



Understanding the Challenges of Childcare in Remote, Rural and Island Settings

A collaborative exploration of barriers, opportunities and next steps to tackling child poverty and realising children's rights through childcare provision in Scotland.





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Introduction

The Improvement Service's Remote and Rural Child Poverty Network identified the availability of flexible, affordable childcare in remote, rural, and island communities as a barrier to wider work on tackling child poverty. This report presents the findings from the 'Childcare Challenge', a collaborative effort involving local authority child poverty leads, third-sector partners and other national agencies. Together, we explored the persistent barriers to affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare in Scotland's remote, rural, and island communities and identified potential solutions to address them.

Childcare is closely linked to all three main drivers of child poverty in Scotland: insufficient income from work, rising cost of living, and insufficient income from social security. Access to affordable, flexible, and high-quality childcare enables parents and carers to take up or increase employment (improving household income from work), reduces the high costs families face when childcare is limited or expensive, and lessens reliance on social security to meet basic needs. Ensuring that every community in Scotland can access such childcare is therefore vital to tackling child poverty and supporting children's wellbeing.

Access to childcare is essential not only for family wellbeing and parental employment but also for the realisation of children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These rights include, amongst others, the right to an adequate standard of living, development, quality education, play and participation. Yet, these rights are not equally realised across Scotland. Many families in rural areas face limited provision, long travel distances, higher costs and complex arrangements that constrain both children's opportunities and parents' ability to work.

This report captures what we learnt through a design-based process that brought together local and national stakeholders to collectively define the problems and co-create potential ways forward.

Our Approach



The Childcare Challenge was inspired by the [service design model](#), which emphasises iteration, collaboration and learning from those close to the issue. This involved three interconnected phases: Discover, Define and Develop, while the Delivery phase will be shaped by the responses of national and local leaders to the findings of this work.

Phase 1: Discover

Informal interviews and discussions were held with child poverty and childcare leads from 14 local authorities, supported by analysis of [Local Child Poverty Action Reports \(Year 6\)](#). This phase revealed common barriers around affordability, viability, and regulatory flexibility. A [Kickstart Paper](#) summarising early insights was shared across partners to stimulate wider discussion.

Phase 2: Define

Three workshops, involving 93 participants from local authorities, the childcare sector, NHS boards, the third sector, and the Scottish Government, examined the issues in greater depth. Partners refined problem statements, explored contributing factors, and began to articulate potential “How might we...?” questions to guide solution-generation.

Phase 3: Develop

Ideas and potential models were developed collaboratively. A follow-up survey invited participants to evaluate the proposed solutions in terms of their impact and feasibility. Although the response rate was modest, clear priorities emerged around funding, regulation, and workforce sustainability. The design-based approach helped to connect fragmented efforts, reveal patterns of shared challenge, and highlight the potential for systemic change.

Phase 4: Delivery

Phase 4, ‘Delivery’, is intended to involve the rollout of selected solutions

identified through the Childcare Challenge work. The Remote and Rural Child Poverty Network will engage with local and national leaders ahead of the publication of the third Child Poverty Delivery Plan, helping to ensure that insights from earlier phases translate into action.

Key Findings

The work identified five overarching themes shaping childcare provision in rural, remote and island contexts. Each theme includes barriers, potential solutions and related children's rights.

1. Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Childcare settings across rural Scotland face persistent challenges in attracting and retaining staff. Small labour pools, low pay relative to the cost of living, and limited progression opportunities make it difficult to sustain provision. Current management regulations, such as limits on the number of settings one manager can oversee, can be impractical in dispersed communities.

What could help:

- Introduce a Rural Care Practitioner model that allows qualified staff to work flexibly across childcare and adult care roles.
- Support shared management or peripatetic leadership approaches to reduce staffing pressure.
- Provide targeted recruitment and training initiatives within local communities.



Rights lens: Workforce shortages undermine children's rights to quality care and early learning (Articles 6, 18(3)).

2. Financial Viability and Funding

Many rural childcare providers struggle to remain financially viable due to small and fluctuating populations. Funding models based on per-child enrolment do not reflect the realities of rural provision and can leave essential services vulnerable to closure.

