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06/09/2023

Dear Colleagues

Programme for Government 2023 – Childcare commitments

In April, the First Minister set out the three missions that define this government's work – equality, opportunity, and community. Through these missions we will tackle poverty and protect people from harm, build a fair, green and growing economy, and prioritise our public services ensuring they are effective and efficient.

Supporting families is fundamental to these missions which is why, this week, the First Minister has committed to expand access to high quality, funded childcare in his first Programme for Government.

I know that delivering this commitment and meeting the needs of families, providers and those who work in the early learning and school age childcare sector will depend on the Scottish Government continuing to work effectively in partnership with the sector and with Local Government.

This letter summarises the childcare commitments in the Programme for Government in the Annex below, and outlines how the Scottish Government will work with you to deliver on them in the year ahead. Further detail, including on the investment allocated to deliver the childcare expansion, will be set out at the Scottish Budget for 2024-25 later this year.

In the meantime, your colleagues, members or staff may have questions and my team will share further briefing material with you that I hope will be helpful in responding to any queries you receive.

Finally, I recognise this expansion comes at a time when many in the sector have been highlighting existing pressures, particularly in relation to workforce. That is why measures to support recruitment, promote Fair Work and raise pay are central to the PfG package. My team remain committed to continuing to work with you to address those challenges.

I look forward to continuing to work with you, in partnership, over the coming years to deliver what is an exciting programme of work that can deliver lasting benefits for Scotland.



Annex – Detail of Programme for Government Commitments

1. Expanding the Early Adopter programme

We will work with Local Government and other partners to develop the local infrastructure and services needed to provide childcare from nine months to the end of primary school in specific communities in six local authority areas.

Through this community-based approach, we will test the different models of delivery that meet different local needs.

We are already delivering school age childcare services to around 1,000 priority families through our work in four existing early adopter areas - Glasgow, Dundee, Clackmannanshire and Inverclyde. We will expand that to include two additional communities in Fife and Shetland, and we will test innovative models of delivery to provide childcare for families with children from the age of nine months to the end of primary school.

This investment will enable us to begin to create and test, for the first time, what an all-age childcare system will look like for Scotland.

We remain committed to taking a person-centred and place-based approach to designing this system – that means involving children, parents and also providers in co-designing services to meet their needs. In the coming year we will continue our engagement work with targeted families to start to develop and co-design the all-age childcare offer in the six early adopter communities.

We know that the current childcare system can be difficult for families to navigate, particularly those on the lowest incomes. Therefore, to make it easier for families to access childcare, we will also develop a digital service that makes it much simpler for parents or carers to register and apply for funded childcare, to find services, and manage what they use. In the next year we will begin to develop and test our digital service within the six early adopter communities to understand how it can best support the needs of parents and carers, and providers.

2. New national offer for two year olds

We will begin work to phase in an expanded national offer for families with two year olds, focused on those who will benefit most. This will build on the foundations of the existing 1140 programme, which makes high-quality early learning and childcare available to around a quarter of families on the lowest incomes.

Over the next year the Scottish Government will work with local authorities and our partners in the sector to develop plans to expand access to funded early learning and childcare for two year olds. Over time, we want to increase access from around 25 per cent now to reach forty per cent of families.

We will continue to work closely with local authorities and providers to maximise uptake of the existing offer as we develop these plans.

In developing and designing the new offer we will learn from the existing offer for two year olds and the work happening in the six early adopter communities. We will consider carefully

how we meet the needs of the six priority family groups set out in our Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Available evidence indicates that some of the needs of one and two year olds are different from those aged three and four and in expanding our offer we will be guided by what families experiencing poverty tell us they need and what the evidence tells us is best for younger children.

Good progress has been made on the commitment made last year in Programme for Government to take forward the research, insights and engagement phase of work on a one and two year old offer. This has included a literature review on the impacts for younger children from attending ELC by Public Health Scotland and mapping work to identify current ELC provision for that age group across Scotland, which we plan to publish as part of the new expansion programme.

3. Provide funding to uplift pay to £12 an hour for those in the PVI sector delivering funded ELC

We will provide the necessary funding to increase the pay of those working in the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector to deliver funded early learning and childcare, to at least £12 per hour, an increase that could be worth up to £2,000 per year for those on full time contracts.

The Scottish Government is acutely aware of the challenges currently facing childcare providers as a result of the combined impact of delivering an expansion during a pandemic, Brexit and now the costs crisis. That is why we are committed to providing the funding to enable childcare workers delivering funded ELC in the PVI sector to be paid at least £12 per hour from April 2024. This includes childminders providing funded ELC.

The Scottish Government will work with COSLA and local authorities to support the implementation of this commitment and will set out further details in the coming months.

We anticipate that payment to support delivery of this commitment will be provided through the sustainable rate setting process, as is currently the case for the ELC real Living Wage commitment.

Fair Work principles have been central to the 1140 expansion to date. Investment to support sustainable rates and the ELC real Living Wage has already led to increases in pay for workers delivering funded ELC across providers in the PVI sector.

Currently, this uplift applies only to staff working in PVI settings delivering funded ELC. We will continue to engage with those working in other parts of the childcare sector, particularly the school age childcare sector, about how we can ensure that Fair Work terms and conditions are central to the programme of expansion as that progresses.

We also understand that in the context of the costs crisis many childminders are facing a number of challenges. We will work with local authorities and the childminding sector over the coming months to ensure that we can implement this commitment in a fair and sustainable way.

4. Recruiting 1,000 childminders

We will scale up innovative pilots for recruiting and retaining childminders to grow that essential part of the workforce by 1,000 more.

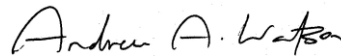
Childminders are an essential part of the childcare sector, offering a high-quality, nurturing experience to children of all ages. We will expand the existing recruitment and retention pilots to grow this essential part of the workforce by 1,000 more by 2026-27.

The Scottish Government has been working with partners to increase the number of childminders operating across Scotland. This work includes contributing funding to innovative childminder recruitment pilots now underway in rural and urban communities across Scotland. These offer a £750 start-up grant and package of fully funded support and training to successful applicants, providing everything needed to establish a new childminding business from home.

We will also implement a range of measures to address retention issues, ensuring that childminders are supported with their workloads and professional development, trialling mentoring scheme and models of funded 'time off the floor' to allow childminders to undertake activity such as planning and continuous professional learning.

We will also continue our funded work to support childminders to play an important role in our all-age childcare delivery within the early adopter communities.

Yours Sincerely



ANDREW WATSON
Director, Children and Families