

Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Policy

Category:

Risk Management and Legal Implications

Failure to manage risk may impact on the delivery of Service objectives and the outcomes achieved by Service users. The Education Directorate aims to mitigate the implications by ongoing management and review of risk in all elements of work activity.

The production of this document is one way in which we aim to reduce our exposure to risk. By providing staff with information on good practice, referring to other guidance that is available across the Council and providing clarity on how we should do things, we can ensure that the management of risk is intrinsic to what we do.

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Early Learning & Childcare Admissions Policy

Throughout this policy, the word '*parent*' should be interpreted as including the child's carer or legal guardian.

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1.0 Introduction / Key Principles

In Scotland, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision reflects a 'funding following the child' approach, underpinned by the principles of Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability.

Fife Council is committed to providing high quality early learning and childcare for children across the area and the purpose of this policy is to ensure that early learning and childcare placements are allocated in a consistent way. It sets out the main principles and criteria used to allocate placements.

All children, including those with additional support needs, are offered early learning and childcare (ELC) in accordance with the terms set down by the Scottish Government under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014:

[Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)

Eligible children are entitled to access a funded early learning and childcare place in line with the following dates:

- August Intake – child's qualifying birthday must be on or before 31 August.
- January Intake – child's qualifying birthday must be on or before 31 December.
- April Intake – child's qualifying birthday must be on or before last day in February.

The funding year is deemed to start on the first day of each academic year, as determined by the Local Authority. Funded early learning and childcare entitlement is calculated on a pro-rata basis for children starting at the January and April intakes.

The following principles apply when allocating a placement:

- Eligible children have access to early learning and childcare regardless of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex or sexual orientation in line with the protected characteristics listed in the Equalities Act 2010:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

- Early learning and childcare is provided on a non-denominational basis.
- The allocation of placements for early learning and childcare in early years establishments is not governed by primary school catchment areas.

2.0 Types of Early Learning and Childcare Provision Available

Funded early learning and childcare (ELC) is available in a number of different early years settings across Fife. These are:

- Fife Council Family Nurture Centres
- Fife Council nursery classes based in primary schools
- Fife Council stand-alone nursery settings

- Fife Council nursery settings based in other Fife Council buildings
- Private Nurseries contracted by Fife Council to deliver funded ELC
- Playgroups contracted by Fife Council to deliver funded ELC
- Childminders contracted by Fife Council to deliver funded ELC

All funded providers need to meet the National Standard identified as part of the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver high quality funded ELC across Scotland. The standard can be found at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-child-national-standard-early-learning-childcare-providers-principles-practice/>

Parents can choose a range of different options to meet their needs. Not all options will be available in every setting. Information on current Early Learning and Childcare Funded Providers across Fife is available at:

[Early Learning & Childcare \(Admissions\) | Fife Council](#)

If parents wish to access funded early learning and childcare for their child within another Local Authority area, then they should contact the relevant Local Authority directly for information on how to apply for a placement in their preferred nursery.

3.0 Applying for a funded ELC placement

There are different application processes depending on both the type of provision selected and the age of the child. Parents can also choose to use more than one ELC funded provider to meet their child's needs but must apply for each place in accordance with the application process for that setting. Funded ELC placements for each child will only be available up to a maximum of 1140 hours per annum across all settings chosen, with any additional hours being charged as wraparound care if this available at the setting (see section 5).

3.1 Application Process for Fife Council Provision: 3 and 4-year-olds

This application process applies to the following services:

- Fife Council Family Nurture Centres
- Fife Council nursery classes based in primary schools
- Fife Council stand-alone nursery settings
- Fife Council nursery settings based in other Fife Council buildings

All applications for Fife Council early learning and childcare placements, for 3 and 4-year-olds, must be submitted during January in the academic year before the child is due to start (i.e. application made January 2026 for children due to start either August 2026, January 2027 or April 2027).