What could help:

- Create a guaranteed funding envelope to ensure a baseline level of support for rural settings, regardless of numbers.
- Apply a rural child poverty lens to funding decisions, taking into account remoteness and seasonal economies.
- Move towards multi-year funding to provide financial stability and enable workforce investment.



Rights lens: Sustained, equitable funding is necessary to uphold the principle of equality and non-discrimination (Article 2).

3. Regulation and Flexibility

National regulation is vital for quality, but participants agreed it can unintentionally disadvantage small or remote services. Lengthy registration processes, inflexible rules, and perceived bureaucracy discourage potential childminders and make service delivery harder.

What could help:

- Tailor Care Inspectorate requirements to reflect rural realities.
- Simplify the process for registration and inspection for small-scale providers.
- Allow the use of community or non-domestic spaces for childminding where appropriate.
- Explore options for paying childminders caring for their own or relatives' children to maintain viability.



Rights lens: Regulation should advance, not obstruct, the best interests of the child (Article 3).

4. Coordination and Planning

In many areas, childcare, early learning, and wraparound care are planned and delivered separately, creating fragmented and inconsistent provision. Parents often have to manage complex, time-consuming arrangements, which can limit employment opportunities and overall family wellbeing.

What could help:

- Plan services at the locality or catchment level rather than setting-by-setting.
- Integrate transport, demographic and employment data into planning decisions.
- Review the School (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 to enable more flexible service models.
- Improve communication with families to build understanding and confidence in new approaches.



Rights lens: Coordinated, accessible provision co-developed with communities supports children's rights to participation (Article 12).

5. Valuing and Supporting the Sector

The childcare workforce and sector are often undervalued, despite their essential contribution to the economy, community sustainability and child wellbeing. Low pay, high workloads and limited recognition contribute to high staff turnover.

What could help:

- Guarantee at least the living wage for childminders and practitioners.
- Support stronger peer networks and professional learning opportunities.
- Promote childcare as a vital, skilled profession underpinning community and economic resilience.
- Continue cross-sector collaboration and sharing of good practice across local authorities.



Rights lens: Recognising the workforce as rights enablers strengthens the environment in which children's rights to development and wellbeing can be realised (Article 4 and 42)

The evidence shows that childcare in remote, rural and island areas requires targeted, place-based solutions that recognise unique local conditions. A one-size-fits-all model does not work. Sustainable funding, flexible regulation, creative workforce approaches and coordinated planning are essential to build services that work for both children and their caregivers to ensure that every child, wherever they live, can access high-quality childcare that supports their right to development and wellbeing.

Our Approach in Action

Phase 1: Discover

Discussion and survey feedback from the Remote, Rural and Island Child Poverty Peer Support Network highlighted challenges of accessing flexible, reliable and affordable childcare provision.

Intended outcomes: Build and strengthen relationships between peers and colleagues working at local and national levels to understand and address child poverty in remote, rural and island authorities in relation to childcare.

- Informal interviews with child poverty and childcare leads from 14 local authorities, including Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Highland, Moray, North Ayrshire, Orkney, Scottish Borders, Shetland, Stirling, and South Ayrshire.
- Analysis of how childcare is explored in Year 6 Local Child Poverty Action Reports.

Following Phase 1, a [Kickstart Paper](#) was developed to provide a starting point for more in-depth discussions in Phase 2. Drawing on desktop research and informal interviews with remote, rural and island child poverty leads, it outlined the nature of the problem and action already being taken at the local and national levels to address it.

At the first of our Phase 2 workshops, partners from the [Highlands and Islands Enterprise](#) (HIE) and the [Care and Learning Alliance](#) (CALA), through the [Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership](#) (HIREP) childcare sub-group, presented complementary findings from their evidence-based report to Scottish Ministers. Their analysis echoed the themes identified in the Kickstart Paper, indicating a strong alignment in both the barriers faced and the potential solutions proposed.

Challenges

- Staffing and recruitment – highly qualified sector, for minimum pay, small labour pools, competition for staff
- Bureaucracy, paperwork and funding – highly regulated
- Finding the balance between regulated and unregulated childcare
- Care Inspectorate regulations – need for a tailored approach
- Travel times and distance – solutions need to be local

- Small numbers of children and business viability
- National Policies/Programmes – need to include a rural focus

Potential solutions

- Subsidised childminder
- Payment for care of own/family children
- Innovative delivery of managerial expertise
- Care Inspectorate tailored approach
- Minimum qualifications to establish a care staff bank for community volunteers
- Single Care Model
- Rural Childcare (Care) Practitioner
- Amendment to the School (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010

Phase 2: Define

The aim of Phase 2 was to bring together existing views, opinions and evidence on the childcare-related challenges experienced in remote, rural and island settings. The first two workshops focused on defining and refining these problems, while the final workshop explored potential solutions, feeding into Phase 3: 'Develop'.

