

ASSESSING THE SUITABILITY AND NEED FOR FURTHER CHILDCARE PROVISION IN ABERDEENSHIRE



INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) launched its online survey 'Childcare Provision in Aberdeenshire 2024' on 24th May 2024 to assess current demand for services in this local authority where the 'rurality element' poses a further challenge to parents as service users of childcare, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and wraparound care services. The survey was open for a month and received 329 valid responses.

This briefing aims to support councillors and/or families in making the case for the provision of services in their area.

Key findings and recommendations

The current childcare offer in Aberdeenshire is not sufficient to meet the needs of parents. As a result, many families rely heavily on unpaid care, with a significant number of women reporting changes to their working arrangements in order to manage childcare responsibilities. This not only reinforces gender inequality but also poses challenges to the council's ambitions for building a sustainable local economy.

RECOMMENDATION 1. The Scottish Government should extend the funded childcare offer to cover the period immediately following maternity leave and develop a plan to progressively move towards universal access to 50 hours of childcare per week.

RECOMMENDATION 2. Aberdeenshire Council should monitor the effectiveness of its childminder recruitment package to help increase the availability of childminders across the area. It should also work in partnership with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to expand the number of childminders delivering funded ELC.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Aberdeenshire Council should use its discretionary powers to expand eligibility for funded ELC for 2-year-olds to include second and subsequent children born from a multiple birth event.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Aberdeenshire Council should review the local availability of flexible childcare and assess the feasibility of purchasing additional hours in public nurseries. It should also work with private and third-sector providers to ensure parents have greater choice in the hours available to them.

RECOMMENDATION 5. Aberdeenshire Council should map the current provision of Out of School Care (OOSC) and collaborate with the private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) sector to develop affordable options in communities where current OOSC availability is insufficient.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Aberdeenshire Council should provide evidence of how it meets its duty to offer appropriate care for school-aged children in need—both during school hours and outside of school hours, including during school holidays. The Council should also identify any potential gaps in current provision and outline a clear plan to address these and improve delivery.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

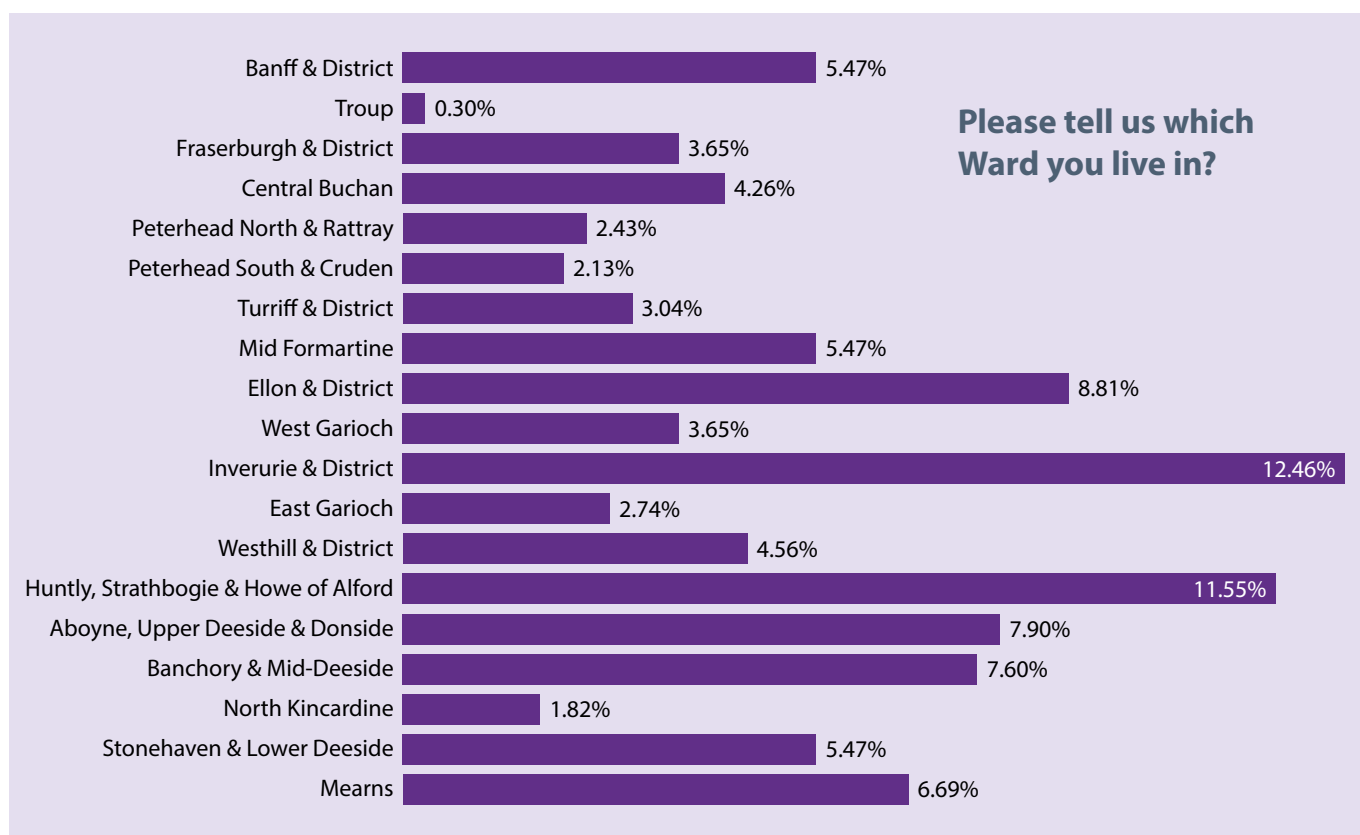
In 2023 Aberdeenshire Council commissioned a review of current childcare provision in the area with the aim of considering “how childcare can be provided that it meets the needs of parents/carers and children, particularly on low incomes and in insecure employment”. The review was published in January 2024 and helped inform the Education and Children’s Services Committee¹ ahead of its meeting on 1st February, where a majority of councillors voted for the motion to withdraw from direct Out of School Care service (OOSC) provision².

