

# HARKINS

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## **CHANGE Evaluation – Year Three**

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Prepared for:

Glasgow Centre for Population Health

# Chapter 1 Background and methodology

## Background and context

### Context

The Scottish Government's policy 'A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland' outlines their vision for expansion that will almost double entitlement to free early learning and childcare (ELC) to 1,140 hours per year by 2020 for all three- and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds. The entitlement of 1,140 hours ELC equates to approximately 23 hours of preschool nursery provision per week based on an average 50 weeks per year. This extended provision is being rolled out in the CHANGE area through the course of 2019, with a deadline of August 2020 for full implementation.

This policy creates important context for the current evaluation, and for the sector as a whole given the level of change required for its implementation which is a key focus for all childcare providers. A significant increase in the workforce will be required which is already leading to staff shortages in the private sector, as staff move to local authority establishments which tend to offer more favourable pay and conditions.

### CHANGE project

CHANGE: Childcare and Nurture Glasgow East, is a three-year project working to create better childcare for communities in the east of Glasgow. Initially funded from 2016 to 2019, the project received funding for a further year of work meaning it will now complete in September 2020.

CHANGE is based on the premise that good quality, flexible, affordable childcare services, when delivered as part of a wider engagement with families and communities, can help to mitigate the impacts of deprivation and build foundations and resilience that support children for life; while recognising that the provision of affordable, accessible childcare in the local area often does not meet families' needs. Therefore, based on building relationships with families and services, CHANGE seeks, over the funding period to improve family wellbeing, increase access to and uptake of childcare places and enhance opportunities for families.

The geographical area covered by CHANGE is Calton & Bridgeton, Parkhead & Dalmarnock and (the majority of) the Tollcross & West Shettleston neighbourhoods. It is estimated that there are approximately 6,100 children aged 0-12 years old in the project area.

The project is led by Children in Scotland and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. Partners include Glasgow City Council with the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) acting as the evaluation partner.

### Project purpose and outcomes

The principal purpose of the CHANGE project is to develop and implement a sustainably funded approach to the delivery of childcare services that focuses on families and the local area. To achieve this, the project aims to deliver:

- accurate assessment of current childcare provision, and unmet need and demand, using appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods
- meaningful engagement and relationship building with local families and community-based organisations
- creation and implementation of a model that supports additional flexible, affordable opportunities for 0-12 year olds in the programme area
- creation of local opportunities that impact on life circumstances, including meaningful employment.

Longer-term outcomes are as follows:

- A new innovative sustainable childcare model in the local area based on meaningful community engagement.
- Improved experience of and access to childcare in the project area.
- Families exposed to the project feeling more supported.
- Local economic benefits.
- Increased knowledge and awareness of what works and why, in providing ELC services across different communities.

The CHANGE project also aspires to share its childcare model, for it to be adapted and applied in other communities in Scotland.

### Year one CHANGE evaluation

A mixed method evaluation was conducted at the end of year one consisting of three interrelated approaches including profiling the CHANGE area and summarising childcare provision alongside primary research with parents/carers and professionals. Key results were as follows.

- The profiling exercise highlighted that the project area remained one of the most deprived in Scotland, with people experiencing challenging life circumstances in relation to their physical, social and economic environment and their health and wellbeing as compared with the rest of Glasgow. The exercise also indicated that, at the end of October 2017, less than 50% of four-year-olds from the overall project area had a place in a local nursery or out-of-school care service, with it being unclear to what extent formal childcare services are being supplemented by less formal provision.
- Primary research with parents and carers indicated that the majority of respondents' children attended nursery, with parents/carers who used childcare generally utilising a mixture of formal and informal provision. Nurseries were the most common form of childcare for preschool children, with formal childcare for school-age children often posing a problem, with limited availability. Free childcare was welcomed by the participating parents/carers, although the current entitlement of 16 hours per week was not always enough for working parents/carers. Parents/carers wanted better, clearer information regarding availability of childcare and how their nursery entitlement worked. Flexibility in operating hours, as well as an ability to cater for children with additional support needs, were also highlighted by parents as essential, but lacking.
- The primary research with professionals highlighted accessibility of early learning and childcare, particularly in monetary terms (affordability). It was generally agreed that the number of local nursery places was too low to meet demand, and that engagement with parents/families would be a crucial step in ascertaining views on what the new childcare model should look like, as well as part of a model of wider family support based on established trusting relationships.

Recommendations from the primary research included the following:

- It was recommended that there should be a general increase in the availability of affordable, flexible, formal childcare to reflect the most common work patterns of parents/carers. In particular, an increase in local authority nursery and OSC places.
- It was recommended that there should be an increase both in the number of dedicated childcare establishments for children with additional support needs providing nursery and OSC places, and in the number of dedicated and properly trained staff for children with additional support needs in mainstream childcare organisations.
- It was recommended that parents/carers should be provided with clear and accessible guidelines on entitlement to childcare provision, different types of childcare provision available in the area, and guidance on applying for childcare places.
- It was recommended that consideration should be given to the introduction of "drop-off" centres for short term care for example, while the parent attends medical appointments.

## **Year three evaluation**

Harkins Research & Consultancy Ltd was commissioned to conduct a qualitative research study which formed part of the evaluation for year three of the CHANGE project.

### **Research questions**

The evaluation sought to address the following:

- What are parent/carer perceptions of the benefits/dis-benefits of engaging with ELC provision in a setting that offers extended hours as a trial for ELC expansion?
- Does an iterative, networking approach, increased service flexibility and redesign of childcare services confer wider community benefits for local people and for businesses such as increased social, recreational and economic opportunities?
- What difference is it envisaged that the establishment of a community Hub (the CHANGE Hub) will make to the provision of childcare locally, for children aged between 0 and 12?

### **Methodology and demographics**

The CHANGE project year three evaluation involved qualitative research and observational work with parents/carers, childcare staff and stakeholders. Topic guides approved by the research steering group were used for the research. The fieldwork took place between May and July 2019.

#### **Research within a setting offering extended hours as a trial for ELC expansion**

The impending ELC expansion provides a significant challenge for the sector, and an important context for the environment in which the CHANGE project operates. The research involved observational case studies in two settings offering extended hours to capture this context and key learning. It should be noted that most of this observational research took place in one setting, with a second setting included to validate findings. As such, discussion in relation to details of the environment, staff and challenges faced relate to the primary setting.

Qualitative research was conducted with 24 parents and carers involving 18 depth interviews (undertaken via telephone or face-to-face) and three paired in-depth interviews. Parents/carers were recruited at two settings offering the extended hours and were provided with a £15 shopping voucher to thank them for their time. There was a broad spectrum of parents/carers in terms of demographic characteristics, including:

- parents/carers from minority ethnic groups (including Polish, Indian, African, English and the travelling community)
- lone parents/carers
- parents/carers with varying numbers of children (between one and four children aged between six months and 22 years)
- parents/carers of children with special needs that included learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, and developmental delay
- kinship carers
- parents/carers with differing working status including employed, in education or training, carer, and unemployed
- parents/carers with differing housing status including owner occupier, private renter, local authority housing and homeless
- parents/carers experiencing complex issues including domestic violence and homelessness
- profoundly deaf parents/carers.

Most children had only attended one childcare establishment with a few children having transferred from another local nursery, and all were utilising the free 30 hours per week with the majority utilising term time provision. Those children attending 52 weeks per year either had parents/carers working full time, or the family had particular needs or issues meaning it was perceived that the child benefited from year-round provision.

A total of 15 staff across the two venues took part in a qualitative in-depth interview. This included a varied staff in terms of role, seniority and level of experience including members of the leadership team, child development officers, young apprentices, and staff champions.

Observational research was undertaken in the primary venue at different times during the day to add further context and reflection to the findings.

### **Research with stakeholders**

A total of ten stakeholders took part in a qualitative in-depth interview, or paired in-depth interview, either face-to-face or by telephone. Stakeholders included members of the CHANGE team and representatives from the Scottish Government, local childcare providers, health visiting, and third sector organisations.

The qualitative data was analysed thematically using an analysis framework.

For the purposes of the report, quotations are attributed to parents/carers, staff (i.e. childcare staff), and stakeholders.

### **Structure of report**

Chapter 2 provides a summary of the findings of the observational case studies involving research with parents/carers and staff within the two early adopter settings and the researcher observation, alongside reflections from stakeholders on the ELC expansion. Chapters 3 and 4 outline the results of the research with stakeholders in relation to the community benefits of the iterative networking approach applied by CHANGE and the redesign of childcare services, and the impact of the CHANGE Hub. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of key findings and recommendations. A more detailed report on the observational case studies on the ELC expansion is provided in the Appendix.

