



Maree Todd at SCMA 2019 Conference crèche. Photo courtesy of Scottish Childminding Association.

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Dear SCMA members,
cc: Graeme McAlister, Chief Executive of SCMA

As 2020 begins, I am hugely excited about the expansion of early learning and childcare and its potential to transform children's and families' lives. I know from personal experience the impact of the unique, nurturing, home learning environment you offer for children in the earliest years and beyond. It was encouraging to see that the latest SCMA Audit showed an increase in the number of childminders approved to offer funded early learning and childcare places, although I would love to see those numbers grow significantly. I am committed to working with childminders, SCMA and local authorities to make that happen.

Towards the end of 2019 I had the opportunity to meet your Chief Executive Graeme McAlister to discuss the findings from SCMA's 2019 Audit. This was a welcome opportunity for me to thank Graeme for SCMA's valuable contribution to early learning and childcare in Scotland – through the services, resources and opportunities SCMA deliver, and through their advocacy of childminders at local and national levels. We had a wide-ranging discussion about what life is like for childminders across Scotland; your experiences of the expansion so far; and what action you would like to see from the Scottish Government.

In conversation, Graeme highlighted a number of challenges that childminders are encountering when looking to get involved in offering funded hours. It is really helpful for me and my team to understand your experiences in more detail, and we are working with SCMA and our other partners to find ways we can help. I welcome SCMA's commitment to continue sharing your experiences with us, and advising us on where change is required.

SCMA's 2019 Audit report included a number of specific recommendations for us in Scottish Government, and also for our colleagues in local government. At the end of this letter I have included an explanation of the actions we are taking in response to these points.

2020 is a hugely exciting year for all of us in Team ELC. Not only will we see children able to access nearly double the amount of funded early learning and childcare and more families having the choice of different types and patterns of provision, but we will also launch a package of new e-learning resources available to everyone in the ELC sector. As childminders you are a valued part of the team, and I hope you will find these new resources useful. We are also working with SCMA to plan a national ELC event for childminders in 2020 where we will have the opportunity to come together to share learning and experiences.

Thank you again for all that you do for Scotland's children and families. Please continue to share your experiences and concerns with SCMA, who are in regular contact with my team.



Maree Todd

Minister for Children and Young People

SCMA Audit 2019 – Scottish Government’s response to recommendations

A. The Scottish Government should officially recommend ‘mixes of provision’ to ensure more balanced provider models in local authority areas.

We appreciate that childminders are experiencing a variety of ELC models locally. Our national policy – developed in partnership with local government and the ELC sector – is that parents and carers can access their child’s funded ELC hours from any provider that meets the National Standard, has a place available, and is willing to enter into contract with the local authority. This is supported by legislation that requires local authorities to consult parents and carers on how ELC should be provided locally.

Local ELC offers will naturally look different, depending on the circumstances and characteristics of the local area, and parental preferences. The number and type of providers is likely to vary, for example, between urban and rural areas. It would not be practical or desirable for the Scottish Government to require that the same mixes of provision are available in every area. Our policy, however, is deliberately designed to emphasise provider neutrality and encourage different types of provision.

I have asked my team to write to local authorities to reiterate our joint commitment that if parents and carers request to use their funded entitlement with a childminder, and the childminder meets the National Standard and is willing to enter into a contract, they must be able to do so. In the letter, my officials will also highlight the benefits of childminding for families, and signpost to resources and good practice.

At a national level, we are taking clear action to promote childminding to parents and carers as a positive option for funded ELC. We recently launched a national marketing campaign to raise parents’ awareness of the ELC expansion. I am delighted that childminding features prominently in this campaign, and I am very grateful to SCMA for their advice and contributions. We have also recently expanded the information available on parentclub.scot/elc about childminding as an option for funded ELC, including as part of a ‘blended model’.

B. All local authorities in Scotland should be required to develop action plans which detail what each is doing to support childminding.

We understand the aspiration behind SCMA’s recommendation that we require local authorities to develop childminding action plans. It was helpful to discuss this proposal in detail with Graeme, and to consider different aspects of our Funding Follows the Child policy and how it is being implemented. While we are not in a position to require local authorities to develop action plans, we will continue to take every opportunity to remind local authorities of the benefits of bringing childminders into partnership, informed by meaningful and effective consultation with parents and carers.

C. The Scottish Government should share examples of successful inclusion of childminders in local authority delivery plans.

We support this recommendation. We are:

1. ensuring parents and carers have the right information to make informed choices about where they can use their funded entitlement (detailed above in point A), and,
2. showcasing where local authorities are working particularly well with childminders.

We will do more to share and promote case studies of how local authorities are effectively including childminders in their expansion plans, for example the blended model trials in East Ayrshire that we shared with all local authorities at our Childminding Summit. We will work with SCMA to identify recent examples of effective partnership working which we will share and promote across Scotland.

D. All local authorities should ensure that tendering processes are transparent and in line with Scotland Excel contracting guidance.

We accept this recommendation and believe that the introduction of Funding Follows the Child and the new National Standard in August 2020 will go a long way towards addressing it. Our Transition Options on Contracting Guidance, published on 29 April 2019, highlights where specific consideration for childminders should be made in the contracting process. Scotland Excel has been working with local authorities to help them develop their contracting approaches for delivering the expanded hours, and if needed we will explore running further sessions in 2020 on contracting with childminders. We will also explore whether it would be helpful to share different contracting approaches across different local authorities.

E. The Scottish Government should support SCMA in researching the reasons for the declining childminding workforce.

Following our discussion, I am pleased that the Scottish Government, the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Childminding Association have agreed to collaborate on new research into the childminding workforce. The Scottish Government will fund this important research. The Care Inspectorate will consider through its business transformation project the information that is automatically collected, and how this can be further strengthened to collect data that will provide an overview of the childminding workforce and trends. We look forward to working with SCMA and the Care Inspectorate on this.

We are also beginning a new piece of research to gather evidence on the impact on outcomes for children and families who use childminding services as their sole provision and families accessing blended models. This will complement the Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare and we think it will provide a valuable evidence base on the benefits of childminding. This evidence base will help to promote childminding in the long term. We have invited SCMA to join the study's research advisory group.

F. The Scottish Government should run a childminding national recruitment campaign to bolster the childminding workforce.

The national recruitment campaign for the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare was developed with SCMA's input. It features information on childminding, what the role entails and how to pursue a childminding career. Many elements of the campaign include childminding, including advertising in local press across Scotland. We will continue to promote childminding as a career, including via social media channels, and we will consider the findings of the new research into the childminding workforce to see if we should take some further, targeted actions to encourage more people into careers in childminding.