Application forms can be accessed online at [Nursery Places for 3 and 4-year-olds | Fife Council](#) and are also available from any Fife Council early learning and childcare establishment. Completed paper application forms should be handed in by parents to their first choice Fife Council early learning and childcare establishment, along with evidence of eligibility as requested on the application form.

Parents are asked to list several choices (which will include the choice of early learning and childcare establishment, session type and time) on their application form, in order of preference. This is so all options can be considered during the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel process if, for example, a placement is not available for the first choice. If none of the choices indicated on the application form are available, parents will be contacted with details of how to access further options for placements.

Applications for places for 3 and 4-year-olds must be received by **31 January**, at the latest, to be included in the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel meetings held each February and March. These panels allocate places for the following academic year, and places are awarded to applicants in line with the priority levels listed below (except for 46-week placements which have separate priority levels):

- **Priority 1**
Children deferring entry to Primary 1 in line with legislative guidance or otherwise staying at nursery e.g. delayed entry, where an additional year of funding has been agreed by Fife Council.
staying at nursery where an additional year of funding has been agreed by Fife Council.
- **Priority 2**
Children whose application form is supported by the appropriate inter-agency documentation, including children on the child protection register and those with additional support needs as defined by The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended 2009).
- **Priority 3**
Children who have a sibling already allocated a place at the nursery who will continue the existing nursery placement in the following academic year (i.e. the sibling is continuing within the same nursery and session time).
- **Priority 4**
Children from the local nursery area (see Appendix 1).
- **Priority 5**
Children from outwith the local nursery area (see Appendix 1).
- **Priority 6**
Children residing outwith the Fife Council area.

Priority levels used for allocating Fife Council 46-week placements only, is as follows:

- **Priority 1**
Children who have siblings already allocated a place at the nursery and who will continue their nursery placement in the following academic year.
- **Priority 2**
Children from the defined Fife Council local committee area (see Appendix 2).
- **Priority 3**
Children from outwith the defined Fife Council local committee area (see Appendix 2).
- **Priority 4**
Children residing outwith the Fife Council area.

Based on capacity, some settings and session times may be oversubscribed and, in this situation, places are allocated in priority order, with higher priority children being allocated first. Where there are more applications than places available, children who have the same priority level are balloted to establish the order that placements are

allocated. Once all suitable placements have been allocated in accordance with application details, then a waiting list is established for any remaining applications, based on the ballot order. This process will continue with any higher priority level applications until a full waiting list is established.

Following the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel process, parents are informed of the outcome of their application by letter. Parents are required to confirm if they are accepting the placement offered by the date indicated in the offer letter. If parents do not confirm acceptance of the placement, within this time, then the place may be withdrawn and offered to another child.

If parents wish to change the agreed placement at any point following acceptance of the place, then a new application for the alternative placement must be submitted. This is treated in the same way as any other application form received on or after 1 February each year.

Applications for 3 and 4-year-old placements received on or after 1 February each year **are not** processed until after the full Early Learning and Childcare Admission Panel process has been completed for this age group, except for children who are priority 1 or 2.

Applications for children who are identified as priority 1 or 2, which are received prior to the academic mid-term February break, are allocated a place in line with the nursery admissions panel process. If applications for priority levels 1 or 2 are received after this date, then they are processed before any other late applications received by the date submitted or placed at the top of any waiting list at that establishment, in date received order.

Late applications for all other priority levels are allocated places on a first come, first served basis, for any remaining places once the panel process has been completed. If a waiting list is in place at the preferred establishment, then applications will be placed at the bottom of any established waiting list in order of date received. A late application may reduce the choice of Early Learning and Childcare establishments available to parents if the nurseries they have chosen are oversubscribed.

Parents should be aware that they are applying for fixed session times at Fife Council nurseries. If parents choose not to send their child for the full session length, then any unused hours as part of that session are counted as part of their funded entitlement and cannot be used elsewhere.