As part of the review, parents and carers were consulted via a survey, which received 139 responses, and 2 focus groups. The findings did not provide enough detail about the types of childcare services used and preferred by parents depending on their children’s age.

Additionally, two councillors approached SWBG and raised specific challenges within their wards, highlighting the impact that a lack of childcare options was having on their constituents as well as employers (with many struggling to recruit staff). Due to the gendered nature of care and the impact that the lack of affordable and accessible childcare services has on women’s employment opportunities and careers, we launched a survey to better understand demand for childcare services in the area.

The survey included quantitative questions about current and future needs and experiences of childcare, and open-text questions to give participants the opportunity to discuss the policy changes that they would like to see going forward.

Demographics



Bar chart 1. Percentage of responses by ward.

¹ Ekosgen (2024) *Provision of Rural Childcare Research and Model Review for Aberdeenshire Council*, available at <https://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/TPI-ekosgen-Provision-of-Rural-Childcare-Research-and-Model-Review-Report-30-01-2024.pdf>

² Education and Children’s Services committee (2024) *Minutes of 1st February 2024*, available at <https://aberdeenshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g399/Printed%20minutes%2001st-Feb-2024%2010.15%20Education%20and%20Childrens%20Services%20Committee.pdf?T=1>

Three hundred and twenty-nine people completed the survey, of which 96% had childcare responsibilities, 2% were pregnant and would need childcare soon, and another 2% were thinking of having a child in the next year. Ninety six percent of respondents were women and 2% preferred not to disclose their sex. The majority of respondents lived in a two-adult household with children (80%), followed by those in a single adult household with children (11%). Most respondents reported an annual household income above £60,000 (54%), while 19% had an annual household income below £30,000.

Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents were in full-time employment, while 49% reported working part-time. According to census data, 48% of women in Aberdeenshire work part time (less than 30 Hours). Of the 38,701 part time workers in Aberdeenshire, 79% are women³. This is slightly higher than the national figure from the census, where 72% of those working part-time (less than 30 hours) in Scotland are women.

Finally, the majority of respondents were in the 30-39 (58%) and 40-49 (25%) age groups, and 6% reported having a disability as defined under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

Household type

- 80% two-adult household with children
- 11% single adult household with children
- 4% three or more adult household with children
- 3% two adult household

Respondents' employment status

- 5% self employed
- 39% employed full-time
- 49% employed part-time
- 5% looking after the home or family
- 1% in further/higher education
- 1% living with a long-term condition or disability

³ Scotland Census (2024) *Census Data 2022*, available at <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/>

⁴ Aberdeenshire Council (2024) *Scotland's Census 2022 – Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion*, available at <https://aberdeenshirestorage.blob.core.windows.net/acblobstorage/aba18f03-d91d-49d2-b91f-c28ec8ceea4e/census-2022-religion-ethnic-group-language-national-identity.pdf>

