

Cross Party Group Children and Young People

Tuesday 25th March 2014

13.00 - 14.30

Committee Room 1, The Scottish Parliament

Chair: Marco Biagi MSP

Early learning and childcare in Scotland: Beyond the 600 hours

Attendees

Marco Biagi MSP

Kezia Dugdale MSP

Alison Johnstone MSP

Irene Audain, Scottish Out of School Care Network

Fiona Barlow, Samaritans

Sara Collier, Children in Scotland

Anne Condie, Scottish Childminding Association

Mark Cooper, NSPCC Scotland

Paul Fletcher, A&M Training

Laura Forster, SCIS

Ross Gilligan, Children in Scotland

Greig Hiddleston, Skills Development Scotland

Martin Hunt, Tartan Silk

Lesley Kelly, Growing up in Scotland

Line Knudsen, Children in Scotland

Rachel Le Noan, Down's Syndrome Scotland

Andrew Lindsay, Big Lottery Fund

Abeer Macintyre, Children in Scotland

Marion Macleod, Children in Scotland

Garry McGregor, Befriending Networks

Robert McHarg, A&M Training

Lesley McNab, CHAS

Brian Magee, COSCA

Paul Mullan, Quarriers

Agnes Mullen, Church of Scotland

Ingela Naumann, University of Edinburgh

Anna Nardin, University of Edinburgh

Alison Newlands, Scottish Council of Independent Schools

Aruna Nilaweera

Janet O'Connor, CHAS

Jamie O'Neill, Roshni

Vibha Pankaj, Enable

Sarah Paterson, Youthlink Scotland

Paula Raymond, Quarriers

Satwat Rehman, One Parent Families Scotland

Maggie Simpson, Scottish Childminding Association

Maggie Tierney, Children in Scotland

Apologies

Jackie Baillie MSP
Alison McInnes MSP
Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports Association
Margaret Barclay, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland
Salena Begley, Family Fund
Morag Coleman, Families First St Andrews
Bill Colley, Caledonia Learning and Care
Mo Colvin, RNIB Scotland
Mig Coupe, Mindroom
Jennifer Drummond, Children in Scotland
Maurice Frank, Personalised Education Now
Rachael Grant, Sense Scotland
Kim Hartley, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy
Keith Irving, Living Streets
Fiona Jones, Cl@n Childlaw
Ruth Kerracher, Article 12
Cath Logan, Big Lottery Fund
Robert MacBean, National Autistic Society
Louise Marryat, University of Glasgow
Sharon McCluskie, Play Scotland
Jenn Mowat, Enable Scotland
Calum Munro, Highland Children's Forum
Mags Powell, Stable Life
Katie Rafferty, National Deaf Children's Society
Helen Reilly, BMA Scotland
Tracy Rodger, CLIC Sargent
Lisa Ross, Mindroom
Linda Whitmore, Enable
Megan Wilson, Sense Scotland
Mark Wong, University of Edinburgh

Welcome

Marco Biagi MSP welcomed the members to the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting on welfare reform and children and young people with long-term conditions/disabilities were approved by the Group, and it was agreed that they would be sent to the Welfare Reform Committee [Action point: secretariat].

Marco introduced today's meeting, which will look at childcare beyond the 600 hours promised in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill and address other issues which have received less attention to date.

Marco invited **Anne Condie, Scottish Childminding Association** to speak first.

Panel contributions

Anne began by outlining the current situation in relation to childminding in Scotland. There are around 5,800 childminders in Scotland providing a quality environment for young children. Childminders are part of the community and are ideally placed to support families. Anne said there was a need to be careful with regards to the rollout of extra hours for 3 and 4 year olds as there was a risk that this could make childminding provision unavailable. Not every Local Authority is considering using childminders under Part 6 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. There is a lack of awareness that childminders can partner with Local Authorities to provide the services.

Marco then invited **Satwat Rehman** from **One Parent Families Scotland** to speak to the Group. Satwat explained that there are around 166,000 single parent families in Scotland, which equates to around 28% of all households in the country. Childcare is consistently raised by single parents as the biggest problem they face. Single parents report that there is a lack of affordable, accessible and flexible childcare. They are often unable to find appropriate, high quality childcare that meets their needs. There is a particular issue for those who are mandated into work once their youngest child starts school. Their biggest worry about this is in relation to childcare.

While One Parent Families Scotland welcomes the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill's extension of free childcare hours, there is a need to keep an eye on what the vision is and the steps needed to work towards that. A coherent offer is needed. Childcare reduces socio-economic inequality, increases maternal employment and increases attainment. It also contributes to equalising the playing field. Sustainable, well-paid employment opportunities are also needed.