Workshop participants:

Three sessions with a total of 93 participants from rural local authorities (13 of 15 represented), NHS boards, 3rd sector, Improvement Service and Scottish Government. Representing:

- Remote, Rural and Island Child Poverty Peer Support Network
- Childcare sector
- Economic development

While we did not engage directly with local voices of lived experience for this work, we were able to gather views relating to childcare challenges from the Aberdeenshire Lived Experience Forum and the Cost of Rural Living in Argyll and Bute citizens' panel, as highlighted in below and in Appendix 2.

“ While we have never used childcare other than family, primarily it is because we cannot afford to be it the cost in general or the cost in time (and money) to get to somewhere that offers appropriate childcare. ”

Aberdeenshire Lived Experience Forum

“ Affordable childcare (I know this is a stretch as resources and wages still need paid but childcare is almost the same amount as a full time wage) or better wages! More localised childcare would also be a benefit. ”

Aberdeenshire Lived Experience Forum

Workshop 1: Defining the Problems

This session provided an opportunity for participants to collectively ‘sense-check’ the initial findings of the ‘Discovery Phase’. In the first workshop, we explored the problems highlighted in the [Kickstart paper](#) to understand if these reflected stakeholders’ experiences and what some of the contributing factors are.

Workshop 2: Refining the Problems¹

This session focused on refining and thematically grouping the identified problems into clear problem statements, laying the groundwork for developing actionable solutions in the subsequent workshop.

Problem statements:

- a. A lack of childcare settings and a shortage of qualified staff in many remote and rural areas mean that parents cannot access the high-quality, flexible childcare they need to allow them to work.
- b. The difficulty of measuring demand – and predicting fluctuations in demand – makes it difficult for childcare settings to be consistently viable or to offer flexible provision.
- c. Childminders are put off from entering the profession due to real and perceived financial and regulatory barriers. This further reduces the availability of flexible childcare options in remote and rural areas.
- d. Higher running costs and lack of supply have resulted in childcare in remote and rural areas being more costly than in urban areas, driving up the cost of living for low-income families.

¹ The refined list of problem statements and participants’ reflections can be found in Appendix 1.

- e. The provision, location and timing of ELC, school-age education and wraparound care are uncoordinated, meaning parents have to come up with complex, costly and time-consuming childcare arrangements, which limit their ability to sustain employment.

Workshop 3: 'How Might We...?'

In this session, participants reflected on the problem statements and explored existing or potential solutions using the 'How Might We' framework.

Some of the questions captured from the discussions of 'How might We':

- How might we understand who manages the infrastructure surrounding the school estate to identify untouched potential?
- How might we ensure we are reflecting challenges as a separate entity, and not talking generally under the ELC heading?
- How might we engage community planning more closely with ELC provision?
- How might we raise awareness and promote flexible working to employers?
- How might we increase the supply of childminders, particularly in rural areas?
- How might we promote childminding both as an employment opportunity but also as a viable and sustainable childcare solution?
- How might we use a better understanding of demographic data to target support?
- How might we ensure we are taking place-based solutions?

And some initial ideas of how to respond to the challenges:

- 'Mobile' childminder – A rural childcare practitioner who can go to various locations (recommended by parents during HIE consultation).
Note: Still awaiting Care Inspectorate feedback on this idea.
- Flexible and adaptable models – An approach to allow more flexibility in childcare provision. Work with families to create tailored solutions for individual needs.
- Increase community confidence in alternative childcare models – Explore ways to build trust in models that offer more flexibility.
- Subsidising services when demand fluctuates – Financial support to maintain services during low-demand periods.
- Workforce planning aligned with childcare needs assessment – Ensure staffing matches demand and community requirements.

- Employer-led childcare partnerships – Multiple employers co-funding and co-managing shared childcare services to reduce individual burden and make workplace childcare sustainable.
- Dynamic, locally-led childcare needs assessment tool – Combine real-time data from parents, providers, and employers to map demand for different types of childcare across communities.

