

Where's my Nursery place ?



FAIR FUNDING FOR OUR KIDS REPORT

DELIVERY OF 600 HRS OF FREE EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE TO 3-5 YEAR OLDS IN 2015/16

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Scottish Government increased the entitlement to free childcare for 3-5 year olds from 475 to 600 free hours per year. One of the [key aims](#) of the policy was to

“support parents to work, train or study, especially those who need routes into sustainable employment and out of poverty.”

The Fair Funding for our Kids campaign was set up in 2014 by parents frustrated at being unable to access their entitlement. Many of us found that local authorities would only offer us half day places at council nurseries, and would not allow us to pay for our child to remain at that nursery for the rest of the day. This is an impossible situation for many working parents. Many of us also found that, while we could place our children in private nurseries which would take care of them for the full day, local authorities were not always prepared to fund these places, even where the nurseries were in partnership with the local authorities.

Last year we carried out our first survey of local authorities, to establish the scale of the problems. We have repeated this work in 2015/16 and found that things are little better.

KEY POINTS

- 73% of all free childcare places for 3-5 year olds in Scotland were offered in council run nurseries.
- 89% of all council nursery places for 3-5 year olds were half days only
- 65% of **all** nursery places in Scotland were half days only
- Local authorities in Scotland are underfunding places in private nurseries by up to £492 per child
- 25 of Scotland's 32 local authorities were offering an hourly rate below the national average cost of a nursery place
- Near total lack of data on children attending formal childcare settings but not accessing their entitlement makes it impossible to judge the success of the policy.

METHODOLOGY

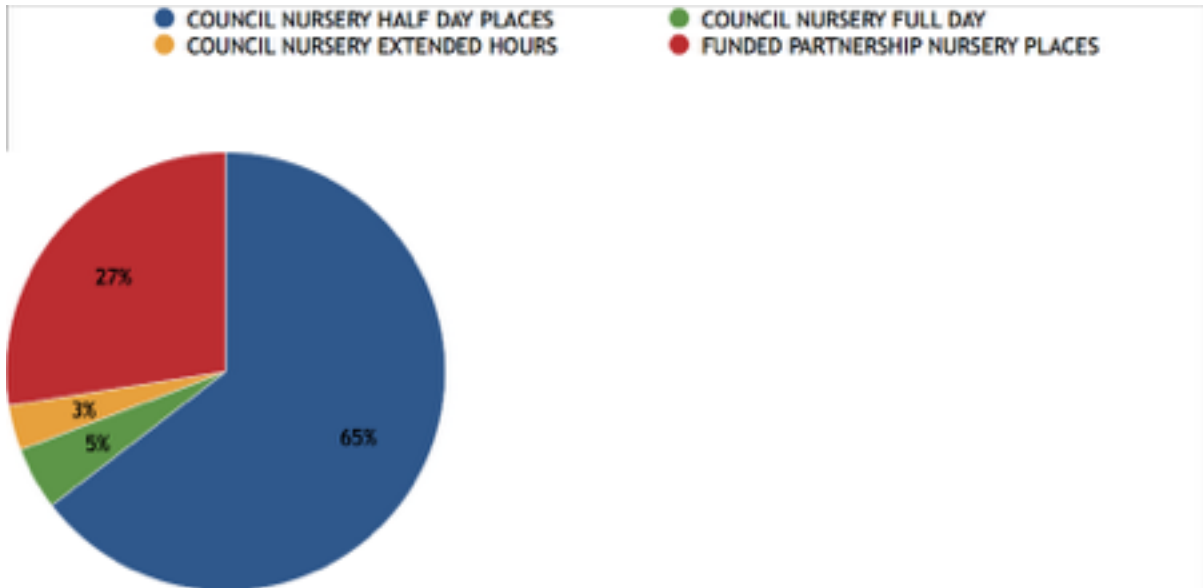
We submitted Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) to all 32 of Scotland's local authorities on 22 June 2016. There is a legal time limit of twenty working days to respond to FOI requests, so responses were due by 21st July. We began analysing responses on 2 August, by which point two local authorities (Highland and North Lanarkshire) had not replied.

