

## Briefing Note Template

**Elected Member Briefing – Early Adopter Communities Project Progress Update**

**Elected Member Briefing Note Ref. No. 2026-14**

### **About this Briefing Note**

Briefing by: Mairi Keith, Project Manager – Childcare

Date: 02 March 2026

Subject: Early Adopter Communities Project

**Public / ~~Exempt~~ / Confidential**

*If exempt or confidential explain risks and consequences*

### **Purpose**

This bulletin provides members with a progress update on Shetland’s Early Adopter Communities (EAC) Project. The project is funded by the Scottish Government and aims to test flexible, place-based approaches to childcare provision. Learning from the project will inform future national policy on childcare provision, particularly within remote and rural contexts.

The update summarises activity and progress to March 2026, with a focus on delivery within the West Mainland and North Isles, alongside developments within existing Early Learning and Childcare and Out of School Care services.

### **Background**

The Early Adopter Communities Project focuses on improving access to childcare for families facing barriers, particularly those within the six Scottish Government priority family groups. The project is underpinned by a people-centred and place-based approach, working closely with local families, schools, early learning and childcare settings, community organisations and partner agencies.

### **Key points**

Key activity includes:

- Development of breakfast clubs, after-school provision, holiday activity programmes and community-based childcare support within targeted communities.
- Activity-based childcare models supported through partnerships with leisure services and other key partners.
- Increased staffing and resources within Early Learning and Childcare settings in the North Isles to expand provision for younger children, particularly two-year-olds.

- Partnership delivery with community organisations, leisure centres and third-sector providers.
- Introduction of a 50% discounted Out of School Care offer for eligible families.
- Workforce development, including training and funded qualifications to strengthen capacity.

Ongoing consultation and engagement with families and communities have shaped service delivery and ensured responsiveness to local needs and emerging opportunities.

### **Overview**

The project has demonstrated positive outcomes for children, families and communities, including:

- Increased access to childcare and activity provision in targeted communities.
- Positive outcomes for families, including improved ability to access and sustain employment, reduced financial pressures and improved wellbeing.
- Increased social opportunities for children through activities and local provision.
- Strengthened multi-agency collaboration and community led approaches to childcare solutions.
- Increased Early Learning and Childcare capacity and improved quality of provision through targeted staffing and resources.

Holiday provision and activity-based models have demonstrated particularly strong engagement, highlighting the effectiveness of flexible, community-based approaches in rural areas.

Staffing challenges continue to present a significant barrier to expanding regulated childcare services and sustaining provision in some locations. Recruitment and retention issues remain a key risk for future policy and service design.

The Scottish Government has provided the following statement highlighting progress, impact, and ongoing collaboration with Shetland’s Early Adopter Communities Project:

*“The Early Adopter Communities Project in Shetland is generating insights into what it takes to deliver childcare services that meet the needs of families in rural and island contexts. Scottish Government officials are working closely with the project team in Shetland with regular online meetings, bi-annual reporting, and – over the last year – two visits to see service delivery and to speak with childcare practitioners, headteachers, parents and carers to hear about the progress and impact of new childcare and activity*

*provision.*

*The project has expanded access to childcare and activities as expected, including new co-ordinated activities clubs and transport options after school, and testing expansion of ELC for younger children. This includes project work in the North Isles and West Mainland communities, as well delivering tests of change in already established settings across Shetland.*

*The Scottish Government is content that the Shetland EAC project is delivering in line with its grant, and are grateful to the project team for exploring and testing innovative models of delivery, while giving careful consideration to issues around operational sustainability in rural contexts”.*

*Kate Smith - Deputy Director – School Age Childcare Division*

The project is currently funded until March 2026, with any continuation subject to confirmation from the Scottish Government. The Project Team are currently in negotiation with the Scottish Government about future funding.

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Last modified on: 2 March 2026

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# Early Learning and Childcare Shetland



## Early Adopter Communities Project

Updated: 02/03/26



## Contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	Aims and Approach.....	2
3.	Grant Allocation.....	2
4.	Project Delivery.....	3
5.	Partnership Working .....	3
6.	Project Governance .....	4
8.	Attendance and Uptake.....	5
9.	Feedback and Impact from the West Mainland .....	9
11.	Challenges and Emerging Themes .....	14
12.	Progress Taking place in the North Isles .....	14
13.	Attendance and Uptake.....	15
14.	Feedback and Impact from the North Isles.....	16
15.	Learning from the North Isles .....	20
16.	Challenges and emerging themes.....	20
17.	Progress taking place in existing services .....	20
18.	Feedback on the 50% Discount .....	21
19.	Learning and Emerging Trends.....	22
20.	Other Activity .....	22
21.	Data Gathering and Reporting .....	24
22.	Overall Insights .....	24

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update in relation to Shetland's Early Adopter Communities (EAC) Project.

The Early Adopter Communities Project is funded by the Scottish Government. The purpose of the Project is to design and test local, place-based approaches to childcare in Shetland. This is an experimentation project to inform the development of national policy which explores how best to meet childcare needs of families in remote and rural areas. Learning from Shetland's involvement will inform the Scottish Government's plans for future childcare provision in Scotland.

A key focus of the EAC Project is to gather insights and learning about the needs of the six priority family groups identified by the Scottish Government. These groups are:

- Lone-parent families
- A household where someone is disabled
- Families with three or more children
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year old
- Families where the mother is under 25 years of age

This update is accurate as of March 2026.

## **2. Aims and Approach**

The project is underpinned by a people-centred and place-based approach, as outlined in the Programme Approach Principles. All activity continues to be co-designed with families, communities, and service providers, enabling local communities to shape childcare support around what matters most to them.

The EAC project focuses primarily on two targeted communities – the North Isles and West Mainland – which were identified as facing the greatest barriers to accessing childcare. In addition, some activity has taken place within existing out-of-school provision where this supports priority families and aligns with project objectives.

The EAC Project remains responsive and flexible, adapting to evolving community needs and emerging opportunities. This approach has been particularly important in rural settings, where solutions must reflect local capacity, resources, and workforce availability.

## **3. Grant Allocation**

A Quarter 3 Budget Form was submitted to Scottish Government in January 2026, showing £197,057.24 of the budget claimed to date from the total £833,000 allocation.

Funding for the Early Adopter Community Project is in place until March 2026. This timeframe has been clearly communicated throughout the project and to all stakeholders. When the timeframe was confirmed, careful consideration was given to the scope and nature of activity to ensure that work undertaken would not result in unintended negative consequences for communities, providers, or families.

Communication around sustainability has been carefully managed. As funding approaches its end, there is an emerging risk that some settings and providers may be reluctant to engage with

the project. To mitigate this, all communications have been explicit that funding beyond March 2026 cannot be guaranteed.

The underspend reflects a deliberate and cautious approach to expenditure, taking into account the short-term funding and the requirement to clearly evidence value for money. Spending decisions have been carefully considered to avoid short-term solutions that could not be sustained beyond the funding period. This approach aligns with national feedback, with the Scottish Government confirming that underspends are being reported across other EAC projects.

#### **4. Project Delivery**

The Project works in partnership with local communities, existing local services as well as wider public sector services to identify solutions to the current childcare challenges.

The team aims to carry out ongoing engagement activities with families, communities and services to assess what childcare and activity resources are already available in those areas.