Phase 3: Develop

The three workshops delivered in the ‘Define’ Phase generated a wide range of potential solutions, including reimagining care models and reviewing regulations to reflect the key role of childminders. The aim of Phase 3 was to synthesise all the proposed solutions and gather further insights from participants. Through a follow-up survey, we presented the ten solutions identified across Phases 1 and 2, inviting participants to share additional reflections and assess each solution in terms of its perceived feasibility and impact.

Our response rate to the survey was modest, with only 10 completed surveys received.

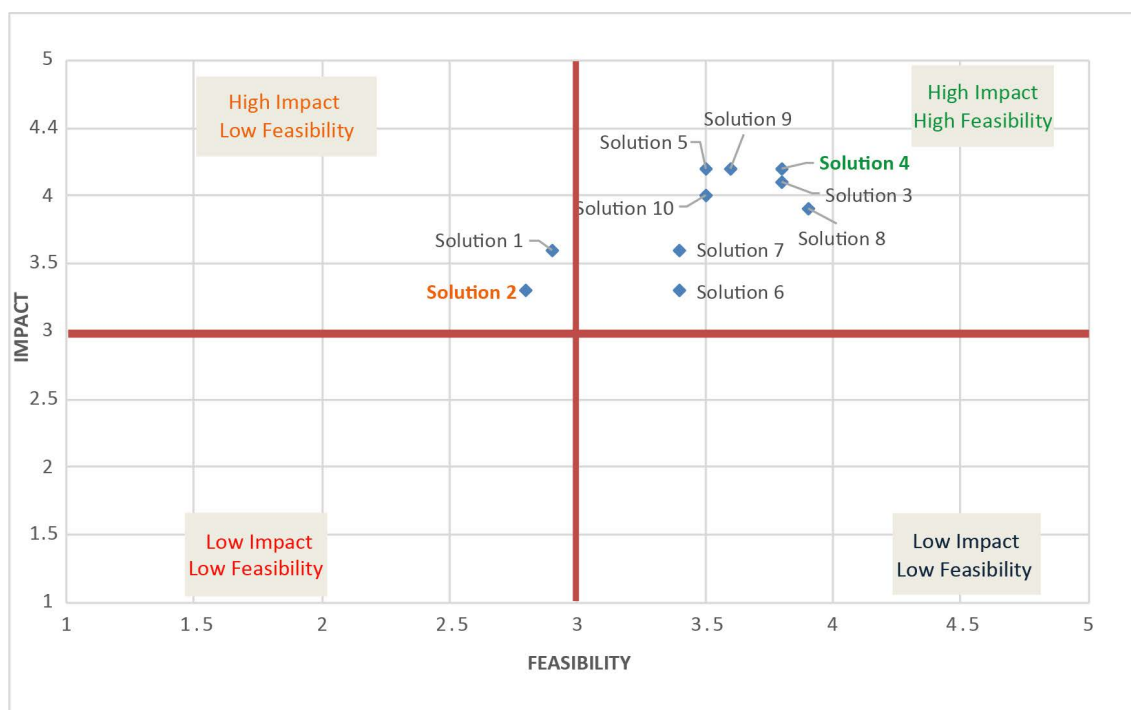
Most solutions were viewed as both high impact and highly feasible, with the following solutions standing out as particularly well-supported:

- To recommend a guaranteed living wage for childminders where low population means they cannot always work /work at capacity (4)
- To recommend that funding is reconsidered through a rural child poverty lens (9)
- To recommend a guaranteed funding envelope for rural childcare settings with variable demand (10)

There were, however, some differences of opinion, especially around the solutions noted below, pointing to areas where further discussion and exploration will be needed.

- Asking the Scottish Government and Care Inspectorate to consider the need for regulatory change to allow for the adoption of a Single Care Model in Scotland. This could allow for the delivery of integrated adult social care and childcare services in rural locations (1).
- Reconsider legal restrictions which currently require managers to attend at least one session per week of each service that they are responsible for, and to be responsible for no more than five services (2).

