

Scottish Parliament Social Justice & Social Security Committee

Inquiry into Addressing Child Poverty through Parental Employment

Briefing on SCMA Involvement – 16 May 2023

Childcare can have a low value and priority attached to it, but it can play a critical role in supporting child poverty reduction through job creation and parental employment, enabling parents/carers to seek and to stay in employment.

ABOUT SCMA

The Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) is a national Third Sector organisation, a professional membership organisation for childminders (2800 members / 81% of childminding workforce), a direct service contract provider to local authorities to support childminders involved in the delivery of funded Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) and supporting vulnerable families, and a national delivery partner. **Our activities contribute to reducing child poverty and we have been leading nationally on developing and delivering innovative recruitment models to support the development of a sustainable childminding workforce and, in turn, provide the infrastructure and capacity to support multiple national policy areas, local community and economic development, and parental employment.**

ABOUT CHILDMINDING

Childminding - is a unique form of childcare and family support delivered in a home, with low adult-child ratios enabling more personalised support, where children of different ages learn and play together in small groups benefitting development; supports children from 0-12 years (or 16 years in the case of children with additional support needs) providing both pre-school and school-age childcare holistically in a single setting, enabling siblings of different ages to be cared for together; is a very high quality form of childcare and consistently achieves higher ratings across all quality criteria, through independent inspection by the Care Inspectorate, than Daycare of Children's Services (local authority and private nurseries combined); follows the same learning (including Curriculum for Excellence) and quality frameworks as nurseries; provides increased flexibility for families linked to their employment and needs; and provides strong continuity of care for children through various transitions (nursery, primary, high school). In practical terms childminders are also independent self-employed small businesses, with the vast majority being sole practitioners/workers. Due to their nature and size childminding businesses can also be established in communities where it may not be viable to sustain a larger staffed childcare service.

DECLINE IN THE CHILDMINDING WORKFORCE & IMPORTANCE OF REVERSING THIS TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF NATIONAL POLICIES

In 2016 the Scottish Government published its blueprint to almost double the statutory entitlement of funded ELC to 1140 hrs for all three, four and eligible two year-olds. **SCMA has been very supportive of this expansion, of ELC policy and in particularly the intent to close the attainment gap and to provide funded childcare to families. However, the manner in which the expansion of ELC was implemented has had a devastating effect on the childminding workforce which has declined by 34% (with the loss of 1926 childminding businesses and 11,336 childminding places for children and families) since 2016 during the six years of ELC expansion.** Shortages of childminders are being experienced in many parts of Scotland resulting in unmet demand for families. **This has major implications for children, families, parental choice, communities and also the delivery of Scottish Government Programme for Government commitments to extend ELC down to one year olds and to develop a new system of wraparound school-age childcare – both areas in which childminders have much experience and will be required to provide the infrastructure to deliver these ambitions.** The reasons behind the decline in the childminding workforce are multi-factorial and are detailed in the SCMA Childminding Evidence Paper (August 2022) available at <https://www.childminding.org/Media/Docs/Common/SCMA%20Childminding%20Evidence%20Paper%20Aug2022%20FINAL.pdf>.

CHILDMINDER RECRUITMENT & PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT

Against this background, SCMA has been leading nationally on childminder recruitment and addressing the issues adversely affecting retention. **We recognised that a national childminding-specific campaign would be required and undertook research to inform this. This identified a very strong link between childminder recruitment and parental employment**, as the majority of childminders are female, enter the workforce aged 25-44 with the main entry point being 30-39, have started a family, wish to care for their own children, need to earn an income and who wish to do something more rewarding and with some flexibility. Childminders bring considerable life experience with them and from very diverse career backgrounds (teachers, nursery workers, administration, banking, retail, events, hospitality etc) and are motivated more by making a difference than income. 89% of childminders believe the most rewarding aspect of their role is seeing children develop in response to their care. As such, we recognised that childminding provides great potential for parental employment, re-training and particularly for those looking to return to the workforce or to change career and obtain more flexibility. Building on this –