3.2 Application Process for Private Nurseries, Playgroups and Childminders: 3 and 4-year-olds

This applies to the following services:

- Private Nurseries contracted by Fife Council to deliver funded ELC
- Playgroups contracted by Fife Council to deliver funded ELC
- Childminders contracted by Fife Council to deliver funded ELC

These are businesses, both private and voluntary, which are contracted to offer funded early learning and childcare on behalf of Fife Council, and each will have their own application process to secure a placement in that setting. If parents wish to apply for a placement at one of the above settings, then they should contact their first-choice

provider directly and request an application form as soon as possible. Placements will be allocated directly by the provider, depending on capacity available.

Parents should be aware that they will be required to enter a contract between themselves and their provider of choice when choosing funded ELC in one of these settings. Parents should be notified of the terms and conditions of this contract when they either apply or accept the placement, and this will set down details such as notice periods and any other charges that may be applicable outwith their funded ELC entitlement. (Parents are reminded that funded ELC remains free at the point of delivery.)

3.3 Applications for Children due to start at the age of 2: all types of provision

Applications can be submitted at any time during the academic year and will be considered at the next available 2-year-old Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel meeting. Panels for this age group are held towards the end of each academic term.

Application forms are available at [Early Learning & Childcare \(Admissions\) | Fife Council](#) (where a list of current providers can also be found, including all providers offering funded 2-year-old placements including private nurseries, playgroups and childminders, as well as Fife Council settings) or any Fife Council setting offering funded ELC 2-year-old placements. Paper application forms should be returned to any Fife Council setting offering 2-year-old placements, along with recent evidence of eligibility so this can be confirmed.

Parents are encouraged to list at least three choices of provider, in preference order, on their application form. This may include local authority provision, or private and voluntary sector services and childminders in partnership with Fife Council to provide funded ELC for eligible two-year-olds (for Priority 1, 2 and 3 only).

Children will be allocated places according to the criteria listed below. *(N.B. eligibility criteria are subject to change in line with any amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014):*

Admissions Criteria: Children aged 2 years old

- Priority 1** Children on the child protection register or with significant social work involvement and the support of a Social Worker. Children meeting this criterion can be offered an available place immediately upon application after their 2nd birthday
- Priority 2** 2-year-old children if the criteria for one or more of the following benefits/tax credits, as set by the Scottish Government, are met:
- Income support
 - Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Incapacity Benefit
 - Severe Disablement Allowance
 - State Pension Credit
 - Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (Support for Asylum Seekers)

If a parent/carer is in receipt of Universal Credit, their 2-year-old may be able to get funded early learning and childcare. The monthly household take home pay must be less than that detailed in the current Scottish Government guidance.

(Please note that income and take-home pay amounts used to determine eligibility are revised on an annual basis, in line with Scottish Government guidance. [Nursery Places for 2-year-olds - Session 2025/26 | Fife Council](#))

Children will be eligible to start their placement at the next access point after their 2nd birthday (intakes take place 3 times throughout the year).

Priority 3 Children who at any time after their 2nd birthday are or have been 'looked after' or subject to a kinship care order or have a guardian by an appointment under section 7 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995; children who have a care experienced parent; children whose family has been supported by the Family Nurse Practitioner Team.

Priority 4 Children who require additional support as identified by the Educational Home Visiting Service or Educational Psychological Service. *(Children with this priority level are not entitled to receive 1140 hours of funded ELC and may be offered sessions in line with their identified needs within a Fife Council establishment only, at the local authority's discretion)*

Priority 5 Children who have inter-agency involvement and have been referred by that agency. *(Children with this priority level are not entitled to receive 1140 hours of funded ELC and may be offered sessions in line with their identified needs within a Fife Council establishment only, at the local authority's discretion.)*

Parents of children who fall into priority levels 4 and 5 should contact the lead professional involved with their family to discuss applying for a placement. Supplementary information relating to the identified needs of children and families is required to support these applications and this should be completed by the lead professional involved. Application forms are available directly from the lead professional. Parents of children who fall into priority levels 4 and 5 should not submit an application for a placement themselves but should request an application be submitted on their behalf by the professional(s) supporting their child. If applications are successful, placements can only be facilitated at Fife Council settings for children who fall into Priority levels 4 and 5.