Figure 1: Rural Childcare Solutions – Impact/Feasibility Matrix



The complete list of proposed solutions is presented below, along with statements highlighting barriers that have hindered progress to date:

Problems identified:

- a. A lack of childcare settings and a shortage of qualified staff in many remote and rural areas mean that parents cannot access the high-quality, flexible childcare they need to allow them to work.

Potential Solutions:

Integrated Models of Care: A Vision for Sustainability

1. One compelling idea to emerge is the Single Care Model. This proposal, led by the [Care and Learning Alliance \(CALA\)](#), aims to develop a model of care enabling a practitioner to be employed and work across adult and childcare care that would allow qualified professionals to care for both children and older adults. This integrated approach could potentially offer a lifeline to rural communities where demand for care is consistent but fragmented.

Participants argued that such a model would not only create sustainable career pathways for carers but also foster intergenerational connection and community cohesion. However, regulatory barriers remain. Participants suggested there might be a need to urge the Scottish Government and the Care Inspectorate to consider reforms that would enable the adoption of this model, allowing for flexible, integrated care delivery in rural settings.

Barrier understood to have prevented these solutions being progressed to date

“Depopulation in islands, recruitment and retention in a sector with a workforce with low morale. Care Inspectorate Regulations. Low pay in sector”

“Teams - Children/Young People and Adults work differently and are seen as different, may be barriers to overcome with management/workers/ qualifications.”

2. Additionally, calls were made by some participants to review managerial requirements for childcare settings. Current rules—such as the mandate for managers to attend one session per week per service and oversee no more than five services—are seen by some as impractical in sparsely populated areas. Loosening these restrictions could ease recruitment pressures and reduce financial strain.

Problems identified:

- b. Childminders are put off from entering the profession because of real and perceived financial and regulatory barriers. This further reduces the availability of flexible childcare options in remote and rural areas.
- c. Higher running costs and a shortage of supply have made childcare in remote and rural areas more costly than in urban areas, driving up the cost of living for low-income families.

Potential solutions:

3. Paying childminders for the care of their own and relatives’ children, who currently count towards the maximum number of children allowed but do not generate income.
4. Guaranteeing the living wage for childminders in areas with low or fluctuating demand, even where demand is low or variable.
5. Allowing childminders to operate in non-residential settings, such as village halls or community centres. (Childminding on Non-Domestic Premises – SCMA Survey, May 2025).

These changes could unlock new childcare capacity, particularly in areas where traditional nursery models are not feasible and support local economic resilience.

Barrier understood to have prevented these solutions being progressed to date

“Availability of Buildings to allow this to happen, many assets such as buildings have been moved into community ownership, so any use of these buildings would likely incur costs of hire. How would this make childcare affordable? The buildings also need to be in accessible areas where families that don’t have access to transport can still collect their children”

“Lack of investment in sector. The extremely fluctuating patterns of demand for childcare which changes on a very rapid basis. Disproportionate Care Inspectorate Regulations in rural communities and in settings or child minders working with small numbers of children.”

Problem identified:

- d. The provision, location and timing of ELC, school-age education and wraparound care are uncoordinated, meaning parents have to come up with complex, costly and time-consuming childcare arrangements, which limit their ability to sustain employment.

Potential Solutions:

Smarter Planning - Coordinated, Data-Informed Provision

Participants raised concerns about the fragmented nature of childcare planning, calling for a more strategic, evidence-based approach. Planning at the secondary school catchment level, rather than setting-by-setting, was proposed to ensure better coverage and cohesion.

To support this, recommendations highlighted include:

6. Investment in data systems that integrate population forecasts, transport routes, and employer locations.
7. Relaxed consultation requirements for individual setting changes, replaced by broader locality-level engagement.
8. Transparent and inclusive dialogue with parents, especially those from priority groups who often struggle to have their voices heard.

This shift could enable more responsive and equitable childcare provision, tailored to the evolving needs of rural families.

Barrier understood to have prevented these solutions being progressed to date

“Changes/amendments are needed to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as without a school or nursery, communities will find it exceedingly difficult to attract new families and repopulate their communities. This is not a quick fix but needs to be part of the re-population ambitions. The amendment to the Act could allow for the service to be delivered by another partner without the LA needing to consult.”

“Silos and people not recognising or valuing childcare. Care Inspectorate having different approach to what a School Age Childcare service is - inspectors do not always realise it is the child’s leisure time - need to take a children’s rights-based approach so the child can choose and also have independence. School closure act is getting in way of taking a place based and parental led approach to the totality of childcare within a community and is keeping unhelpful silos in place.”

