

PE2112/D: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland

Tim Eagle MSP written submission of 3 October 2024

I would like to take this opportunity to put forward my support for the above-mentioned petition submitted by the charity, Pregnant then Screwed.

Despite the roll out of the expanded hours in 2021, many parts of the country continue to experience huge demand for early learning and childcare places with significant knock-on consequences to parents, particularly mothers.

While any expansion of hours is welcome, there were several negative consequences that have occurred as a result of how the roll out was managed. The level of funding continues to be a barrier to private providers setting up and running facilities, some private providers feel there is an unfair advantage to council managed settings, many 2's groups were lost due to the need to deliver the 1140 hours target, and particularly in rural areas, the lack of further education credits to regional colleges is limiting the number of spaces available on courses despite many young people being keen to explore the profession as a career.

On top of this, the increase in the level of children requiring enhanced support is adding further pressure to the management of facilities. This need for increased staffing to provide for all children was not appropriately considered in the original roll out of the expanded hours by councils.

Childcare requires not just school hour provision, but for true flexibility, it requires an agile wraparound service which can meet the varying needs of parents throughout the day and during the school holidays. At present many parents do not feel those needs can be met locally. For those in rural areas of Scotland, a significant barrier to childcare is the lack of affordable transport options.

The action plan: A blueprint for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland, published in 2017 had three main aims; ensuring children's development improves, improving family wellbeing, and increase parents and carers opportunities to take up or sustain work, training and study. Commissioning an independent review now will allow the Parliament and interest groups to look at the successes and challenges over the last seven years, and offer suggestions that could help highlight key areas to work on moving forward.

Raising a child and being part of a family should be a joyful experience. One filled with adventure and fun. It is essential that any government takes very seriously its responsibility to support parents in that role with the flexibility of choice. In the spirit of choice I would add that fully funded, accessible, wraparound early learning facilities require to be supported by a package of strong measures around paid maternity and paternity leave, flexible working policies and information to support parents.

I am delighted to offer my personal support to this petition.