## Chapter 2 ELC expansion: summary

This chapter provides a summary of the perceptions of parents/carers, childcare staff and stakeholders as to the benefits of the extended hours provision. Fieldwork was undertaken in two settings currently offering such provision as a trial for ELC expansion, although the majority of qualitative research was conducted in one of the settings alongside researcher observation.

This primary setting is a large nursery with a total capacity for 140 children including 88 three- to five-year-olds, and has offered extended hours since it opened in August 2017. Staff were either recruited for this establishment or transferred from a nearby smaller nursery. Transferred staff were able to remain on their term time contracts with all new staff recruited on a 52 week per year contract. Up until August 2019, parents/carers were able to choose how to use their allocated six hours of childcare per day. Going forward, parents/carers of children joining the nursery will be required to choose a morning or afternoon session. It is important to note therefore, that the case study included in this section will not reflect the model of provision going forward.

### Rationale behind ELC expansion

Overall, participants were supportive of the premise behind extended provision. Children were expected to benefit from a range of positive opportunities for their social and emotional development; parents/carers could take advantage of additional time to further their work prospects/employability or to undertake other activities.

*“It’s a juggling act for any parent. It can alleviate stressors for parents by offering extended hours; it offers more flexibility and is an acknowledgement that the working day and parenting day is long”. (Stakeholder)*

Issues raised with the vision of ELC expansion included whether it should be provided universally or targeted to families in greatest need who may benefit more. Questions were also raised about whether the extended provision provides longer term benefit to vulnerable families or is a “band aid” if not accompanied with corresponding support for vulnerable parents/carers.

### Use and awareness of childcare

The extended hours had resulted in less reliance on informal childcare and/or use of multiple childcare providers, thus creating more consistency for children and removing the “burden” particularly from grandparents of regular childcare duties.

*“It has helped reduce the worry of childcare and also increased consistency for the child as care is being provided in the one place so children aren’t being cared for in different places and by different people each day or even being picked up by different friends/family during the week”. (Staff)*

There were few reported barriers to accessing childcare for three- to five-year-old children. Awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds was very low, with some families experiencing barriers to accessing childcare for this age group which led to a reliance on private nurseries.

Health visitors were the most common information source for childcare, and also for prompting and supporting parents/carers to apply. Other avenues included social workers, baby and toddler groups, peers and nursery websites. Some parents/carers were unaware of where to access up-to-date information regarding childcare availability.

*“My health visitor gave me all the information I needed which was great. I wouldn’t have known where to start.” (Parent/Carer)*

## Satisfaction with childcare provider

Overall, parents/carers were very satisfied with the nursery; trusting the staff to keep their children “safe, happy and well looked after”. In particular, they praised the quality and flexibility of provision to meet their family’s needs.

*“It’s quite fantastic that they manage the hours as we need them. I sometimes need to start work at 8.30am so they will take him earlier and I can collect him earlier.” (Parent/Carer)*

## Communication and relationships

Overall, parents/carers felt communication with the nursery (which included text messages, message boards, learning journals and face-to-face communication) was more than sufficient. There were, however, some comments suggesting that pick-up time could be rushed.

*“Communication and feedback from staff are excellent. You very much feel that they know your child and can tell you anything that had happened that day. For example, if they had had a fall, whether they had eaten well at lunch, what the child did that day.” (Parent/Carer)*

Some staff felt that shift patterns reduced effective engagement, but this was not reflected in the opinions of parents/carers who did not raise any issues engaging with different staff members and praised the “open door policy” with parents/carers encouraged to make contact at any time.

*“Although I don’t always see the same member of staff, I do feel they know my children. I get the answers I am looking for...You can speak to them any time; they are always available.” (Parent/Carer)*

Overall, staff felt the extended hours had positively impacted on their relationship with and knowledge of the children which was a natural consequence of the children spending longer in their care. Given that children spend a considerable part of their day at nursery, staff considered it even more important to provide a high-quality service and develop positive relationships.

## Benefits for children

There was general consensus that the extended provision offered multiple benefits for children which are outlined below.

- **Social development:** This was the most commonly perceived benefit, due to increased interaction with adults and greater opportunity to develop friendships with children of different ethnicities and from different cultures which “bring children out of their shell”. Lunchtimes were viewed as a great opportunity for children to improve their social skills and independence, while being encouraged to eat healthily.

*“The biggest benefit is for the kids, They are feeling more comfortable, are settling really well, and most importantly are getting to know more kids and staff... they are here for double the amount of time and so have all that time to communicate, learn and engage.” (Staff)*

- **Language development:** In particular, parents/carers from minority ethnic groups commented on the improvement in their child’s written and spoken English and, as such, had no concerns about their child starting school.

*“She barely spoke when she first started as Spanish was her first language. Now she speaks to everyone.” (Staff)*

- **Range of activities and opportunities:** The range of activities on offer, particularly those which provided children with different experiences to those available at home, were seen as instrumental to the children’s learning and to “allow children to become their own person”.

*“They are doing completely different things and learning all the time. He is developing through the different types of play; he learns so much more than he would with me.” (Parent/Carer)*

- **Independence:** The extended hours were perceived as beneficial in terms of increasing the child's confidence and independence. Parents/carers praised the nursery for their strategies used to achieve this.

*"Everything they do is about helping them to help themselves, from choosing what they want from the menu at lunch, to clearing away the plates, putting their coats on, going to the toilet." (Parent/Carer)*

- **Preparation for school:** The extended hours and busy nursery environment were said to offer a significant benefit in terms of preparation for school:

*"It prepares them for school.... longer hours, routine, lunchtimes, play times outside, different areas of the three-to-five rooms; it's all so good for them." (Parent/Carer)*

- **Tailored support:** The nursery is committed to meeting the needs of all children including those with issues such as vulnerability and additional support needs. The staff work with parents to develop joint strategies to implement in the nursery and home setting which have resulted in a reduction in behavioural problems and other issues, with the extended hours allowing for more dedicated time to implement these strategies.

*"He plays so well now and is such a happy wee boy.... brilliant to hear that giggle." (Parent/Carer)*

- **Support for vulnerable children:** Staff highlighted particular benefits for vulnerable children able to access the 52-week provision including structure, consistency, positive role modelling and a "positive experience of early life". However, as mentioned previously, the need for accompanying support for vulnerable parents/carers was viewed as critical:

*"You can't just remove the child from it [home environment] and then send them back to the same situation after nursery without doing anything to improve it." (Staff)*

## Benefits for families

Overall, the extended hours were perceived to offer various family benefits, provided that the parents/carers used their free time productively. Staff acknowledged it is "early days" in terms of outcomes but were very positive and supportive of those parents who had gained employment, entered into training or education, increased their employability, or were working more hours as a result of the extended hours of ELC provision. Some parents/carers reported attending college or training courses, working additional hours, or volunteering as they felt confident and happy their child was being well cared for in nursery during the extended hours:

*"Some are now attending college and Uni which they didn't think they'd be able to do until their child was at school which is fantastic." (Staff)*

*"I'm confident that he is safe while I am studying so the extra hours have been fantastic." (Parent/Carer)*

Other benefits included ease of attending appointments, increased household income, and additional time for: undertaking other caring duties (e.g. for relatives), quality family time, including time with their other children, and household chores. An opportunity for "me time" was particularly valued by lone parents.

*"It gives me time to help my mum out [who has arthritis]. I'm learning to drive and it's time to breathe!" (Parent/Carer)*

*"We've gelled more as a family; nursery has given us structure. Before, our life was a mad rush, messy, chaotic. But we've now got time to sit with the older two and help with their homework, we talk to each other about what we've all been doing. It's great." (Parent/Carer)*

## Issues

Overall, perceptions of extended hours were very positive with very few issues raised. Perceived challenges included the following.

- **Sustainability:** Working parents/carers or those in education were concerned about the lack of sustainability of flexible provision once their child reached school age. Stakeholders questioned the general sustainability of the provision, and whether there would be a reduction in free childcare provision in the future when families relied on it.
- **Flexibility:** Available nursery provision including the extended hours not accommodating those who worked weekends or late night/early morning shifts was raised as an issue.  
*"I can only apply for jobs that fit in with the nursery hours which is frustrating." (Parent/Carer)*
- **Lunchtimes:** Staff raised many practical challenges with lunchtimes including the lack of a dedicated lunch area of the required size, and staff cover required for lunchtimes.
- **Focus on care rather than education?** Whether extended hours mean staff spend more of their time on general care rather than preschool education as such was questioned:  
*"There has been a lot more responsibility placed on practitioners including toilet training, toothbrushing... it feels at times like we're predominantly doing care; where does the education come in?" (Staff)*
- **Focus and resources on three- and four-year-olds?** A natural consequence of the introduction of extended hours was much focus and resource being directed to its implementation, and an associated reduced priority on younger children. Very low awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds, and limited access to childcare for this age group, presents issues in terms of ensuring early intervention for vulnerable families.