Ongoing engagement activities have taken place with families and services within the targeted communities to assess what childcare and activity provision already exists and where gaps remain. This includes engagement with parents and carers to explore support needs for:

- Families with children aged two years and under
- School-aged childcare, including breakfast clubs, after-school provision, and holiday support

Consultation and engagement within targeted communities, along with a multi-agency approach, have been central to shaping the project's delivery model.

#### **5. Partnership Working**

A key development over the reporting period has been the strengthening of collaboration and partnership working. As the project has progressed, the number of partners involved has grown, reflecting the importance of a multi-agency approach in achieving sustainable outcomes.

Current partners include:

- Happyhansel Primary School and Sandness Primary School
- Aith Primary School
- Baltasound ELC
- Mid-Yell ELC
- Community Development Workers (North Isles and West Mainland)
- Sandness Development Group
- North Yell Development Group
- West Mainland, Mid-Yell and Baltasound Leisure Centres
- Ability Shetland
- Employability Team
- Hame Fae Hame and Lerwick ELC
- Active Schools

This network has significantly strengthened the project’s capacity to design and deliver provision that reflects local circumstances.

## 6. Project Governance

To support the delivery of the Project a Project Board was established in November 2023. The membership of the Project Board consists of representation of the following services:

- Early Learning and Childcare
- Quality Improvement
- Learning Estates
- Schools including the Youth and Employability Team
- Children’s Social Work
- Assets, Commissioning and Procurement
- Community Planning and Development
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Legal
- Economic Development
- Health and Social Care
- Communications

The Project Manager reports regularly to the Project Board, which provides accountability, strategic oversight, and expertise.

## 7. Progress taking place in the West Mainland

Significant progress has been made across the West Mainland, with a range of provision now in place, including:

- Breakfast and after-school clubs at Happyhansel Primary School
- Transport and supervised access to West Mainland Leisure Centre
- Sandness Friday activity sessions
- Holiday provision at West Mainland Leisure Centre
- Partnership delivery with Ability Shetland
- Progress towards extending provision for two-year-olds at Happyhansel ELC

(Details of opening times, attendance levels, and operational notes are set out in the tables below.)

Despite evidenced demand, staffing continues to present challenges for childcare provision. While some services have experienced temporary pauses due to staffing constraints, the provision delivered to date has had a demonstrable positive impact on families.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Opening times</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Happyhansel Primary School Breakfast Club	5 days a week, 8:15am-8:40am. The club has been in operation since September 2024.	Attendance ranges from 3-8 children. Tuesday is the most popular day, with an average of 6 children.

Happyhansel Primary School After-school Club	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:15pm-4:45pm. The club has been in operation from November 2024.	Staffing continues to present challenges. The club was required to pause for a short period in Term 2 due to staffing constraints but is now operating again in Term 3.
West Mainland Bus and Supervision in place at West Mainland Leisure Centre, in partnership with the Sandness Development Group, Happyhansel Primary School and Sandness Primary School.	Supervision is available on Mondays and Wednesdays, 3.30pm-6.30pm, during term-time. The bus picks children up from Sandness School at 2.55pm and Happyhansel School at 3.05pm and takes them to the West Mainland Leisure Centre.	The EAC Project now funds the bus. Supervision at the leisure centre means that children can access activities independently, reducing the need for parents to accompany them.
Sandness Activities on Friday	Friday afternoons, after the end of the school day, from 2pm to 4.30pm on a fortnightly basis. The sessions are planned and overseen by a coordinator, and started on Friday 29 August.	The sessions provide activities for local children of primary or nursery age. Parents/carers are invited to accompany their child. A total of 7 families with 13 children have attended these sessions.
Holiday Provision at the West Mainland Leisure Centre	Every Monday during the Summer and October holidays, 10am-3pm, with a bus pick-up/drop-off.	High attendance in both Summer and October.
Ability Shetland Saturday Club	Saturday Club takes place every 2nd week, and Holiday Club takes place on Wednesdays during the holidays.	EAC fund supports staffing for the West Mainland Saturday and Holiday Clubs; continued into term 2 and October.
Happyhansel ELC completed variation for 2-year-olds.		This has been approval by the Care Inspectorate, following a visit. Happyhansel are now able to accommodate eligible 2 year old placements.

## 8. Attendance and Uptake

Attendance data for breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, holiday provision, and community activity sessions demonstrate consistent uptake and sustained demand.

Patterns indicate:

- High mid-week attendance at breakfast club
- Variable but generally positive attendance at after-school provision
- High engagement with holiday activity-based provision

- Consistent family participation in Sandness activity sessions

These trends suggest that provision is meeting a genuine local need, particularly where transport barriers have been addressed.

### Happyhansel Breakfast Club Attendance

<b>Happyhansel Breakfast Club – term 3 Attendance 2024/25</b>					
	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Week 1	N/A	6	6	3	6
Week 2	4	5	6	3	7
Week 3	6	5	6	5	5
Week 4	5	4	N/A	5	8
Week 5	6	5	8	5	5
Week 6	4	4	6	5	6
Week 7	7	4	5	7	N/A
Week 8	N/A	4	6	4	7
Week 9	6	5	6	4	8
Week 10	4	5	5	5	7
Week 11	3	6	7	5	2
Week 12	5	7	9	4	4
Week 13	3	5	8	4	8

<b>Happyhansel Breakfast Club – term 4 Attendance 2024/25</b>					
	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Week 1	N/A	5	6	3	4
Week 2	4	4	4	5	3
Week 3	3	6	4	6	4
Week 4	4	8	6	5	7
Week 5	N/A	5	7	5	7
Week 6	4	4	6	4	7
Week 8	5	4	6	6	6
Week 9	8	6	11	7	5
Week 10	6	5	11	6	5
Week 11	4	5	4	4	6

<b>Happyhansel Breakfast Club – term 1 Attendance 2025/26</b>					
	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Week 1	N/A	N/A	7	3	8
Week 2	6	6	6	6	8
Week 3	5	5	7	7	7
Week 4	7	5	7	6	5
Week 5	6	8	7	8	5
Week 6	7	6	7	6	5
Week 7	7	6	10	5	9
Week 8	5	3	5	4	6

<b>Happyhansel Breakfast Club – term 2 Attendance 2025/26</b>					
	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Week 1	N/A	N/A	2	4	4
Week 2	4	3	4	4	7
Week 3	8	3	2	5	5
Week 4	7	3	4	4	4
Week 5	8	4	5	6	No power
Week 6	6	8	3	6	2
Week 7	6	4	4	6	6
Week 8	5	3	6	5	5

### Happyhansel After-school Club Attendance

<b>Happyhansel After-School Club – Term 3 Attendance 2024/25</b>		
	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
Week 1	N/A	N/A
Week 2	7	10
Week 3	6	10
Week 4	8	6
Week 5	9	Closed
Week 6	10	9
Week 8	5	6
Week 9	11	9
Week 10	9	10
Week 11	11	1
Week 12	4	5
Week 13	5	3

<b>Happyhansel After-School Club – Term 4 Attendance 2024/25</b>		
	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
Week 1	3	2
Week 2	3	6
Week 3	4	3
Week 4	3	5
Week 5	2	5
Week 6	3	4
Week 8	3	4
Week 9	4	2
Week 10	3	3
Week 11	Cancelled	Cancelled

<b>Happyhansel After-School Club – Term 1 Attendance 2025/26</b>		
	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
Week 1	n/a	closed
Week 2	closed	5
Week 3	closed	4
Week 4	closed	5
Week 5	closed	4
Week 6	closed	6
Week 7	closed	5
Week 8	closed	closed

Happyhansel After-School Club did not run in term 2 due to a shortage of staff.