Satwat commented that there is a need to support the childcare workforce by ensuring better pay. This would also help reduce gender inequality as the workforce is predominantly female. The terms and conditions of childcare workers are often unfavourable – e.g. some workers do not receive sick pay. For example at a recent conference delegates heard about a childcare worker whose own child attended the childcare setting where she worked. If she was off sick, she received no sick pay, yet she was expected to continue to pay fees for her child. Satwat said that One Parent Families Scotland's vision for childcare is that, like education, it should be seen as a fundamental part of our society. There should also be a role for children's services beyond those involved in childcare delivery.

Irene Audain from the **Scottish Out of School Network** was then invited to present. Irene explained that school age childcare is often

confused with homework clubs or extended school provision, yet what it actually is is registered childcare for those aged 4 and a half up to the teenage years, especially for young people with disabilities. It is the second largest childcare provider in the country. There are around 50,000 children using schoolage childcare in Scotland. More than half of provision is managed in the third sector, while around a third is run by the private sector. Less than one-sixth is delivered by the public sector. SOSCN provides quality assurance based on the play work principles, the UNCRC and GIRFEC. Services are registered with the Care Inspectorate and staff with the SSSC and have to gain qualifications, including degree level qualifications for managers. Qualified staff equals a better quality service. Recently there has been a worrying relaxation of UK Government policy in relation to schoolage childcare in England. The staff-pupil ratio can be as high as 1:30 and staff do not have to be qualified. In Scotland ratios are rightly 1:10 or 1:8.

Schoolage childcare contributes to a wide range of policies and supports children's wellbeing, rights and development. The Scottish Out of School Network is part of the implementation group for the National Play Strategy. The 1995 Children (Scotland) Act requires school age childcare to be provided for children in need. A 2013 survey found that 38% of services were providing places to children in need. SOSCN feels that while the duty in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill to consult parents on schoolage childcare is a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough. SOSCN is also involved in the Early Years Taskforce.

Under the current system subsidies in the form of childcare vouchers and tax credits are available for school age childcare, but proposals by the UK Government for future vouchers did not include this age range. However this has now changed to cover childcare for children up to the age of 12 (or 15/16 in the case of young people with disabilities). On average, parents pay £50 per week during term time and £100 per week during school holiday periods for childcare. Tax credits and vouchers are a complex repayment system, instead services should receive direct payment from the state. Under welfare reform, parents have to seek work once their child is 5. According to a report by Save the Children, there is a lack of accessible and available childcare for parents.

Schoolage childcare improves children's inclusion, provides opportunities to make friends, and enables them to engage in a range of physical activities. It provides children with time to have fun and enjoy themselves, which is an important aspect of child development. It extends skills and horizons, especially for only children, children living in rural areas and children with disabilities.

Nordic models of childcare feature the following factors: all include schoolage childcare in state subsidised provision; staff are professionally

qualified; there are higher rates of female employment and sometimes birth rates are also higher; and there is an emphasis on the social and personal development of children.

Dr Ingela Naumann of the **University of Edinburgh** was next to present. Ingela talked about the broader context and highlighted that the institutional set-up was very important. Comparative research of childcare systems in Europe has demonstrated that integrated systems were better than split systems, such as the one we currently have in Scotland, for several reasons.

Ingela looked at the reasons why is childcare such a prominent theme at the moment. Firstly, early years education and childcare supports children's wellbeing and development. It creates safe spaces to meet other children. Secondly, it helps to boost parental employment. Families are less stable than before and everyone needs to work to sustain the economy as we have a shrinking working age population, which means that as many people as possible need to be in the workplace. Arguably, not every type of childcare currently available in Scotland supports parental employment. Thirdly, early years education and childcare supports equality. The educational and economic status of parents is the strongest predictor of where their children will end up. Childcare can help reduce this inequality by supporting parents and children.

The condition for all three is that there must be equal access for all children, which is a steep challenge. More integrated systems are better placed to try and meet this challenge. What works best in terms of achieving this goal is childcare and early years education being available in the same setting, full-time and all year-round. Slovenia has a lower GDP per person than Scotland yet it has a better integrated system. Scotland has a split system with universal free education for 3 and 4 year olds, but childcare is separate. This presents logistical challenges for parents. Private providers offer year-round service, but the entitlement only applies term-time, so there is still a lot of the fee that is not covered. However this type of provision helps parents combine work and family life and also has the advantage of there being one place for children of all ages, which prevents the need for children to have to move around different childcare providers. The integrated approach is more holistic.