⁵ *Ibid*

Respondents' household annual income

| Household annual income | % Response |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Less than £10,000 | 1.83% |
| £10,000 to £19,999 | 3.35% |
| £20,000 to £29,999 | 8.23% |
| £30,000 to £39,999 | 7.01% |
| £40,000 to £49,999 | 9.76% |
| £50,000 to £59,999 | 7.93% |
| £60,000 to £69,999 | 11.59% |
| £70,000 to £79,999 | 12.50% |
| £80,000 to £89,999 | 8.54% |
| £90,000 to £99,999 | 6.71% |
| £100,000 or more | 14.94% |
| Prefer not to answer | 7.62% |

Respondents' age range

| Age group | Response % |
|-------------------|------------|
| 17 or younger | 2% |
| 18-25 | 1% |
| 25-29 | 11% |
| 30-39 | 58% |
| 40-49 | 25% |
| 50-59 | 2% |
| Prefer not to say | 1% |

Limitations of the study

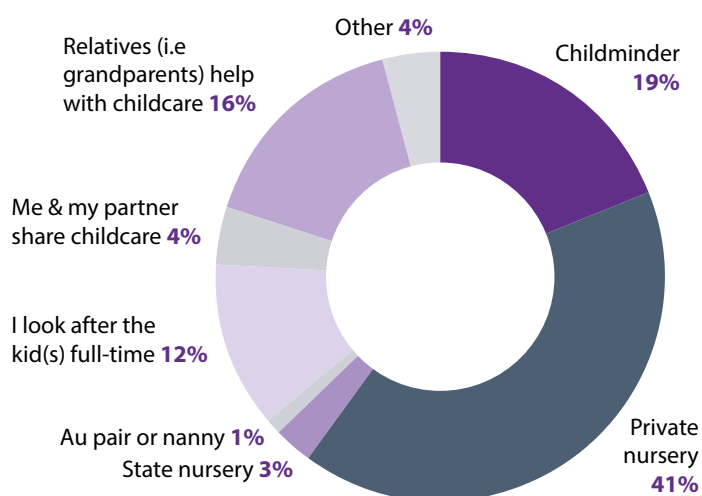
Aberdeenshire has a predominantly white population at 97% according to the latest census⁴. This demographic profile is reflected in the survey data we gathered, with 98% respondents identifying as white, including White Scottish, Eastern European, Irish, and any other white background. However, the survey did not capture significant responses from the next largest ethnic group in the area: Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British, who represent 1% of the local population⁵. Only 1 response (0.30%) was received from this group.

Additionally, this report does not address the specific challenges faced by families who have children with Additional Support Needs (ASN). Future research should explore this aspect of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) policy, with a particular focus on whether services in the area adequately consider and cater to their needs.

FINDINGS

Experiences of Childcare for Parents with Children Under 3

Just over half of all respondents (51%) had a child under the age of three. For this group of parents, the main childcare providers were private nurseries, followed by childminders.



Pie Chart 1. Respondents' main provider for under three-year-olds.

When asked about the **range of options** they use to manage childcare, 49% of respondents with a child under the age of three said they relied on relatives. In addition, 29% reported sharing childcare responsibilities. These findings suggest that many families depend heavily on unpaid care to meet their childcare needs.

"Without free childcare from Grandparents working would not be possible. And without a second income our mortgage would not be affordable", female respondent with an annual household income between £50,000 to £59,999.

The median use of formal childcare among respondents was 20 hours per week. However, when asked about what their ideal number of hours would be -assuming no barriers related to cost, availability, or location- this figure rose to 25 hours per week. **The main factors limiting current childcare usage, as identified by respondents, were affordability, availability of spaces, and accessibility in terms of proximity to providers.**

"We cannot afford to use childcare, and the location of available childcare is too far away from our location/working hours", female respondent with an annual household income between £50,000 – £59,000

"Can't afford any more days of nursery as it takes up all my pay between that and travel but I want to continue working", female respondent with an annual household income between £30,000 – £39,000.

"Couldn't afford to pay for 30 hours a week so Grandparents help out", female respondent with an annual household income between £50,000 and £59,000.

Respondents reported **monthly childcare costs ranging** from £250 to as much as £2,000. While 28% said they do not find these costs affordable – making it difficult to cover other household expenses – a further 52% noted that they can manage the costs only by making adjustments in other areas of their household spending.

"Can't afford to work extra hours to increase income, can't afford family holidays. Can't afford meals out as a family, often end up with no money left and have to rely on credit card which is building up debt", female respondent with £40,000 to £49,999 household income.