### **MAD days attendance**

<b>MAD Days Attendance Summer</b>							
	30 June	7 July	14 July	21 July	28 July	4 August	11 August
Attendance	22	30	31	38	35	34	28

<b>MAD Days Attendance - October</b>			
	13 Oct	20 Oct	27 Oct
Attendance	32	28	34

Overall, 58 children and 37 families participated in the MAD days during the summer holidays, and 41 children and 30 families participated in the October holidays.

### **Sandness Activity Days**

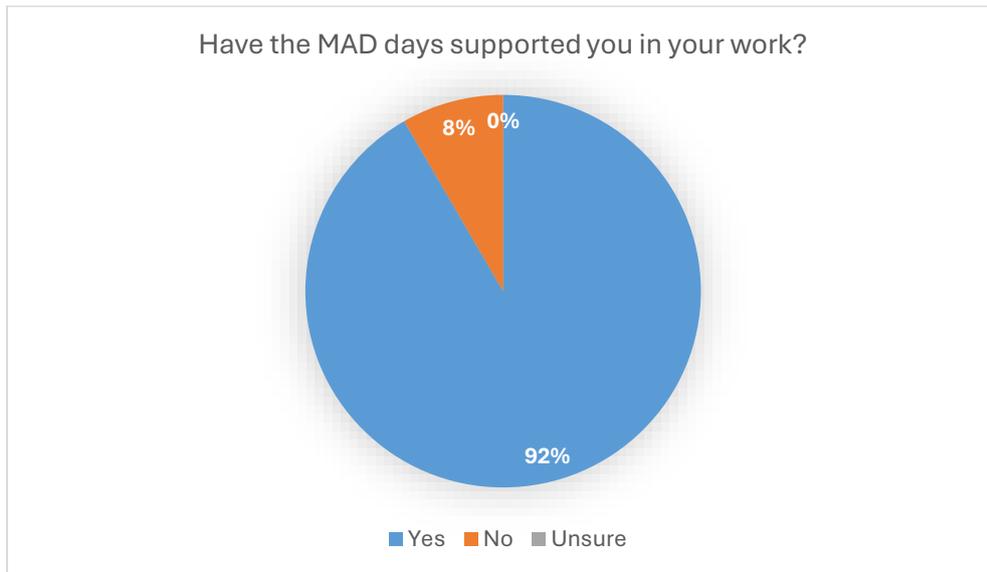
<b>Sandness Activity Sessions</b>						
	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Week 6</b>
Attendance	5 families with 10 children	6 families with 11 children	5 families with 9 children	7 families with 13 children	6 families with 11 children	5 families with 9 children

## 9. Feedback and Impact from the West Mainland

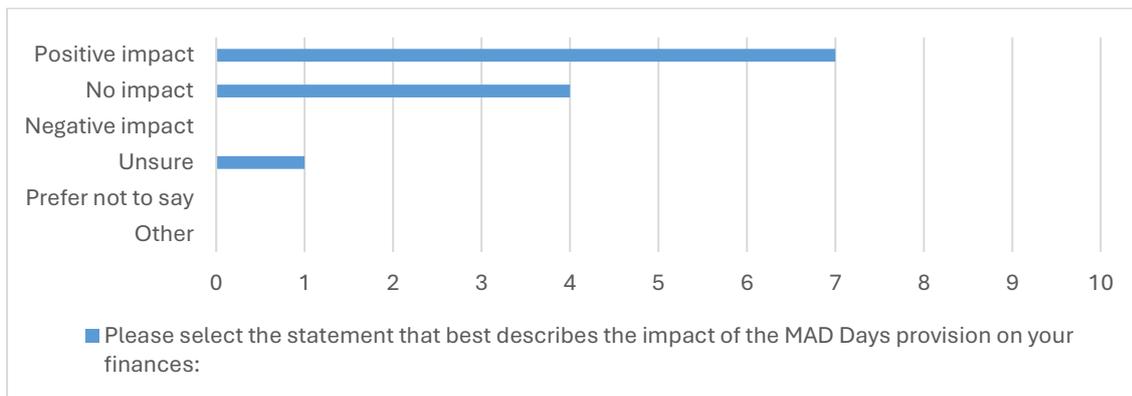
### MAD Days

The West Mainland MAD days ran for three Mondays during the October holidays, from 10am to 3pm, at the West Mainland Leisure Centre, with pick-up/drop-off provided. The provision was free to all families. A total of 41 children were signed up to attend across the three sessions.

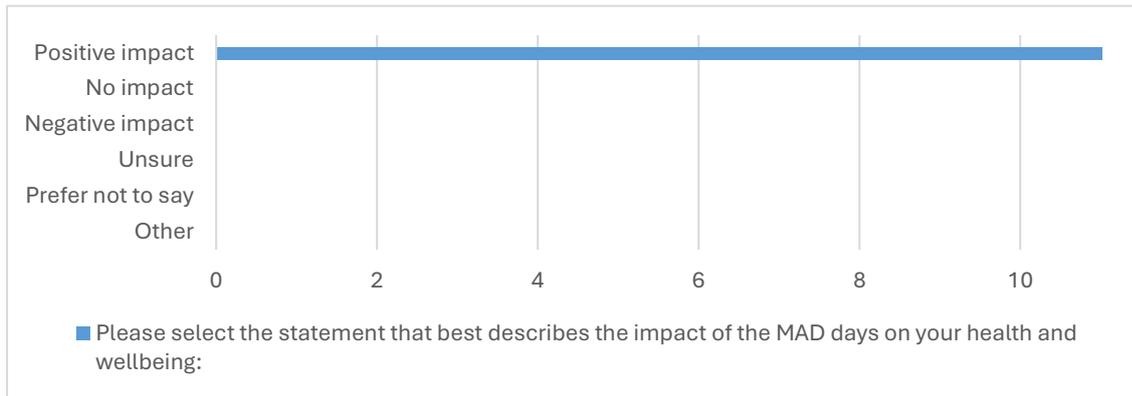
A feedback form was circulated following the October sessions, and 12 parents/carers responded.



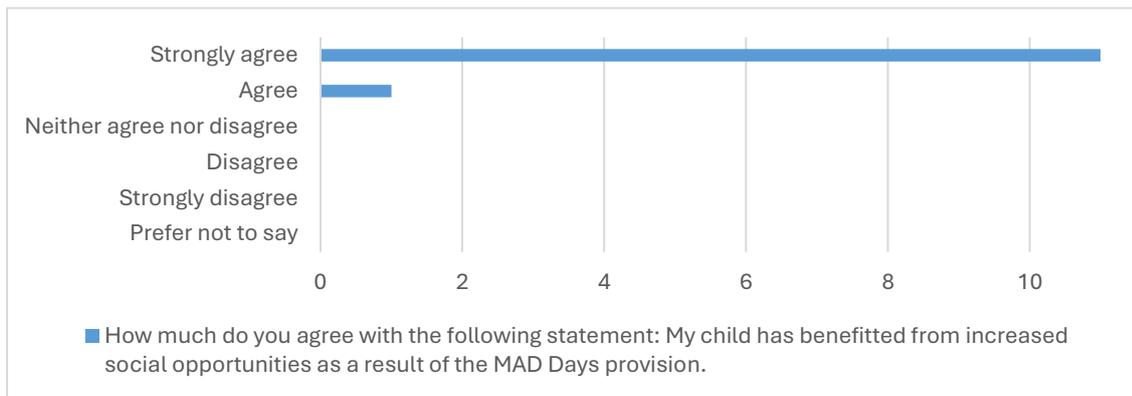
**Please select the statement that best describes the impact of the MAD Days provision on your finances:**