## Researcher observation

The researchers spent considerable time in the nursery, engaging with staff and observing the environment at different times throughout the day including transition, lunchtime, PATHS<sup>1</sup> sessions, and home time. This section provides a summary of key reflections from this observation.

- Overall, the nursery environment was perceived as welcoming, nurturing and comfortable for children.
- Although the environment was noisy as would be expected, the noise was not overpowering and there was no sense of chaos or disorder.
- As there was much activity taking place (e.g. PATHS sessions, visits to local park, ZUMBA, and cooking classes) the room very rarely had the full complement of children.
- Despite the nursery having large rooms, staff had managed to create nurturing and calming areas where children could receive particular attention including a quieter area for younger children to nap.
- The staff effectively balanced monitoring of the children and structured learning with allowing free play, both inside and outside. The children played outside three times a day, regardless of the weather.
- At all times, staff encouraged positive behaviour from the children such as respecting their peers, sharing, playing together and being inclusive.
- Children seemed happy, settled, content and well behaved (despite reports of many children having behavioural issues).
- No child was excluded or left out, with children having the confidence to approach staff if they needed something. Any child who was upset was quickly attended to.
- Despite the reported challenges, lunchtimes appeared to be a pleasant experience for children, which provided an opportunity to develop their social skills and table manners, in addition to encouraging healthy eating.

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<sup>1</sup> The PATHS Programme is designed to facilitate the development of self-control, emotional awareness and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

The researchers noted the constant energy and commitment of staff to continuously develop and improve provision to best meet the needs of children and families. The leadership team appeared incredibly passionate about what they do and are very solutions-focused and determined to overcome any challenges they face. This ethos was present throughout the nursery.

Overall, it appeared that, despite the challenges faced, the nursery offered a nurturing environment and quality provision for children who received much individual care and attention. Despite the volume of children, there was no sense of a 'one size fits all' approach, with staff working hard to meet the needs of all children.

Further information is provided in the Appendix.

### **Key reflections**

Overall, the extended hours appeared to offer multiple benefits for both children and families, with a key theme being reduced stress and pressure on families to rely on informal childcare and/or use multiple childcare providers, and balance multiple duties including employment, caring responsibilities and general daily chores within a short time period while their child was at nursery. However, there was a general sense from participants that this time should be used productively in order for the extended hours to be worthwhile, with it being questioned whether the provision should be universal or targeted to those families thought to be most in need of additional childcare.

Most importantly, the extended hours offered various benefits for children including social and language development and preparation for school. In particular, vulnerable children able to access the 52-week provision were seen to benefit most, as they were provided with care and nurture within a safe and comfortable environment for an increased number of hours per week.

The case study research highlighted the level of change required in the nursery setting to implement the extended hours, while maintaining continuity of high-quality provision. It is a testament to the organisational leadership that staff applied a solutions-focused attitude and commitment to continually evolving and improving the service to best meet the needs of families. Despite staff concerns regarding the impact of communication, infrastructure and lunchtimes, in particular, on the children's experience, both feedback from parents/carers and researcher observation highlight the nurturing, comfortable environment that had been created for children, providing multiple benefits in terms of social development and preparation for school. This a real testament to the motivation and commitment of staff.

Vulnerability was a key research theme, particularly in relation to the need for a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable families. This was a general finding from the CHANGE community engagement, as discussed later in the report, and relates to the extended provision in terms of accompanying tailored support being required for vulnerable parents/carers in order to achieve longer term outcomes for children and families. Awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds was found to be low. It was also reported that implementation of the extended hours left little time for prioritising provision for two-year-old children, which raises concerns that vulnerable families most in need may not be benefiting from early intervention.

To summarise, extended hours provide a challenge for nurseries to adapt to the new requirements of the provision but offer real benefits for families, particularly if considered in a more holistic model of family support.

## Chapter 3 The CHANGE approach

This chapter examines the nature of the CHANGE project including its iterative, networking approach and aim of increasing flexibility and redesign of childcare services in order to confer community benefits.

### Iterative networking approach

Establishing an iterative, networking approach is integral to the CHANGE project and the methods by which it achieves its outcomes. This includes having an in-built flexibility to respond to the outcomes of the community engagement work and networking with partners, and heavily investing in and prioritising engagement with a wide range of community partners. This approach was applied from project initiation, where the project team undertook significant engagement activity during year one to gather input from a range of partners and community members.

Overall, stakeholders were incredibly positive about the approach applied by the project team, and their skills, capability, commitment and determination to carry it out. Their collaboration methods were perceived to be driven by a desire to achieve the best outcomes for families by sharing learning, reducing duplication, and implementing needs-led approaches within an ethos of accountability and “*tireless effort*”.

*“Rather than duplication, it’s very much a partnership approach to the support provided.” (Stakeholder)*

*“It’s been a tireless effort ...they are really passionate about who they engage with. The strategy has not been them in isolation, it’s very much about participation and working with people... It’s been a positive experience for me and a very good example of how partnership working can be done.” (Stakeholder)*

*“It’s been an interactive experience, consistently and continuously using different methods to engage both the community and professionals.” (Stakeholder)*

This allowed the project team to gain a real sense of community assets and services, while understanding the needs, issues, and barriers faced by local families.

Key enablers identified by stakeholders included:

- genuine and authentic engagement which empowers and engages a community by giving people a voice
- intensive work to gain buy-in and engagement from key influencers in the local area
- the skills, commitment and capabilities of the project team
- the project becoming an ambassador for local projects lacking the dedicated time to raise awareness of the importance of quality childcare provision
- the project being a “*connecting force*” and enabling engagement between different community organisations
- the project team being known in both the sector and local area, and having implicit contextual knowledge, appreciation and understanding of the community which enables effective engagement
- the project being a dedicated resource with a clear vision for improving community outcomes.

*“The team are known and embedded in the area which is crucial in terms of relationship building and managing to get to people...We wouldn’t reach people if they hadn’t done the groundwork. It opens doors for other agencies, and I think that’s a great thing and I hope it continues.” (Stakeholder)*

*“All this work has been needed for quite some time but there wasn’t any one person or organisation that’s been willing to take it on board and make it happen... you needed someone like CHANGE who has the time and headspace and skills to take that challenge on.” (Stakeholder)*

### **Authentic community engagement**

A key facet of the networking approach was authentic, family-centred community engagement. This is a key project characteristic which has been present since its inception.

#### **Community engagement within the CHANGE project**

To inform the development of the project, the project team undertook extensive community engagement activity.

In **year one**, the team engaged with approximately 100 families accessing childcare services or other services to identify key barriers to accessing childcare and to slowly build relationships with community groups.

In **year two**, the project team developed a community engagement plan to target individuals not currently accessing childcare due to particular barriers. Such groups included asylum seeking and refugee families, kinship carers, parents/carers of children with a disability, disabled parents/carers, parents/carers with a learning difficulty, and families experiencing poverty. Results indicated that complex or challenging circumstances exacerbated childcare barriers including a lack of financial support, a lack of affordable, specialist additional support needs provision, and isolation.

The community engagement work was also enhanced in year two to include consultation sessions in two primary schools in the CHANGE project area, with children aged 8-11 years old on their expectations of an out-of-school care service or activity club.

By the end of year two, the project team had gained a true and in-depth understanding of family need. This understanding continues to influence the direction of the project, with the team committed to continual awareness-raising of family need with local providers, partners and stakeholders.

#### **Key enablers**

Both the project team and stakeholders indicated that the success of the community engagement exercise was dependent on a range of factors:

- Recognising the need for a long-term process that necessitates investment and commitment in order to break down barriers, have sensitive conversations, and uncover the real issues.
- Ensuring that feedback is taken on board where possible.
- Creating mechanisms for sharing the outcomes and impact of the community engagement which displays accountability and helps foster a sense of trust within the community.

*“It’s really powerful that they really listened, took things on board and then made changes before feeding back to the community.” (Stakeholder)*

*“Through very effective relationships they have managed to get to those very sensitive conversations. They have created a real culture of learning and not made assumptions about what parents want.” (Stakeholder)*

The CHANGE community engagement process demonstrated longevity in comparison with a number of previous short-term funded projects, which had led to a level of community fatigue with engagement.

*“It took a while to engage as people were actively avoiding it as they were so disengaged due to the way they had been treated over previous years, Many organisations had lost funding and stopped in the project area, so the CHANGE project had this to overcome. Building relationships takes time; networking and groundwork is the key to success.” (Stakeholder)*

### **Iterative process**

Authentic community engagement necessitates an iterative approach, to ensure the needs and issues identified by the local community are translated and implemented into planned strategies and activity. This approach was applied from an early stage in the CHANGE process, where the team questioned the need for the creation of more childcare places in the local area, rather than a more holistic model of family support including childcare that meets the needs of local families.

