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Sue Webber MSP

Convener

Education, Children and Young People

Committee

20 September 2024

Dear Convener,

### **Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future**

I am writing to notify the Committee of the launch of the Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future, and to highlight the important progress already being made on childminder recruitment and retention.

Childminders are an essential part of the childcare sector, offering a high-quality, nurturing experience to children of all ages. We have seen declines in the childminding workforce over recent years – a trend that is mirrored elsewhere in the UK – and we have worked with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) and other partners to understand the reasons behind the decline, and to identify priorities and further steps we can take to better support, recruit and retain childminders.

As announced in the 2023 Programme for Government, we are committed to growing the childminding profession, to ensure that more families have access to the unique and flexible experience of childcare that childminders can offer.

### **Programme Launch**

Backed by over £1m of Scottish Government funding this year, together with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA), we launched the Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future (PSCF) in June 2024. The programme is expected to run for 3 years, and will support the recruitment of new professional childminders across Scotland. The programme also includes a range of measures to address the retention of the childminding workforce, delivering more practical support to ensure our existing professionals are supported with their workloads and professional development.

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Our ambition is for all Scottish local authorities to be able to benefit from the new recruitment approach being trialled over the lifetime of the programme, bolstering the availability of childminders across Scotland. In year one (2024-25), there are 17 local authorities participating<sup>i</sup>.

The launch has been very well received, with over 500 individual enquires received by the SCMA and over 50 prospective new childminders already enrolled for the induction programme. The SCMA are already receiving notes of interest from other local authorities wishing to participate in year two (2025-26).

## **Childminder Recruitment**

The SCMA has developed a new model of childminder recruitment which has been successfully piloted in rural, island and urban local authority areas with support and funding from Scottish Government and other partners – as a result of these pilots, 100 new childminding businesses have already been established or are progressing towards registration with the Care Inspectorate.

This childminder-specific recruitment model is now being scaled-up nationally and will make the tailored approach to attracting new childminders available widely across the country, where local authorities choose to participate. The approach is based on a demographically targeted marketing campaign and a supported model of childminder recruitment, which helps new childminders to establish their businesses.

The recruitment programme offers a minimum of a £750 start-up grant for childminders who successfully register with the Care Inspectorate following their participation in the programme, along with a package of fully funded support and training throughout the Care Inspectorate registration process. Over half of Scotland's local authorities are participating with the potential for more to come on board in phases throughout the three-year Programme.

The SCMA is currently undertaking a digital recruitment advertising campaign which is running throughout participating areas noted above, carrying a series of key messages regarding the benefits of becoming a childminder.

This campaign is supported by a combination of other measures such as local marketing and PR, posting organic social media content, dedicated SCMA staff taking part in face-to-face information events, as well as dissemination of recruitment information through local authorities – all of which is generating steady enquiries.

## **Workforce Retention**

The Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future will also test innovative childminder retention measures to support the existing workforce, spanning three key areas of focus; Quality and Learning, Mentoring and Funded Time Off the Floor – a unique concept for childminding which will be the first pilot of its kind trialled in Scotland. These measures will be tested in manageable numbers in targeted areas so that we can ensure high-quality measurement, evaluation and modification.

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The programme will trial two models of funded time off the floor, including: reduced practice time, enabling a reduction in practice time with no loss of income; and funded time back which will provide payment for a set number of hours in the evenings and weekends, when many childminders may complete their paperwork and undertake professional learning. A mentoring scheme has also been developed, pairing new childminders with those who have more experience, offering guidance, support, and sharing best practice to help new childminders thrive.

The measures outlined propose radical solutions to help address some of the issues which have resulted in a decline in the childminding workforce. These new ideas and solutions will need time to be tested, evaluated, modified and adapted to see which combinations are likely to help support and retain childminders moving forward.

One area of support within the retention work will begin in late September for all childminders. Building on recent pilot activity across five local authorities to reduce and streamline administrative burdens for childminders, the programme will provide childminders with funded access to SCMA's three Quality in Practice courses designed to support childminders in cross-referencing policy, guidance and framework documents. Over the lifetime of the programme, other Quality and Learning strands will be introduced, providing further professional learning to support quality improvement.

I would like to take this opportunity to again thank the SCMA for their hard work on the programme and their dedication to the representation and support of Childminders in Scotland.

I hope this information has been of interest to you and provides some insight into this exciting programme aiming to support the creation of new childminding businesses to help families access high quality and flexible childcare, and the trialling of real solutions and innovations to improve the experience of existing childminders across Scotland.

Yours sincerely

**NATALIE DON-INNES**

Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise

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<sup>i</sup> The local authorities participating in the recruitment campaign in year 1 are: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, East Renfrewshire, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow, Inverclyde, Midlothian, Renfrewshire, Scottish Borders, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Lothian.