Another factor is the need to reduce parental working hours. Nordic countries have flexible maternity/paternity leave which can be taken up until the child is 8 years old.

Integrated systems facilitate a holistic approach, one that is not merely focused on cognitive development. These systems are also better suited to meeting needs in terms of equality, as they provide more equal access for children from different backgrounds.

In Scotland, the result of the split system is that only one part is universal and the rest is provided on the free market, which can result in services being too expensive for many parents.

Group discussion

Marco Biagi thanked the panel for their contributions and opened up the debate. He asked the panel whether they had a view on the public/private divide issue.

Ingela Naumann explained that there are a diverse range of systems throughout Europe. Slovenia has a fully public system, whereas in Norway there are a high number of private providers. However, the private providers have to operate using the same regulations and same subsidies as the public providers, and are not allowed to set fees. So there is diversity in terms of providers, but no competition in terms of prices.

Anne Condie said there was a need to be careful and noted that in Scotland decisions are devolved to 32 different Local Authorities who set their own fees for partner providers. It is not full-cost recovery. The funding isn't sufficient to encourage partner providers to access it, and vulnerable households can't afford to top up the difference.

Irene Audain noted that in Sweden, trained pedagogues are regarded as equal to teachers, although they have different specialisms. It is important that this shouldn't be about extending academic learning, as children need play and leisure time too.

Satwat Rehman said that integration in the early years is to be welcomed, but queried whether there was a role for childminders in an integrated system. Some families and carers would prefer to have the option of childminders. Childminders have the option to come into day centres so that children can benefit from the group setting. Satwat said that what is needed is a supply-side funding model in order to provide childcare that is more sustainable but also more flexible.

Lesley McNab, Children's Hospice Association Scotland, asked about children with complex needs and noted that families' experience was that there are very few childminders who are able to provide care for children with these needs. Direct payments cannot be used for childcare costs, which places a financial burden on families and means that many parents feel they are unable to work.

Ingela Naumann said that the research didn't look specifically at children with complex needs. Children have different needs and there is a role for

childminders within any system. Diversity should not be an excuse for fragmentation, however.

Satwat Rehman responded that more tailored provision is needed. The cost for a place for a child with a disability is borne by the state not by the parent, and arguably it is not legal for providers to claim that there is a greater cost for parents of children with disabilities. There are higher levels of poverty and underemployment in families affected by disability, and a further problem is the lack of flexibility in workplaces. There is a need to tie-in employment practices with parents' needs.

Jamie O'Neill, Roshni commented about children often having to move between a complex array of childcare arrangements, and noted that in the case of his sister's two children, one of whom is school age and the other is nursery age, there are a total of 11 individuals spread over 6 households involved in providing childcare. One issue which Roshni has encountered is the issue of single asylum-seeking parents. The needs of single fathers have not been given due attention. There are particular problems for families who are subject to UK Home Office regulations, e.g. having to report every week and receiving vouchers or cards rather than cash, which restricts them to using specific shops and services. Childcare is not a priority for many of these families. Roshni has also noted some issues in relation to new communities with regards to gender equality and aspirations around young women's careers. For example they knew of a 16 year old girl from the Slovakian community who was getting married and abandoning her plans to join the police force, as the expectation in her family was that girls should focus on marriage and children instead of education and employment. Jamie also commented that there are issues around afterschool provision for children from some faith communities. Parents from the Muslim community often send their children for religious instruction after school, which can be based in the mosque but is sometimes provided in an individual's home. There is a need to ensure that this type of provision is supported and regulated.

Irene Audain said that there is a need to support parents and invest in diversity. There is a lot of valuable voluntary work that is being done in many services.

Satwat Rehman said that the 600 hours offer should not be seen in isolation. It needs to be seen as an entitlement. Among some black and ethnic minority groups, there is a lower take-up of places, particularly among Asian communities. The problem stems from a perception that if a service is not provided within a school, it is not of the same quality. What is needed is outreach and information work using community organisations. This can help to encourage access and take-up of places.

Marion Macleod, Children in Scotland mentioned the National Parenting Strategy and said that where children tend to do best is when wellbeing outcomes for children are placed first. The evidence suggests that integrated systems with well-qualified staff are best-placed to form positive relationships with parents, which in turn supports parents to improve their interaction with their children. The argument for integrated systems is persuasive since the current situation is confusing and inefficient. The OECD figures show that Scotland is not getting best value as we spend much more than Nordic countries but without the positive outcomes.

