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Graeme McAlister
Scottish Childminding Association

16 July 2020

Dear Graeme,

Thank you for your letter and briefing note of 7 July on SCMA's survey and the sustainability of the childminding sector.

Childminders are a vital part of childcare in Scotland, and we are committed to reopening childcare in a way that prioritises the safety of children and childcare professionals. The expert scientific advice continues to stress that minimising contact is important in suppressing the virus and ensuring Test and Protect is effective.

I would like start by expressing my appreciation for childminders who have continued to deliver critical childcare to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. The support childminders have given to families across Scotland during this difficult time has been invaluable.

And because of the unique and smaller home-based nature of childminding settings, the Scottish Government, after seeking health advice, allowed childminders to reopen on 3 June.

I understand the concerns childminders across Scotland have about their financial sustainability, which is why we will reduce restrictions on blended placements and cohort size as soon as possible.

I am pleased to say the Deputy First Minister announced today that this is our intention: we will be able to ease the complete ban on mixing – or blending – different types of childcare. This will not be a return to normal childcare operations, but we now also expect that the “bubbles” model that restricts children to small groups will not be needed.

Our latest public health and scientific advice means that, on the condition that the virus continues to stay suppressed and that we continue to put in place effective monitoring, as well as Test and Protect, we will be able to ease the requirement to avoid using more than one childcare setting from August – while still supporting families to limit use of multiple settings where possible. I have asked officials to work with you to share the revisions that will be required to our guidance for your input as we develop it.

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Our action to support childminders underlines how important we think they are for the childcare sector, and the childcare sector's role in supporting economic recovery. Unfortunately, our plans to promote the role of childminding in delivering 1140 hours of funded ELC was paused because of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, I would welcome further close working with SCMA to progress this in the coming months with local authorities and parents.

I have welcomed the opportunity to work in partnership with SCMA on the establishment of the Workforce Support Fund which has opened for applications today. I hope that it can provide some support to childminders facing challenging financial circumstances.

The Scottish Government's routemap for recovery sets out a four phase approach to easing lockdown restrictions while still suppressing Covid-19. I am pleased that we have now moved from phase 2 to phase 3 of the routemap and that the First Minister was able to confirm reopening of all childcare services, and an easing on some of the continued restrictions on childminders.

The changes we are making continue to depend on suppressing the virus – if we don't do that, further changes will not be possible.

Thank you for writing to me.



MAREE TODD
Minister for Children and Young People

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