When it comes to arranging and managing childcare, 23% of respondents said they found it neither easy nor difficult, while 39% described it as difficult and 14% as very difficult.

When asked whether the current childcare provision in their area met all their needs, 50% of respondents said yes. Among those who felt their needs were not being met, the most commonly reported issue was a lack of available places, meaning parents often have to apply very early to secure a nursery spot. This shortage also results in limited choice for families.

The survey also explored how long it takes parents to reach their childcare provider. Seventy seven percent of respondents reported a **travel time** of under 20 minutes, with 21% travelling between 20 and 40 minutes, and only 3% travelling more than 40 minutes.

“Child is under 1, extremely difficult to find childcare with availability, have to rely heavily on family, which isn’t always feasible meaning it restricts ability to work”, female respondent with an annual household income between £70,000 – £79,999.

“Couldn’t get a space to return to work after maternity leave even though searching for many months so had to take another couple of months of unpaid leave until a space came available”, female respondent with an annual household income between £30,000-£39,999.

CASE STUDY: THE IMPACT OF CHILDCARE COSTS ON PARENTS OF MULTIPLES



Four percent of all respondents who required childcare were parents of twins or triplets. Of these, the majority had children under three years of age.

While none of these respondents reported an annual household income below the £50,000-£59,999 mark, they were more likely to find childcare costs for under 3s unaffordable (75% versus 28% for all parents of under 3s).

The parents who shared the childcare costs with us spend on average £1,400 per month for their under 3s and use an average of 16 hours of paid childcare per week per child. In addition to the costs, finding a place for two or more children at once is the second biggest challenge for these respondents. If there was no cost or accessibility issues, parents would increase the use of paid childcare to 26 hours per week.

Only one respondent had twins aged 3. However, they were not attending nursery because they did not qualify for funded ELC; they had missed the cut-off date and needed to wait until the beginning of the next term.

“One year old twins and 6 year old son, currently I work 3 days however with the cost of wraparound care for my son in primary two and full days at nursery for the twins, I am averaging around £200 per day on childcare and now faced with taking a career break until the twins are 3 for funded nursery hours or at school age. It’s not affordable to have the twins in nursery full time to allow me to work full time, I currently work for a £600 loss each month”, female respondent with an annual household income between £70,000-£79,999.

“We found a nursery but had to put the kids’ names down before they were born and we will finally get the days that we want by the time the kids are 18 months old. Paying for twins in childcare takes up pretty much all of my salary. We don’t have family nearby to help so if I want to continue my career then we need childcare. I have reduced my hours to go part time but it’s still hard. We looked at a variety of options from nannies to nursery and nursery was the best option but it’s expensive and was stressful to arrange”, female respondent with an annual household income of £60,00-£69,999.

Experiences of Childcare for Parents with Children between 3 and 4 years of age

Twenty-nine percent of respondents had a child between the ages of 3 and 4. Private nurseries were the main ELC provider for 42% of this group, closely followed by state nurseries at 41%. Notably, only 5% used childminders

as their primary childcare provider, representing a 75% decrease compared to the usage reported for children under the age of 3. Additionally, 2% said they mainly relied on shared childcare responsibilities with their partner or support from relatives.

CHILDMINDERS DELIVERING ELC

The number of childminders in Scotland has almost halved in the last ten years⁶. According to Audit Scotland, while a greater proportion of childminders are delivering funded ELC than before the expansion, not all childminders do so despite many of them being registered and approved by councils as ELC partner providers⁷.

Our survey results show a 75% decrease in the number of parents using childminders as their main provider of childcare for their 3- and 4-year-olds compared to those with children under 3 years of age. Anecdotal evidence from some respondents points to the amount of bureaucracy and difficulties that childminders face, and the impact of this on their business model.

In June 2024, the Scottish Government announced it has committed more than £1m in funding to scale up the Scottish Childminding Association's recruitment pilot programme across the country, starting with 16 local authority areas. Aberdeenshire is one of the local authorities included in the programme⁸. The council launched its childminding recruitment campaign in September 2024.

While it is too early to evaluate the results of this recruitment campaign, it is crucial that the council keeps working with relevant partners, including the Scottish Government, to understand the drivers of the crisis in the sector and support childminders to deliver funded ELC, so that it can effectively retain and grow the childminding workforce in Aberdeenshire.

When asked about the **range of childcare** options they use beyond their main provider, 25% of respondents said they rely on relatives, and 45% share childcare responsibilities with their partners.