**Please select the statement that best describes the impact of the MAD days on your health and wellbeing:**



**How much do you agree with the following statement: My child has benefitted from increased social opportunities as a result of the MAD Days provision.**



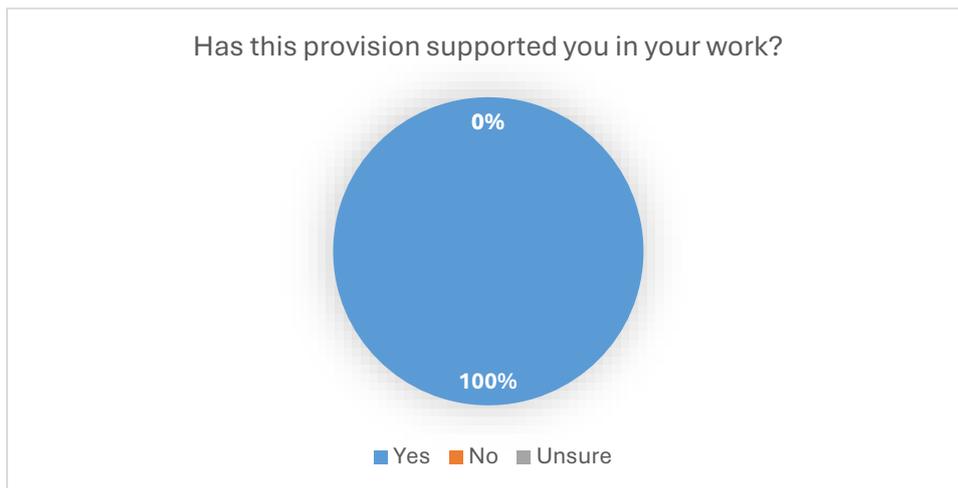
**How has the MAD Days provision impacted you and your family?**

It has helped with me and my children's physical and mental health greatly.
Safe and fun space for the bairns, a chance to see their pals and have some independence and I know they're having a fun time. Plus it's affordable which is wonderful.
Made family coordination easier.
Allowed time and head space to be complete household tasks on one day of the week throughout holidays. Made me feel better able to cope with the holiday period. Allowed the children time with friends and to enjoy sports and activities.
I feel because they were just 2 Mondays, they were delighted to be going. My oldest daughter was very proud of herself after she had done so well up the climbing wall. They were happy and excited about their days.
My children have enjoyed the holidays having this to look forward to every week.
The MAD days are a massive help during the holidays and my daughter enjoyed the activities and it's beneficial for her to mix with children she would not normally socialise with.
Healthy, fun and social time for a few days in the holidays - my son loved it.
We are happy knowing our child was having fun in a safe and secure known environment among friends.
It gives an opportunity to spend a lot of time with friends outside the home in a social laid-back environment.
The bairns really enjoy it - it reduces the stress of trying to find childcare and we think it's great.

## Happyhansel Childcare Services

Happyhansel Primary School offers an After-School Club on Tuesdays and Thursdays (3:15 pm–4:45 pm) and a Breakfast Club five days a week (8:15 am–8:40 am). The EAC Project also funds a bus service transporting children from Happyhansel Primary School and Sandness Primary School to the West Mainland Leisure Centre on Mondays and Wednesdays.

A feedback form was shared to families by the school in November 2025, with responses received from six parents/carers.



## How has this provision impacted you and your family?

This has been a huge support to my family. I feel we are more relaxed around work as we know there is reliable and trustworthy teachers/workers supporting us. It's a great asset to the community, all the children have even more opportunities to grow in confidence with each other and the teachers/workers. They feel they can reach out more with all the additional activities before school. Its broken the Bridge of student and teacher. They are a team.

The breakfast club helps us to do school drop off and get to work on time.

It has allowed us to spend more time with others in the family as the child has attended either breakfast or after school clubs. It has allowed me to be able to provide my family with a healthy tea as I haven't needed to rush to get the child to their after-school club; and so means I can collect them later.

This provision has, for me as mum, been life changing. I am now in FT employment doing a job that I am proud to do. I feel valued in the Shetland community and am actually using my brain (and skills and experience) This has had such a positive impact on my mental health, as well as my self worth. I would not have been able to move into this role if these clubs didn't exist. The impact on the family has been positive as having a happier mum means there is less stress in the home. Our child that attends these clubs has had such a great range of experiences their confidence has grown. It has also reduced the stress levels throughout the family as we are doing less 'juggling' as parents.

Our child loves breakfast club! It is a 'soft start' to the day, allowing her to build relationships with staff and with children from the other class.

**Feedback from West Mainland bus and Leisure Centre supervision:**

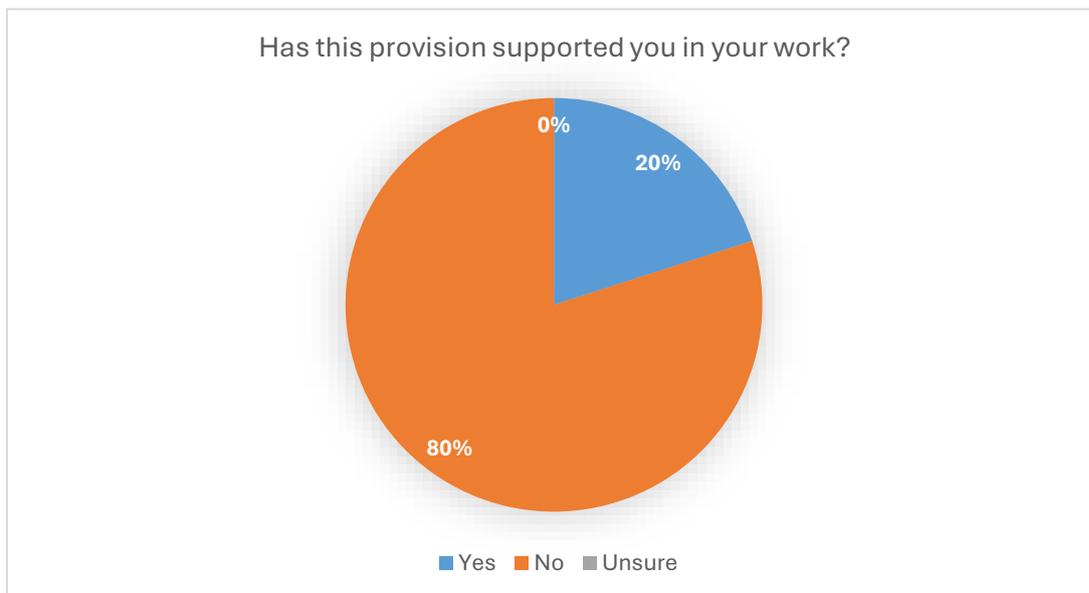
*“The Monday and Wednesday bus to the WMLC has been amazing for our family. Knowing that our child is safe and participating in the sporting activities they love means we can actually complete a day’s work. Instead of rushing off then ‘catching up’ in the evening means we can actually spend quality time with our children in the evening. It has also allowed us to explore the potential of me to return to the profession I am trained to do. The provision of childcare really has had a positive impact on the whole family.”*