*“We don’t want to create more childcare that people won’t use. Some of what we captured was it is more about getting people ready for childcare; more about family support... People are sometimes more than one step away from a childcare place so it’s not a case of if you open a nursery, people will use it.” (Stakeholder)*

*“The work has taken on a holistic approach for the whole family and so it has much better outcomes for everybody.” (Stakeholder)*

Part of the iterative process involved engaging with the Scottish Government Quality Improvement team and developing a methodology to create a driver diagram so initial testing could be undertaken before any scaling-up activity. The project team highlighted the process of “*continuously learning*”.

### **Increased service flexibility and redesign of childcare services**

As discussed, the CHANGE project made a significant time and resource investment to community engagement and networking to embed a collaborative and co-productive approach to the project. On reflection, the project team suggested a minimum of a four-year funding period to embed this type of project and ensure positive outcomes: the first two years to undertake community engagement and networking; and a further two years to implement the outcomes of the first stage.

The CHANGE project has achieved various specific outcomes in terms of childcare provision and community benefits which are outlined below.

### **Report on the cost of childcare in the CHANGE area**

This report was produced based on initial results of community engagement with families, when the cost of childcare was the most frequently mentioned barrier to accessing childcare. The project team undertook analysis of the cost of childcare; exploring the significant cost of using childcare (including additional and hidden costs) and the related impact on families.

### **Childminders**

The project has worked on two childminding initiatives: one is in partnership with Clyde Gateway, the Scottish Childminding Association and Jobs and Business Glasgow, with the other alongside the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), a Health Visiting team and NHS Health Improvement. The aim is to recruit new childminders in the Clyde Gateway and CHANGE areas. The target is to increase the number of childminders in the project area from three to 30. Links were made with training providers to promote this initiative within the community.

*“The aim was for people who live in the community who want to get back into employment to be supported and trained and enabled in a way that they can manage their commitments in a way that is affordable and sustainable so linking with Clyde Gateway allowed us to tackle the bigger picture.” (Stakeholder)*

*“People in the local area becoming childminders so people don’t need to leave the area, so it makes that support more accessible, more grassroots.” (Stakeholder)*

### **Family support emergency childcare places**

The community engagement exercise highlighted the need for a supportive service providing emergency childcare hours for families during stressful or difficult times. Often families in the project area need to attend emergency appointments, sometimes at short notice, and thus require a safe childcare option.

There were very few families accessing community childminding (funded by Glasgow City Council and run by the Scottish Childminding Association) in the project area. Given the potentially challenging and chaotic situations faced by these families, having to travel outside the area for such provision was not viewed as ideal.

As part of a multi-disciplinary working group including the Children's Services Executive Group, the North East Children's Services Locality Group, the North East Health and Social Care Partnership, and the Care Inspectorate, the CHANGE team are investigating both a: 'crisis creche' which would offer children a session with qualified staff in a relaxed stimulating environment, for a short period of time; and a 'crisis playgroup' which would offer registered childcare with a qualified staff team in a relaxed, calm and stimulating environment, and be used where a block booking is required over a longer period.

There were some challenges faced in relation to ensuring the need for such provision was considered in a local rather than national context.

*"The national picture had an influence. We had to fight the cause around childminding; because it's not about the national picture. It has to be tied to local area and this area is more complex." (Stakeholder)*

More time is required to train community childminders meaning there will be a time lag in terms of when this provision will be available. The project team recognised this initiative requires more time to embed so the benefit can be realised.

### **Out-of-school care (OSC)**

Consultation with childcare providers and families indicated a lack of OSC places in the area, especially in and around Parkhead. The CHANGE project played a pivotal role in establishing OSC provision at a new local primary school which began in August 2019. The project team filled an important gap in terms of capacity to establish the provision, and provided a crucial, trusted, independent liaison role between the parent council, local authority and the childcare provider. Key characteristics of the CHANGE team which enabled this initiative were capacity, knowledge of the sector in order to reinforce regulatory requirements, and a neutral voice.

*"It really helped having someone in the middle, because working with parent councils can be really difficult, but CHANGE could say they were independent so people are more likely to listen to them, and they already had the relationship established with all the key players. If CHANGE hadn't come on board at that time, it might have slipped through the net again." (Stakeholder)*

The project team also undertook extensive development work to create a robust model of OSC provision for the local area including investigating costs, venues, providers and so on, that can be adopted by a local provider.

### **School holiday clubs**

The CHANGE project worked with a local school and NHS Health Improvement to increase engagement in the school holiday club. Previously, engagement was very low, particularly from families most in need of the support (the school had identified families experiencing a range of complex issues including trauma, domestic violence and mental health issues who struggled over the holiday period). One of the CHANGE Hub tests of change focused on information for families and practitioners. The project worked as part of a multi-agency group including Glasgow City Council, a Health Visiting team leader, NHS Health Improvement and GCVS to co-ordinate online service information for North East Glasgow. The application of this test of change led by the CHANGE Hub resulted in an increase from five to 90 families in attendance. Other initiatives at the school include 'Feed Families' every Wednesday and a community garden which is currently being rolled out to another four schools in the local area.

*“The work at St Paul’s would not have happened without CHANGE and that has been so beneficial, so that’s a direct outcome from the project.” (Stakeholder)*

### **Childcare directory**

One of the CHANGE Hub tests of change focused on information for families and practitioners. The project worked as part of a multi-agency group including Glasgow City Council, a Health Visiting team leader, and NHS Health Improvement and GCVS to co-ordinate online service information for North East Glasgow. The premise was based on feedback from families regarding the quality and accessibility of information on local childcare provision and their preference for one website holding all the relevant information. Information was moved to ALISS (A Local Information System for Scotland). The project team were involved in delivering sessions to local organisations and the community including schools on the purpose of the directory:

*“Families highlighted that information was really poor so we’re trying to turn that around. People don’t want any more new websites; they just want all the information to be together.” (Stakeholder)*

### **Play services**

Feedback from families indicated their use of local services which are not registered childcare services but which they rely on for support. These typically included play and youth-based services delivering free or very low-cost services. The project team aimed to support these services to expand on their existing offer.

The project team liaised with some of the play services (and Glasgow Life) to identify their main challenges which centre on funding and sustainability. The team are in the process of publishing a series of learning summaries focusing on these challenges. Other interactions with play services have included providing support in terms of a communication strategy and enabling attendance at a workshop run by CHANGE on the development of OSC services in Parkhead.

### **Other initiatives**

CHANGE is involved in a community growing project to reduce the cost of food in services which will have an associated reduction in cost for families and is part of a working group including NHS Health Improvement, community food growers, a senior nutritionist, and local childcare providers.

### **Key reflections**

The CHANGE project appears to have been truly successful in applying an authentic, community-informed model which is centred on the needs, assets, challenges and characteristics of the local community. The project is characterised by the commitment of its staff to ‘tirelessly’ engage, implement and feedback to ensuring ongoing engagement and buy-in from local partners and community members.

Taking on board the results of community engagement necessitates an iterative approach and a willingness to adapt project outcomes. CHANGE applied this iterative model which allowed for a shift in focus from purely increased childcare provision, to a more holistic model of family support including sustainable, high quality, affordable childcare. The project has achieved many specific outcomes including increased OSC provision, ongoing work to recruit local childminders, and input to a local online childcare directory; all of which will benefit the community.

The strength of the project is that outcomes are driven by community need, as defined by community members, and thus will offer real benefit.

## Chapter 4 CHANGE Hub

A key mechanism of the CHANGE project was the establishment and operation of a community Hub comprising local partners with a common purpose. This chapter examines what difference the Hub will make to the provision of childcare locally, for children aged between 0 and 12.

### Establishment of CHANGE Hub

Following significant engagement, networking and relationship building in year one, the CHANGE Hub was established in year two to bring together organisations working with families to share ideas, concerns, good practice and innovation using the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative methodology to evidence impact. The aim is to lead change at a local level which will reduce barriers to accessing childcare.

At the time of the research, the Hub had 15 members with representation from Social Work, Education, Health, DWP, local childcare providers, third sector organisations and community ambassadors. The Hub is supported by a Scottish Government Improvement Adviser, to agree and work on 'tests of change'.

The establishment of the CHANGE Hub has been an ongoing process, with engagement and communication methods evolving throughout the course of the project to best meet the needs of its members. Initially, attendance at meetings was inconsistent partly due to busy workloads and also a sense that the extensive range of information provided, and issues discussed were not relevant for all members. Following consultation and review, individual working groups were created: members invested in particular areas meet separately and then feed into the overall Hub meetings. This provided a more tangible offer to partners, which alongside the clear outcomes from their involvement, has strengthened engagement:

*"Initially the offer was quite broad which was not enticing enough for people so by making it specifically targeted, the buy-in improved significantly and we have consistent attendance at the working groups... They now see the value and think it is worth investing their time as it's not just a talking shop." (Stakeholder)*

The Hub has worked well in enabling effective, informal working relationships between local organisations. This partnership working is essential to provide holistic support to families.

