

SCMA Update on Continued Operation of Childminding Services During School and Nursery Closure Period

Things continue to move at a pace few, if any of us, have experienced before. Earlier this afternoon, the Deputy First Minister of Scotland addressed the Scottish Parliament on the coronavirus situation and the closure of schools and nurseries. In addition to announcing the cancellation of SQA exams due to take place in the spring he identified three critical groups and interests requiring support at this time –

- **key workers** (in emergency services, health, social care and other sectors i.e. energy suppliers, prisons etc requiring childcare). Local Authorities have been provided with guidance about this definition, allowing flexibility for different needs in rural and urban areas. The process of how they will be matched with childcare is still to be developed
- **educational continuity** (to enable pupils in S4-6 complete their course work in the absence of exams)
- **vulnerable children**

What does this mean for childminding?

- **childminding businesses can remain open, but will be required to change their business model during this period to providing care only for children of key workers** (for clarity and in response to a number of members' enquiries, the choice to do so is personal. We were heartened by the warm response from many members yesterday to the possibility of being able to support the families of essential services' workers; equally if you have concerns about your health or that of members of your family there is no requirement to do so);
- **the Care Inspectorate has developed new interim guidance for operating during this period** (including staffing ratios);
- **all partner providers (including childminders) currently contracted and due to deliver funded hours during this period will receive payment for these hours;**
- **the current situation may have an effect on the delivery of 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) by August 2020;**
- **Local Authorities will be given flexibility to use other funding allocated to support ELC in 2020/21 to support alternate childcare provision during this period and will be encouraged to maximise their use of the voluntary sector (including childminding) during this period; and**

- a further £350 million funding has been allocated by the Scottish Government to support those affected by loss of income during this period, on top of £320 million last Saturday and two waves of funding announcements from the UK Government (such has been the speed of these announcements we, and others, have still to unpack the detail, identify who may be eligible for what and if there are any gaps).

In a subsequent letter from the Scottish Government to all Local Authorities in Scotland it is noted that **“childminding services can continue to operate on a limited basis with reference to public health guidance”**. It is also noted that –

“Childminders will not be required to cease operations at this time, although it is recognised some may choose to do so. Childminders should continue to have reference to public health guidance. This is because the impact of transmission is more limited in smaller settings. Through the Care Inspectorate, the Scottish Government will write to all childminders to advise them of the situation”.

In addition, we have also been invited by the Scottish Government to explore with them if there may be potential for the further involvement of childminding within supporting the three critical groups and interests identified. Discussion will commence shortly.

While it is hard for us or anyone to provide complete clarity at this time, we hope this update makes things a little clearer for you and at least as clear as they can be today. Clearly, the announcement also presents temporary change, for those of you who wish to continue operating during these exceptional times, in the form of developing a new business model based on supporting children of key workers during the period of school and nursery closures. But, childminding services remain open and have the opportunity to continue to function while most schools and nurseries, other sectors, professions and trades do not.

There is a lot to think about and we expect the announcement and our update and others' will prompt many more questions for which much of the detail has still to be developed. However, there is a commitment from all involved to make this happen. And as for your questions, please bear in mind that we may not have the answers yet. But, as we have been doing during the coronavirus outbreak, we will aim to answer them as quickly as possible, feed them into national and local discussions and obtaining clarity from others, where required, on your behalf.

Finally, we appreciate how challenging, stressful and unsettling this period is for you, we will continue to update you at every opportunity and to represent your interests and concerns.

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