**Ability Shetland**

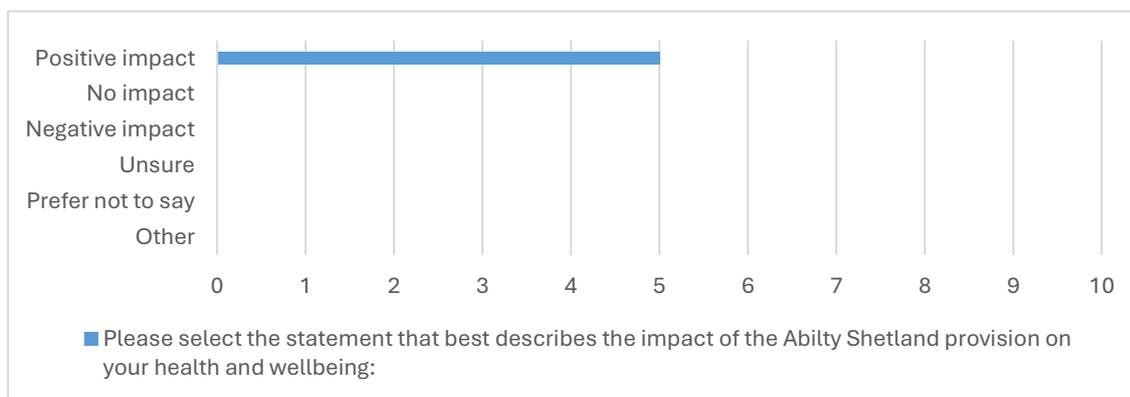
As part of the Early Adopter Communities Project, funding has been provided to support staffing for both the West Mainland Holiday Club and the West Mainland Saturday Club, beginning in July 2025. A total number of 17 children participate in Ability Shetland provision in the West Mainland.

A feedback form was circulated to families who used the Holiday Club in October and the Saturday Club, with five responses received.

**Has this provision supported you in your work?**



**Please select the statement that best describes the impact of the Ability Shetland provision on your health and wellbeing:**



## How has this provision impacted you and your family?

Impacted greatly - my son loves the one on one at the clubs. This then also means my other two children get the chance to do things we are unable to do while my son is at holiday club.
Personally, there isn't much impact as I stay with him due to inconsistent people at the club. That creates an unsafe feeling for me and my child. Saying that, he does look forward to going to the Saturday club.
My child is able to socialise in a supportive and safe environment whilst also enjoying new experiences.
Ability Shetlands Saturday group and Holiday clubs often feel like a lifeline service for my family, so that my disabled children have a place they feel welcomed and well cared for while providing an opportunity for respite for myself from my demanding role as a full-time care giver.
Improved rest and wellbeing for rest of the family.

## 10. Learning from the West Mainland

Key learning points from the reporting period include:

- Unregulated, activity-based models proved highly effective as community-based, multi-agency solutions, particularly for holiday provision.
- Compared to regulated childcare, these models offered greater flexibility, variety, and responsiveness to family needs.
- Maximising local assets – including staff, transport, venues, and trusted relationships – supported high-quality and sustainable delivery.

The partnership with Ability Shetland has been a major success. Ability Shetland is a well-established organisation with strong community integration and experience in delivering activity-based provision for children with disabilities and additional support needs. Through this partnership, the EAC Project funds staffing costs for the West Mainland Saturday Club and ASN Holiday Club, strengthening sustainability while providing valuable learning for the project.

When asked about the benefits for families, the Ability Shetland Team Leader explained:

*“Social opportunities for their children in their local community meaning less time travelling, rest and time with siblings and other family members, or giving them the opportunity to get tasks done that they cannot when their child is with them - i.e. shopping, visiting friends, hobbies etc”.*

They also highlighted the broader impact of funding:

*“By having this funding, it means we can utilise other pots of funding for other parts of Shetland. It is important to provide services in even the smallest populated areas in rural Shetland where numbers at clubs may be low, but the impact is just as big.”*

This collaboration demonstrates the value of partnering with established community organisations, allowing the project to extend its reach, enhance sustainability, and deliver meaningful outcomes for families in rural areas, particularly for children with disabilities and additional support needs.

## 11. Challenges and Emerging Themes

Staffing remains a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas where recruiting and retaining qualified staff is difficult. This has affected the long-term sustainability of some highly valued services, including after-school provision at Happyhansel Primary School and proposed provision in Aith.

However, the project has demonstrated increasing flexibility in responding to opportunities and local demand. Initiatives such as Sandness Friday Sessions and expanded holiday provision were developed in direct response to community feedback and available resources.

As awareness of the project has grown, so too has local ownership. Partners are increasingly thinking creatively about childcare solutions, reflecting stronger engagement and shared responsibility.

The flexibility of the funding has been central to this success, enabling tailored responses that support the needs of staff, families, and children.

## 12. Progress Taking place in the North Isles

Progress has also been made across the North Isles, with activity focused on strengthening Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) capacity, enhancing provision for two-year-olds, and delivering holiday support.

Key areas of work include:

- Support Worker ELC recruited in Mid-Yell ELC
- Support Worker ELC recruited in Baltasound ELC
- Working with Mid-Yell and Baltasound ELCs to enhance quality care for 2-year-olds
- Engagement with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to explore childminding opportunities in Yell
- Delivery of North Isles Summer Holiday Provision
- Completion of a capital project to enhance outdoor learning at Baltasound ELC

(Details of opening times, attendance levels, and operational notes are set out in the tables below.)

<b>Project</b>	<b>Opening times</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Support Worker ELC – Mid Yell ELC	Recruited October 2024 (until March 2026)	This has allowed for an increased number of paid 2-year-olds in the setting and a more reliable service for families.
Support Worker ELC – Baltasound ELC	Recruited January 2025 (until March 2026)	This has allow for an increased number of paid 2-year-olds in the setting and a more reliable service for families.

Enhancing quality of care for two-year-olds	Resources for 2-year-olds ordered 2025	Settings identified common needs, including age-appropriate furniture, resources, and clothing to support high-quality care.
Engagement with SCMA	Ongoing	SCMA is working with local partners to explore interest in childminding in Yell and can offer learning and support through the Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future (PSCF).
North Isles Summer Holiday Provision	Weekly for five weeks during the holidays.	Provision included 2 sessions at Unst Leisure Centre, 2 sessions at Mid Yell Leisure Centre, and a cinema trip, supported by transport.
Capital project – outdoor shelter, Baltasound ELC	Completed October 2025	The shelter enhances outdoor learning opportunities in all weather conditions.

### 13. Attendance and Uptake

#### 2-Year-olds Attendance in ELC

- Mid-Yell ELC: 3 two-year-olds
- Baltasound ELC: 2 two-year-olds

#### North Isles Summer Holiday Provision 2025

Attendance at the North Isles Summer Activity Programme was high, demonstrating demand for structured holiday provision across the islands. A total of 52 children and 36 families participated in the North Isles holiday provision.

