



University  
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Centre for  
Public Policy

## EVALUATION REPORT

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# Evaluating Cross-Boundary Childcare Provision in Scotland: Insights from an Edinburgh Case Study

2 April 2026

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Published by the Centre for Public Policy  
at the University of Glasgow

# About this report

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This research was undertaken by the University of Glasgow Centre for Public Policy, commissioned by Pregnant Then Screwed.



## University of Glasgow Centre for Public Policy

Based at the University of Glasgow, the [Centre for Public Policy](#) conducts academic research, impartial analysis, programme and policy evaluation, and facilitation. It works collaboratively with policymakers, practitioners, and academic researchers to support evidence-based decision-making and drive solutions to societal challenges.



## Pregnant Then Screwed

[Pregnant Then Screwed](#)'s vision is for a world where the mothers, parents and families of today and tomorrow thrive. But the reality right now is mothers, parents and families are repeatedly failed by systems that are supposed to help them, systems which set up unfairness and disadvantage across a lifetime. Pregnant Then Screwed exists to challenge this. In Scotland much of their work focuses on childcare, and the challenges parents face finding affordable, accessible and high quality childcare.

# Authors

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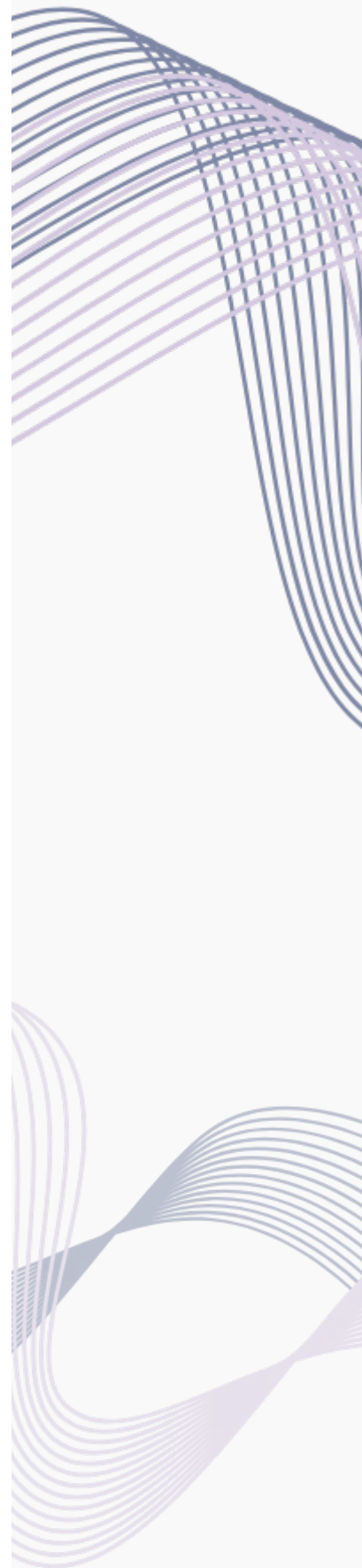
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# Executive summary

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This evaluation assesses the impact of the City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC) policy decision to restrict access to PVI (private, voluntary and independent) childcare provision for cross-boundary families, i.e. families who want to access their funded childcare entitlement with a provider located in a different local authority area from where they live. It provides a snapshot of the early effects of this policy change on families affected. This research focuses on identifying the challenges arising from the policy's implementation, including impacts on childcare costs, parental employment opportunities, and patterns of childcare use for parents outside of Edinburgh. The findings aim to support future policy development and effective local implementation.

- The Scottish Government's policy - offering 1140 early learning and childcare (ELC) funded hours to all three and four-year-olds, and eligible two-year-olds - continues to be supported at a local level. Yet, differences in how the CEC implements the policy for cross-boundary families appears to limit key principles such as parental choice, flexibility, and, where possible, funding following the child. The extent of the impact of the policy change on families varied based on household circumstances and the level of flexibility available within workplaces and childcare settings.
- Without access to PVI childcare in Edinburgh, parents had to rely on local authority provision in the city or childcare - local authority and/or PVI - in their local authority area. Alternative childcare arrangements were often described as less flexible (i.e. restricted to school hours which did not echo working patterns) and the availability of places for children were limited (i.e. specific days, hours, and waiting lists) and were not available at short notice. Families often had to weigh up affordability, quality of provision, and practical travel considerations - sometimes incurring extra costs to maintain continuity of care or remain with a preferred provider.
- Alterations to cross-boundary arrangements in Edinburgh reshaped how families structured their time, employment, and caring responsibilities, often with negative consequences. For some families, this led to changes in childcare costs, employment patterns, and work-life balance. Parents described increased financial pressures related to childcare fees when access to cross-boundary PVI settings changed. Some parents - most often women - had to reduce or alter their working hours to accommodate the policy change, highlighting a gender imbalance.

- Families with strong informal support networks, such as help from relatives or friends, were better able to manage changes. Those without this support reported greater uncertainty and stress when trying to secure suitable childcare which meets their needs. Parents relied on informal childcare provided by family or friends to cope with the policy change.

The findings highlight the need to engage with the key principles of the 1140 national childcare policy of parental choice and flexibility in childcare at a local level where feasible. Strengthening collaboration and shared learning across the Scottish Government, local authorities, providers, and families will support a more equitable, sustainable, and family-centred system. This will also be important if other local authorities consider adopting similar restrictions in accessing PVI childcare settings cross-boundary.

