

To: Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Children & Young People  
Cc: John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister

From: Scottish Executive Board, SCMA (on behalf of childminders in Scotland)

18 August 2020

Dear Ms Todd,

### **COVID-19: Financial Support for Childminders**

Scottish Executive Board of the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) met on Saturday 15 August 2020. During our Board meeting we discussed the very significant financial impact that COVID-19 is continuing to have on childminding and the wider childcare sector, and the need for all childcare providers to receive financial assistance at this challenging time. We also discussed the very significant level of concern which has arisen amongst childminders following the launch of the Scottish Government's Transitional Support Fund for other childcare providers. During this meeting we agreed that -

- we are aware that SCMA's Leadership Team has been, and continues, to be heavily involved in contributing constructively to discussions with the Scottish Government about further funding for childminding and that our staff are not able to share detail of these discussions with childminders at this stage. We understand discussions will continue this week. We are supportive of this approach;
- however, we feel it necessary to express our deep disappointment and dismay at the way in which the Scottish Government announced the Transitional Support Fund. The initial announcement raised much hope and expectation across the sector. Then details of the Transitional Support Fund, once developed, were sent to all childcare providers in Scotland (including all childminders). This included details of awards starting at £1500 for childcare providers with 1-10 places (directly comparable in size to the majority of childminding settings); as a result, many childminders who are experiencing financial difficulty and don't know if they will be able to stay open or to re-open their settings believed they were being directly invited to apply and were relieved by this recognition and opportunity. Turning to SCMA for clarity, in the absence of any specific details about childminding in relation to the fund, SCMA took responsibility for communicating to childminders that they were not eligible to apply for this Scottish Government fund which we were advised had been introduced in response to the significant implications of the current operating guidance for Daycare of Children services settings;
- Scottish Executive Board contains representatives from around Scotland with many years of childminding practice between us. Our Board members are from around the country and as far spread as Orkney, Aberdeen, Inverclyde, Dumfries, Stirling, Edinburgh and Fife. Our Board members all reported that they have never known childminders to be as dismayed and let down as they have been by the Scottish Government's handling of this; and Board members themselves echoed this sentiment, acknowledging a strong sense of disillusionment;
- SCMA has worked constructively with the Scottish Government to support childminding over a number of years. The Scottish Government will be aware that childminding is a flexible, high-quality form of childcare which consistently achieves higher quality ratings across all criteria than many other providers. Regrettably, at a single stroke, the current situation has caused a very significant disconnect with many childminders around Scotland now feeling de-valued, demoralised and excluded. This has unfortunately undermined much of the positivity created by supportive messages about childminding which we have previously received from you as the Minister for Children & Young People and has caused many childminders to believe that the Scottish Government views childminding as a lesser form of childcare to other providers;
- while the Scottish Government's Transitional Support Fund appears to have been developed to provide Daycare of Children services with financial support in response to the impact of their current operating guidance, which could affect their financial viability, there are also very serious risks posed to the financial viability of many childminding businesses –
  - 70% of childminders in Scotland have lost over 50% of their income during COVID-19 and 60% of childminders believe their income will not return to pre-COVID-19 levels within 6 months;

- while restrictions on blended care have been eased, they have not been lifted completely and will continue to have an adverse financial impact on childminding businesses in Scotland;
- in addition, 700-1000 childminders remained open during lockdown to support the national response to COVID-19 by providing critical childcare for key workers and vulnerable children. This was at a time when the operating guidance was stricter, public health understanding was evolving, there was a stronger emphasis on outdoors and when wider social guidance had resulted in the closure of play parks. Many childminders invested, at their own personal expense, in outdoor shelters and equipment to enable children at that time to be outdoors as much as possible while supporting the national response and feel particularly let down by recent developments.
- **Scottish Executive Board recognises that discussions are ongoing with SCMA regarding further funding for childminding and that it is not always possible to change the terms of large-scale funds, such as the Transitional Support Fund, once allocated. We would, however, request that –**
  - the **Scottish Government** takes action urgently to redress this current situation by allocating financial support to childminding at a level which is appropriate to the serious risks to financial viability within childminding (as evidenced by recent SCMA financial viability surveys);
  - this financial support reflects the larger-scale funding which has been allocated to other providers;
  - that this could involve widening the eligibility for applications to the Transitional Support Fund to include childminders and increasing the size of this fund to support this OR if this cannot be delivered through the Transitional Support Fund, another funding route to provide financial support to childminders is identified; and
  - that the **Scottish Government** apologises to childminders for its handling of this situation and the offence and distress caused.

Yours sincerely

Scottish Executive Board, SCMA:

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Sam Clarke, Aberdeen (Vice Convener)  
Donna Dawson, Moray (Treasurer)

Joanna Addie, East Lothian (Vice President)  
Christine Ross, North Lanarkshire  
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Scottish Childminding Association, 7 Melville Terrace, Stirling, FK8 2ND  
Tel: **01786 445377** | Email: **information@childminding.org** | **childminding.org**



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