A. PROVISION FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

(1) Working for Families Fund - Scottish Executive
A project has been developed to support 40FTE childcare places in 5 locations for children of parents involved in training and work through the working for family’s pilot project. This project seeks to support the most vulnerable families who may be unemployed, on low-income, single parents or those with disability, mental health or substance abuse problems. The wider project offers training and education advice access to job vacancies, practical help on applying for jobs and childcare assistance.

(2) Charging Policy
The council aims to offer service flexibility in its early years establishments and makes services in excess of the core sessions available on payment of a charge of £2.50 per hour or part of an hour. This subsidised rate allows parents including those on low income to access a good quality extended childcare place subject to availability. There is no charge for places for children under three who receive services in nurseries or through day-care services. All nursery places for vulnerable children are free.

(3) Admissions Policy
Within the council’s admissions policy for early years establishments (3-5 year olds), working parents are allocated a higher priority to allow them to access places in nursery centres which provide services over and extended day and for 52 weeks per year. This allows parents to access extended care services and the subsidised rate above is applied.

(4) Sitter Service
North Lanarkshire Sitter Service, established with funding from North Lanarkshire Childcare Partnership, has been operating since 2002. The service is accessible to families, both lone and two parent, throughout north Lanarkshire where the parents are in work or education. In order to ensure affordability of the service, a sliding scale of charges depending on household income is in place. The service provides flexibility particularly to lone parent families and accommodates shift patterns between 6.30am and 10.30p.m

(5) Out of School Hours Sustainability Support.
North Lanarkshire Childcare Partnership supports the affordability of 1638 registered Out of School Hours Childcare Places through Out of School Care Poverty package. This support allows groups in areas of disadvantage and with a high proportion of low-income families or children with additional support need to access funding support. Services can apply for funding to underwrite core operation costs, accommodation, transport, resources ensuring that low-income families have access to good quality childcare.
(6) **Partners in Play**
North Lanarkshire Childcare Partnership supports this project, which supports families who are disadvantaged through disability. The project extends access for families in employment with disabled children to affordable childcare. The project achieves this by providing mainstream care providers information, training, resources and staffing support. Partners in Play supports the inclusion of some of the most vulnerable of families without any additional charge to parents or carers.

(7) **Information for Families**
All nursery establishments provides parent information on tax credits.

B. **FLEXIBLE CHILDCARE**

(1) **SCMA**
Through the support of two development staff from the Scottish Childminding Association, North Lanarkshire Childcare Partnership support the registration of child minders who offer flexible childcare for parents. Last year 33 new childminders registered providing families the opportunity to receive childcare to suit their families need.

(2) **Out of School Care Development**
North Lanarkshire Childcare Partnership has supported the development of 1685 Out of School Hours places throughout the local authority. Out of school allows parents to access childcare to meet shift patterns before and after school. Maximisation of Working Tax credit through partnership with Job Centre Plus allows parents to access affordable childcare as the tax relief cuts the cost to the parent.

(3) **Admissions Policy**
A new admissions policy has been developed to provide extended places for working parents in nursery centres. Clear guidance and training has been developed to support the policy and procedures. All partner nurseries are involved in area admissions panels and all paperwork to support the application for a nursery place is used by both the local authority nurseries and the partner nurseries.

(4) **Expansion of Nursery Places**
The council is in partnership with 44 nurseries in the voluntary and independent sector. The council has developed nine new nursery centres which offer 52 week over extended days providing more flexible services. There has been substantial development of places for 0-3yr olds through Surestart funding.

C. **AVAILABILITY OF CHOICE**

(1) **Partnership Agreements**
The council commissions over 1600 places from partner nurseries within the voluntary and independent sector. Service Level Agreements are reviewed annually in order to meet parental demand and to respond to demographic changes. New 3 year agreements are being developed to give more security to partner nurseries. Partnership nursery staff are involved in this process.
(2) Publicity
Admission details for all nursery establishments are advertised in the local press. Where space allows parents are provided with their first choice of nursery. The Childcare Information service provides up to date information on the availability of nursery places.

D. SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

(1) Information for Parents
Parents’ information leaflets are distributed in all nurseries (local authority and partner). Parents are informed in April each year about the allocated nursery place.