Inter-agency referral panels take place throughout the year, to allocate and review places for 2 year old children who fall into priorities 4 or 5 and for those children who missed their panel date and are already entitled to start under priorities 1, 2 and 3. Placements for children who fall into priorities 4 or 5 are not guaranteed for the full academic year as they are based on the needs of children and families and may be withdrawn or reduced at any time. Any such placement offered will be subject to regular review.

In the situation where there are too many applications for a setting, a ballot process is held, in priority order, to allocate places and establish a waiting list.

Children accessing 2-year-old placements must complete a new application form when applying for a 3 – 4-year-old nursery placement, as this is a separate process.

Securing a place in a funded 2-year-old provision does not entitle a child to a place in the associated 3 – 4-year-old provision in that setting.

4.0 Inter-Agency Referrals for 2, 3 and 4-Year-Olds

All applications for an inter-agency priority allocation for Fife Council settings must be accompanied by supporting documentation from the appropriate professional involved. Appropriate evidence may include:

- a) Relevant documentation supporting the application from an appropriate agency e.g. GP, Health Visitor, Educational/Clinical Psychological Services, Educational Home Visiting Service, Social Work.
- b) Evidence of current Pre-Three Community Team and/or Educational Psychological Service involvement
- c) Evidence of current Social Work involvement.

If a parent submits a nursery application form indicating that there are reasons for an inter-agency referral, without any supporting documentation, then education staff may contact the named person for that child, with the consent of the parent and/or carer, to discuss the child's needs. The parent/carer will then be responsible for ensuring relevant documentation is submitted by the appropriate agency in time to be considered at the relevant panel process.

For 2-year-old applications, it is the responsibility of the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions Panel to determine if the details provided in the inter-agency referral form indicate that the child should be offered a nursery place under the appropriate priority.

If the panel decides that an inter-agency priority place is not appropriate, then the panel will re-prioritise the application. Parents will be informed of this decision by the headteacher of their first choice of setting.

5.0 Wraparound Care (additional paid hours)

Some Early Learning and Childcare establishments may be able to offer additional hours to children, on a paid basis, if they have enough places and staff available to provide the additional care.

In Fife Council settings, parents should be aware that these hours cannot be guaranteed for the full year as circumstances may change at the establishment. There is an hourly charge to parents for this service and places for wraparound care are allocated on a first come first served basis.

In private nurseries, playgroups and childminders, any wraparound care provided is subject to their own terms and conditions. The purchase of wraparound care does not influence the allocation of funded early learning and childcare placements.

6.0 Deferred Entry to Primary School

In Scotland, children usually start primary school around their 5th birthday i.e. between 4 ½ and 5 ½ years old. Children aged 5 years on the first day of the relevant academic year must start primary school or other formal primary level education, such as home learning. If a child

is aged 4 on the day they are due to start primary school, then parents can choose to defer entry to Primary 1, for their child, until the following academic year.

Every child is different. The decision to defer a child's school entry is a parental decision. Prior to parents making the decision it is important that a range of factors are considered, including:

- how the child feels about starting school.
- the child's strengths as a learner.
- if having an additional year at nursery would have a positive effect on the child
- who can help inform the decision-making.

Once a child has started in a deferred ELC placement, the decision cannot be reversed at any point during their education.

It is accepted that the best decisions are reached with input from those who know the child as a learner and it is recommended that parents discuss options for their child with the staff in the child's current ELC provider as soon as possible. If parents have any questions about the primary school their child will attend, they can contact the Headteacher of the school directly.

