

Glasgow pledge to lead UK with nurseries nearby [GB] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Parents will have access to year-round nursery provision "within buggy walking distance from their homes" in what has been described as the UK's most comprehensive and flexible childcare service.

In a radical overhaul of its childhood services across the next five years, Glasgow City Council is aiming to increase the entitlement to free education for all three and four-year-olds from 12.5 hours to 15 hours, and by 2009 half of all eligible parents should have access to school and community-based childcare for five to 14-year-olds.

Parents would be able to book the hours they need and contribute towards the cost where required.

Within the next two years Glasgow City Council is also attempting to offer children, young people and their families access to sports, music, play and other activities by keeping schools open from 8am until at least 6pm. The scheme, when fully operational, will cost £10m a year, with most of the money being reallocated from other areas and from the ongoing streamlining of senior management within the education department.

The council also believes there is up to £2m in "free money", essentially untapped tax credits, to help families pay for the care provision, with the lack of relevant services the reason why the money is currently unclaimed.

However, opposition leaders in the city have said that unless the council addresses the cull of nursery teachers within the past six years, the overhaul "is in danger of being little more than window dressing".

As part of the council's strategy, due to be approved on Friday, five pilot schemes in eight centres across Glasgow will be launched in November, costing £3.25m over two years.

Nursery admissions and the charging system will be reformed in the pilot areas to include a priority banding system for the allocation of extended nursery places, which will prioritise parents wishing to access education, training or employment.

A standard rate of £2 per hour will be charged, with reduced rates to help those who cannot afford it or are training to return to work, and there will also be reduced rates for those with more than one child.

According to the council, with the new pricing system allowing parents to claim more tax credits, some will receive as much as 80% of their childcare.

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- reprinted from the Glasgow Herald

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/08/09/glasgow-pledge-lead-uk-nurseries-nearby-gb> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/spaces> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/urban>