

PE1430/A

**PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF PE1430
RESPONSE FROM GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL**

- What are your views on what the petition seeks?
- The Committee would be grateful if you could set out how you monitor and apply the regulations and what criteria you set on childminding services in your area, particularly for those in domestic premises.

Impact of Increased Levels of Childminding on Private Pre-school Nursery Provision

The Glasgow City Council area has a relatively small number of registered childminders within it given the size of the city. As at 14th June 2012, there was a total of 169 registered childminders within the city, with a maximum of 869 childcare places available between them.

Contrary to the petitioner's statement at point number 5. :

“Due to the operating costs of private sector Pre-School Nursery businesses increasing over the last few years, predominately from increases to VAT and astronomical rises in Business Rates, there has been an increase in the number of people opening Child Minding businesses, as they can operate with far less overhead costs.”

There is no evidence in the Glasgow City Council area to indicate that this is the case.

The number of registered childminders in the city has remained relatively stable with no significant increase or decrease over the past 4 years.

The number of private sector Pre-School Nursery businesses has, however, increased slightly.

Registered Numbers

Of the 169 registered childminders, only 2 (just over 1%) are currently registered to care for more than 6 children.

In both cases, the childminder is registered to care for a maximum of 7 children – 1 child more than the usual maximum of 6. It is our understanding that this type of exception to the registration norm may be granted where the childminder is caring for twins / triplets or other multiple birth situations whereby they would be unable to accommodate all of the siblings otherwise.

The majority of Glasgow childminders are registered to care for either 5 or 6 children, including their own, at any one time – 72 (42.6%) registered for 5, 65

(38.4%) registered for 6 – with the remainder being registered to care for between 2 and 4 children at any one time.

Joint Childminding

There are 6 jointly registered childminders in the city, whereby 2 individuals are registered to care for children at the same domestic premises.

Of these 6, the majority (5/6) are registered for 6 children with the remaining one being registered for 5 children.

As the numbers of children remain the same as they might be if there were only one individual registered at the premises, it would appear to us that the joint registration has been entered into to allow the childminders a degree of flexibility around situations where only one of them may be available due to some other commitment (eg a medical appointment) - and / or to ensure that the person mainly responsible for the children has a registered back-up person who can assist with tasks such as collection from nursery, playgroup or school.

This approach helps to ensure that the childminding service runs smoothly and remains available for the parents who need it to allow them to work as there is a reduced likelihood of the childminder being unable to care for children should some crisis or commitment arise in his / her own life.

There are no examples within Glasgow of individuals registering and then employing assistants to allow them to care for up to 24 children within domestic premises.

Glasgow City Council would not, therefore, agree with the petitioner's view that :

“All childcare businesses employing more than one person, paid or unpaid, should be carried out in premises that have the requisite Planning Approvals.”

This would seem to us to be an unwarranted level of regulation in many circumstances. There has been no need within the Glasgow City Council area to apply any planning regulations, change of use or restrictions upon childminding services to date.

Service Names

Statement from the petitioner :

“In some cases it is unclear to members of the public whether they were putting their child into a Pre-School Nursery or a Child Minding business due to deliberate and unclear marketing. For example “Child Minders” who have advertisements which do not mention that they are

actual Child Minders, for example one business has no mention that it is a registered Child Minder, but does say it is a business which Child Minders can not be.”

In Glasgow, there are only 8 registered childminders who do not simply use their own name as the registered name for their service.

Of these 8 services, 6 include the word “childminding” in their service name – eg. Cheeky Cherubs Childminding – and the remaining 2 use service names which include their own first names and do not include the word “nursery” – eg. Moira’s Playdays ; Fiona’s Little Angels.

Regardless of what they are called, none of these 8 services are registered for more than a maximum of 6 children.

It is Glasgow City Council’s view, therefore, that there is no significant issue of lack of clarity or false advertising with regard to the service names being used within the city.

Training & Qualifications

Statement from the petitioner :

“SCSWIS/SSSC requires that the staff in Pre-School Nurseries must have specific qualifications varying to their responsibility/job position, however childminders or their staff require no qualifications. The document below, published by SCSWIS, only recommends that individuals get some training and does not mention any minimum qualifications.”

Glasgow City Council is committed to ensuring that all early learning and childcare services within the city provide the best quality of provision possible for children and families. Recognising the importance of those who work with young children holding qualifications and / or accessing suitable training sits alongside that.

In order to support the development of quality in this sector, we currently fund the Scottish Childminding Association to deliver a training programme for all new childminders which includes input on child development and planning activities, as well as advice on running their service. We also fund SCMA to provide 2 part-time workers who work with childminding groups or networks based in the community and assist them to participate in one of our 10 Local Childcare Forums – which are cross-sectoral forums for all types of early learning and childcare providers.

The Childcare Forums facilitate access to locally based training sessions on a wide range of topics and these are well attended by childminders. The Forums also circulate information on funding to support access to certificated childcare qualifications and a number of childminders have taken advantage of this.

Our local information would correlate with the national statistics of around 33% of registered childminders either already holding or working towards qualifications.

Whilst we would agree with the general principle of wishing to see a well trained, qualified workforce across the early learning and childcare sector which includes childminders, any move towards a mandatory requirement for childminders to hold a qualification must be balanced against the potential loss of childminders from the sector should they choose to give up childminding rather than undertake a qualification.

Statement from the petitioner :

“Although Child Minding Businesses charge a similar level of fees as a Pre-School Nursery they do not provide any education i.e. comply with Curriculum for Excellence. (Online research)”

There are currently no registered childminders within Glasgow who are contracted by the Council as pre-school education partner providers. However, the petitioner is incorrect to imply that childminders cannot be education providers. There is no impediment to this so long as the individual childminder can meet and maintain the required educational standards.

Rural local authorities in particular may seek to contract with childminders as part of their overall delivery of the pre-school education entitlement. Whilst it may be currently relatively uncommon, further exploration and development of this model may serve many local authorities well in future as they seek to expand the flexibility of services for parents and children by further combining early education and childcare.

Conclusion

Glasgow City Council is not in favour of significant change to the regulatory framework as it pertains to registered childminders. In our opinion, there is no evidence within the city that there is any real detriment to private sector nurseries through competition from less regulated childminders.

The advent of increased regulation from 2002, when the Care Commission (now the Care Inspectorate) came into being, caused a very significant drop in the number of registered childminders – estimated to be a loss of as much as a third of the total nationally.

A further decline would undoubtedly impact upon working families as the childcare choices open to them would become more restricted.

This may be of particular significance in rural areas where there may be no other options available, or for families who require unusual patterns of care – eg shift workers – which often cannot be sustained within a nursery or group care setting. The flexibility of a domestically based, registered childminding service is invaluable in such circumstances.