Deferred places can be funded in any of the ELC Providers listed in Section 2 of this policy.

6.1 Application to Continue Existing ELC Placement for a deferred year.

If a parent wishes to continue the placement a child currently attends for a deferred year, they should check directly with the provider in the first instance and as soon as possible. For Fife Council settings, eligible children can continue with their existing placements if this is requested. Other providers may have their own policy about whether a placement can be continued in line with their admissions process and the capacity of the service.

If the provider can continue the existing placement for the following year, a 'Request for Deferral' application should be submitted directly to the provider, whether that is a local authority service, private or voluntary sector service or childminder in partnership with Fife Council to provide funded ELC. This application must be submitted by 31 January in the academic year before the deferral will take place, to confirm the deferral request.

Applications for children who are identified as deferred entry to primary school (Priority 1) for a local authority setting, which are received prior to the academic mid-term February break, will be allocated a place in line with the nursery admissions panel process. If applications for deferred entry to primary school are received after this date, then they will be processed before any other late applications received by the date submitted or placed at the top of any waiting list at that establishment, in date received order.

6.2 Application for an alternative ELC Placement for a deferred year.

If parents wish to change the Fife Council ELC placement their child attends (for example, number of sessions attended, type of session attended or different provider)

for the following academic year, then they should complete a new application for a nursery place, as outlined in Section 3 of this policy. Applications for any Fife Council run facility should be submitted by 31 January in the academic year before the child is due to start their deferred placement.

For placements based in a private nursery, playgroup or childminder offering funded ELC on behalf of Fife Council, parents should contact their preferred ELC provider directly to request a place for the following academic session. Each private/voluntary sector/childminding service has its own admissions policy and will be able to let parents know if they are able to offer their child a placement for the following year.