These figures highlight two key trends:

- ▶ **Unpaid care continues to play a role in how families manage childcare.**
- ▶ **Reliance on unpaid care drops considerably once children become eligible for funded ELC.**

| Children under 3 | Children between 3 and 4 |
|---|---|
| 49% of respondents relied on relatives and 29% reported sharing childcare responsibilities. | 25% of respondents relied on relatives and 45% shared childcare responsibilities with their partners. |

Table 1. Differences in levels of unpaid childcare used by respondents depending on children's age.

The median use of formal childcare among these respondents was 25 hours per week, including the 1,140 hours of funded ELC. However, when asked what their ideal number of childcare hours would be – regardless of cost or availability – this figure rose to 30 hours per week.

Around half of respondents provided comments to explain this gap, with most saying that additional hours of childcare would allow them to increase their paid work hours or access better-paid employment.

"I have had to reduce my hours as I can't get childcare. I would increase this again if I found childcare", respondent with one child (age 3-4) an annual household income between £30,000 – £39,999.

"I am not able to work full time due to childcare cost", respondent with two children (ages 3-4 and 5-11) and an annual household income between £80,000-£89,999.

"I would like to increase my working hours, but we can't financially afford it", respondent with one child (age 3-4) and an annual household income between £40,000 – £49,999.

⁶ BBC (2024) *Scottish childminders numbers almost halve in a decade*, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-68591169>

⁷ Audit Scotland (2023) *Early Learning and Childcare. Progress on delivery of the 1,140 hours expansion*, available at https://audit.scot/uploads/docs/report/2023/nr_230601_early_learning_childcare.pdf

⁸ Scottish Government (2024) *Recruiting and retaining childminders*, available at <https://www.gov.scot/news/recruiting-and-retaining-childminders/>

Respondents who shared their childcare costs reported paying between £30 and £1,060 per month. Half of them said they were able to manage these costs without affecting other areas of household spending.

Despite the availability of more funded hours, 17% of respondents still found childcare costs unaffordable and said they struggle to manage other household expenses. Half of this group also had children under the age of 3, which likely influenced their responses, given the limited funded childcare available for that age group.

Nonetheless, it's important to note that the 17% reporting unaffordability represents an improvement compared to the 28% reported among families with children under three.

The survey included specific questions on funded ELC.

Regarding accessibility to funded hours, approximately 95% of respondents were able to use these hours. However, when asked about how well ELC hours met their needs, only 31% of respondents told us that funded hours fully meet their needs, and 65% said they partly meet their needs.

Respondents' concerns centered around the 1140 hours being insufficient particularly if used outside term time and the lack of flexibility in relation to how these hours can be used:

"Not enough hours to cover full time work but cannot afford to pay any more alongside 2-year-old son's nursery bills"; respondent with an annual income of £100,000 or more.

"We need more hours, and the way that nurseries work means we end up wasting lots of them. At our nursery funding can only be used for full days (10 hours). Since we need care 5 days a week, there's still quite a lot left to pay"; respondent with an annual income of £100,000 or more.

"I take 1140h over the whole year, we get 20.5h. It is enough to cover my working hours by a fraction with no time to spare. I do not have enough time to study as well. We don't have family support to help us. If we transitioned to term time and would leave us struggling through the holidays"; respondent with an annual household income between £40,000 and £49,999.

Regarding the distances that parents need to travel to access childcare, there has been an increase in the number of people reporting travel times between 20 and 40 minutes compared to figures for those with under 3s: 33%, an increase from 21%. Meanwhile, 67% of respondents travel under 20 minutes to reach their childcare provider, down from 77% previously.

In relation to arranging childcare, 62% of respondents said it was easy or very easy, and 17% found it difficult or very difficult.

Finally, we asked parents of children aged 3 to 4 how they manage childcare responsibilities outwith school term time, and what impact this has on them. While respondents use a variety of options, the majority rely on a combination of unpaid care from relatives (51%), flexible working arrangements shared with their partners (22%), or taking annual leave to cover care needs (41%).

In comparison, only 27% use private nurseries, 10% rely on childminders, and 9% access holiday camps or other organised activities. This overreliance on unpaid care often results in the inability to increase earnings or even a loss of income for many families:

"Huge impact. 6/7 weeks holidays isn't practical for working parents at all"; female respondent with an annual household income between £30,000 to £39,999 using a state nursery.

"If my husband is offshore then I have to refuse extra hours at a relief post in order to cover childcare myself"; female respondent with an annual household income between £60,000 to £69,999 using a private nursery.

