Scottish Childminding Association

committed to quality childcare

Des Murray
Chief Executive
North Lanarkshire Council
Civic Centre
Windmillhill Street
Motherwell
ML1 1AB

23 June 2020

Dear Mr Murray,

Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) Offer to Parents: childminding

We are aware of significant local concern from parents and childcare providers across the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector in North Lanarkshire regarding the options apparently being presented to parents by North Lanarkshire Council for receiving funded ELC hours.

Linked to this I am writing this open letter to you personally to seek urgent clarification on the inclusion of childminding as an option for parents to receive their funded ELC hours entitlement. We have been contacted by a number of very concerned childminders in North Lanarkshire who have, independently, reported to us that childminding is not being presented as an option to parents. They have also reported that parents are being required to identify local authority nurseries only as their options for receiving their funded hours of childcare or, indeed, other local authority facilities which may be re-purposed to provide childcare due to restricted capacity within local authority nurseries.

Such an approach, of prioritising North Lanarkshire Council provision ahead of other childcare providers, would be contrary to the provider-neutral nature of national ELC policy and directly contradictory to the recently published national framework for education and ELC recovery agreed by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) which explicitly states that –

"*An inclusive and innovative approach to safely increasing the available capacity which safeguards quality, including greater use of outdoor space, re-purposing 1140 hours capacity and activating 1140 hours contingency plans for critical capital projects. These include making use of community facilities which have been approved for other uses if required for capacity - including town halls, libraries etc.* ***Local authorities and providers will work in partnership to consider all of the options for capacity in the local area, and how best to use these to meet demand".*** ['Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision', Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (May 2020)].

North Lanarkshire Council has, we understand, already approved 140 local childminders to participate in the delivery of funded hours. However, we felt it necessary to write formally to your authority in January as very few of these childminders were actually being offered the opportunity to deliver funded hours and this was causing significant concern amongst local childminders (of whom over 80% are members of SCMA). More recently, we understand that very few local childminders were included by your authority in delivering critical childcare during lockdown despite national public health guidance having been developed to support childminding settings to remain open during lockdown to support the national response to Covid-19.

While local authorities can explore the use of alternative facilities, this should not be the only or primary option where other childcare providers are available to provide capacity. As such, we can understand mounting concern amongst local parents and childminders if your authority is considering re-purposing buildings not designed to provide childcare when there are 140 local childminders and many other PVI providers operating in the area. Such an approach, if taken, could pose a significant risk to parental choice, the financial viability of many local childminding businesses and future access to childcare in North Lanarkshire.

I would appreciate an early response clarifying this important matter.

Kind regards

Graeme McAlister
Chief Executive

Scottish Childminding Association, 7 Melville Terrace, Stirling, FK8 2ND
Tel: **01786 445377** | Email: **information@childminding.org** | **childminding.org**

Scottish Childminding Association is a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Scotland. Registered Charity No SC010489. Limited Company No 144696.
SCMA is an appointed representative of PACEY which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority for general insurance only