North Isles Summer Activity Programme				
Cinema Trip	17 July	24 July	29 July	5 August
27	35	21	27	31

# NORTH ISLES SUMMER ACTIVITY PROGRAMME

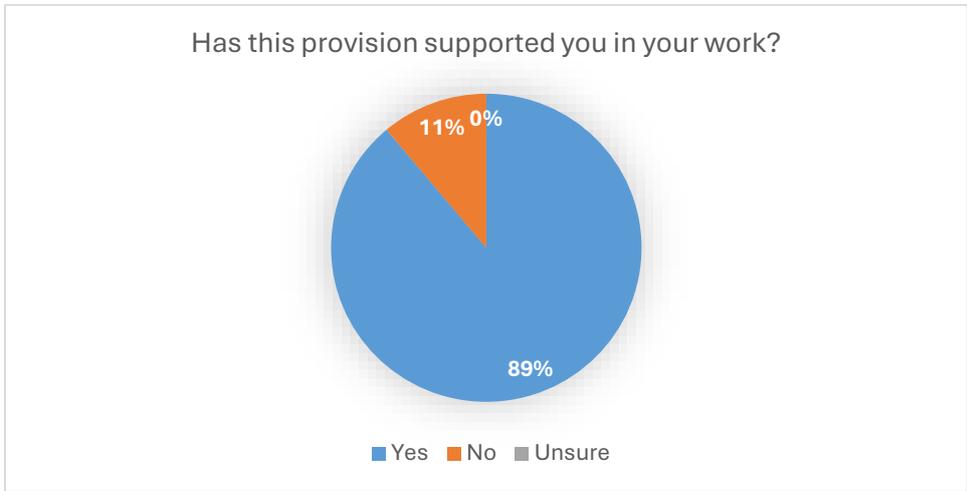
<b>Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> July</b> Yell Leisure Centre 10:30 - 3:00 pm	<b>Activities:</b> Swimming, Sports Fun Activities AA Fired Up
<b>Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> July</b> Yell Leisure Centre 10:30 - 3:00 pm	<b>Activities:</b> Swimming, Sports Fun Activities Yoga & Crafts
<b>Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> July</b> Unst Leisure Centre 10:30 - 3:00 pm	<b>Activities:</b> Swimming, Sports Fun Activities & Glansin Glass
<b>Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> August</b> Unst Leisure Centre 10:30 - 3:00 pm	<b>Activities:</b> Swimming, Sports Fun Activities, Rugby & Drama

**Important info:**  
 These sessions are free.  
 for ages primary 1 - primary 7  
 Places must be booked with [kate@northyell.co.uk](mailto:kate@northyell.co.uk)  
 Transport is available between islands so Bairns can attend all activities  
 Bairns will need water, pack lunch and swimming stuff

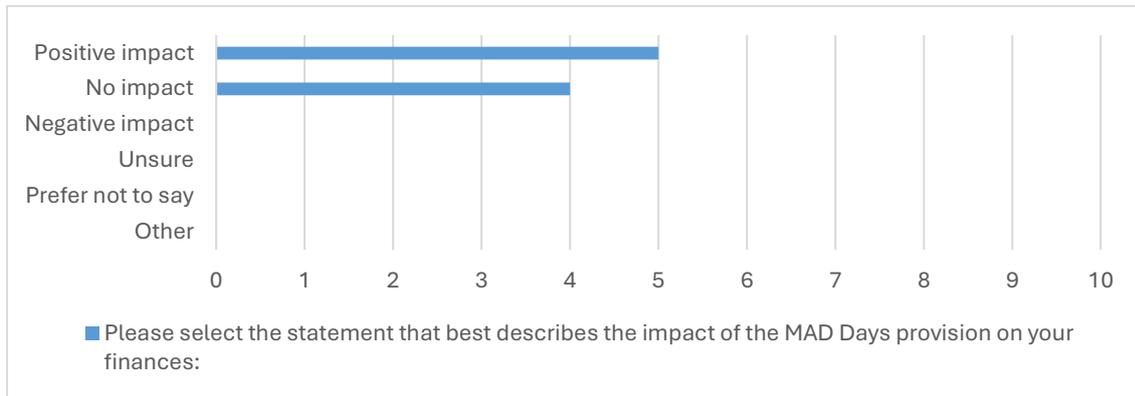
### 14. Feedback and Impact from the North Isles

#### North Isles Holiday Provision

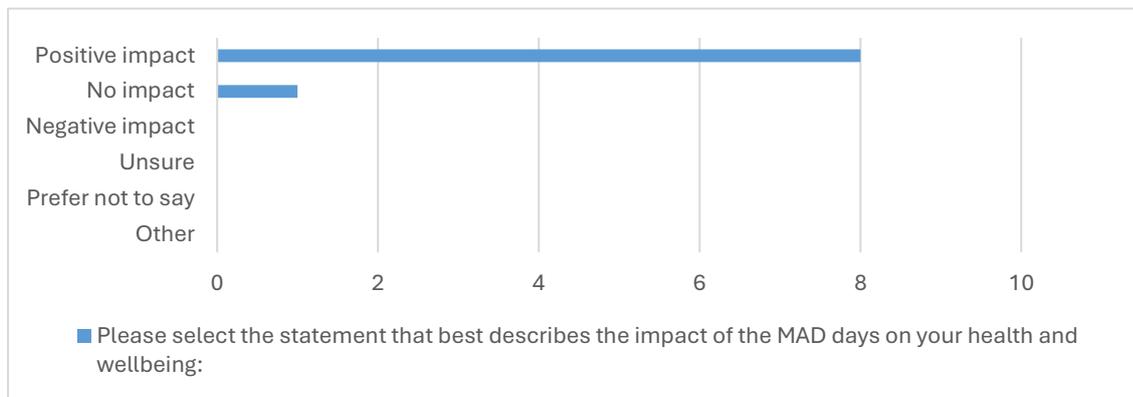
A feedback survey was shared with families in August 2025 and received **nine responses**. Feedback highlighted positive impacts on family finances, parental wellbeing, and children’s social opportunities.



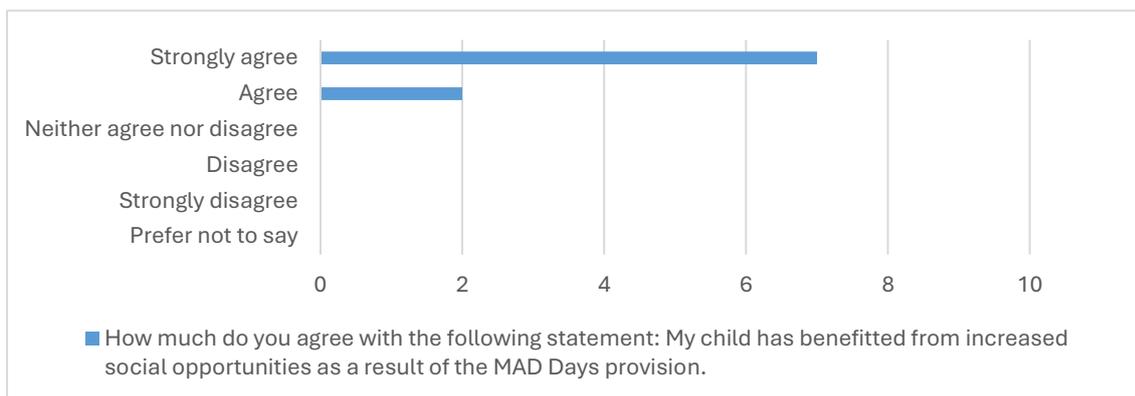
**Please select the statement that best describes the impact of the MAD Days provision on your finances:**



**Please select the statement that best describes the impact of the MAD days on your health and wellbeing:**



**How much do you agree with the following statement: My child has benefitted from increased social opportunities as a result of the MAD Days provision.**



**How has the Activity Days provision impacted you and your family?**

Great opportunity to allow my child to meet their peers in the North Isles and try different activities.

To not burden grandparents with childcare all the time and to allow child to socialise and have different experiences is good and reduces the guilt.

It was really good for something to be on in the isles for my child to be part of.

