was person-centred, so it was right for them at that point in their life and journey. She referenced the 16 plus meetings which happen at various points throughout the year across all secondary schools where multi-agencies come together to discuss individuals of particular concern. Ms Hood stated all school college partnership offers were delivered equally and equitably across the seven schools, occasionally with a pilot being trialled in one or two schools first.

Councillor Dugdale asked if Ms Davidson could expand further on the impact of poor mental health on young people who are unemployed not seeking. Ms Hood reported that statistical return of unemployed not seeking covered the economically inactive and unavailable due to health which included young people with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities or people taking time out to travel. She added they were beginning to see mental health issues in young people filter through from the pandemic which is why the strength of the 16 plus network and early identification was so important.

Councillor Hampshire welcomed an excellent report and raised the importance of giving every young person the opportunity to get into employment. He noted this was not about trying to stop people receiving benefit but instead about the great opportunity in life to find positive employment. Councillor Hampshire thanked all staff involved in this work and congratulated them on a huge achievement.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Hood and Ms Davidson for their report and recommended everyone read it as it showed the variety of opportunities and destinations for our young people. She noted the shadow of COVID showing an impact on mental health but thanked all EL Works staff and partners for their work to support young people through that and into positive destinations. Councillor Dugdale was heartened to see the number of young people engaging in Foundation Apprenticeships and highlighted the number of young people achieving awards in construction crafts with The Ridge and at Wallyford Learning Campus, the school to college partnership and the parental employability scheme. She noted it wasn't just about jobs but also about enabling young people to find areas which excite them and where they can excel which was evident with young people engaging when they were ready. Councillor Dugdale welcomed an inspirational report which she was pleased to have at Committee.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

Note the significant proactive work currently underway to support improved outcomes for learners leading to positive destinations.

6. SUSTAINABLE HOURLY RATE FOR FUNDED PROVIDERS DELIVERING EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE IN EAST LoTHIAN FOR 2025/26

A report was submitted by the Executive Director, Education and Children's Services to note the sustainable hourly rate paid by East Lothian Council to Early Learning and Childcare (EL&CC) funded providers in the private and third sector, to delivery funded early learning and childcare for 2025/26 and to agree to delegate authority to the Head of Education to review and approve future sustainable hourly rate changes.

Kelly Weir, Senior Officer – Early Years reported East Lothian Council had a legal duty to ensure that a statutory amount of early learning and child care was available for each child delivered through a variety of funded providers. She drew Members' attention to the increased rates from £8.12 to £8.42 for eligible two year olds and from £6.65 to £6.90 for three to five year olds from the 1st of April 2025 as well as a 3.75% uplift applied to the 24/25 rate to enable funded providers to pay early learning and child care workers delivering funded hours at least £12.60 per hour. Ms Weir confirmed this increase had been met from Scottish Government funding and the staff costs were assumed to account for 75% of the sustainable rate. She explained the proposed local hourly rate would be reviewed using Scottish Government and COSLA guidance using a cross data collection exercise of the current rates charged by private nursery providers and benchmarking against neighbouring local authorities. Ms Weir stated the hourly rate must be affordable and sustainable to the Council whilst enabling funded providers to pay employees the real living wage, reinvest in their service and provide high quality early learning and child care and any increase in costs would need to be met from the early years budget for 25/26 as no additional funding was available.

Councillor Hampshire asked for an indication of the non-staffing elements and asked if all of that would come from the Council's budget. Ms Weir confirmed a data collection exercise was being undertaken at the moment and as part of that providers are being asked to detail their property costs, supplies and services, admin costs and external service charges such as a care inspectorate fees. She explained this information would then be analysed along with finance colleagues to look at if an increase or change was required to the 25% of the rate. Ms Weir added when preparing the Early Years budget a slight increase was included within it in preparation for this piece of work base on the inflation rate at that time.

Responding to a question from Councillor McFarlane, Ms Alison Cameron, Service Manager – Early Years and Childcare reported they had continued to build on their relationship with the improvement service to understand the community needs, especially as being a very fast growing local authority. She confirmed East Lothian Council was absolutely committed to supporting all families and those most vulnerable as the eligibility for a two year old place was based on family income and reported in April 2025 the two year old provision was moved to the new purpose built early learning and child care setting at Rosehill Campus which allowed an increase in capacity from 10 to 20 children. Ms Cameron added there would also be capacity to support eligible two children within the new Blindwells and Craighall campuses and high quality documentation had been further developed to support consistent practice across all settings, whether local authority or funded providers which included a transition refresh to the transition documentation to better understand the two year old children within our communities to best understand their needs and actively work to support everyone family. Ms Hood explained they were working with information from the Improvement Service to identify families who are eligible and to work actively with other services such as East Lothian Works, Families Together East Lothian and Volunteer Centre East Lothian to maximise the support offered to children and families.