*"The Hub has brought together partners into the same space who previously wouldn't have worked together and helped to break down those barriers." (Stakeholder)*

*"It's about agencies coming together with similar outcomes but different ways of getting there; how do we overcome hurdles because we want to work together... as you build relationships, and get to know organisations and their abilities to do things, you then build and reshape what you were going to do." (Stakeholder)*

The Hub being visible to the local community and not being viewed as a "secret society" with hidden objectives was seen as a key strength. The CHANGE project having a community base was an enabler to the transparency of the project and Hub:

*"The Hub has to operate visibly and in real time... people are wary of short-term projects which could have impeded engagement so being visible was key. Making it clear we're here to facilitate partnerships... There are no hidden agendas. We are all singing from same hymn sheet and want to work together." (Stakeholder)*

*"Being based in the old schoolhouse in the centre of the community has made a big difference as we have picked up on a lot of ad hoc issues. We are more connected to the services and people; we're visible and there on daily basis to encourage purposeful engagement and are not seen as distant... Nothing beats that physical presence. Progress has come on leaps and bounds." (Stakeholder)*

A further perceived strength of the Hub is that it has secured attendance by key, local influencers who have “bought into” the purpose and how their involvement will increase positive outcomes for local families. The involvement of such key influencers has led to a sense of a movement, and a positive change rather than a project *per se*.

### **Family Champions**

The Hub has been supported by up to four local Family Champions who help communicate information on CHANGE to the local community and share local family’s views. The Family Champions were recruited through collaboration with local services and were fully supported by a project officer. These individuals had experienced barriers to accessing childcare in the project area and so had experience of the impact on their family circumstances. Recruitment of such individuals through organisations attending the Hub was a key enabler to engagement, with the Hub being able to collectively offer support, development and training to those wishing to join as a Family Champion.

### **The future of the Hub**

A key strength of the CHANGE project, and one which will allow for a longer term impact on local childcare provision, is the focus on creating and facilitating effective, sustainable collaborations and partnerships among local providers. It is hoped that these partnerships, strengthened by the community Hub, will continue to reap benefits for the local community past the funding period:

*“It comes across that they want to make a long-lasting difference, also that they recognise that they’ll not be there forever, so opening doors for other organisations that are there longer term. They are not trying to duplicate or step on toes; they are trying to facilitate effective partnerships.” (Stakeholder)*

There were some concerns that the Hub will cease to be as effective, or in fact exist, at the end of the CHANGE project: without a dedicated resource to continuously push the agenda, people are likely to fall away.

*“I worry that people will go back to working in silos again.” (Stakeholder)*

Discussions have taken place within the Hub about the best ways to ensure its sustainability going forward including communication methods, systems for sharing information, and the possibility of the Hub becoming constituted.

### **Transferable model**

Stakeholders were asked to what extent the CHANGE model was replicable as a model of good practice in other communities. The general consensus was that the processes and ethos in which the project has been implemented is easily transferable to any community; those processes including an intensive period of community engagement undertaken by individuals based within the community to contextualise the project. The reasoning behind the transferability of the model was strengthened by the work with the Scottish Government Quality Improvement Team to ensure a robust logic model with KPIs and a Theory of Change:

*“The model is robust and universal. It might need slight tweaks as there will be specific issues for each community, so the workers involved on the ground need to be aware of those community issues. Staff need to be embedded otherwise it would take a lot of time to build trust and engagement.” (Stakeholder)*

*“The approach used is a very robust model. There is a structure to help understand what is leading to impact – so for a scalable model, using that approach that will lend to high confidence of what will work...its one of the most innovative and exciting projects happening in Scotland at the moment.” (Stakeholder)*

Overall, the CHANGE Hub was viewed as a huge success, with the strength of the Hub continuing to grow as it becomes embedded into the local community. This was thought to lead to significant community benefit, particularly in relation to the creation of childcare provision suited to the needs of the local community, and a more holistic model of family support.

## **Key reflections**

The creation and development of the CHANGE Hub echoes the ethos of the project, in that it has evolved to meet the needs of its members and maximise engagement and outcomes. The creation of working groups has contributed to its success and has led to the creation of strong partnerships between community organisations including the support of key local influencers. The aim is for these partnerships to continue to strengthen and reap benefits following the funding period, supported by a community Hub that will continue to evolve in terms of structure, communication methods, and membership.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

The current evaluation sought to examine the impact of the CHANGE project in terms of its effectiveness as a model to bring about wider community benefits and make lasting change to the provision of childcare in the project area. Examining the context of the ELC expansion and perceived benefits of the extended hours through observational case studies was a further objective.

### **Community engagement determining need for holistic family support**

The CHANGE approach offers a best practice model of undertaking authentic community engagement and networking in order to implement an iterative approach that reflects community needs and circumstances to achieve outcomes. This was intrinsic to the CHANGE project and led to a revised focus on the wider need for holistic family support to best meet the needs of families in the project area, rather than more of a specific focus on increasing childcare provision. Initial development work undertaken to map community assets, ascertain community need, and network with local organisations provided the project team with a true understanding of the challenges and issues facing families, and the sense that considering childcare in isolation would be not effective. The need for a more holistic model was echoed in the observational case studies, where extended provision was viewed as beneficial for providing vulnerable children with a nurturing environment and respite from difficult family circumstances. However, such an approach was perceived as a “band aid” which would not result in longer term outcomes if not accompanied by holistic support to address the root causes of vulnerability. This is a key finding and highlights the importance of community engagement and a commitment to an iterative approach to achieve the most significant and relevant outcomes for a community.

Holistic family support necessitates multi-agency working and joined up approaches to ensure family-centred provision. Collaboration and partnership working have been strengthened by the extensive networking exercise undertaken by the CHANGE project, and the establishment of the CHANGE Hub and associated working groups. Key learning from the Hub development is that providing partners with a clear, tangible offer for their involvement facilitates effective engagement, as does feeding back the outcomes achieved by the Hub. It is expected that sustainable partnerships which continue to reap community benefits will be a legacy of the project.

Vulnerability was a key research theme. The need for vulnerable families to receive early intervention in the form of tailored, holistic support was highlighted, again echoing the extension of the project scope from more of a childcare focus to holistic family support. Specifically, concerns were raised in regard to the limited impact of the extended hours if not accompanied with holistic family support, the low awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds, and the need for flexible provision for vulnerable families, including promoting the 52-week option to ensure consistency and structure. This highlights the need to consider childcare as part of a much broader support package for vulnerable families which is implemented as early as possible to maximise outcomes.

## Key features of CHANGE approach

Key features of the CHANGE approach include:

- tireless commitment and motivation among skilled workers already embedded in the community to develop trust and real engagement, both from partners and community members
- buy-in and engagement from a range of local partners and 'key influencers' to help drive the nature of the project, establish effective collaborations, and offer sustainability in terms of ongoing community benefit after the end of the project funding period
- a need for flexibility and an iterative approach to refine the scope and project objectives to reflect the outcomes of community engagement and networking
- a robust framework against which to measure outcomes before the model is shared and rolled out.

The evaluation highlights the long-term nature and investment required to implement a community-informed model based on the needs and circumstances of the community, and the impact on the available time to implement the outcomes of the process. There was an acknowledgement within the research that the intensive process of community engagement meant there was less time within the life of the project to implement strategies and activities based on that engagement and realise outcomes. For CHANGE, this meant that although there are specific tangible outcomes to provide more flexible, needs-led childcare provision in the local area (including OSC provision, training of community members to become childminders, school holiday club), the project has not focused on its original aim of purely increasing the number of childcare places in the project area.

## ELC expansion

A significant element of the research involved examining the perceived benefits of the ELC expansion within early adopter settings. Overall, results indicated a range of perceived benefits both for the child and family including social, language and emotional development for the child and greater preparation for school, the opportunity to provide specific support and role modelling to children from vulnerable groups, and an increased opportunity for parents/carers to increase their income, working hours, employability, or undertake tasks and responsibilities resulting in increased quality family time. The research also highlighted the significant challenge faced by childcare providers in implementing the extended hours while ensuring an ongoing, high-quality service and environment for children. It is testament to those establishments involved that they have managed to achieve this.

The context is very significant, given the change facing the sector in terms of implementation of the extended ELC provision. The research indicates the importance of organisational leadership and culture in times of changing service provision. Key facets of this culture include a tireless commitment to be innovative and problem solve while maintaining quality of service. The staff displayed real commitment and desire to evolve and adapt the service to meet the needs of families, particularly given that the establishment was an early adopter of the extended hours with no 'blueprint' of how to implement the change effectively. Staff concerns regarding the extent to which the nursery could continually offer a quality service, particularly to vulnerable children or those with additional support needs, did not appear to be an issue for parents/carers who were very positive about the nursery and the benefits of a nurturing environment for their child(ren).