MODELS OF PROVISION

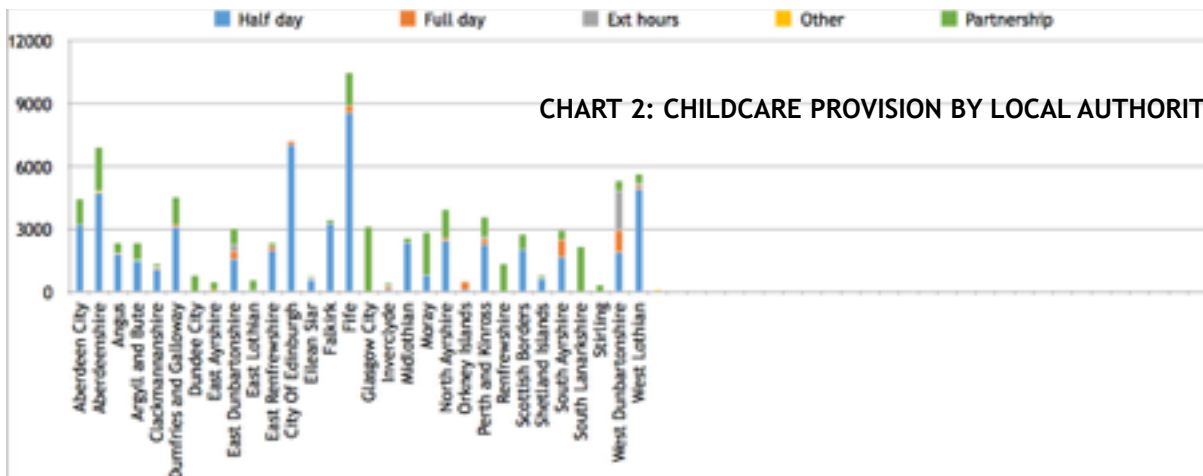
Our research has found that in 2015/16, almost three-quarters of Early Years and Childcare places made available in Scotland were offered in council-run nurseries: the same result we found last year. Almost 90% of council nursery places were daily 3 hour 10 minute sessions (a slight improvement on last year, when 95% of council places were offered on this basis). Parents do not normally have the option of paying for their child to remain at the same nursery for the rest of the day. This means that the majority of parents are being offered just over 3 hours of childcare per day, which offers little or no useful support.

As a result, most parents who work, train or study must go to the private sector to find full day childcare. All local authorities pay for funded sessions in Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) nurseries with whom they have entered into a partnership agreement. These settings can offer flexible childcare that meets working family's needs, but only around a quarter of all Government funded childcare places were made available in partnership settings. Again, this figure is the same as last year.

CHART 1: CHILDCARE PROVISION ACROSS SCOTLAND



(Please note: Three local authorities (Dundee City, Glasgow and Renfrewshire) did not have sufficient data to give a breakdown of models of council provision. These local authorities were not included in the pie chart data).



UNDERFUNDING OF PARTNERSHIP PLACES

Each local authority in Scotland sets its own rate for the value of a funded partnership place.

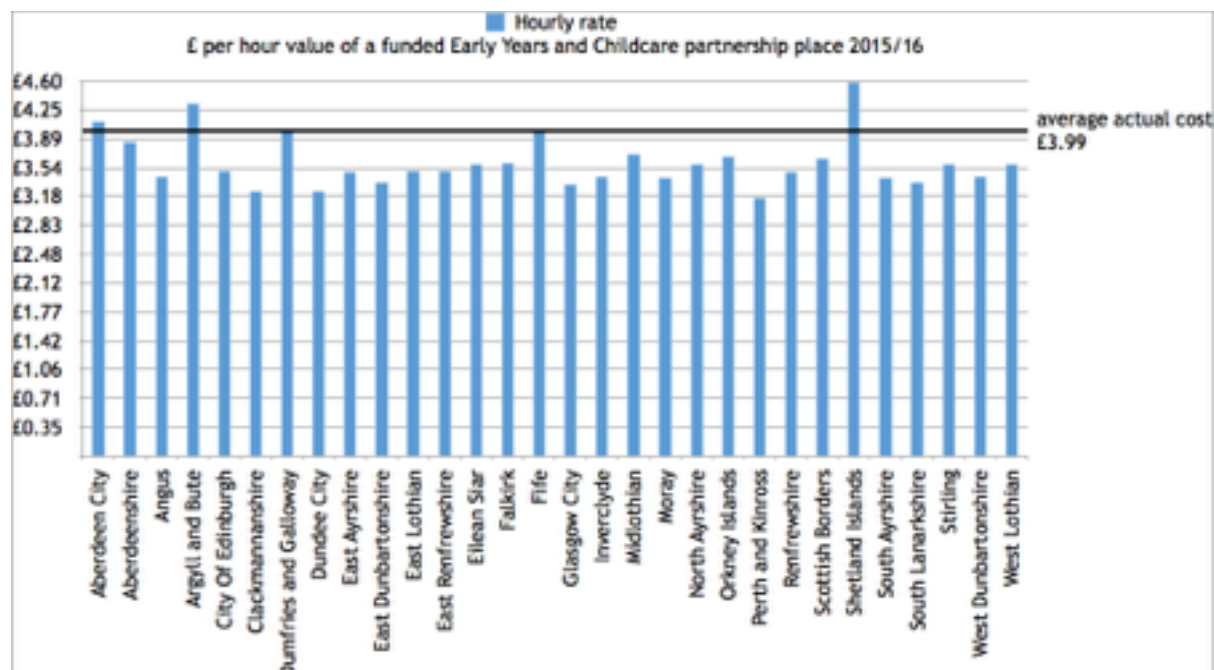
The national average rate for a nursery place for over 2s in Scotland, according to the Family And Childcare Trust’s annual Childcare Costs Survey 2015¹, was £3.99 per hour.