7.0 Appeals Process

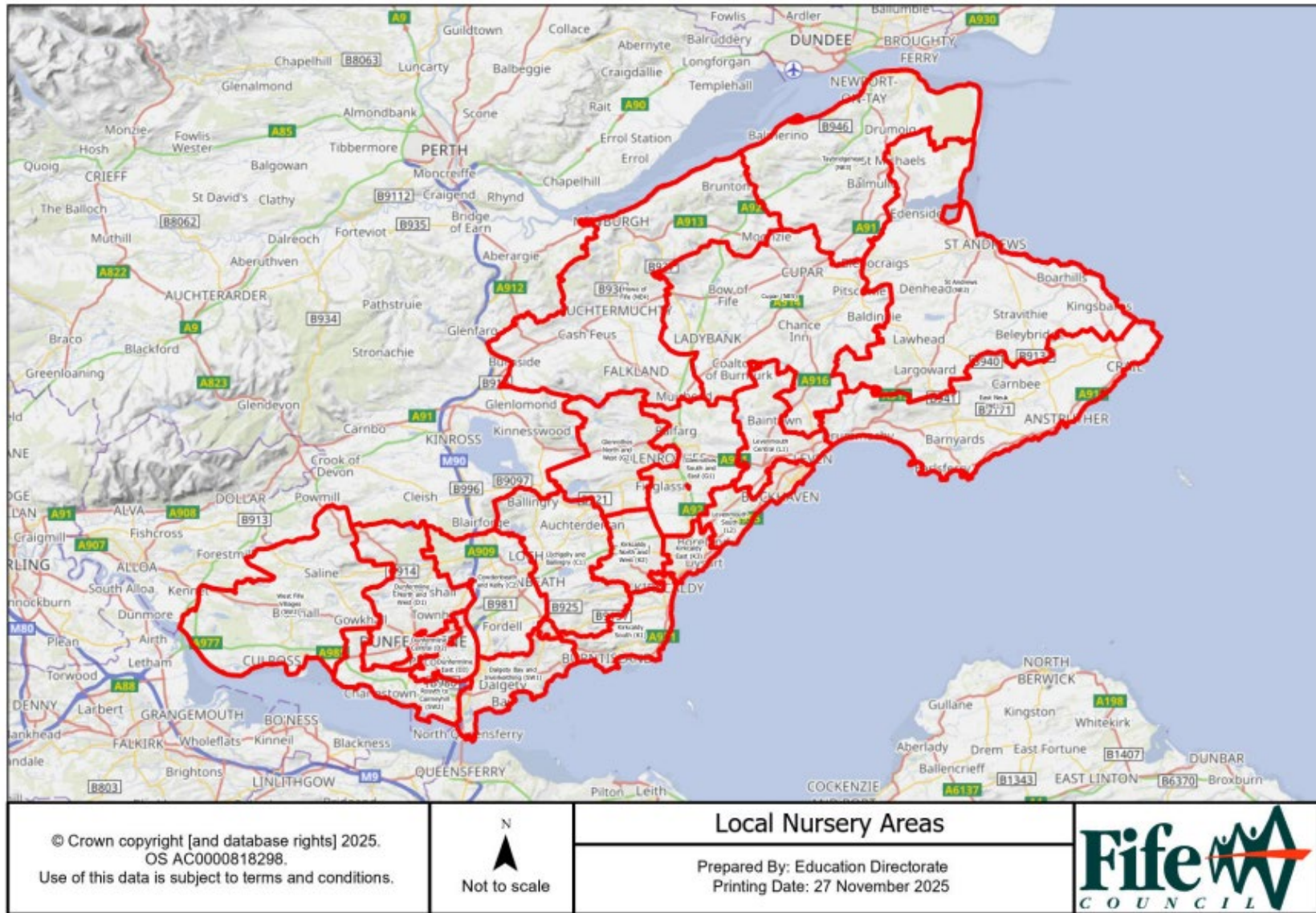
If a parent thinks their child has been given the wrong priority level for a Fife Council ELC placement, based on the criteria listed in this policy, then they can submit an appeal. The appeal process will assess whether the correct procedures have been followed in allocating places, based on information supplied in the application form, in accordance with the Early Learning and Childcare Admissions policy.

Information on how to submit an appeal is included in offer letters sent out following nursery panels. This information is also available at [Early Learning and Childcare | Fife Council](#). All appeals must be submitted within 28 days of parents being notified of the outcome of their application for Early Learning and Childcare. Additional information may be required to support an appeal.

The outcome of any appeal is final.

If the appeal is successful, then the child will be moved to the top of any waiting list for places at that location and will be offered the first available place. Where there is a number of successful appeals for the same location, then a ballot will be held to establish the order of entry.

