

The Potential Role of Dublin City Council in Facilitating the Provision of Childcare Services

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Racheal Batten and seconded by Lord Mayor, Alison Gilliland at the June City Council meeting:

‘That we write to the Minister for Children requesting support for Dublin City Council to run their own city crèches and special state insurances be provided.’

Following a discussion, it was agreed that the Chief Executive would commission research on the matter and report back to Council in 3 months.

Proposed Approach

Acknowledging the social and economic value of the childcare infrastructure and the role it plays in supporting children, families, the wider community (in the short, medium, and long term), the scope of this piece of work is to establish a positional paper for Dublin City Council (DCC) that will generally describe the extent to which DCC is currently involved in supporting childcare within the City Council area, and what that provision looks like. It will go on to identify the key challenges facing the community childcare sector and how DCC might play a greater role in supporting childcare service provision.

There will be a particular focus on community/not for profit childcare provision. According to Pobal’s *‘Annual Early Years Sector Profile’* Report (May 2022), one third of the childcare provision in Dublin City is community based.

The context of the report will be informed by a review of recent literature on the sector including:

the *‘Annual Early Years Sector Profile’* Report (May 2022),

‘First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children, and their Families 2019-2028’

the *‘Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022’* and draft *‘Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028’*.

The research will address two objectives as follows:

Objective 1

To review the role DCC plays in supporting the childcare sector with a view to identifying the type and extent of these interventions (e.g. identifying any premises and the terms under which premises are provided for childcare facilities).

Proposed Methodology

The review will consider the statutory basis for DCC's involvement in facilitating childcare provision.

Using a ***Snowballing*** methodology, initial informational interviews will be conducted with a small sample of significant stakeholders, whose knowledge of DCC's historical role in Community Childcare will inform a series of additional contact points to gather wider knowledge. This will serve as a scoping exercise, outlining the specific role DCC has in supporting community childcare, looking at both physical resources (buildings) and soft supports (e.g. financial incentives, rates exemptions, rent rebates etc.). It will seek to quantify the current level of support by DCC to the sector (incl. grants, capital costs incurred, rents foregone etc.)

Interviews with key personnel from DCC's Housing & Community Department, Planning Department and the North and South City Area Directors of Service will allow for a view on where there might be gaps in provision within the city and if provisions in the draft Development Plan need to be reviewed.

Objective 2

To identify the key challenges facing the childcare sector within the City Council area, and what role DCC might play in addressing these challenges.

Proposed Methodology

A review of existing data to establish what community childcare services are operating within the DCC area. This will extend to identifying what funding programmes are supporting these services.

Interviewing key personnel from the Dublin City Childcare Committee and a sample of childcare service providers to form a view about the key challenges facing the childcare sector in the City Council area. This will cover:

- Exploring issues that have persisted in the community childcare sector (e.g. sustainability), with some examples of where Community Childcare provision has failed and also where it has worked.
- Proposing how DCC might best assist in helping to address these challenges (incl. community initiatives, access to community grants that become available to the sector, community integration and support, promotion of events, etc.).
- Assessing uptake of childcare premises in new developments (by private or community providers), which have been conditioned as part of the planning process and where uptake is low among private providers, identifying what is driving this (is viability a concern?).
- To the extent that insurance costs are identified as a key constraint to engage with the City Council's insurer, IPB, to see if there is any scope for action to address unaffordable insurance costs.

All of this will be done with due consideration to the roles of other key stakeholders including:

DCEDIY (This will be particularly pertinent when considering sustainability.),
TUSLA (Child protection – areas of disadvantage),
Pobal (Funding programme management) and
Dublin City Childcare Committee.