¹ Family and Childcare Trust, [Childcare Cost Survey](#), 2015

Our FOI requests have revealed that 25 of Scotland's 32 local authorities are offering an hourly rate below the national average cost.

The worst performing local authority in this regard was Perth and Kinross where a funded partnership place was valued at £1902 for 600 hours compared to the Family and Childcare Trust's reported national average of £2394: underfunding of £492 per child per annum. Glasgow paid the fourth lowest rate, at £3.33 per hour.

Just five local authorities paid more than the national average rate: Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Aberdeen City, Argyll and Bute and Shetland Islands.



LACK OF DATA ON CHILDREN UNABLE TO ACCESS THEIR ENTITLEMENT

Our FOI requests have revealed that at least three out of Scotland's 32 local authorities are restricting the number of funded places they will provide in their partnership settings, regardless of how many children are in attendance. They are:

East Lothian, West Lothian and East Dunbartonshire.

It should be noted that in last year's report, six local authorities said they capped places: Glasgow, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire and Stirling all did so. East Dunbartonshire did not cap last year but reports doing so this year.

But there is something of a mystery here. Glasgow City Council clearly stated in its FOI response that it funds all 3-5s within its boundaries. But several Fair Funding for our Kids members and supporters have found that their child's partnership nursery in Glasgow has not been awarded sufficient funding for all the children attending. And in a recent Fair Funding survey of partnership nurseries in Glasgow, 85% reported that their funding for partnership places had been capped. That sur-

vey also found that nurseries in West Lothian have to cap places: for example, one nursery had 60 eligible children but only 28 places.

We therefore doubt the accuracy of Glasgow City Council's claim not to cap partnership places.

Katherine's story

I live in East Lothian and enrolled my twin girls into a local partnership nursery to start in September prior to them turning three in October. I was aware of the funded places and we had worked out our family finances accordingly. The nursery fees were just affordable. The month before the girls started we received a letter from the nursery informing us that places in partnership nurseries were to be capped and the nursery would pro-rata the allocated hours between all children. So instead of 16 hours a week for both children I received six hours. I had no idea where to turn to for help. Luckily we had grandparents living relatively close by to plug the gap. Other parents simply had to not take up the place and did not return to work as planned.

Lorraine's story

I live in Glasgow and have a 5 year old and a 3 year old. I work full time and have been told the only childcare the council can offer me is nine funded hours per week at a private nursery for my eldest. If I didn't work, I could access the full 16 hours a week.

I can't leave work during the day to take my child to another nursery, and I don't think I should have to: he'd be leaving the environment and relationships he's built up just to chase the funding we're supposed to be entitled to.

It's infuriating that my children can't receive the hours they are entitled to because they come from a working family. My weekly bill for 3 days is £170 and I get refunded by 9 hours every quarter: the funding is not guaranteed for the full year.

The council have already told me I wouldn't qualify for a place in a council nursery because I am not a priority case.

We do not have such detailed information about other local authority areas, but we know that partnership places are being capped in other areas from the first-hand experience of parents who contact us looking for help. We think the Scottish Government should endeavour to find out the exact scale of the problem.

Children attending PVI settings outwith the partnership scheme are also unable to access their entitlement to 600 free hours of childcare. FOI requests have revealed that none of Scotland's local authorities hold any data on eligible children attending Care Inspectorate registered childcare settings who are not in partnership with their local authority. This situation is unchanged since last year.

Without this data, it is impossible to assess the number of children whose parents/carers are paying for formal childcare but who are not able to access the financial support that the Government has promised them.

CONCLUSION

Although the promise of free childcare hours is welcome, this policy is failing in one of its primary aims; to support parents into work or training and provide a route out of unemployment and poverty.

For parents who cannot afford the high cost of private childcare, the half day sessions available in council nurseries are often their only available option. Rather than supporting parents into employment, this model of provision simply becomes another barrier to work: few of us can find a job that will fit around three hours and ten minutes of childcare per day.

We call on the Scottish Government to work with all local authorities to create a genuinely flexible system of national childcare, that will work for all parents and children.