## Recommendations for policy and practice

The findings presented in this report are intended to inform ongoing learning and dialogue around the implementation of the 1140 National Policy Principles. When decisions are made in isolation, interdependencies across childcare and related policy areas may be overlooked, increasing the likelihood of gaps between policy intent and families lived experiences.

### **Strengthen consistency and clarity in implementation**

Improved collaboration between national and local government in the implementation of the 1140 childcare policy could help address perceived inequalities in access and ensure that the policy functions as intended for all families.

### **Rebalance flexibility and choice within local delivery models**

A review of local delivery models is recommended to assess whether current patterns of provision meet the needs of working families. Making childcare more flexible - especially in council settings that only run during school term time - would give parents more choice and make it easier for families to fit childcare around their different work patterns.

### **Mitigate disproportionate impacts on women and lower-income families**

Local policy and practice could more explicitly consider gender equality and socio-economic impacts, including how childcare constraints can influence employment decisions and household income. Existing mechanisms - such as Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) - could be used more systematically to

identify and mitigate inequalities. However, this should be done earlier in the policy design process as part of the policy planning to have any real impact.

**Embed family experience in ongoing policy development**

Strengthening mechanisms for listening to families lived experiences would support more responsive, family-centred implementation and continuous improvement of the 1140 ELC entitlement. Building an evidence base through evaluation and participatory methods in policy implementation could help to support decision-making and policy design.

# 1. Policy context

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Access to high-quality, affordable and accessible Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) is a central element of the Scottish Government’s approach to improving outcomes for children, reducing child poverty and supporting inclusive economic growth. As set out in [Best Start, Bright Futures](#), ELC is intended to address the structural drivers of poverty by supporting parental employment and promoting children’s wellbeing and development in early years. The expansion of funded childcare provision represents a significant national investment in Scotland’s families and aligns with wider ambitions under the [No One Left Behind](#) policy to reduce barriers to labour market participation, particularly for women and lone parents.

Despite this policy ambition, evidence consistently highlights challenges in translating funded entitlements into access that fully meets parental need <sup>1</sup>. Parents often report ongoing difficulties related to the availability of places, long waiting lists, and limited flexibility in delivery models<sup>2</sup>. Funded hours are not always aligned with modern working patterns, including shift work, part-time employment and variable hours. Encouragingly, a recent evaluation published by the Scottish Government on the expansion to 1140 hours noted an increase in the number of childcare settings operating outside of school hours or during term-time. That said, this varies quite significantly between local authorities. Where childcare is required beyond the funded entitlement, affordability remains a concern, particularly for lower-income households <sup>3</sup>.

These issues can constrain parents’ ability to sustain employment or engage with employability support. The Scottish Government’s expansion of [funded ELC to 1140 hours per year](#) represented a substantial financial commitment to early years provision. The entitlement applies to all three- and four-year-old children and to eligible two-year-olds. The aim is to improve child development outcomes, reduce socio-economic inequalities, and support parental participation in work, education, and training. In a bid to achieve this aim, a key principle is that the [“Funding Follows the Child”](#), which links public

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1 Evans & Cebula (2024) Poverty proofing the future of early years childcare: Expansion of funded early years childcare in Scotland Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)

2 SWBG (2023) Policy Briefing: Childcare Survey 2023 Scottish Women’s Budget Group.

3 Angsten Clark A, Davies S, Owen R, Williams K. 2024. Beyond individual responsibility – towards a relational understanding of financial resilience through participatory research and design. *Journal of Social Policy*. Published online 2024:1-18.

Arpino, B. and Luppi, F., 2020. Childcare arrangements and working mothers’ satisfaction with work–family balance. *Demographic Research*, 42, pp.549-588.

funding to the child's entitlement rather than to specific providers. As such, cross-boundary funding is a core component of the ELC system, designed to uphold this principle where practicably possible. The [guidance](#) states explicitly that: "The choice of setting available to families is not restricted to their own local authority boundary".

Under national guidance, families are expected to access their funded ELC entitlement in any setting - public, private, third-sector, or childminder, reflecting the provider neutral design of the policy - provided they meet the [National Standard](#), have capacity and are contracted by a local authority. Until now, cross-boundary arrangements have been managed with this principle in mind. Regional arrangements<sup>4</sup>, operationalise this principle by enabling member. For example, this supports parents living in Kirkintilloch (East Dunbartonshire Council) but working in Glasgow (Glasgow City Council) accessing childcare that suits their needs, either in the local authority where they live or where they work. These protocols are intended to ensure that, where physical and financial capacity allows, families can take up funded hours in a different local authority area, supporting parental choice and equitable entitlement across local authority borders and providers.

However, shifting financial and operational contexts have challenged this practice more recently. Budget constraints have led to local authority deliberations (i.e. Edinburgh and West Lothian) on how to enable the delivery of a high-quality childcare service. With tightening budgets, Councils are exploring cost savings – i.e. considering ways in which to maximise local authority settings rather than commissioning PVI placements.

A key principle of the fiscal framework - encapsulated in the Verity House Agreement – is reduced ring-fencing of local government budgets. [Ring-fencing for local authority ELC budgets was removed from 2024–25](#), with funding now integrated into the General Revenue Grant (GRG). This allows local authorities more flexibility in how they allocate these resources across the Council.

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<sup>4</sup> The West Partnership Cross Boundary Funding Protocol is designed to support the implementation of Funding Follows the Child. As well as the 8 local authorities that make up the West Partnership (Glasgow, East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, South Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire), neighbouring local authorities in South, North and East Ayrshire and Argyll and Bute Councils are signed up to this protocol, however, processes may differ.