"We have to use our work holidays or unpaid leave. I would like to work more days but can't afford to or get suitable hours at nursery for two children"; female respondent with an annual household income between £30,000 – £39,999.

"I have no access to anything over summer holidays other than grandparents. Either support working parents to enable them to look after their children or support for more childminders to open businesses"; female respondent with an annual household income of £40,000 to £49,999.

Experiences of Childcare for Parents with Children between 5 and 11

Fifty-six percent of respondents had a child aged between 5 and 11. While these children attend school, many still require wraparound care, which refers to before and after school childcare for school-aged children⁹. Seventy seven percent of respondents told us that the current provision does not meet all their needs, 44% find arranging wraparound very difficult and 27% difficult. This may explain why the most frequent form of wraparound care for respondents with children of this age group is the help of relatives and/or friends.

However, paid forms of wraparound care during term-time used by respondents were:

- **after school clubs (28% respondents);**
- **breakfast clubs (22%) and;**
- **childminders (17%).**

During school holidays, the majority of respondents also rely on forms of unpaid care to manage their childcare responsibilities: 57% use their paid holidays and 54% get help from their relatives. Additionally, 34% use holiday camps or other organised activities for children while 14% employ childminders.

The median use of formal wraparound care among respondents was 12 hours during term time and 30 during holidays. When asked about their ideal number of wraparound care hours, these figures increased to 16 and 35 respectively.

Many explained that increased availability of wraparound care places, more childminders, and improved affordability would enable them to work more hours. It is worth noting that there are considerable differences in the amount of wraparound care required by and between households.

Twenty-five percent of respondents do not find wraparound costs affordable, and 44% had to make changes to other areas of household spending to manage the cost of wraparound care activities.

“School holidays are the worst time. My husband works offshore and I do shift work. If I am unable to get time off it takes more than my monthly pay for childcare”; respondent with an annual household income between £70,000 to £79,999.

“I struggle because childcare costs have doubled but my wage hasn’t. My child goes to childminder before school and after school, 3 hours a day 4 days a week, average cost per week £84. This means monthly £300-400. This means we have no money for holidays to do days out”; respondent with an annual household income between £40,000 to £49,999.

“Can’t find work that fits with child in school when there is no options for wrap around care in my area”; respondent with an annual household income of less than £10,000.

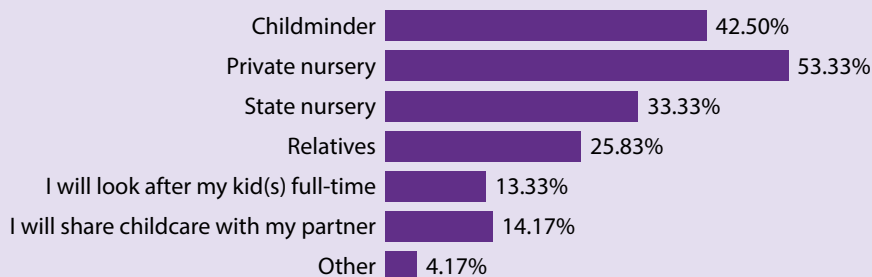
Assessing future needs

Thirty-nine percent of all respondents expect to have childcare needs within the next three years. Among these, the top three preferred childcare options – based on current delivery models – are private nurseries (53%), childminders (42%), and state nurseries (33%). While the reasons behind these preferences are not always clear, comments suggest that familiarity with available options plays a role. For example, one mother noted that her preferred option was to continue with her current childminder who does not offer funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

In terms of the preferred number of childcare hours per week, respondents indicated an ideal average of 25 hours.

⁹ UK Government (2024) *Wraparound childcare: Everything you need to know about before and after school childcare*, available at <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/09/before-and-after-school-childcare-what-is-wraparound-childcare/>

Which of the following would be your preferred childcare option once your child was over 9 months?

