

Collaborative Approach to Delivering Funded ELC in West Lothian

The number of partner providers in West Lothian increased by 38% in the four years since 2019 and in 2023, more than 760 children accessed funded ELC through a Partner Provider.

In 2023, The Improvement Service Early Learning and Childcare team supported Education Officials and Partner Providers from West Lothian Council to realise a shared vision for partnership working.

The commitment and buy-in of Education Officials and Partner Providers, with some support from the IS ELC Team further strengthened the relationship between the local authority and their partners; and continues to positively impact the delivery of sustainable ELC provision.

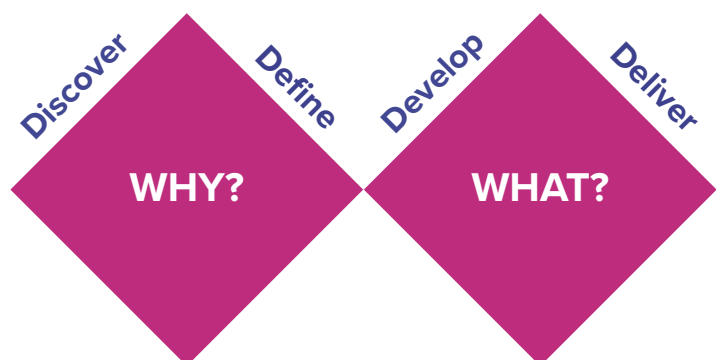
Following a period of steady partnership growth¹ and in response to a significant local challenge, Education officials at West Lothian Council agreed it would be beneficial to refresh their shared vision and values with the intention of achieving a collective understanding for partnership working, including the roles and responsibilities of the local authority and partners.

Education officials contacted the Improvement Service in August 2023 to discuss areas where Improvement Service could support West Lothian to strengthen an already good relationship with funded providers and ensure the continued delivery of sustainable ELC provision.

Following [SAAtSD](#) principles, it was important to identify the 'why' and the 'what'. Before considering possible approaches to realise the ambition, the IS ELC team undertook an in-person scoping session with education officials to discover and define the local landscape.

The scoping session was a crucial step in taking time to fully understand local challenges and avoid jumping too fast into developing a solution. It allowed education officials to consider a wider range of issues and identify areas that had not previously been highlighted. Through this exercise, education officials reached consensus on the key areas to be addressed.

In October 2023, the IS ELC Team facilitated a workshop with education officials and 29 partner providers to consider a collaborative approach to delivering ELC in West Lothian. The workshop, held in a local secondary school, was informed by the outcome of the scoping session and was an opportunity to think about defining shared goals through collaborative working. It focused on:



¹ The number of partner providers increased from 19 in 2019 to 31 in 2023. The number of children accessing funded ELC via a partner provider increased by 204% , raising from 250 in 2019.

- Aspirations and vision of ELC in West Lothian; and
- Achieving the vision and principles of collaborative working.

Education officials and partner providers agreed that thinking and working together as one team was extremely valuable, however for this to be effective, a shared understanding of the vision values and aims should be agreed and observed.

Using this shared objective as the focus, and through a series of discussion points, the first part of the workshop was designed to guide participants to consider and articulate the aspirations for the future of ELC in West Lothian.

A vision for ELC had previously been developed by West Lothian in collaboration with partner providers, in 2019. It described the aspirations of the future of the provision, and how this would be achieved. At the time of development, all ELC providers who responded agreed it was reflective of the relationship with West Lothian Council. However, the workshop was a good opportunity to reflect on this vision.

By creating a reflective space, participants spent time considering whether the vision, as it was, still accurately described the aspirations for ELC, the elements of the current vision they believed had been achieved and if there was anything else that should be included to achieve the goal. At the end of the first part of the workshop, more than twenty key messages linked to the aspirations and vision had emerged.

Effective partnership working depended on those involved having shared goals and values. Therefore, it was crucial for all members of the partnership to want the same outcomes to ensure they are motivated to participate.

The second part of the workshop shifted the focus to achieving the vision and the principles of partnership working. This meant identifying and agreeing the areas that everyone would to address- the 'what' was in and out of scope, before agreeing a set of principles believed to be key for effective collaborative working – the 'how' will the partnership approach this?



An extensive amount of feedback was collected during the workshop – over 150 pieces of individual feedback was captured from the breakout sessions and plenary discussions. This feedback was scrutinised by the IS ELC Team and was the foundation for several recommendations across five key thematic areas.

Since the workshop in October, a number of recommendations have been progressed locally. Including,

- **The establishment of four thematic area working group** with membership including representatives from partner providers, school SLT, ELCASMs and West Lothian College. Three of these groups are also co-chaired by a partner provider.
- **An in-person ELC Conference** where partner providers delivered workshops across the day.
- **Increased GLOW access** by providing each setting with more accounts.
- **An ELC newsletter** that is issued monthly to all local authority and partnership settings, including topical insights and updates.

Options for setting-to-setting visits and showcasing sessions are also being explored.