## 1.2 Case study: City of Edinburgh Council (CEC)

Within this wider policy and delivery context, the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) implemented a change during 2024–2025 in how it funds Scottish Government ELC places in PVI settings:

### **Edinburgh City Council (2024)**

Budget pressures to deliver ELC in Edinburgh led to a policy change. To enable delivery of a high-quality service, the Council revised the model of delivery for early years learning and childcare. As at March 2024, 174 children from nine other local authorities received a funded place in Edinburgh with 150 of these places in private provider settings, at a cost to the Council of approximately £1.2 million to provide these places. On 23 January 2023, information was shared with the Education, Children and Families Committee which considered how to maximise the use of local authority places by reducing the need to commission external provision and providing places for children from other local authorities whose parents/carers work in Edinburgh (Edinburgh City Council, 2024).

This resulted in a determination by the Council's Strategic Programme Board on 30 November 2023 to remove cross-boundary families in 1140 funded hours private/voluntary/independent (PVI) nurseries provision. A decision was taken to continue to fund existing cross boundary places in private settings but phase this option out from August 2024. Existing funded children who are not Edinburgh residents will continue to be funded. If they have a younger sibling who attends the setting and will be eligible for funding during session 2024-25, the Council will also fund this child to prevent the need for the parent to use more than one early year setting (Edinburgh City Council, 2024).

*Edinburgh City Council (2024) Internal Audit Report: CEJ2404 – Early Years Cross-Boundary Places*

Figure 1: CEC Decision-Making Process on 1140 Cross-Boundary

Citing budget pressures, the Council withdrew funded places for children who live outside the local authority boundary area and wish to attend PVI settings within Edinburgh (i.e. cross-boundary). Previously, families living in

neighbouring (boundary) local authorities were able to access funded places in Edinburgh-based PVI settings, often reflecting commuting patterns or proximity to parents' workplaces. As indicated in figure 1 the intention of this policy change was to contribute to more sustainable Council budgets and childcare provision in Edinburgh. The Council's decision was implemented from August 2024 onwards, meaning that cross-boundary families entitled to 1140 hours would only be able to access their 1140 entitlement for local authority childcare settings not PVI. This is a departure from National guidance as discussed earlier in this section.

This report presents the findings from a survey and in-depth interviews conducted with parents of children living in local authority areas which border Edinburgh and are currently, or soon to be, affected by the change. The aim of this research is to understand the unintended consequence of this decision taken by the Council.

## 2. Methodology

This evaluation assesses the impact of the City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC) decision to restrict access to PVI (private, voluntary and independent) childcare provision for cross-boundary families. The study provides a snapshot of the policy's early effects and examines how the change has influenced parental access, affordability, choice, and the overall sustainability of the local ELC system. The research focuses specifically on identifying impacts on childcare costs, parental employment opportunities, and patterns of childcare use. The evaluation was guided by three core research questions:

1. How has the policy influenced parental choice of childcare and patterns of use?
2. What impacts has the policy had on childcare costs for families?
3. In what ways has the policy affected parents' employment decisions and opportunities?

To address these questions, a set of evaluation criteria was developed to capture social, economic and practical dimensions of impact. These criteria considered:

1. **Work-life balance** (time management, career impact, workplace support)
2. **Financial impact** (income changes, childcare costs, budget adjustments)
3. **Social support and networks** (family and friends, community resources, social isolation)
4. **Coping strategies and adaptability** (flexibility, problem-solving, resilience)
5. **Long-term impact** (future planning, sustainability)

This framework enables the evaluation to distinguish between the intended aims of the policy, the realities of its implementation, and the contextual factors shaping outcomes for families.

### 2.1 Data collection

Data were collected through a mixed-methods approach. The research team conducted nine in-depth qualitative interviews: six with affected parents and three with representatives of childcare associations. Participants were recruited

on a voluntary basis through the Pregnant Then Screwed Facebook group. In addition, a survey was distributed through the same platform, generating 70 responses from parents affected by the policy change. Representatives from Scottish childcare associations were recruited directly via Pregnant Then Screwed to provide the context in the delivery of 1140 childcare.

All data collection took place between August and November 2025. Parents who took part in the survey or interviews were either affected by the closure of a PVI nursery in Edinburgh or were seeking childcare but weren't eligible for cross-boundary funding in PVI settings. Table 1 outlines the narratives of those parents interviewed:

**Table 1: Parent interviewees**

Parent	Narrative
Parent 1	<p>Parent 1 has two children (aged 3 ½ and 8 months). One child is in receipt of PVI cross-boundary 1140 funding in Edinburgh, the youngest will soon attend nursery and will be eligible for 1140 funding when she turns 3 years old.</p> <p>When the parent returns to work after maternity leave, it is expected that the youngest child will attend the same PVI nursery in Edinburgh. However, it is expected that by the time the youngest can access 1140 funding, the child will need to move to a different nursery to be eligible for funding.</p>
Parent 2	<p>Parent 2 has one child just under the age of 2. The parent extensively researched childcare options before their child was born and had selected a PVI nursery in Edinburgh, which was close to their home, suited their child's needs and their needs for travel and employment patterns.</p> <p>However, their child won't be eligible for cross-boundary funding at the PVI setting of their choice and when their child turns 3 years old, and able to access 1140 funding, they will need to move nursery. This parent is considering remaining at the nursery and continue to pay for childcare without accessing the 1140 funding.</p>