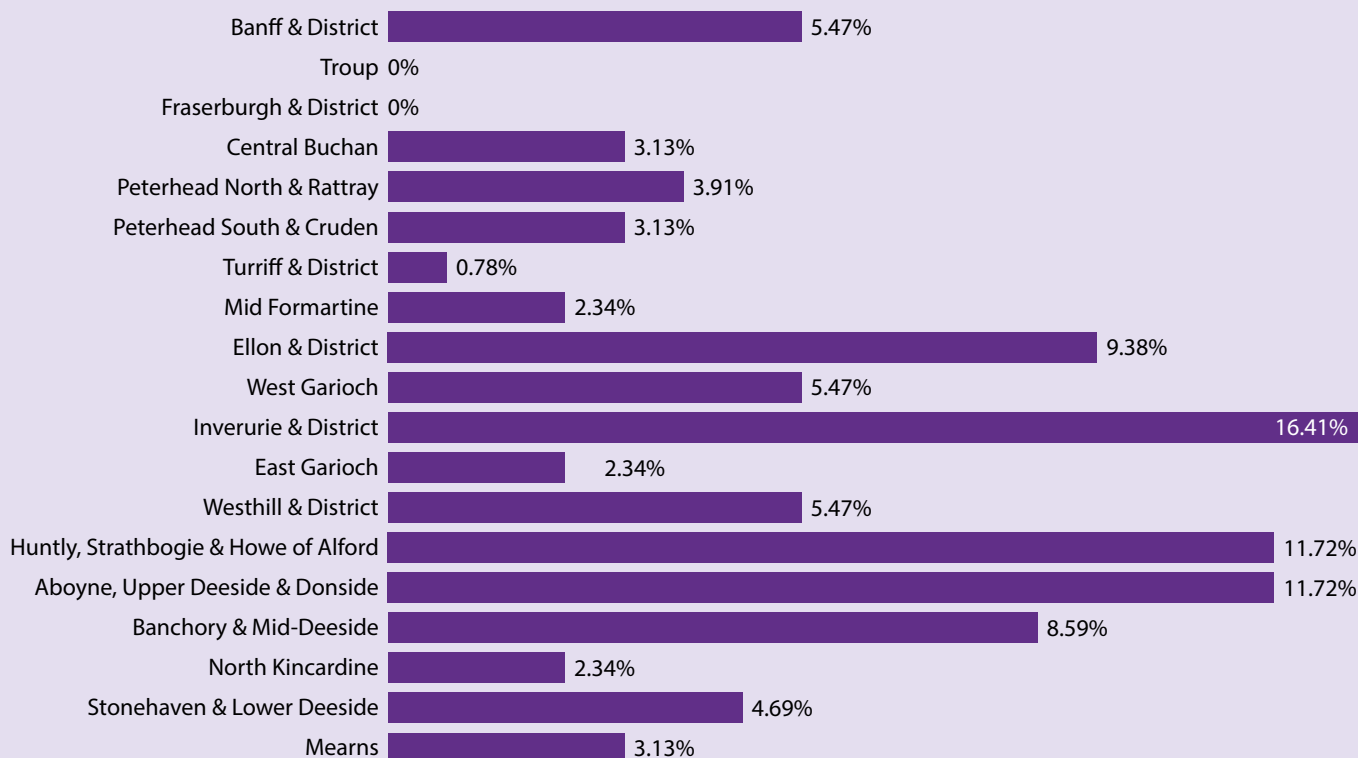


Bar chart 2. Preferred childcare option for respondents with future childcare needs.

People had concerns about being able to access these options, mostly due to issues around cost and availability, with some highlighting the impact of the closure of Tulleyneville Nursery on the overall number of options in Alford.

The top areas within Aberdeenshire where most respondents want to see increased childcare options to cover future needs are Inverurie, Ellon, Alford, Banchory and Aboyne.

Please tell us which Ward you live in?



Bar chart 3. Ward of those responding to question on future needs.

MAKING CHILDCARE WORK

According to those who took the survey, the lack of affordable childcare and/or available places has an impact on families, particularly mothers, as it constrains their ability to seek paid work and/or limits the type

of work that they can do. This is particularly true for mothers of younger children who are more likely to reduce their working hours or give up work compared to mothers of children above 5 years of age.

| | All respondents | Respondents with children under 3 | Respondents with children aged 3-4 | Respondents with children aged 5-11 |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Reduce hours | 38% | 49% | 40% | 29% |
| Give up work | 7% | 8% | 8% | 5% |

Table 2. Percentage of respondents indicating changes to their work arrangements to manage childcare.

The survey also reinforces the view that childcare remains a highly gendered issue, with 96% of respondents being women. This gender dynamic is further highlighted when looking at how childcare responsibilities are managed within households. For example, 38% of respondents said they had to reduce their working hours to manage childcare, compared to just 8% who reported that their partners had done the same.

The data suggests that partners are more likely to increase their paid working hours when children are young. Assuming most of these partners are male, this trend reinforces traditional “breadwinner” roles, underscoring the persistent imbalance in caregiving responsibilities.

| | All respondents | Respondents with children under 3 | Respondents with children aged 3-4 | Respondents with children aged 5-11 |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Increase hours | 12% | 18% | 15% | 8% |
| Reduce hours | 8% | 7% | 10% | 10% |

Table 3. Percentage of respondents indicating changes made by their partners to their work arrangements to manage childcare.