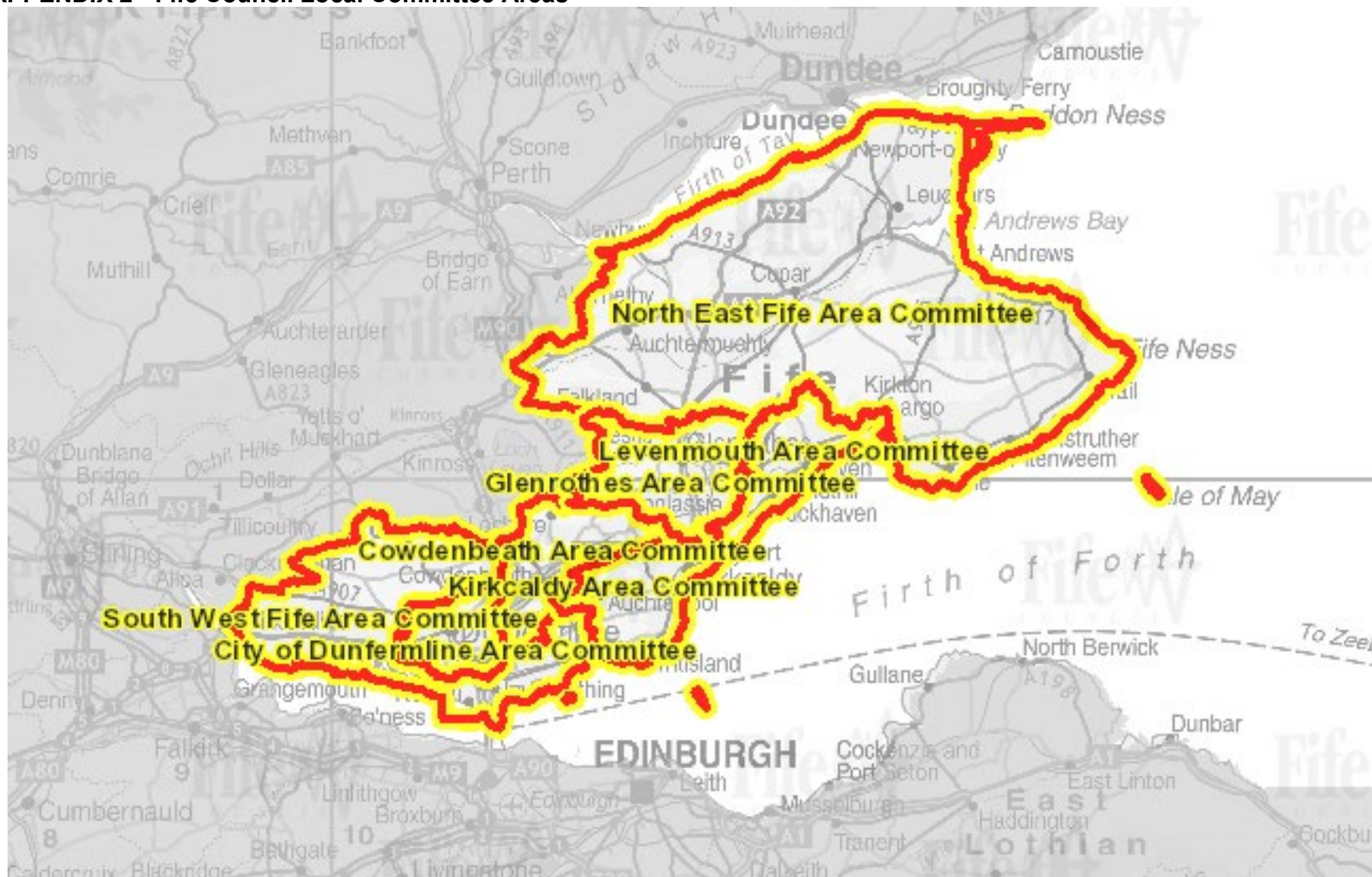
APPENDIX 1 – Local Nursery Areas



SW1 – Dalgety Bay and Inverkeithing
SW2 – Rosyth to Cairneyhill
SW3 – West Fife Villages
D1 – Dunfermline North and West
D2 – Dunfermline Central
D3 – Dunfermline East
C1 – Ballingry to Lochgelly
C2 – Cowdenbeath to Kelty
G1 – Glenrothes South and East
G2 – Glenrothes North and West
K1 – Kirkcaldy South
K2 – Kirkcaldy North and West
K3 – Kirkcaldy East
L1 – Levenmouth Central
L2 – Levenmouth South
NE1 – East Neuk
NE2 – St Andrews
NE3 – Taybridgehead
NE4 – Howe of Fife
NE5 – Cupar

Confirmation of local nursery area can be found by entering individual postcode into the Nursery Local Area checker at www.Fifedirect.org.uk\earlyyears

APPENDIX 2 - Fife Council Local Committee Areas



South and West Fife Area Committee

City of Dunfermline Area Committee

Cowdenbeath Area Committee

Glenrothes Area Committee

Kirkcaldy Area Committee

Levenmouth Area Committee

North East Fife Area Committee