They brought about a chance for my child to be independent, and do activities away from the rest of the family...giving them a feeling of ownership of their time.

It has enabled both parents to be at work whilst knowing the bairns are doing a wide range of activities with friends and enjoying themselves.

It was such a good range of activities, my child was able to try new things and spend time with other children, making connections. He loved the days and it also meant I could work those days knowing he was cared for in a safe and fun environment.

Feedback from staff at Mid Yell Early Learning and Childcare:

*“Having an extra support worker in place has had a hugely positive impact in terms of the quality of service we can provide. Having an extra member of staff to support - particularly the 2 year olds in the setting - ensures that the needs of all our children are being met. Without additional staffing it would be very challenging to accommodate 2 year olds while continuing to observe, support and challenge our older and more able children. It also means that we can have our outdoor space open and available for free-flow play right from the beginning of the session. Without an additional member of staff, we would only be able to open outdoors once snack had finished”.*

Feedback from staff at Baltasound Early Learning and Childcare:

*“The funding received to support resources and staffing for our two-year-olds has had a very positive impact. It has enabled the staff team to provide a wider range of high-quality, age-appropriate resources that support children’s development and wellbeing.*

*One particularly valuable resource has been the indoor den. Although introduced with our two year olds in mind, it is now used by children across the setting as a calm and safe space to support self-regulation, quiet time and small group or individual activities such as reading and imaginative play.*

*The additional staffing has made a significant difference to our provision. It has allowed staff to offer more focused one-to-one support for our two-year-olds, ensuring their individual needs are met. It has also created opportunities to provide targeted transition support for our four and five year olds as they prepare for their next stage of learning.*

*The new outdoor classroom has also proved to be an extremely valuable resource. Due to the extreme weather conditions we experience in Unst, this structure allows us to access outdoor learning more frequently by providing essential shelter, ensuring children can continue to benefit from outdoor experiences in a safe and comfortable environment.”*



**Feedback from the Capital Project in Baltasound – Outdoor Shelter in Baltasound ELC:**

ELC Manager: *The new outdoor shelter has been a fantastic addition to our Early Years provision. It provides a safe, sheltered and wind-free space, making outdoor learning more accessible for our youngest learners throughout the year. The flexible design also protects resources from the Shetland weather, and we look forward to continuing to develop this space to further enrich learning and play.*



## **15. Learning from the North Isles**

- Targeted staffing investment has a direct and immediate impact on service quality and capacity, particularly for two-year-old provision.
- Capital investment in outdoor learning supports year-round play and learning in a challenging climate.
- Locally delivered holiday provision reduces travel, strengthens community connections, and supports parental employment.
- The importance of childcare for younger children was also highlighted during the First Minister's visit to Mid-Yell ELC, where discussions with the headteacher, ELC staff, local councillors and parents reinforced the need for flexible and sustainable childcare in remote and rural areas.

## **16. Challenges and emerging themes**

Consultation was undertaken in Baltasound to assess interest in an after-school club for primary-aged children. While nine families expressed interest, the service could not be progressed due to staffing constraints.

As in other areas of the project, recruitment and retention of staff remains the most significant barrier to expanding regulated childcare provision in the North Isles.

## **17. Progress taking place in existing services**

There are currently four regulated Out of School Care (OOSC) services operating across Shetland:

- Brae OOSC
- Sandwick OOSC
- Islesburgh OOSC
- Dunrossness OOSC

Staffing challenges continue to significantly impact service stability. Both Sandwick and Dunrossness OOSC have experienced temporary closures due to insufficient staffing.

A 50% discounted childcare rate has been introduced in existing OOSC settings for families within the six priority family groups and those in receipt of Universal Credit or the School Clothing Grant.

Progress so far:

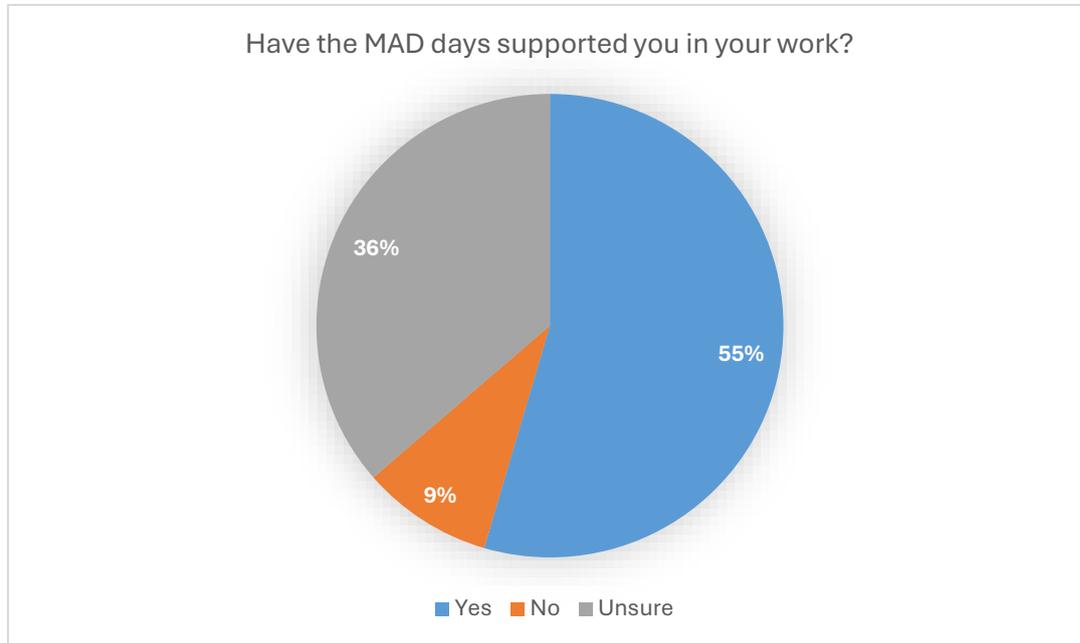
- Two Play Practitioners were recruited for Islesburgh OOSC.
- A Practitioner ELC and OOSC was recruited at Sandwick OOSC but has since resigned.
- Progress has been significantly impacted by staffing shortages in Sandwick and Dunrossness, resulting in temporary closures.
- Islesburgh OOSC has seen an increase in eligible families and a gradual rise in attendance.
- Funding has supported the purchase of additional resources to enhance provision.

A total of 30 applications have been received for the 50% discount in Islesburgh out of School Club.

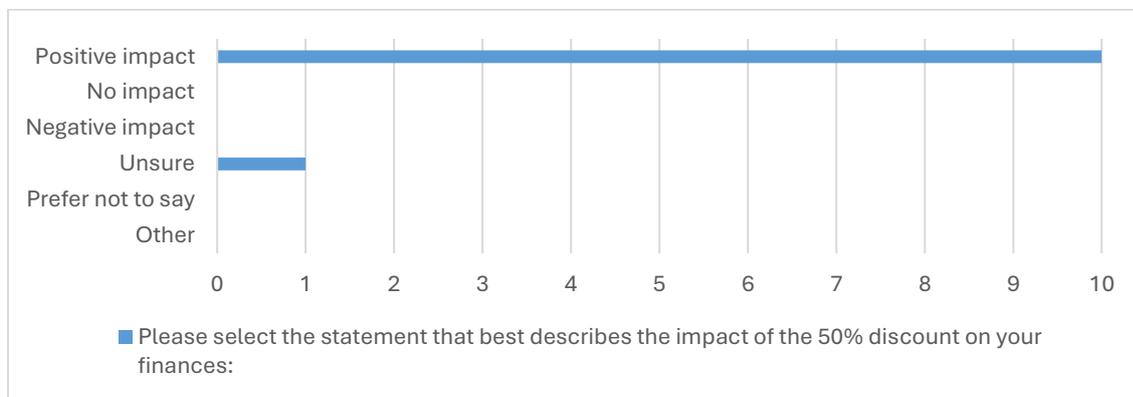
**18. Feedback on the 50% Discount**

The discount has been available since Easter 2025. A feedback survey shared in November 2025 received 11 responses.