- **Remote & Rural Recruitment:** recognising that the decline in the childminding workforce and the need for recruitment was more pronounced in remote and rural areas, SCMA convened a national and local stakeholder strategic discussion on childminder recruitment in remote and rural areas in November 2021. This led to the establishment and launch of the **Scottish Rural Childminding Partnership (SRCP)** in March 2022. This was led by SCMA with financial support from Highlands & Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government and delivered in partnership with 10 remote and rural local authorities (Argyll & Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dumfries & Galloway, Highlands, Moray, North Ayrshire, Orkney Islands, Scottish Borders, Shetland Islands and Stirling Councils). Importantly, the SRCP recognised the vital role that childminding could play in job creation and supporting community and economic development by creating much-needed childminding places and enabling parents or carers to seek work or to stay in work. The SRCP also recognised that many local authorities were unable to fund childminder recruitment out of their ELC budgets and the pilot provided participating local authorities with a free/funded opportunity for this to be undertaken in their areas. The pilot aimed to recruit 100 new childminders where they were most needed and also to test a demographically-targeted recruitment campaign and supported childminder recruitment model through which successful candidates would receive intensive childminding-specific support from SCMA in helping them through the complex registration process and establishing their businesses complemented by a start-up package of SCMA's childminding-specific learning courses and a £750 start-up grant. **Latest figures show that 43 new childminders have now completed the registration process with the Care Inspectorate, a further 10 are working their way through this process and another 6 are still to apply for registration. Of those who have completed registration, 39 new childminding businesses have already been established, are operational and providing much-needed childminding services to local communities.** This has included recruiting childminders in areas which have previously not had childminders or in which others (including Early Years and Employability teams) have not been able to recruit into. We also believe that the results from this pilot (47.32% employment rate) compare favourably with the 'No-One Left Behind' approach - between April 2019 and March 2022 8,289 people (33%) entered employment. [Scotland's Devolved Employment Services: statistical summary November 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-devolved-services-statistical-summary-november-2022/pages/10-to-15.aspx) whilst the percentage of direct Job Outcomes through [Fair Start Scotland: Annual Report Year 4 \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fair-start-scotland-annual-report-year-4/pages/10-to-15.aspx) is 37%. Our approach has also attracted wider interest from Employability Teams, Job Centres and the DWP. Early learning from the SRCP pilot included that potential childminders need longer to consider becoming a childminder than the original 6 month pilot. For many, life can get in the way (this could involve giving up another job, moving house, building work, caring commitments etc) and it is clear that childminder recruitment needs to become a rolling year-round process. Linked to this, 15 strong candidates within the SRCP pilot did not progress due to timing and personal circumstances, but have expressed strong interest in becoming a childminder at a later date – potentially extending further the employment impact of the SRCP pilot.
- **Urban recruitment:** given the acute pressures being experienced in the childminding workforce the early emerging results from the SRCP pilot attracted considerable interest including from local

authorities in other (urban and mixed) areas of Scotland who were keen for us to deliver our recruitment campaign in their areas. This led to the launch of the **Scottish Childminding Partnership (SCP)** in February 2023. This pilot aims to recruit another 115 childminders, apply learning from the SRCP pilot and to test the application of our demographically-targeted recruitment campaign and supported childminder recruitment model in larger and more densely populated urban areas (Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and East Renfrewshire), while undertaking some targeted rural follow-up (in Highlands and Dumfries & Galloway). In developing this pilot thought was also given to piloting an alternate funding model which could have the potential to be scaled-up nationally if successful. As such, the SCP pilot is based on a participative funding model in which all partners contribute funding (the Scottish Government, the City of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee Councils, East Renfrewshire Council, Dumfries & Galloway Council and Highlands Council). **Local authorities participating in the urban part of the pilot have contributed Parental Employability funding to support this.** While this is a national funding stream, each local authority has its own eligibility criteria for how this Parental Employability funding can be used. As such, the SCP is more complex than the earlier SRCP pilot, but also more focused on reducing child poverty through parental employment, with particular emphasis on urban areas of deprivation. The SCP is still in its early stages and updates will be provided as the pilot progresses. As with the earlier SRCP, the SCP also has a strong focus on capturing learning. During the pilot we will also capture data on other potential barriers to establishing childminding businesses, through parental employment, in urban areas. This will build on earlier work undertaken by SCMA in supporting childminding business establishment in low-income communities which identified some barriers including – Housing (with some Housing Associations or local authority Housing Departments being unwilling to allow tenants to run childminding businesses from rented properties), confidence (childminders are self-employed business owners and additional support can be required to support confidence and skills development), and transport costs.