Echoing previous results in relation to meeting the needs of vulnerable families, it was questioned whether (1) the extended provision should be universal or targeted at families most in need, and (2) whether extended childcare provision is sufficient to achieve longer term outcomes for vulnerable families if not part of a more holistic model of family support. This reflects the evolution of the CHANGE project: a focus on an encompassing model of family support being seen as more effective than a more direct focus on increasing access to affordable, quality childcare.

## **Sustainability of outcomes**

As with any funded project, the sustainability of outcomes and the continuing legacy of the project in terms of strengthened partnerships between organisations and the community to address family support is a concern. The project aims to embed initiatives and continually strengthen collaboration and partnerships so there is an effective framework in place to allow for greater community benefit. However, a fundamental benefit of the project is there being a dedicated resource with committed, experienced staff with a specific remit of addressing childcare in the local area which has led to specific project outcomes including the new OSC provision. Stakeholders worried that this would not have happened without that resource being in place. This raises concerns about the extent to which similar outcomes are achievable once that resource is no longer in place.

To conclude, the project has applied innovative methods of establishing community need in order to facilitate a collaborative, family support model to improve community outcomes including the provision of quality childcare. It is a clear example of the skills, capabilities, commitment, investment and flexibility required to create a model within a community setting which aims to result in benefits for that community.

## **Recommendations**

Key recommendations include the following.

- The importance of holistic, family support alongside quality childcare provision is key learning which should be shared as a mechanism for improving the outcomes of communities.
- There should be longer term research to monitor the impact of the ELC expansion in terms of outcomes for children and families. This may involve quantitative approaches alongside qualitative work with parents/carers to determine any impacts, and a comprehensive exercise including representatives from education, social work and health visiting.
- The key learning from the early adopter settings should be shared widely to other settings to reduce duplication of effort, and to provide a 'blueprint' for challenges faced and identified solutions.
- The current model should be disseminated in order to share the learning of the resource and effort required to undertake authentic community engagement which impacts on the direction of a project which best meets the needs of the local community.
- The sustainability of the CHANGE project should be maintained through the continuing evolution of the CHANGE Hub to best facilitate established networks and collaborative working among key organisations in the local community, ensuring the continuation of activity in relation to childcare provision, including pursuing the OSC approach.
- There should be dissemination of the project results among the community, including its legacy, to ensure the end of the project does not foster a sense of distrust or fatigue.
- The remainder of the project period should be used to continue to implement activity and strategies that can be maintained and followed through by local organisations.

## Appendix ELC Expansion – Full Report

### Details of settings

The primary setting where the majority of the research was conducted is a large nursery with a total capacity for 140 children including 88 three- to five-year-olds and has offered extended hours since it opened in August 2017. Staff were either recruited for this establishment or transferred from a nearby smaller nursery. Transferred staff were able to remain on their term-time contracts with all new staff recruited on a 52-week per year contract. All staff are required to work shifts which posed some challenges. In 2019, the nursery created Champions for various roles including Family Support, PATHS, STEM, Outdoor Learning, Health and Wellbeing, in addition to employing a Literacy Development Officer.

Up until August 2019, parents/carers were able to choose how to use their allocated six hours of childcare per day. Going forward, parents/carers of children joining the nursery will be required to choose a morning or afternoon session. This means that parents/carers with a child in the nursery and a sibling beginning to attend may have different sessions for each child. It is important to note therefore, that the case study included in this section will not reflect the model of provision going forward.

The second setting is a smaller nursery with a capacity of 82 children including 72 three- to five-year-olds. This establishment began offering extended hours in January 2018 and so was much earlier on in the process in terms of overcoming challenges and embedding the new service when fieldwork was conducted. The staff group has grown considerably to service the extended hours.

These case studies illustrate the range of issues experienced, and views of staff and parents to the implementation of the extended hours. Specific details regarding the nursery environment, the type of provision and researcher observations are related to the primary setting.

### Rationale behind ELC expansion

Participants were asked whether they were supportive of the premise of the ELC expansion, and the benefits it would provide to families. Overall, parents/carers were overwhelmingly positive and perceived there to be multiple benefits which are outlined in the following section. The only issue raised by some was whether 30 hours a week was too much time spent away from parents/carers, particularly for younger children.

The views of staff and stakeholders were more mixed. The extended provision was seen to offer particular benefit for vulnerable children who would be cared for in a safe and nurturing environment. Generally, the extended hours were seen to benefit children who would experience a range of positive opportunities for their social and emotional development, and for parents/carers who could take advantage of additional time to further their work prospects/employability or to undertake other activities.

*“It’s fantastic to be able to support them [the parents]; it lets them access different types of work and courses.” (Staff)*

*“It’s a juggling act for any parent. It can alleviate stressors for parents by offering extended hours; it offers more flexibility and is an acknowledgement that the working day and parenting day is long.” (Stakeholder)*

Issues raised with the vision of ELC expansion as outlined below.

- Whether the extended hours should be provided universally or targeted to families in greatest need who may benefit more including the most vulnerable and working parents/carers and those in education or training. There was cynicism towards parents/carers who did not use the time constructively:

*“If extended hours are given and parents don’t do anything productive? Is that really worth it? There’s got to be give and take so the time be used productively, so implementing a contract or something linked to it to achieve a goal?” (Stakeholder)*

- To what extent the ELC expansion provides longer term benefit to vulnerable families or is a “band aid” if not accompanied with corresponding support for vulnerable parents/carers.

### **Use and awareness of childcare**

The extended hours had resulted in less reliance on informal childcare and use of multiple childcare providers, thus creating more consistency for children and removing the ‘burden’ particularly from grandparents of regular childcare duties. Informal childcare was more generally relied on for emergencies such as child illness, late pick up and so on.

*“It has helped reduce the worry of childcare and also increased consistency for the child as care is being provided in the one place so children aren’t being cared for in different places and by different people each day or even being picked up by different friends/family during the week.” (Staff)*

There were few reported barriers to accessing childcare for three- to five-year-old children. In most cases, parents/carers had only applied to the one establishment due to its good reputation and offer of extended hours.

*“I get two buses to come here, both because of how good it is and also because they offer the 30 hours.” (Parent/Carer)*

Awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds was very low, other than in cases where the health visitor had contacted the nursery on their behalf. Some families experienced barriers to accessing childcare for this age group which led to a reliance on private nurseries:

*“I had to put off going to Uni as couldn’t get him in anywhere, I tried all over, but then got a place here when he was 3.” (Parent/Carer)*

Health visitors were the most common information source for childcare, and also for prompting and supporting parents/carers to apply. Other avenues included social workers, baby and toddler groups, peers and nursery websites. Some parents/carers were unaware of where to access up-to-date information regarding childcare availability.

*“My Health Visitor gave me all the information I needed which was great. I wouldn’t have known where to start.” (Parent/Carer)*

### **Satisfaction with childcare providers**

Overall, parents/carers were very satisfied with the nursery, and in particular, praised the quality and flexibility of provision to meet their family’s needs. Parents/carers commented on:

- Their trust in the nursery and its staff; knowing their children would be “safe, happy and well looked after”. Parents/carers commented that their children received individual attention and were well cared for.

*“I completely trust the nursery. I worry whenever he’s not with me but when he’s here I don’t as I feel confident, he’s safe and happy.” (Parent/Carer)*

- The flexibility offered to meet family’s needs. Parents/carers very much liked the fact they could choose how to allocate the six hours per day and straddle the hours over mornings/afternoons to suit their working patterns. In addition, flexibility to offer additional hours to cover appointments, exams and so on; or to change agreed hours to meet the needs of parents was valued.

*“It’s quite fantastic that they manage the hours as we need them. I sometimes need to start work at 8.30am so they will take him earlier and I can collect him earlier.” (Parent/Carer)*

- The nursery being open from 8am to 6pm, again offering flexibility:

*“It’s open 8am-6pm; you couldn’t get better than that. I’m on my own with three weans and manage to work ...it’s great.” (Parent/Carer)*

It should be noted that some parents were generally distrusting of private nurseries, and preferred local authority nurseries which were perceived to be better regulated with better trained staff.

*"I was desperate to be in a council nursery because of the standards of care and properly trained staff... The 30 hours a week were just an added bonus, but I would have been happy to pay for that." (Parent/Carer)*

## **Communication and relationships**

### **Communication**

Overall, parents/carers felt communication with the nursery (which included text messages, message boards, learning journals and face-to-face communication) was more than sufficient. There were, however, some comments suggesting that pick-up time could feel rushed with parents/carers having to probe for information and feedback rather than it being forthcoming.