Councillor Bruce asked how the new sustainable rate for East Lothian compared to other local authorities. Ms Weir did not have the data for this year yet but confirmed a lot of other local authorities would be in a similar position to East Lothian and going through the same exercise. She provided data from the previous year which showed East Lothian as tenth for three to five year olds in private nurseries, seventh for eligible twos within private nurseries, eighth for three to five year olds for our child minders and fifth for our eligible two child minders and confirmed as soon as this year's data was available it would be shared with Members.

Responding to questions from Councillor Bruce, Ms Weir explained the whole rate process was under review and from 2026/27 there would be new Scottish Government Guidance. She confirmed the 75% and the 25% would be delegated to the Head of Education to allow her to make decision on an annual basis about any increase or review of the rate. Ms Cameron added that all decisions would be in conjunction with finance colleagues and the convener of the Education and Children's Services Committee.

Councillor Yorkston asked what levels of engagement had been undertaken with funded providers before reaching the sustainable rate proposed. Ms Cameron explained work started last year with finance colleagues to engage in data collection exercises as a trial to adjust and adapt and feedback to colleagues around changes to make data collection processes as realistic as possible. She added funded providers were keen to provide data as if they don't then we were not going to have a true and accurate reflection and could not keep our commitment of doing the best for children within East Lothian. Ms Cameron stated the rate had to be affordable and sustainable to the Council and to ensure our funded providers paid their employees the real living wage and reinvest in their service.

Responding to a question from Councillor Ritchie, Ms Weir stated one of the changes through the Scottish Government and COSLA have agreed that from April 2026 there can be no different rate for any funded providers, and this was already the case in East Lothian. She added a lot of focus was on private nurseries as they have higher costs, and we have to make sure it's an equal rate for everybody and last year useful information was provided from childminders so that will be continued again this year.

Councillor McIntosh asked how the current number of registered child minders compared to previous years. Ms Weir confirmed there had been a bit of movement, some child minders retiring and new ones registering so the number had remained static, but they continued to actively encourage children's minders through the onboarding process. Ms Cameron added in the last couple of weeks they had engaged with economic development to have a very clear pathway into onboarding for child minders to become early learning child care providers, so they are aware of the process and what they need to build into their business plan right from the very beginning.

Responding to a question from Councillor Menzies, Ms Cameron explained we need to ensure all of our cost collection and data measures are transparent so that we can continue feedback loops to funded providers and child minders. She added East Lothian Council was completely committed to a provider neutral service and to understand that regardless of where our children go for early learning and childcare, it has to be the very best and stated all data collection, data handling and decision making would be open and transparent.

Councillor Hampshire thanked officers for the report and highlighted the difficulties and challenge Early Years within East Lothian had faced. He stated he was comfortable

Councillor Menzies said Councillors had to be mindful that they have an obligation to the rights of staff to ensure they are being treated fairly and paid well and that by extension goes to those we contract in for services with the decision making part being part of the larger financial situation whether this was done by Councillors or officers. She added if we were unable to get good quality childcare in place then we could not have a sustainable and thriving county as parents would not be able to work there would be supporting the recommendations as it streamlined the process and made it easier for everyone concerned.

Decision

- i) Note the increase in the sustainable hourly rate paid by East Lothian Council to Early Learning and Childcare (EL&CC) funded providers in the private and third sector, to deliver funded early learning and childcare, from 1 April 2025 as per section 2.5 of the report.
- ii) Note the further local review of the sustainable rate paid by East Lothian Council to Early Learning and Childcare (EL&CC) funded providers in the private and third sector, to deliver funded early learning and childcare, by August 2025 as per section 3.6 of the report.
- iii) Agree to delegate authority to the Head of Education to review and approve future hourly rate changes (increase or decrease) up to the value of 10% in consultation with the Convener of the Education and Children's Services Committee and the Head of Finance and in line with Scottish Government and COSLA guidance. The Members Library will be updated accordingly going forward.
- iv) Note the funding commitment from Scottish Government to allow local authorities to uplist their 2024/25 rates by a minimum of 3.75% to support the financial sustainability of Early Learning and Childcare and fulfil the shared commitment to delivering Fair Work policies.

For (8): Councillors Bennett, Dugdale, Hampshire, McFarlane,
McIntosh, Menzies, Ritchie, Yorkston

Against (2): Councillors Bruce and Findlay

Abstentions (1): Councillor Gilbert

Therefore, on a majority vote, the recommendations were carried.

7. PREVENT IN EAST LoTHIAN

A report was submitted by the Executive Director – Education and Children's Services to provide information and assurance to Committee about our local processes around Prevent.