Subject to successful outcomes being achieved, SCMA believes that our demographically-targeted campaign and supported childminder recruitment activity should be extended nationally (with financial support) to support children, families, communities and parental employment.

SCMA is also actively involved in contributing to child poverty reduction and parental employment through a range of other targeted projects and services –

- **School-Age Childcare:**

- childminders provide both pre-school and school-age childcare. Approx. 50% of the children in childminding settings are of school-age and childminders have extensive experience of providing school-age childcare, before and/or after school. SCMA has recently completed delivering the Access 2 Childminding (A2C) project, funded by the Scottish Government, to provide school-age childcare childminding placements to low-income families and to support parents seeking employment. This project is currently being evaluated;
- Linking in with our current SCP pilot, it was recognised that there was no childminding provision in Linlathen, Dundee, that this is particularly required to provide access to school-age childcare within this low-income community and Linlathen has been included as a priority target for recruiting childminders within the SCP pilot;
- In parallel, SCMA has been in close discussion with the Scottish Government regarding the development of the new system of wraparound school-age childcare. SCMA was recently invited to submit a funding proposal to the Scottish Government to extend some work from the Access 2 Childminding pilot and to undertake some further innovative work within the Early Adopter Communities to contribute to informing the development of the new targeted school-age childcare offer.

- **ELC (Eligible Two year olds) and Community Childminding Services:**

SCMA is currently contracted to deliver a range of services for local authorities. This includes –

- **ELC:** supporting childminders in delivering funded ELC to three and four year olds and to eligible two year olds. Eligible two year-olds (approx. 25% of two year olds) are a priority group for the Scottish Government based on providing additional support to low-income families. Uptake of funded ELC provision for eligible two year-olds has been lower than anticipated due to a number of reasons (possible stigma and also as local authority data has not been linked with benefits entitlement, although the Scottish Government has now acted to address the latter disconnect). SCMA has worked to increase uptake amongst eligible two year-olds through our 'Integrated Service Models' in Aberdeen and Glasgow. These seamlessly link families accessing our Community Childminding Services (details below) into eligible two year-olds provision;
- **Community Childminding Services:** SCMA is also contracted to deliver Community Childminding services in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Fife and Scottish Borders. These services provide family support to vulnerable families through an early intervention (provided by specially-trained childminders) for families who may be one step away from crisis and in which whatever is happening at a parental level (addiction, mental health, terminal illness, bereavement etc) is impacting on the child (such as through the development of attachment disorders), this has been picked up by social workers or health visitors and referrals are made to our services. SCMA is also in discussion with the Scottish Government about how learning from our Community Childminding services and childminders' experiences of providing nurturing care to one year-olds more widely could be applied to help inform the development of the ELC for one year-olds offer.

As should be evident, childminders play a very important, and largely under-recognised, role in supporting children, families and communities. Childminding is also a very flexible, and generally low-cost, form of childcare delivered by childminders living and working within their local communities. However, childminding is not a high-income profession. Our recent Childminding Cost Pressures & Business Sustainability report, January 2023 (available at <https://www.childminding.org/Media/Docs/Common/TellSCMA%20Childminding%20and%20You%20Survey%202022%20Survey%20Report%20No%20%20Childminding%20Cost%20Pressures%20and%20Business%20Sustainability%20FINAL160123%20PDF.pdf>), found that **only 13% of childminders can pay themselves the Real Living Wage**, childminders have been significantly affected by the Cost of Living Crisis and risks remain around childminders' business sustainability. It should also be clear from this briefing that childminders will be required to support an increasing range of national policy agendas and commitments and have much more to contribute in our collective efforts to reduce child poverty and support parental employment. Within our Cost Pressures & Business Sustainability report we made a series of recommendations to the Scottish Government to address the challenges experienced by childminders. Since then SCMA has been invited to submit more detailed proposals and solutions. Discussions are ongoing.

Graeme McAlister
Chief Executive

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