Beyond the long-term consequences on women’s careers and loss of pension contributions, the immediate impact of childcare costs and/or lack of earnings on households’ finances brings its own challenges, particularly at a time when increased

interest rates have led to higher mortgage repayments and rental costs¹⁰. For example, the majority of respondents with young children stated being unable to save any money or had to use their savings to afford childcare costs.

¹⁰ Office for National statistics (2023) *How increases in housing costs impact households*, available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/howincreasesinhousingcostsimpacthouseholds/2023-01-09>

| | All respondents | Respondents with children under 3 | Respondents with children aged 3-4 | Respondents with children aged 5-11 |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| We are unable to save any money | 46% | 51% | 52% | 42% |
| We must use savings to afford this cost | 12% | 14% | 10% | 12% |
| We had to make changes to our household budget | 62% | 68% | 62% | 59% |
| We are struggling to manage other household costs | 21% | 24% | 20% | 21% |

Table 4. Percentage of respondents indicating the type of impact childcare costs have on their household finances.

While managing childcare clearly has serious financial implications – with 52% of respondents stating that the lack of affordable or available options directly affects the work they can do – many also pointed to the negative impact on their mental and physical health.

Childcare challenges also lead to significant **behavioural responses**. For instance, 38% of respondents said these difficulties influenced their **decision not to have another child**.

Another important finding from the survey is that **these challenges could drive people to leave the area** – potentially reversing the population growth seen in

Aberdeenshire following the pandemic¹¹. Ten percent of respondents are considering moving elsewhere within Aberdeenshire, while 14% are thinking about leaving the region altogether.

In June 2024, Aberdeenshire Council published its new plan to support the area's shifting demographics. One of the plan's key pillars is to build a sustainable economy by attracting people of working age to the region, complementing the 'highly skilled local workforce'.¹² However, our survey findings highlight a major barrier to achieving this goal: many working-age individuals are unable to reach their full potential due to the lack of accessible, affordable childcare in the area.

¹¹ Aberdeenshire Council (2023) *Population statistics*, available at <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/statistics/population/#:~:text=Aberdeenshire%20total%20population%20by%20year,-In%202021%20Aberdeenshire's&text=There%20was%20a%20corresponding%20decrease,growth%20up%20until%202014%2F15>.

¹² Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2024 - 2029, available at <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-plan>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey's findings reveal that current childcare and wraparound care services in Aberdeenshire are both unaffordable and insufficient to meet demand. As a result, families depend heavily on unpaid care to manage their childcare responsibilities. While some parents might willingly choose to take on childcare related tasks, particularly when their children are young, many respondents indicated that more affordable and accessible childcare would enable them to work more hours. This would not only improve financial outcomes for households but also support progress towards gender equality, given the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities.

The following recommendations have been informed by those who responded to our survey, as well as by previous evidence and work carried out by the Scottish Women's Budget Group.

Recommendation 1:

The Scottish Government should extend the funded childcare offer to cover the period immediately following maternity leave and develop a plan to progressively move towards universal access to 50 hours of childcare per week.

Recommendation 2:

Aberdeenshire Council should monitor the effectiveness of its childminder recruitment package to help increase the availability of childminders across the area. It should also work in partnership with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to expand the number of childminders delivering funded ELC.

Recommendation 3:

Aberdeenshire Council should use its discretionary powers to expand eligibility for funded ELC for 2-year-olds to include second and subsequent children born from a multiple birth event.

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Aberdeenshire Council should review the local availability of flexible childcare and assess the feasibility of purchasing additional hours in public nurseries. It should also work with private and third-sector providers to ensure parents have greater choice in the hours available to them.

Recommendation 5:

Aberdeenshire Council should map the current provision of OOSC and collaborate with the private, voluntary, and independent sector to develop affordable options in communities where current OOSC availability is insufficient.

Recommendation 6:

Aberdeenshire Council should provide evidence of how it meets its duty to offer appropriate care for school-aged children in need- both during school hours and outside of school hours, including during school holidays. The Council should also identify any potential gaps in current provision and outline a clear plan to address these and improve delivery.



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ABOUT US

The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) is an independent analysis and campaign group that aims to promote gender analysis in public policy and public finance decisions through budgetary processes. SWBG brings together a wide range of women from across Scotland who have an interest in women's equality and want to achieve better gender equality in our society. We have focused on encouraging active gender analysis in the Scottish Budget process since 2000.