

## SUBMISSION FROM PARENTING ACROSS SCOTLAND

### **About Parenting across Scotland**

Parenting across Scotland (PAS) is a partnership of voluntary organisations working together to provide a focus for issues and concerns affecting parents and families in Scotland. The PAS partners are CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>, Aberlour Childcare Trust, Capability Scotland, Families Outside, One Parent Families Scotland, Relationships Scotland, Scottish Adoption Association, and SMC (formerly Scottish Marriage Care).

### **Childcare**

Childcare is a major issue for women in determining their choices of whether to start working again after the birth of children. Yet the proportion of women in the workforce is a major determinant of the economic wellbeing of a country, and of averting poverty. Investing in childcare is about investing in the infrastructure and wellbeing of the country and society.

**Affordability:** The high cost of childcare is a major issue for many parents, acting as a barrier to employment and training. In Europe, on average, a family spends 13% of its income on childcare, while in Britain this figure is 27%, often making it economically unviable for a second person in the household to work

Many parents are forced into using multiple providers and informal arrangements; grandparents, in particular, are used for childcare by two thirds of parents in Scotland. Juggling multiple providers is extremely stressful and is generally dictated by cost rather than choice.

There are particular difficulties in accessing childcare for particular groups: children with disabilities and multiple births (twins, triplets etc) face greater barriers in accessing and affording suitable childcare. Families affected by disability are more likely to be living in poverty, but also less likely to be able to find a route out of poverty through work because of their particular difficulties in accessing childcare. Any childcare policy solutions need to bear the needs of those affected by disability in mind.

**Flexibility:** Childcare cannot be a one size fits all options. Increasingly, changing and variable patterns of work dictate women's employment patterns, and childcare needs to be responsive to this. For many women accessing education and matching this to childcare is a particular problem: childcare needs to be arranged before women can start college, but usually timetables and finance are not fixed until terms start creating difficulties in arranging childcare. Often availability of childcare in particular areas can be a barrier to work, especially in rural areas and areas of deprivation. With demand led funding, the sustainability of childcare in areas of deprivation will continue to be an issue, maintaining the circular argument that there are no jobs in these areas, and so no childcare is needed, and that therefore there is

no labour market pool to populate job creation. Childcare needs to be available first as a right for children and families.

It should also be remembered that childcare is not solely an early years issue; the problems of childcare do not stop when a child starts school and, in fact, often become more difficult at this stage with many women forced to withdraw from the labour market at this stage. Policymakers looking at childcare must consider the needs of parents with children from birth to fourteen; childcare should not be solely considered as an early years issue.

**Joining up policies:** Childcare must be seen in relation to other policies, such as learning, education and economic regeneration, and be part of an equation that involves other family friendly working practices. In terms of enabling women to re-enter the labour market and encouraging greater gender equality, flexible working, parental leave and other family friendly working policies and practices need to intersect and be considered alongside childcare provision. Flexible working, in particular, can benefit women by allowing more flexibility and affordability in their use and choice of childcare. Currently, section 75 duties under planning legislation, oblige developers alongside local authorities to consider community need and benefit, usually schools and health needs; childcare provision and transport ought to be considered here with any major residential or mixed development.

## **Solutions**

**Policy integration:** Integrating policy frameworks both nationally and locally is crucial, particularly in ensuring that childcare is considered not solely as a children and families issue but is also integrated into economic regeneration. Guidance to local authorities and CPPs should ensure that childcare is a cross policy issue which is integrated across departments. Additionally, it is imperative that childcare is seen as an issue beyond the early years.

**Affordability:** ideally, childcare should be funded as a supply side subsidy rather than demand led to ensure sustainability of provision, especially in areas of deprivation. Ensuring sustainability also allows for quality improvement and workforce development. Subsidy also needs to be given to flexible provision as this cannot be provided sustainably without subsidy, but is needed to ensure that women have access to childcare.

Currently, the system of subsidy to parents is confused and inefficient; current childcare proposals from Westminster will only compound this. We support transformational change towards supply side funding with a resultant clarity of provision, cost and quality for parents.

**Parental involvement:** Alongside demographic profiling, there needs to be extensive consultation and dialogue with parents to plan provision. Any consultation needs to involve parents who are not currently working or using childcare to assess barriers.

***The cost of investing in universal childcare that is affordable to families at the point of delivery are high; the costs of not doing so are far greater in terms of the wealth and well being of our country and its citizens.***

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