Parent	Narrative
Parent 3	Parent 3 has two children (aged 6 and 3) who both attended a PVI nursery in Edinburgh that closed. The oldest child is now at school, but this parent struggled to find alternative childcare for the youngest child when the nursery closed. Because of this, their youngest child must split their week between a private and a local authority childcare setting to top up childcare to fit with their employment patterns.
Parent 4	Parent 4 has one child aged 15 months. She planned access to childcare with her husband before they bought their house. Access to a nursery was important when deciding where to buy a home. The nursery they selected was a PVI nursery 100 yards from their home but situated in Edinburgh. Her child attends this nursery, but she will need to move her child when she turns three to access 1140 funding as she won't be eligible for cross-boundary funding.
Parent 5	Parent 5 had one child aged 5 and one child aged 1 attending the nursery that closed. Following the closure, she had to seek alternative care for her one-year-old (and 5-year-old for a short time before starting school). To continue to be eligible for 1140 funding she moved her children to a nursery in West Lothian which has led to a 25min drive rather than 10mins to the nursery that closed.
Parent 6	Parent 6 has one child aged 2 1/2 and she needs to split childcare across two nursery settings to fit with employment patterns.

The sampling strategy allowed for timely, detailed evidence from those directly experiencing the consequences of the policy. However, it also introduced limitations. Participants were recruited through a single advocacy-focused online community rather than through random sampling of all families affected, generating risks of selection bias in the findings, under-representing families who experienced minimal or no impact and over-representing those reporting more negative or significant consequences.

However, the analysis is not intended to be representative or generalisable. Rather, it provides an exploratory insight into the impacts of the policy on affected families, to help shine a light on some of its potentially unintended effects. As such, the sampling strategy remains an appropriate means of sharing the experiences of these participants.

## 3. Key findings

This section outlines the key findings from this research. It is structured around the evaluation criteria: work-life balance, financial impact, social support and networks, coping strategies and adaptability, and long-term impact.

### **As a result of the City of Edinburgh Council's policy change survey findings include:**

1. **88%** of respondents were female
2. **65%** of respondents reported an increase in childcare costs
3. **46%** of respondents reported an increase in time spent delivering and/or collecting children
4. **66%** of respondents reported changed work hours or patterns
5. **61%** of respondents reported needing to rely on family and friends for support

### 3.1 Impact on families, parents and children

This section discusses the impact of the decision on parents and work life balance, finances, changes to commuting times, dependency on extended networks, and longer-term strategies to manage impact.

#### **Nursery closure**

The decision to withdraw 1140 funding for cross-boundary places was described as a contributory factor in the closure of one PVI nursery in Edinburgh. It was a popular choice for parents' living on the boundary of Edinburgh and working within the city. Parents reported that the speed at which the cross-boundary decision was implemented was particularly challenging for them to access comparable, alternative childcare at such short notice:

*"[the nursery] told us they were shutting, they gave us two days' notice, so they told us at 6:15pm on the Friday night that they were shutting on the Wednesday.' So yeah, so that was how much notice we had... they'd kind of explained before that they were having difficulties with cross funding, but then they reassured us that 'No, it's fine. The funding's in place.' But it*

*turned out that the funding wasn't." (Parent 5)*

Parents remained eligible to access cross-boundary places in local authority childcare settings, but the options available were not considered suitable by parents. Interviewees explained that local authority childcare settings tend to operate reduced hours in comparison to the PVI sector and were only available during school term time. For those working full-time, or with flexible work patterns, seeking alternative childcare was more problematic. It was evident that parents found it challenging to adapt to the childcare provision available. One interviewee explained:

*"So, I think one school nursery said, 'We can have her from 8:50am to 11:20am or something or 8:55am to 11:20am'. And I was like, 'Oh, that's not even [close to what we need but] there was no option to extend that. [I was] planning for going back to work. So, I was like, 'We both work 9am till 5:00pm, [so] the cover needs to be in place around that. So ideally a nursery that would be 8am till 6:00pm.'" (Parent 5)*

When the change in policy was decided, it was not communicated to parents clearly. Of the parents surveyed, 4% were informed by their local authority. 56% of survey respondents were informed by their nursery and 40% were informed via their wider networks. The withdrawal of 1140 funding for cross-boundary places created disruption for families who relied on the nursery that closed. Although cross-boundary access to local authority childcare remained available in local authority providers, the limited hours and term-time-only provision did not align with many parents' needs, leaving some without suitable alternative childcare within the short timescales involved.

## **Factors influencing family childcare decisions**

Our research pointed to several key factors which shaped childcare choices, for example, where to live, ease of access, close or enroute to the workplace. Some parents had extensively researched their childcare options before buying their homes, to ensure access to childcare that aligned with their work schedules, family needs, and budgets. Parents had also selected their childcare setting based on ease of access. For some parents, being able to access childcare close to home and on route to work was a key factor when deciding where to live:

*"So yeah, our house is here [points to map]. The Edinburgh Council boundary*

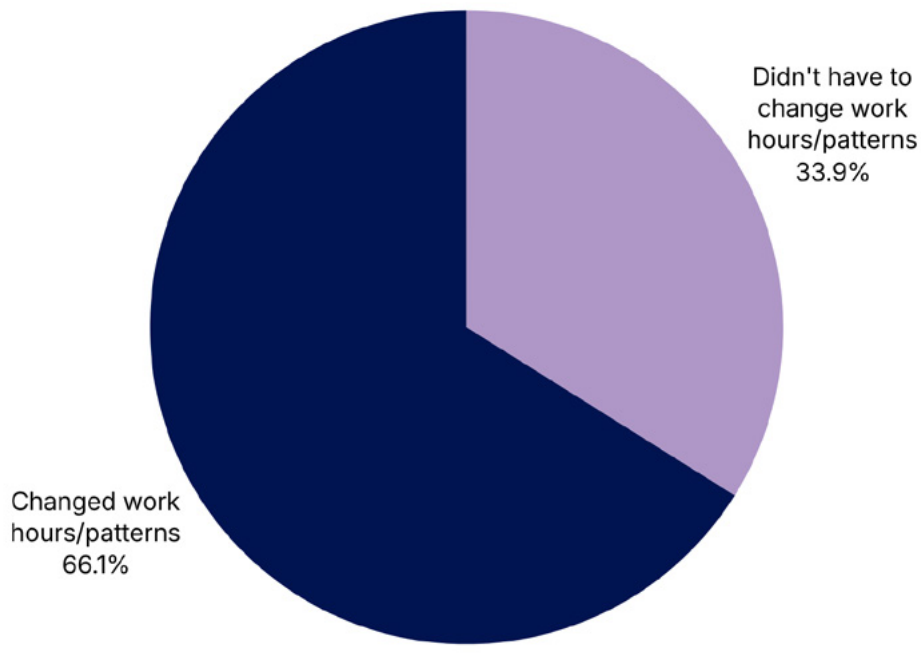
*is there. It's like a mile, like a mile from our house, basically... The [current] nursery was picked on the basis that it was close enough to home for commuting.” (Parent 2)*

There appears to be some differences in how Scottish local authorities were implementing the 1140 policy and funding cross boundary places. One interviewee described how neighbouring authorities applied different policies on cross-boundary funding. Their child’s friends from Edinburgh were able to access funded places in West Lothian private nurseries, while their own family faced restrictions when seeking similar provision in Edinburgh, highlighting inconsistencies between local authorities’ approaches.

### **Changes to work patterns and employment**

Survey participants reported that the policy change had a noticeable effect on their working lives, with around two-thirds describing adjustments to their working hours or patterns.

*Chart: Changes made in work hours/patterns*



These changes were often linked to the closure of one existing PVI provision or the limited availability of 1140 hour placements within their own local authority area which met the needs of those parents. For example, this was both the absence of places generally and those which met the needs of parents, i.e. parents requiring a Monday or Tuesday afternoon but childcare providers

only having availability on Wednesday and Thursday. As a result, interviewees described having to reorganise work and childcare arrangements, including considering part-time work, condensed hours, or reduced flexibility.

One interviewee highlighted the difficulty of balancing childcare with full-time employment:

*“We’re going to have to make big decisions about our working hours - whether one of us goes part-time or if condensed hours is an option... With condensed hours, you’re talking 10-hour days, so how do you get the kids ready for school in the morning or make their dinner at night?”*  
(Parent 1)

A gendered pattern emerged during parents' accounts during interviews. Women were more likely to adjust their working hours, often because their roles or employers were perceived as more flexible, or because employers of working fathers were seen as less accommodating:

*“I also believe that it’s still that sort of societal thing [where], if I was a female working in [my husband’s male dominated field] you wouldn’t bat an eyelid about me going to ask about condensed hours, whereas if he goes to ask about condensed hours... you know, all these companies are putting these policies in place and things like that, but they’re not being taken up by men. They’re still being taken up by women because they have to. And there’s no choice. Ultimately, when it comes to it, one of us has to go part time, it probably will be me, which means, say I took a 20% cut on my salary, that’s a bigger cut proportionally than if my husband was to take the cut, but it probably will just be me because that’s just... the way it is.”* (Parent 1)

Income differences within households also shaped decisions. In many cases, the lower earner - typically the mother - reduced working hours, even when this involved long-term financial and career disadvantages. In one instance, a woman who earned more than her partner was expected to reduce her hours due to workplace norms and perceived gender expectations. The interviewee explained:

*“These policies exist, but they’re not taken up by men. One of us will have to go part-time, and it will probably be me... even though the proportional*

*cut is bigger for me.” (Parent 1)*

Participants interviewed also described practical day-to-day impacts, such as being late for work, leaving early for pick-ups, or managing longer journeys between multiple childcare settings. These challenges were compounded by the structure of local authority provision, which some parents found incompatible with full-time working hours due to limited or inflexible session times.

Interviewees expressed concern that changes to their working patterns would affect career progression, promotion prospects, and future employability. One interviewee explained:

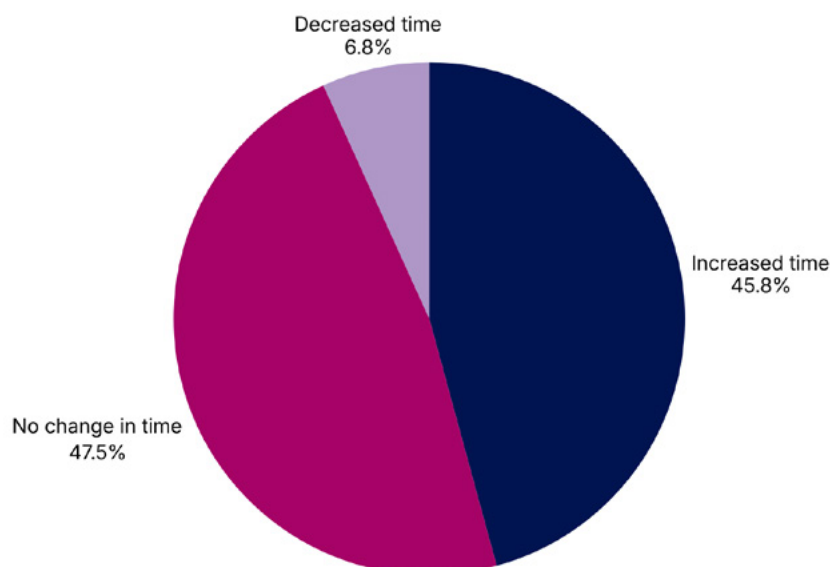
*“Dropping my hours would have a massive impact on my career development... It has massive implications for my future opportunities.”*  
(Parent 4)

Changing work patterns and hours is not a costless proposition for parents, and particularly women. Findings suggest that the policy change contributed to altered work patterns for many families, with the potential for long-term disproportionate effects on women’s employment.