Ingela Naumann commented that the drive to ensure that parents are 'educated' can be seen as punitive and does not take account of the pressures that structural factors such as work, housing, income, living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood etc place on parents. Improving financial support for families, rather than monitoring them and lecturing them about what they're failing to do or doing wrong, would be more beneficial. Government tends to focus on what individual families are doing rather than on providing support to help working families get out of poverty.

Anne Condie noted that although childminders aren't required to be qualified, nevertheless they score very highly in Care Inspectorate reports. The methodology in the inspection reports is changing to focus on wellbeing and the SHANARRI indicators. The focus should be on quality, not qualifications. The advantage of childminding is the children of different ages from the same family can be cared for together in the same place. Childminding is the only nondivisive childcare in that it doesn't separate children according to age.

Marco Biagi asked the Group for their views on the status of the childcare workforce.

Alison Johnstone MSP commented that she had used a childminder as when she was looking for childcare, she noted that nursery staff were often very young, and that she preferred the normal family setting provided by the childminder. Childminders can take children along to local authority nurseries. Childminders are often undervalued and underused. The high cost of childcare is not reflected in staff salaries, yet fees in Scotland are among the highest in Europe.

Marco asked the Group why it was the case that Scotland has such expensive childcare, yet the staff are badly paid?

Anne Condie noted that the average childminding service costs rose by only 13p over the past 3 years.

Ingela Naumann said that private childcare is not generally profitable unless owners have a chain of establishments. Financially, the sector is quite risky and there tend to be a lot of closures. Childcare workers tend to earn the minimum wage and there is a very high turnover of staff. There tends to be a predominance of young girls, and there is not much in the way of career progression. More needs to be done to ensure there is status and respect for the childcare workforce.

Irene Audain commented that in schoolage childcare, it is very rare to make a profit. Term time fees often subsidise the holiday provision. Roughly, managers earn £12 per hour on average, practitioners earn £8 per hour and support workers earn around £6 per hour. She has known cases where managers were earning the minimum wage. With bigger providers, managers tend to earn around £15/16. So it is not clear where the money is going. The workforce also has issues around gender as male practitioners tend to do different activities from the female practitioners. When they hosted a group visiting from Iceland, it was notable that three quarters of the practitioners were young men. Recently the Network has offered internships for recent graduates to work with children to encourage participation in sport.

Marco Biagi flagged up the Fathers and Parenting Inquiry which is currently being undertaken by the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee.

Kezia Dugdale MSP spoke about the need for a transformational shift in relation to childcare and noted that the Government's offer in relation to increasing entitlement was still one that was based on hours, rather than being about flexibility. There needs to be a cross-party consensus on taking this issue forward.

Marco asked the Group what they thought Government should do first in order to bring about cultural change in relation to childcare.

Anne Condie said that the key to transformational change is parental choice. Change is hard and difficult for local authorities to achieve. The danger is that childminders will be overlooked and that the service will go into decline.

Satwat Rehman said that we need to start looking at funding models, specifically supply-side funding. We need a system that doesn't involve a complex model of payments to parents.

Irene Audain said that what is needed is investment for childcare up to the age of 16, as this would enable the inclusion of young people with disabilities as well as supporting older schoolage children.

Ingela Naumann said that there is a need for a consensus on investment now, for example in the form of a 1% increase in income tax, in order to yield returns further down the line.

Marco asked the Group whether there was a view that parents would be resistant to losing childcare vouchers and moving towards municipal provision.

Satwat noted that what's most difficult for parents is having to piece everything together. The system is complex, and it's difficult to know whether you've over claimed and will have to pay back your tax credits. It would be much easier if childcare was available as a resource in the community, in the same way as schools are.

Irene said that although vouchers and tax credits were supposed to be about parental choice, the reality is that there isn't any choice. Parents would prefer everything to be available in the one place.

Close

The Group agreed that the meeting had enabled the expression of a range of views on childcare and that no further action points were required.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 30 April and the topic is the Commonwealth Games legacy. The Cross-Party Group on Sport will also be looking at this topic, and members of this Group are invited to attend that meeting. In turn, CPG Sport members will be invited to attend the meeting on the 30th.

There will also be an extra meeting in June, which will be an event to promote young people's engagement in the independence referendum. The meeting was proposed by the Scottish Youth Parliament, who will deliver one of their 'Aye, Naw, Mibbe' sessions at the event. Further details will be circulated to the Group in due course.

Marco thanked everyone for their participation and drew the meeting to a close.