*"Communication and feedback from staff are excellent. You very much feel that they know your child and can tell you anything that had happened that day. For example, if they had had a fall, whether they had eaten well at lunch, what they child did that day." (Parent/Carer)*

Some staff felt that shift patterns reduced effective engagement and made it difficult to establish trusting relationships with parents/carers, but this was not reflected in the opinions of parents/carers, who did not raise any issues regarding engaging with different staff members and praised the "open door policy", with parents/carers encouraged to make contact at any time.

*"It is the person on the register who will see the parents. I have to ask them to pass a message on the parents of the children I am caring for which is not ideal." (Staff)*

*"Although I don't always see the same member of staff, I do feel they know my children. I get the answers I am looking for... You can speak to them any time; they are always available." (Parent/Carer)*

### **Relationships**

Overall, staff felt the extended hours had positively impacted on their relationship with and knowledge of the children which was a natural consequence of the children spending longer time in their care. Given that children spend a considerable part of their day at nursery, staff considered it even more imperative to provide a high-quality service and develop positive relationships.

*"As they are in nursery for longer, it's easier to tell if they were not having a good day as you know them so well." (Staff)*

However, others felt they did not know the children as well, although this perception appeared to be linked to the size of the nursery and shift patterns rather than the extended hours *per se*.

Going forward, the nursery intends to align the children and staff depending on their contract to work either term time or 52 weeks per year to allow for even greater consistency.

## **Benefits for children**

There was general consensus that the extended provision offered multiple benefits for children which are outlined below.

### **Social development**

Greater opportunity to further the children's social development was the most commonly perceived benefit, due to increased interaction with adults and peers and greater opportunity to develop friendships. Staff spoke of children becoming more "emotionally robust and experiencing what is real life".

*"The biggest benefit is for the kids, they are feeling more comfortable, are settling really well, and most important are getting to know more kids as staff...they are here for double the amount of time and so have all that time to communicate, learn and engage with other staff members and kids." (Staff)*

A further benefit was the greater opportunity for children to develop friendships with children of different ethnicities and from different cultures which *"bring children out of their shell"*.

Lunchtimes were viewed as a great opportunity for children to improve their social skills and independence, while being encouraged to eat healthily and try new and different foods. Children are encouraged to choose their own food and feed themselves including pouring their own drinks, clearing their plates, and using cutlery; while being encouraged to talk with staff and their peers to allow for a pleasant, social experience.

### **Language development**

Parents/carers felt the extended hours had been beneficial to their child's language development. In particular, parents/carers from different minority ethnic groups including Polish, Spanish and Indian commented on the improvement in their child's written and spoken English, and as such, had no concerns about their child starting school. Their child spoke their ethnic language at home and had now become proficient in English which was viewed as a real positive:

*"She barely spoke when she first started as Spanish was her first language. Now she speaks to everyone." (Staff)*

Language development was a particular positive for a child with profoundly deaf parents and grandparents whose first language is sign language:

*"She couldn't express her emotions verbally but is now chatting away all the time... it's great for her to have time with grown-ups who will chat to her which we can't do." (Parent/Carer)*

### **Range of activities and opportunities**

The range of activities in the different areas of the nursery (including reading, science, sand pit, art corner) were said to be instrumental to the child's learning, Parents/carers and staff frequently commented that the children benefited from different activities and opportunities which they did not encounter at home; in particular spending so much time outside and visiting the local park. The additional time at nursery allows for a greater range and flexibility in activities offered which weren't possible within the reduced hours to *"allow children to become their own person"*.

*"They are doing completely different things and learning all the time. He is developing through the different types of play; he learns so much more than he would with me." (Parent/Carer)*

*"I feel that their physical development has improved as the children were playing out and doing more exercise...many parents don't want to take their children out, but here they are encouraged to go out whatever the weather." (Staff)*

### **Independence**

The extended hours were perceived as beneficial in terms of increasing child confidence and independence. Parents/carers praised the nursery for the strategies used to achieve this.

*"Everything they do is about helping them to help themselves from choosing what they want from the menu at lunch, to clearing away the plates, putting their coats on, going to the toilet." (Parent/Carer)*

### **Preparation for school**

The extended hours and busy nursery environment were said to offer a significant benefit in terms of preparation for school:

*“It prepares them for school... longer hours, routine, lunchtimes, play times outside, different areas of the 3-5 rooms; it’s all so good for them.” (Parent/Carer)*

Opinions among staff were more mixed, although some commented that whereas before children received “wee snippets” of learning, the extended hours allowed for learning to be embedded throughout the day in all activities.

Visits to the nursery from Primary 1 pupils and teachers from local schools where each child is allocated a P1 buddy was seen as a real benefit. Anecdotal feedback from the local school headteacher was that children were coping much better with the transition to school following the extended hours, which was particularly critical given that pupils began a full day from August 2019.

### **Tailored support**

The nursery is committed to meeting the needs of all children including those with issues such as vulnerability and additional support needs. The staff work with parents/carers to develop joint strategies to implement in the nursery and home setting which have resulted in a reduction in behavioural problems and other issues, with the extended hours allowing for more dedicated time to implement these strategies.

*“He plays so well now and is such happy wee boy.... brilliant to hear that giggle.” (Parent/Carer)*

Staff did raise concerns regarding the extent to which the nursery infrastructure was suitable for children with additional support needs, due to the lack of a quiet and nurturing space or a sensory room. Similar issues were raised in relation to the size of the establishment and volume of children, which staff worried could result in a less nurturing environment.

However, parents/carers of children with additional support needs generally praised the individual care and attention their child had received and the commitment of staff to meet their needs. Some parents/carers had concerns about the extent to which staff fully understood their child’s needs, but these were resolved following engagement with the headteacher. Overall, the nursery environment was not perceived to be unsuitable or harmful, with it being acknowledged that children required a period of transition to settle into the busier environment.

*“My son is on the autistic spectrum and the nursery has adapted what they offer to suit us; they suggested changing to 52 weeks as continuity maintained his routine and reduced the stress of stopping and starting nursery at holidays.” (Parent/Carer)*

Similarly, parents/carers did not raise issues with the size of the nursery, with some commenting that the large and diverse environment had increased their child’s confidence in mixing with a wide range of children and adults.

*“She’s come on so much since she started and has grown in confidence so much because of all the different children and adults she is mixing with.” (Parent/Carer)*

### **Support for vulnerable children**

Staff highlighted particular benefits for vulnerable children able to access the 52-week provision including structure, consistency, positive role modelling and a “positive experience of early life”.

*“I used to be concerned that we would not see children over the holiday period, and you would sense that at times they would go backwards in their development during this time. Basically, it allowed for inconsistency for children who already had chaotic lives so the extended provision I feel is so much better for these children.” (Staff)*

However, as mentioned previously, the need for accompanying support for vulnerable parents/carers was viewed as critical.

*“You can’t just remove the child from it [home environment] and then send them back to the same situation after nursery without doing anything to improve it.” (Staff)*

*“We’ve gelled more as a family; nursery has given us structure. Before, our life was a mad rush, messy, chaotic. But we’ve now got time to sit with the older two and help with their homework, we talk to each other about what we’ve all been doing. It’s great.” (Parent/Carer)*

### **Benefits for families**

Overall, the extended hours were perceived to offer various family benefits, provided that the parents/carers used their free time productively. Staff acknowledged that it is “early days” in terms of outcomes, and were unclear as to the proportion of parents who had actually gained employment, entered into training or education, increased their employability, or were working more hours as a result of the extended hours. However, they were very positive and supportive of those parents who had done so. Some parents/carers reported attending college or training courses, working additional hours, or volunteering as they felt confident and happy their child was being well cared for in nursery during the extended hours

*“Some are now attending college and Uni which they didn’t think they’d be able to do until their child was at school which is fantastic.” (Staff)*

*“I’m confident that he is safe while I am studying so the extra hours have been fantastic.” (Parent/Carer)*

Other benefits included ease of attending appointments, increased household income, and additional time for undertaking other caring duties (e.g. for relatives) and household chores. An opportunity for “me time” was particularly valued by lone parents.

*“It gives me time to help my Mum out [who has arthritis]. I’m learning to drive and it’s time to breathe!” (Parent/Carer)*

*“It takes the pressure off them and helps them develop themselves as a person.” (Parent/Carer)*

Parents/carers having increased time to spend with their other children was also beneficial, particularly for families with a child with additional support needs.

*“Everything was based on him [child with additional support needs] so having him in nursery each day gives me time for the others and also time to do things in the house which I can’t do when he is there”. (Parent/Carer)*

### **Quality family time**

Parents/frequently commented that the extended hours allowed for more quality family time as the childcare provision provided structure to the day, the parent/carer had some time away from their child, and the child’s time at nursery resulted in improved behaviour which had improved their relationship. This was a particularly common perception among lone parents who had no respite otherwise.

