**STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING ON TUESDAY 12TH NOVEMBER 2024**

**UPDATE TO EARLY YEARS CSP**

Sir, at the end of October, I published my Early Years Plan. This formed part of my commitment to ensure transparency as the work on Early Years progresses, both with the Assembly and the public. In particular, the CEHA panel wished to know how the work to develop the extended nursery provision would be progressed.

Sir, Reports can sometimes be lodged without any real discussion in this assembly. Today I would like to make this statement and take questions on the plan to encourage transparency and be clear on the plan itself. Within the Common Strategic Policy (2024-2026) that was approved in May 2024, I and the rest of the Council of Ministers, made the top priority of this plan to ‘Extend nursery and childcare provision’. It is important to remember why this priority was proposed and approved.

Importantly, evidence is clear that increasing the capacity of a **quality** provision of early childhood education and care, can have a transformative and positive effect on young children. As Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, this is something I care deeply about.

Secondary to that, there are a number of further benefits which will be recognised by the delivery of this Government priority, and felt by a large proportion of islanders, either directly or indirectly. Namely:

* Improved access and choice for families as childcare spaces increases.
* A strengthened proposition for Jersey to attract and retain working families.
* Utilisation of capacity in school workforce and/or premises.
* Increasing training and support for the existing nursery provision and a drive to increase the value of those who work in this vital sector.

I’ve listened and heard from parents with young children, online petitions, emails and direct messages, how difficult it can be to secure childcare for their young children. This doesn’t just impact those people directly; it impacts our wider economy and retention of a working age population.

We committed to actions not words and this is what we have done. In order to truly understand how best to respond to the demand, we have begun a series of pilots, each with its own specific scope, objectives and measurement.

Running pilots means that we can test these different operating models to better inform our policy decisions, ahead of moving to a universal offer, and increase capacity at the same time.

Pilots also assist in wider understanding of the economic impact of any change and how they best support provision across the sector.

From September of this year, we have three schools operating pilot schemes:

* Two provisions for 2–3-year-olds have opened, prioritising those with the greatest need. These children were unable to access current nursery provision.
* This is created within existing Government school buildings. This does not mean that there is formal classroom teaching; the sessions are tailored, by professionals, for the age group and ability. We are simply utilising existing space in Government buildings, thus reducing the overheads. My sincere thanks go to those schools and the Jersey Child Care Trust (JCCT) for developing the provisions at such pace. This is a brand-new model, where a third-party provider is operating from existing Government locations, and one we are open to rolling out further.
* Trialling extended wraparound care for 3–4-year-olds in three Government pre-schools. We know that the limited hours in Government pre-school settings without wraparound care can make it difficult for working parents. We hope that these pilots will show us whether extending the provision and providing greater parent and carer choice, creates more overall capacity within the system where there is identified need.

All the pilots will be reviewed, at the end of the academic year in 2025. Over the course of 2025, we hope to build on these pilots, and CYPES officers are already exploring options. All these actions have a context and build upon progress that has already been made. And I acknowledge all the previous work in this area.

The evidence paper on optimising early childhood education and childcare (ECEC), commissioned in 2023 and published by the ISOS Partnership on 1st August 2023, has been used to shape future policy.

The roundtable events from November 2023 to January 2024 identified key ‘guiding principles’ which continue to inform policy development.

This constitutes a significant level of engagement across the sector before any pilots commenced. Early Years policy has been a constant area of focus over the last decade, for each Minister in post. I would like to thank the previous Minister and Assistant minister for focus on this area. We are here thanks to a significant amount of work that has gone into research, consultations with parents and families and professional providers from across the industry. The report itself details a number of key milestones. I will not list them in this statement.

The feedback and engagement with our nurseries, childminders, nannies and regulators, schools and charities have all helped to shape our analysis and improve the accessibility families have to early years care and education for their children.

Amongst other priorities, their input and consultation have helped us understand that recruitment and retention within the sector is a challenge, and so from September we have begun a recruitment campaign, assisted by the Best Start Partnership, to promote the range of careers available within the early years sector. Further work is already underway to co-develop a plan to include investment in quality through Continuing Professional Development.

The right care at the right moment requires a responsiveness and sensitivity that should be recognised as serious professional work. We must recognise the value of those work in this sector to our society.

I am grateful to all those who represent the industry that have met with me, written to me, and offered their valuable insight and experience. We want the changes we are developing to benefit those who utilise early years childcare and education, but also the providers of this care. First and foremost, however, we want the changes to benefit the island’s children

I’m sure Members will agree that the work delivered on this priority has been done at significant pace. I am both impressed and grateful that we are already offering placements for children in our pilot schemes, that prior to this were not accessing Early Years care.

The work however doesn’t stop here, and as I previously mentioned, officers are already working on further pilots to be rolled out. This is crucial as it evidences a track record in delivering positive change, making further investment in Early Years a decision we can make with confidence.

The investments required will reap benefits that impact current generations, but also those beyond for years to come.

Sir, thank you for the opportunity to make this statement, I hope Members have had the opportunity to read the published report and I would welcome any questions they may have.