**Has the 50% discount supported you in your work?**



**Please select the statement that best describes the impact of the 50% discount provision on your finances:**



**How has the 50% discount to childcare payments in the out-of-school clubs impacted you and your family?**

Positively.
Relieved some financial worries.
Massively, I don't worry as much when I need to take on extra shifts at work about the extra costs of childcare fees.
Very good.
Very positively.
It provided us with the opportunity to use OOSC provisions during the holidays without such a financial burden. This meant we were able to take annual leave at the same time so the whole family could enjoy time together rather than back-to-back annual leave to ensure one parent was with the children.

Very good.
Very good.

## 19. Learning and Emerging Trends

- Those using the discount has grown as it becomes more established.
- However, staffing shortages remain the primary constraint on expanding discounted provision across all OOSC settings and have resulted in temporary closures. These disruptions have significantly hindered progress in delivering the 50% discounted childcare offer, limiting accessibility for families and slowing overall project momentum.
- This has highlighted the importance of developing locally tailored and sustainable staffing models that reflect the realities of rural and island communities. Ongoing collaboration between schools, local authorities, and community partners will be essential to achieving this.

## 20. Other Activity

Alongside place-based delivery, the Early Adopter Communities Project has supported a range of workforce development and system-wide activities aimed at strengthening capacity, quality, and sustainability across Early Learning and Childcare and Out of School Care services.

### PDA Education Support Assistance Qualification

The PDA Education Support Assistance qualification is delivered by UHI Shetland over one year via online learning, with weekly classes. On completion, participants can register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) to work as:

- Support Workers in Early Learning and Childcare
- Play Support Workers in Out of School Care Services
- Learning Support Workers in schools

Fully funded places were offered to supply staff in the West Mainland and North Isles. The funding supported five supply staff in targeted areas to undertake the qualification.

To date:

- Two staff members have completed the qualification, contributing to longer-term workforce sustainability.

### Training for supporting 2-year-olds

6 online professional learning sessions were delivered by Kym Scott, beginning on 7 October. These sessions focused on supporting the learning and wellbeing of two-year-olds and were open to ELC staff across Shetland.

Each session covers a different developmental aspect:

- Understanding the brain of two-year-olds.
- Connected and Confident: Understanding and meeting the emotional needs of two-year-olds.
- Helping two-year-olds to settle in using good attachment practice.

- Capable and Competent – Supporting the physical development of two-year-olds.
- How two-year-olds learn and how to provide the best conditions for this.
- Early maths and literacy for two-year-olds.

Attendance by session:

- October: 13 attendees (1 from the North Isles)
- November: 18 attendees (2 from the North Isles)
- December: 12 attendees (2 from the North Isles)
- January: 14 attendees (1 from West Mainland, 2 from the North Isles)

#### Targeted Support for Breakfast Provision

The EAC Project now funds a support worker for one hour per day in Mossbank to support the breakfast club. The average daily attendance ranges from 8 to 13 children.

A review of breakfast club provision has been completed and will inform future planning.

#### Childminders

The project continues to work with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to explore opportunities to increase childminding capacity in Shetland.

Current activity includes:

- Development of a Shetland-specific childminder recruitment campaign
- Planning of SCMA-facilitated online engagement sessions

In addition:

- Two childminders in Dunrossness are now fully qualified following EAC-funded SCMA subscriptions

#### Scottish Government Visit

In January 2026 a representative from the Scottish Government visited Shetland for two days to observe the real life impact of Shetland's Early Adopter Communities Project. During the visit, they met with a range of local services and partners to gain insight into project delivery and see activities in practice. Feedback from the visit included:

- *The visit was extremely worthwhile, and the positive impact of the EAC projects and funding was evident across the projects visited. It was clear to see how the project team's careful approach to developing the EAC projects is creating strong foundations, producing key learning, and supporting communities.*
- *Particularly interesting to see was how some settings were capturing evidence of impact – e.g. in Islesburgh Out of School Club we really enjoyed reviewing their floorbook which demonstrated young people's, parents'/carers/ and staff's reflections on what difference the EAC funding had made to available provision*
- *The project is clearly supported by a very engaged project board and it was impressive how the project team had developed this over time, and brought together a wide range of interests from across different areas of the council*

- *It was positive to see colleagues engage collaboratively at the meeting, identifying routes to join up working and funding streams, exploring routes to do this locally, while highlighting the role of national government to progress strategic alignment*
- *A personal reflection from visiting the islands was the range of experiences, environments and settings across Shetland – the experience of families in Lerwick, being very different to the experience of families in Unst (for example), this highlighted the importance of taking a place based and person centred approach in Shetland to understand community needs and be responsive to these.*
- *It was a really worthwhile opportunity to deepen our understanding of the learning being surfaced from Shetland, and ensure this is used appropriate to help shape future childcare expansion policy.*

## **21. Data Gathering and Reporting**

Meetings are held between the Scottish Government and the Grantee every six weeks, to update the Scottish Government on:

- The progress of the Project’s delivery in relation to the objectives and expected outcomes;
- Key learning that has been taken from the delivery of the Project;
- Key challenges the Project is facing, and any adaptations required as a result of continued learning and feedback.

Reporting periods have been set by the Scottish Government to submit reports covering the duration of the project. These are:

- First reporting period: will cover a 7-month period between 1st Sept 24 – 31 March 25
- Second reporting period: will cover a 6-month period between 1st April 25 – 30th September 25
- Third reporting period: will cover a 6-month period between 1st October 25 – 31 March 26

Submission of a final and comprehensive evaluation report is to be submitted no later than 30 April 2026. The report is to demonstrate how the Project has contributed to meeting user needs, the impact that the project has had on local families and communities as a whole, as well as key insights obtained from engagement and discovery activity.

## **22. Overall Insights**

Several key insights have emerged during this period that are important for understanding the progress and impact of the EAC Project:

The project has demonstrated that a flexible, place-based approach is essential when delivering childcare in rural and remote communities. Emerging opportunities, such as the Sandness Friday Sessions and holiday provision, highlight the value of adapting delivery in response to community needs and feedback.

The holiday provision delivered in targeted communities demonstrates that activity-based provision effectively meets local needs and highlights the differences between regulated and unregulated care. For the nature of the activities offered, the unregulated model worked well, with high attendance and positive engagement.

Multi-agency collaboration has been critical to the project's success. Engaging schools, ELCs, development groups, leisure centres, and third-sector partners has enabled the co-design of services, shared learning, and more sustainable delivery models

While the project has taken time to build momentum, this deliberate and steady approach has been critical in laying the foundations for long-term sustainability. Taking the time to build relationships, establish trust, and test delivery models has ensured that progress is meaningful rather than rushed. The learning gained through this process will be invaluable for future policy and programme design in rural childcare development.

The success of some projects has been a result of the commitment and drive from communities themselves. This local knowledge, experience and connections have been invaluable.

Staffing is central to widening any offer and increasing capacity within settings.