## Changes to the time spent travelling to and from childcare setting

Nearly half (46%) of survey respondents reported an increase in the time spent travelling to and from their childcare setting following the policy change.

*Chart: Changes in time spent delivering and collecting children*



Survey respondents reported increases which ranged from 30 to 90 minutes per day. Interviewees described the process of longer, more complex journeys resulting from the need to access alternative childcare settings.

This included travelling in the opposite direction of work, making earlier drop-offs and later pick-ups, and navigating journeys that required doubling back along the same route. One interviewee explained:

*“So it’s [on] me now because I drive to work. So I just have to drive the opposite way - basically to drop [my daughter] off and then drive back [on] exactly the same roads [to work]. I have to like drop her off earlier than I would if she was on the way to work obviously and pick her up later.” (Parent 6)*

Interviewees with more than one child described additional pressures, particularly when children were allocated places in different nurseries due to limited availability of eligible funded provision. One interviewee explained the impact:

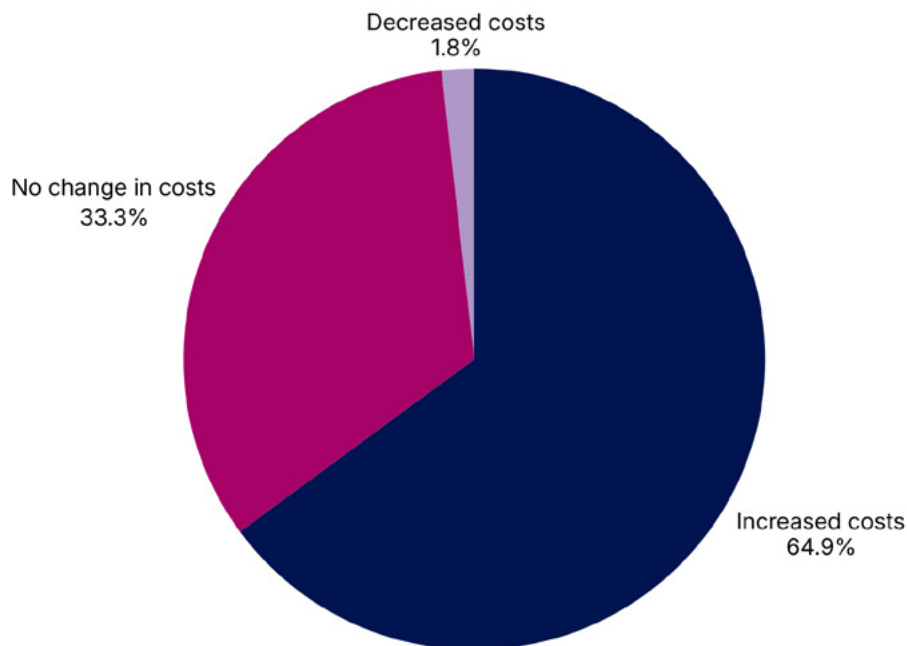
*“[My other daughter] won’t get the government-funded place, which means we [will] have to move her. So, one of the problems is that there is literally nowhere to move her to. There’s not a single nursery within a 20-minute drive of where I live in Midlothian that has any space until [she] turns 4. And the ones that do have space are further away, [which] means that I [would] have to double back on myself and drive the opposite direction for about half an hour and then [...] drive back on myself and into work.” (Parent 1)*

Overall, the findings indicate that the policy change contributed to increased daily travel time for a substantial proportion of families, with implications for parents’ time management, work routines, and the practical coordination of care across different childcare settings.

## **Financial impact: Childcare costs**

Childcare costs increased for 65% of survey respondents and this increase varied across families.

Chart: Changes in childcare costs



According to survey respondents, this increase ranged from an additional £150 to £1642 per month - one parent reported an overall cost increase of £1642. While interviewees reported being only moderately worse off compared to others, even smaller increases were described as financially burdensome:

*"We're probably about £200 a month worse off as a result of this [policy change] decision, which is a lot less than some other families." (Parent 3)*

For others, additional expenses arose from the need to pay for extended drop-off and pick-up times to accommodate working hours:

*"We have to pay for an extra hour [in total] in the morning to drop her off a half hour extra, [...and then an] extra half an hour in the afternoon." (Parent 6)*

One parent also highlighted the additional costs due to fuel and travelling further and that, although they were able to absorb some of the childcare costs, it wasn't sustainable overall:

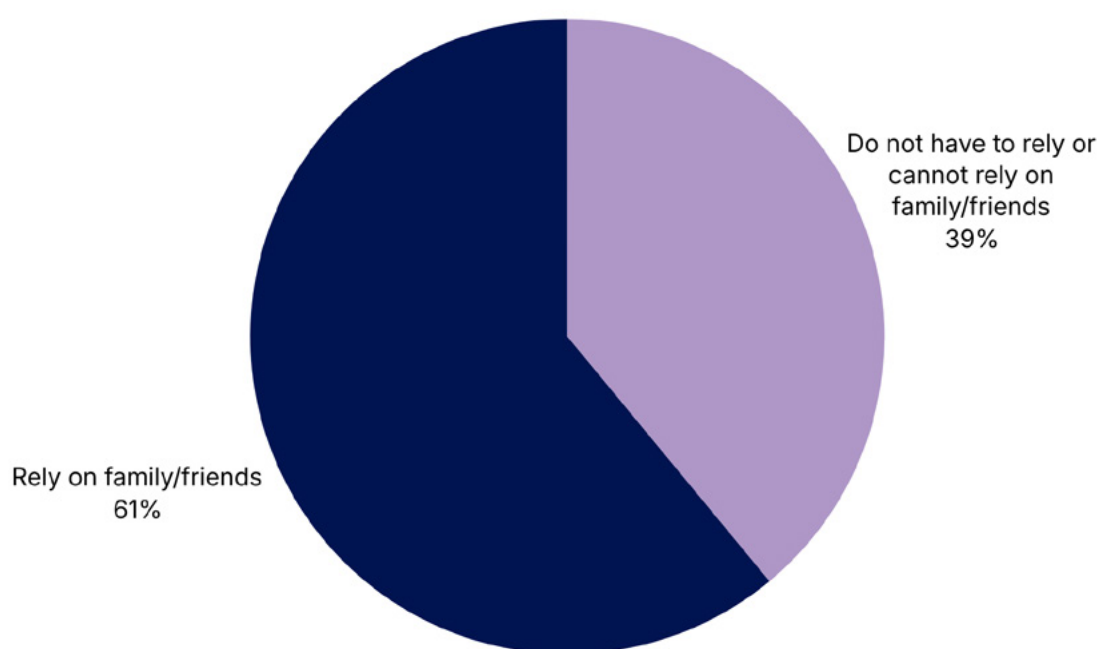
*"I could just about absorb that [additional] childcare [cost] for a small portion of time, but obviously that was not ideal. And then we were thankfully able to get her a place, a nursery called [name of nursery],*

*which is fantastic and a wonderfully run nursery. [But] it is far away from our house.” (Parent 5).*

## Social support and networks

The survey indicated that 61% of survey respondents relied on informal childcare provided by family or friends, while 39% of survey respondents reported having no access to such support following the policy change.

*Chart: Reliance on family/social network*



This distribution suggests that a proportion of families were unable to draw on informal networks to mitigate disruptions to formal childcare provision. Interviewees commonly reported limited access to extended family support. Even where relatives lived locally, their ability to provide childcare was constrained by factors such as age, health conditions, or competing responsibilities.

*“We don’t have any family. I’m from England and I moved up for the job and my husband’s mum [living close] is a single woman who is disabled. She’s not able to provide any childcare, so we don’t have any sort of family childcare. Our plan was to put our child into nursery five days a week.”  
(Parent 4)*

These limitations reduced the practical availability of informal care, despite

its presence in principle. Parents who had relocated to Scotland - often for employment - reported additional barriers, as they lacked geographically proximate social networks. For these families, childcare arrangements were largely dependent on formal provision. As one interviewee noted:

*“We don’t have grandparents nearby; we don’t have family. It’s us and nurseries that are responsible for our children.” (Parent 1)*

The absence of informal support increased a household’s exposure to disruptions in nursery availability. Several interviewees described needing to take periods of annual leave to cover gaps in provision. One interviewee explained:

*“We were in a position where we had no nursery place for our two-year-old. Between me and my wife, we used two or three weeks each of annual leave to provide care.” (Parent 3)*

Evidence suggests that the Council’s decision heightened reliance on informal childcare among those who had access to it, while leaving a notable minority without any alternative support. Families without local networks were particularly vulnerable to disruptions, leading to increased use of annual leave and reduced flexibility in managing work and caring responsibilities.

## **Coping strategies and adaptability**

Interviewees highlighted a range of challenges relating to their capacity to cope with and adapt to changes in childcare arrangements resulting from the policy change. A central theme across interviews concerned the disruption caused by removing children from nurseries where they had established routines, relationships, and a sense of familiarity.

Interviewees described the practical and emotional implications of withdrawing children from settings in which they were settled. One interviewee explained that their child had developed strong relationships with staff and peers over an extended period, noting the difficulty associated with re-establishing these connections elsewhere:

*“She had built up relationships with staff and children... she was confident in her routine, and we felt she was well cared for.” (Parent 5)*

Transitions to new settings were described as requiring adjustments for both children and parents. Interviewees reported that children needed time to re-learn routines, engage with new staff, and form connections with peers. For some families, these transitions coincided with other stressors, increasing the overall difficulty of the process:

*“She had to re-learn meeting staff and children and building up that routine... it was very different.” (Parent 5)*

One interviewee also noted the time-intensive nature of settling-in processes, which involved multiple short visits and ongoing coordination around work and caring responsibilities:

*“And the new environment that she went into was very different... she just had to re-learn, meeting staff, meeting kids and just building up that routine. She was very resilient with it, but for us, it was very difficult.” (Parent 5)*

And:

*“It’s just another thing to organise and plan... you go for an hour, then another day, and hope they feel more comfortable.” (Parent 5)*

For children with additional needs, the challenges associated with transition were amplified. One interviewee explained that their child’s hearing impairment and delayed speech development made it more difficult for her to adjust to a new environment and rebuild social connections:

*“She was losing the contacts she was developing and had to start all over again... it takes her a while to open up to people.” (Parent 6)*

In addition to the emotional and developmental implications, parents described the logistical complexity of securing alternative childcare. Limited availability and long waiting lists reduced parental choice and, in some cases, required families to consider less convenient or lower-quality settings. One interviewee reported:

*“No nursery would accept me... the only nurseries with space were across a very busy roundabout.” (Parent 4)*

Another highlighted a perceived relationship between nursery quality and availability:

*“The nurseries that have space... they’re just not good. The ones with good inspection reports have long waiting lists.” (Parent 1)*

Finding alternative childcare was described by interviewees as complex and with limited availability and long waiting lists, families had little choice over provision. Interviewees perceived a clear link between quality and availability, noting that nurseries with spaces were often those viewed as lower quality, while higher-quality settings had longer waiting lists. As a result, many parents felt compelled to accept longer travel times, higher costs, or less convenient arrangements to avoid placing their children in settings they considered unsuitable.

Parents who were able to meet these additional costs often did so to secure what they perceived to be higher-quality or more stable provision:

*“This is about what is best for the children. We’ll take the financial hit if we must.” (Parent 1)*

Some families described taking proactive steps, such as directly approaching nursery managers, to secure a placement. While these strategies occasionally resulted in positive outcomes, parents noted that the process was highly stressful and contributed to instability for affected children. One interviewee described the impact:

*“It worked out well in the end, but it was incredibly stressful and meant my daughter had to change last minute.” (Parent 3)*

The evidence indicates that the change placed demands on families’ adaptive capacity. While parents demonstrated resilience and problem-solving, these efforts frequently came at the cost of disruption to routines and reduced flexibility in managing work and caring responsibilities. The findings highlight that families’ ability to adapt was influenced by the availability and quality of alternative provision, as well as the specific needs and circumstances of individual children.

*“The nurseries that do have space, the reason they have space is [because] they’re just not good. You know, the care inspector*

*reports. We're really lucky where we are with [name of nursery] and they're an absolutely fantastic nursery and they consistently get really good care. They're really good with all the children. My daughter absolutely loves all of them." (Parent 1)*

This is also a challenge for nurseries accepting new children and having to adapt to the needs of the parents and child.

It was clear that, for those who could absorb the additional costs, they were willing to do that for the benefit of their children's safety, comfort and learning:

*"Ultimately, this is about what is best for the children. You know, we'll take the hit financially if we have to. It might put strain in the family. We'll do whatever we can for childcare." (Parent 6)*

One interviewee explained their process:

*"...we basically found a nursery. I turned up on the doorstep at 6:00 AM and we saw the manager and she ended up being in this new space which has worked out really well. But at the time it was incredibly stressful and it also meant that we weren't able to have our first choice provision [and] it caused quite a lot of distress for my daughter because she having to change last minute, not to mention all the staff completely lost their jobs with no, with no change at all." (Parent 3)*

Despite these pressures, as noted, parents demonstrated resilience and problem-solving, often needing to prioritise their children's safety, comfort, and learning above financial or personal cost – those with the financial capability and working patterns to do so. Those who were able to absorb additional expenses were willing to do so to secure what they felt was the best possible care. However, this adaptability came at the cost of increased stress, emotional exhaustion, and disruption to family life, highlighting the limits of families' capacity to absorb systemic childcare changes without adequate support. At the same time, lower income families with inflexible shift patterns may struggle to build such resilience.

## 4. Conclusion

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This evaluation highlights the early effects of the City of Edinburgh Council's decision to restrict access to funded private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) childcare provision for cross-boundary families. The evidence suggests that this change has reshaped how families navigate childcare arrangements, with consequences for parental choice, affordability, and flexibility. For some families - particularly those with limited workplace flexibility or without access to informal support networks - the policy has introduced additional pressures in managing employment and caring responsibilities. It has limited the principle of funding follows the child.

Across the system, the policy shift has also influenced patterns of cost and use, as families weighed the balance between continuity, quality, and affordability. While the underlying aims of the 1140 hours entitlement continue to be strongly supported at a local level, the findings indicate that aspects of local implementation and restrictions placed, may limit the policy's potential to deliver equitable access and uphold the principles of choice and flexibility for all families, regardless of local authority boundaries. Although the impacts described by interviewees and survey respondents may be temporary and are likely to stabilise over time, it remains important to recognise these short-term effects, particularly if other local authorities adopt similar policy approaches.

The study underlines the importance of clear communication, shared understanding, and ongoing collaboration across national and local government, providers, and families. Strengthening these relationships will be central to supporting consistent, transparent policy decision-making and ensuring that local delivery models remain responsive to diverse needs. Better alignment between policy intent and lived experience will also be essential should other local authorities adopt similar approaches to cross-boundary provision.

Overall, the findings point to the value of continuous learning and dialogue as the early learning and childcare system evolves. Embedding family perspectives in policy development, considering gendered and socio-economic impacts more systematically, and enhancing flexibility within local delivery models can all contribute to a more equitable and sustainable approach. Supporting these improvements will help maximise the benefits and expansion of the 1140 hours entitlement for children and families across Scotland.

# Research Ethics

The research has been reviewed and overseen by the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. This is a highly robust ethical review process that ensures compliance with best practice in the ethics of social research as well as regulatory requirements (such as data protection). The ethical risks involved in the research related predominantly to research participants and due diligence was followed in relation to the protection of participants in line with University research regulations.

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# About this report

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It was published by the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Glasgow on 2 April 2026.

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