*“There is far less conflict between me and him as his behaviour has improved so we now enjoy doing things together like going swimming or to the park.” (Parent/Carer)*

### **Increased income**

The reduced cost of childcare associated with the extended hours was viewed as a significant benefit by parents/carers who commented that their disposable income had increased, and they were “no longer having to survive on Dad’s wage as all my pay would go towards childcare”.

## Issues

Overall, perceptions of extended hours were very positive with very few issues raised. This section outlines issues or challenges participants raised with the provision. There were some particular challenges that relate more to the specific establishment than the extended hours *per se* which are also discussed.

### Sustainability

An issue raised by working parents/carers or those in education was the lack of sustainability of flexible provision once their child reached school age, as the school hours will not fit with their present jobs or their ability to secure employment which they are training/studying for *“so it could all be a waste of time”*. Stakeholders questioned the general sustainability of the provision, and whether there would be a reduction in free childcare provision in the future when families relied on it.

### Flexibility

Despite most parents/carers considering the provision to be highly flexible, others highlighted that the available nursery provision including the extended hours did not accommodate those who worked weekends or late night/early morning shifts. Stakeholders reiterated this drawback.

*“I can only apply for jobs that fit in with the nursery hours which is frustrating.” (Parent/Carer)*

*“It is a drawback that provision is only offered on weekdays between 8 to 6pm, as so many people now work shifts and weekends.” (Stakeholder)*

A frequent concern among parents /carers was the reduced flexibility of sessions within the nursery from August 2019. Staff had mixed views about this change. Some thought the enforced morning and afternoon sessions would not fit with working patterns, meaning children would miss out on some of their entitled hours. However, others welcomed the change as it would allow for more structure within the day, reducing the *“chaotic nature of children constantly coming and going”*.

### Lunchtimes

Although there were real positives associated with the children having lunch in nursery, staff raised many practical challenges. During the fieldwork period, it was only children in for the morning session that were provided with lunch (alongside particular children which the nursery had identified), although this will change from August 2019 with all children receiving lunch.

Challenges identified were:

- the lack of a dedicated lunch area of the required size meaning lunches were served both in the foyer (a busy area where parents/carers collect and drop off children) and in the classrooms which could be quite *“smelly”* after lunchtime.
- staff cover required for lunchtimes with staff being very stretched over lunchtime and swapping halfway through the lunchtime period to allow staff to have their lunch.

### Focus on care rather than education?

With the extended hours, staff reported spending much of their time on general care such as providing snacks and lunch and toileting rather than preschool education as such. In addition, a consequence of the children spending so much time at nursery was staff taking a more active role in e.g. toilet training and eating habits.

*“A lot of the day seems focused on care so settling in, toileting, lunch, snacks... education that you do as part of your degree is less used.” (Staff)*

### **Focus and resources on three- and four-year-olds?**

A natural consequence of the introduction of extended hours was much focus and resource being directed to its implementation, and an associated reduced priority on younger children. Coupled with the very low awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds, and barriers faced accessing childcare for this age group, this presents issues in terms of ensuring early intervention for vulnerable families.

*“There has been a lot more responsibility placed on practitioners including toilet training, toothbrushing... it feels at times like we’re predominantly doing care, where does the education come in?” (Staff)*

### **Issues linked to particular establishments**

- **Staff to child ratio:** Staff reported the staff to child ratio caused issues which were exacerbated by the volume of children and staff and thus the continuous need to cover annual leave, absence and so on.

*“When you have such a high number of staff, you’ve always got holidays, professional development, absence. It only takes one of these to upset the apple cart.” (Staff)*

- **Pace of change:** The rapid pace of change and development within the nursery and the introduction of the extended hours was an obvious challenge. The lack of a ‘blueprint’ or guidance for implementation of the extended provision meant the need for ongoing learning and involvement.
- **Staff:** The nursery embedding effectively two different staff teams who work a mix of full and part time, and 52-week and term-time contracts into a cohesive team has been a significant challenge including ensuring effective communication between staff, and that all staff feel part of the ongoing evolution of the nursery.
- **Environment:** Staff raised issues with the size and layout of the nursery to meet the needs of all children, particularly those with additional support needs. The lack of smaller rooms within the nursery to undertake one-to-one time with children, meet parents, undertake Health Visitor and Social Work appointments, and for a quiet space for children was seen as a challenge. The work of the Staff Champions was said to be restricted due to lack of space. However, staff had adapted the larger rooms to create small areas which allow for a more nurturing area for children in order to continuously evolve to improve the experience for children.

### **Researcher observation**

The researchers spent considerable time in the nursery, engaging with staff and observing the environment at different times through the day including transition, lunchtime, PATHS<sup>2</sup> sessions, home time. This section provides a summary of key reflections from these observations.

- Overall, the nursery environment was perceived to be welcoming, nurturing and comfortable for children.
- Although the environment was noisy as would be expected, the noise was not overpowering and there was no sense of chaos or disorder.
- As there was much activity taking place (e.g. PATH sessions, visits to local park and so on, ZUMBA and cooking classes) the room very rarely had the full complement of children meaning it was not as busy as it could have been.
- Despite the nursery having large rooms, staff had managed to create nurturing and calming areas where children could receive particular attention including a quieter area for younger children to nap.
- The staff effectively balance monitoring of the children and structured learning while allowing free play, both inside and outside. The children play outside three times a day, regardless of the weather.
- At all times, staff encourage positive behaviour from the child such as respecting their peers, sharing, playing together and being inclusive.
- Children seemed happy, settled, content and well behaved (despite many children having behavioural issues)

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<sup>2</sup> The PATHS Programme is designed to facilitate the development of self-control, emotional awareness and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

- No child was excluded or left out, with children having the confidence to approach staff if they needed something. Any child who was upset was quickly attended to.

### **Lunchtimes**

During the research, reported challenges with lunchtimes included the volume of children to be served, limited space, and pressure on staff to deliver a pleasant social experience for children. Despite this, researcher observation indicated the nursery was able to offer this pleasant experience, while helping develop children's social skills and table manners, in addition to encouraging healthy eating.

Children have outside play directly before lunchtime, when the staff prepare the lunch area including putting out tables and chairs, partially drawing the blinds and playing music. All staff, including the management team, are involved. There is one member of staff and approximately 8-10 children per table.

The researcher noted how children are encouraged to be independent and help themselves. Staff encourage conversation and gently encourage children to eat new, healthy foods. Children have a quiet time after lunch to settle where they sit and draw or play board games.

The researchers noted the constant energy and commitment of staff to continuously evolve and improve provision to better meet the needs of the children and families. The leadership team appeared incredibly passionate about what they do and are very solutions-focused and determined to overcome any challenges they face. This ethos was present throughout the nursery.

Overall, it appeared that despite the challenges faced, the nursery offered a nurturing environment and quality provision for children who receive much individual care and attention. Despite the volume of children, there was no sense of a one-size-fits-all approach, with staff working hard to meet the needs of all children.

### **Key reflections**

Overall, the extended hours appear to offer multiple benefits for both children and families, with a key theme being reduced stress and pressure on families to rely on informal childcare, use multiple childcare providers, and balance multiple duties including employment, caring responsibilities and general daily chores within a short time period while their child was at nursery. However, there was a general sense from participants that this time should be used productively in order for the extended hours to be worthwhile, with it being questioned whether the provision should be universal or targeted to those families thought to be most in need of additional childcare.

Most importantly, the extended hours offered various benefits for children including social and language development and preparation for school. In particular, vulnerable children able to access the 52-week provision were seen to benefit most, as they were cared for and nurtured within a safe and comfortable environment for an increased number of hours per week.

The case study research highlighted the level of change required in the nursery setting to implement the extended hours, while maintaining continuity of high-quality provision. Driven by organisational leadership, staff applied a solutions-focused attitude and commitment to continually developing and improving the service to best meet the needs of families. Despite staff concerns regarding communication, infrastructure and lunchtimes in particular impacting on the child's experience, both feedback from parents/carers and the researcher observations highlight the nurturing, comfortable environment that has been created for children, providing multiple benefits in terms of social development and preparation for school. This demonstrates the motivation and commitment of staff.

Vulnerability was key research theme, particularly in relation to the need for a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable families. This was a general finding from the CHANGE community engagement, as discussed later in the report, and relates to the extended provision in terms of accompanying tailored support being required for vulnerable parents/carers in order to achieve longer term outcomes for children and families. Awareness of provision for eligible two-year-olds was found to be low. It was also reported that implementation of the extended hours left little time for

prioritising provision for two-year-old children, which raises concerns that vulnerable families most in need may not be benefiting from early intervention.

To summarise, extended hours provide a challenge for nurseries to adapt to the new requirements of the provision but offer real benefits for families, particularly if considered in a more holistic model of family support.