Lindsey Byrne, Head of Children's Services stated Contest was the national counterterrorism strategy which aims to reduce the risk from terrorism in the UK and Prevent was one of the four key strands with an aim to stop people being drawn into terrorism and allows agencies to intervene at the first signs that a person may be susceptible to radicalisation. She highlighted the UK wide developments in what type of interest and behaviours were now considered under Prevent and made Members aware of the East Lothian Prevent Delivery Group which oversees local implementation of the Prevent Duty for Scotland and ensure East Lothian's workforce has sufficient training in Prevent and knows how to identify someone who may be susceptible to radicalisation regardless of their beliefs or ideology. Ms Byrne noted herself as the Prevent Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for the Council and she would explore any concerns further and if appropriate would begin the referral process. She said it was important to note staff do not need to be experts in the Prevent processes as they would be fully supported. Ms Byrne made Members aware of East Lothian's well established Prevent Multi-Agency Panel Process (PMAP) which was convened, chaired and administered by Council staff and therefore must ensure there are enough senior members of staff trained and able to support the risk assessment of complex situations alongside multi-agency partners with the support of two Home Office Prevent Advisors for Scotland. She noted Prevent had become an area requiring continuous learning with regular conferences, specialist training models and national benchmarking exercises which whilst positive, could become a challenge to meet all training and development demands which balancing other public protection and service delivery requirements. Ms Byrne was confident the Council was in a strong position to respond to the developing national guidance and would continue to work with the Prevent Delivery Group to ensure tight leadership and oversight of the Prevent agenda in East Lothian.

Responding to questions from Councillor Bruce, Ms Byrne explained in the sphere of Prevent a concerning view would be someone who has a view that is considered extreme and aligned with causing significant harm as a way to further the cause of that view which would be the definition of terrorism. She added the whole purpose of risk assessment is not only understanding the person's view but also their capabilities to cause harm in order to advance it. Ms Byrne reported there were balanced systems in place to fully risk assess whether someone's views had the potential to cause significant harm to others and if they did not then it wouldn't be suitable for them to be considered under Prevent as it has a clear focus on trying to identify those who are susceptible to potential radicalisation with a view to causing harm therefore, she was confident people would not be brought into that space if it was not appropriate to do so. She also confirmed that when talking about harm this could be physical harm, mental harm or both and explained not everyone who writes something mean on social media would fall under the umbrella of Prevent as there was a distinct connection

between the persons views and behaviour and their susceptibility to be brought into terrorism as a result of views and behaviours.

Councillor Hampshire asked how we work with our teachers to ensure they are picking up anything within a class and providing advice and support to make a young person understand the direction they are moving in is wrong. Ms Byrne stated part of the issue around Prevent was that children and adults have access to really concerning spaces online with no geographical boundaries to who could be affected. She added part of the Prevent Delivery Group's focus was about ensuring everyone in East Lothian, the entire workforce, multi-agency partners and our own staff within the Council had access to a suitable level of training which is slightly different based on your level of interaction with members of the public. Ms Byrne made Members aware there had been an increase in teachers noticing things within their classrooms and having conversations with young people regarding particular interests that could be risky, therefore training was key and also making sure people know they do not need to be experts in Prevent but if there is something of note to discuss it with her or another Prevent colleague.

Responding to a question from Councillor McIntosh, Ms Byrne stated the term misogyny was aligned with some of the specific ideologies that we are concerned about, particularly the involuntary celibate movement which has extreme misogyny at its heart so even though misogyny would not be a standalone item it is certainly an undertone in some ideologies.

Councillor Gilbert asked if it was just teachers who were receiving the Prevent training or if other groups would also receive it. Ms McDowell confirmed all members of education staff have been trained on the mandatory module through LearnPro and children and young people also receive training on Prevent through the curriculum.

Responding to a question from Councillor Menzies, Ms Byrne said there was no typical background or specific ideology of people who come in to Prevent but there were commonalities such as a sense of lack of belonging, people who are struggling to find who they are but there was no specific social or economic background that would suggest they were more likely to be referred to Prevent.

Councillor Dugdale asked if East Lothian had received any additional resource by the Government to meet the demand of Prevent. Ms Byrne said there had been no additional resources within local authorities to manage this area of development, but some local authorities have created focused and dedicated Prevent posts within their teams. This is not the case in East Lothian and Prevent is managed within existing workloads and staff cohorts. She added the Government was expanding the national resource available to us with two home office advisors which was great but did generate more work in the Prevent area.

Councillor Hampshire commented that although terrorism is not something that is thought about daily in East Lothian the threat of it was growing across the UK every year and as a Council, we have a duty to make sure staff are as well prepared as possible and to look out for any situations that could arise within East Lothian.

Councillor Dugdale thanked Ms Byrne for the report and for the collaborative work across a number of agencies and was reassured that the Home Office Prevent Advisors had observed East Lothian Prevent as a multi-agency panel and provided positive feedback. She highlighted the importance of knowing who to report concerns to reassured by the training and support for staff across the Council and schools to ensure everyone can be vigilant.

Decision

The Committee agreed to:

- i) Note the content of the report.
- ii) Note the confidence in our multi-agency processes to support people who may be susceptible to radicalisation.

Signed

Councillor Fiona Dugdale
Convener of the Education & Children's Services Committee