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A report for Audit Scotland into the SNP childcare and early learning policy has raised a series of concerns regarding its achievability and planning.

Councils are preparing to provide 1,140 funded hours for all 3 and 4-year-olds – and eligible two year-olds – to improve outcomes for children and to support parents to work, study or train.

This report suggests that the requisite increase in childcare staff and changes to premises will be difficult to achieve, detailed planning should have started earlier and there remains a considerable gap between what local councils and the Scottish Government expect the policy to cost.

The report also assessed the earlier 2014 expansion of funded early learning and childcare to 600 hours.

On this earlier expansion the report states that the government did not identify measures of success before committing almost £650m to the increase, making it difficult to assess whether it is delivering value for money.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“This Audit Scotland report is damning in term of exposing the failures of SNP policy on child care.

“It makes clear that there has been no attempt to evaluate different options in terms of delivering the additional hours of child care, or, just as importantly, the cost implications.

“Therefore, providers and councils have no idea of whether the current investment is delivering value for money and parents are left frustrated because the current system is still not delivering the flexibility they need.

“This is a very serious wake-up call for the SNP. It has been all talk on the surface but, on the ground, there are fundamental issues at stake which are impacting on the effectiveness of children’s care.”