(2) Parent Support Programmes
Family Caring Trust delivered parenting skills in-service training for a range of staff including early years staff. Representatives from 15 nursery centres and 25 primary schools with nursery classes attended. 16 home link workers also attended this training. All who attended received a 'Pram to Primary School' pack for use in their establishment and home link workers were given a pack for each of the establishments they work in. Other developments which have been supported by the Authority include the provision of family fun bags and techno bags, the delivery of storytelling workshops for parents and the supply of videos Parents as Partners and Starting Out

Other developments supported by Sure Start funding for very young children and their families include:

- Home link project to encourage and support parents to become more involved in their children’s learning and development. Project works with parents and children in local group settings and currently delivering 45 programmes to 446 parents and 522 children. Recent project expansion to provide crèche service and allow parents to progression to a range of parenting support programmes. Project developing links with male parents and with 4 very young parents groups
- Oral health and nutrition project to deliver community based healthy eating programmes and consequently raise awareness of nutrition and develop parents cooking skills to support healthy eating. The project delivered a service to 391 parents in 2003/04
- Bookstart development project to support parents in development of early literacy skills delivers parents and child sessions in appropriate surroundings in local libraries supported by 2 members of staff to provide practical support and demonstration sessions. Service delivered to 214 children and 198 parents in 2003/04.
Breastfeeding support project provides a peer education service to allow successful breastfeeding mums to be trained to allow them to provide 1:1 advice, information and support to nursing mothers. The project not only trains the volunteer parents in personal and social development, assertiveness and life skills but also supports the nursing mum in the breastfeeding process. The project trained 32 volunteers who offered support to 350 mums in 2004.

The social work outreach support project provides an intensive support service for families experiencing difficulties with very young children. The project operates on a referral basis and offers home based support in a range of practical skill development, emotional support, confidence and esteem building and coping strategies for parents.

(3) Establishment based support

Across the range of early years services local initiatives have been developed to actively involve parents in their children’s learning. This includes the operation of parents’ rooms with staff able to deliver a range of parents skills sessions.

In North Lanarkshire Council, we firmly believe that the earliest years of children’s lives are vital in their future development. We have produced our own birth to three document ‘Effective Early Development and Learning – The Critical Period from Birth to Three Years’ This places a huge emphasis on:

- The learning environment
- Child development and learning
- Interactions between the child and educator

The aims and principles of this document are further developed and endorsed through the delivery of the three to five curriculum.

(4) How do we ensure children reach their full potential?

- promote spacious, well resourced, welcoming environments, both inside and outside (NOF funding has helped to develop outdoor play.)
- acknowledge that children will play independently and in small groups
- high priority to the health and safety of children in our care
- inform parents about their children’s progress through formal and informal meetings
- work in partnership with all agencies to assure a quality learning experience for young children

(5) What is the role of the adult?

- plan effectively to support children’s learning
- support a child centred approach to learning
- provide a wide range of choices to ensure breath and balance across the five key aspects of learning
- interact appropriately to support and challenge children’s learning
- be sensitive in our interactions
- assess and evaluate how and what children learn
- plan for future learning through our IEP’s and PLP’s
- ensure that we share our assessments with children, parents and carers and relevant agencies
- encourage children to self assess using their own profiles and transition records
(6) Training to deliver effective early years education specific to address these issues.

- A targeted approach to art for practitioners working with young children.
- Reggio Emilia approach to creativity
- Coaching sessions for practitioners and children in the delivery of early music making.
- Tony Buzan – mind mapping
- Additional support ICT programmes to develop staff awareness to enhance children’s skills.
- Top Start training.
- Promote health promotion, eco friendly nurseries.
- Playback – looks at the attitudes of adults towards children with disabilities.
- Working collaboratively with parents.
- Challenging children’s learning.
- INPP – a movement programme for children with additional needs or for children who have not reached their full potential.

(7) Future Potential

- continue to increase staff’s knowledge and understanding of children’s development and learning
- continue to be aware of children’s learning styles and dispositions to learning
- continue to promote the importance of health and physical activity for young children
- continue to deliver a multidisciplinary approach to continual professional development
- continue to promote ICT strategy across all aspects of the curriculum
- continue to develop partnerships with parents and carers using a variety of parenting programmes
- continue to promote inclusion within all early years establishments
- continue to monitor and evaluate practice across the statutory, private and voluntary sector, ensuring the delivery of effective early year’s provision