Problem identified:

- b. The difficulty of measuring demand – and predicting fluctuations in demand – makes it difficult for childcare settings to be consistently viable or to offer flexible provision.

Potential Solutions:

Funding - A Rural Child Poverty Lens

Rural providers face higher operating costs and inconsistent demand, yet funding models remain largely per capita and fail to reflect these realities.

The recommendations proposed were:

9. A rural child poverty lens to be applied to funding distribution, taking into account the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), remoteness, and demand variability.
10. A guaranteed funding envelope for rural childcare settings with variable demand. Instead of funding being based solely on a per capita approach, a minimum amount of funding could be guaranteed for undersubscribed but essential rural childcare settings. The funding would be guaranteed, meaning it would be available regardless of the number of applications for that year or how many places are successfully funded.

Consistent funding would mean rural local authorities and organisations could plan and invest in projects over longer periods, rather than relying on short-term, competitive grants. Such measures could provide financial security for providers and help maintain essential childcare infrastructure in remote areas.

Barrier understood to have prevented these solutions being progressed to date

“Lack of value placed on the sector, lack of an economic and rural lens when designing policies, processes and legislation.”

“While funding is key staffing is the next biggest issue - childcare practitioners are paid less than teachers/PSAs and in some areas with high AirBnB etc cleaners (£20+ an hour to clean glamping pods!) - when add in additional costs if living in rural areas and high housing costs (or lack of affordable housing) it makes it really difficult for people to stay in childcare work.”

In the survey, we also asked for additional comments or recommendations made to tackle child poverty through the provision of childcare in rural and island settings:

“*Extending funding to support after-school care/holiday care and transport.*”

“*It is probably more beneficial to focus on childminder solutions in rural and island areas. However, lack of available adults and also lack of suitable accommodation is a barrier.*”

“*A Childcare hub/setting is accessible, and transport linked. Looks at employment opportunities, particularly those in remote/rural/tourist spots to assist in childcare for the times it is needed, i.e. wrap-around around where parents/family members work different hours/shifts. Childcare transport, extending period of childcare.*”

“ It needs a co-ordinated ‘can do’ approach where everyone agrees to start with the outcome and build their systems, regulations, policies and funding from that. We cannot keep trying to squeeze rural childcare into urban models of regulations etc - if there is the collective will to let go of current ways of working and instead think differently things could happen - childcare in Rural and Island communities is not a nice to have but without it the very sustainability of those communities is threatened. Surely together we can fix this! ”

“ The work of the Improvement Service, specifically this piece of work, complements the HIREP Childcare Evidence Report that was submitted to the Scottish Government in May 2025. ”

Next Steps: Phase 4 Delivery

Phase 4, Delivery, focuses on translating the insights and solutions developed through the Childcare Challenge into tangible action. This phase aims to support the implementation of selected solutions that address the most pressing childcare challenges identified across remote, rural, and island communities.

The Remote and Rural Child Poverty Network and its partners will play a key convening role, engaging with local and national leaders ahead of the publication of the third Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Through this engagement, the Network will promote collaboration across sectors, champion scalable models of good practice, and advocate for policy and investment changes needed to sustain progress.

The Delivery phase represents a shift from exploration to implementation, moving from understanding challenges and designing solutions to testing, adapting, and embedding them within local systems. The success of this phase will depend on continued partnership working, alignment with national priorities, and a shared commitment to reducing child poverty through accessible, affordable, flexible, and sustainable childcare provision while upholding children’s human rights.

Acknowledgements

This report was developed collaboratively through the commitment of local and national partners, including members of the Remote, Rural and Island Child Poverty Network, childcare sector representatives, local authority officers, third sector colleagues and Scottish Government teams.

Their insights and contributions have shaped every aspect of this work.

Contact

For further information or to share learning related to this work, please contact the Improvement Service Child Poverty and SAVVI Programme Manager:

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Appendix 1: Summary of Workshop 2 Outputs

Problem statement

- f. A lack of childcare settings and a shortage of qualified staff in many remote and rural areas means that parents cannot access the high-quality, flexible childcare they need to enable them to work.

Management - currently managers can only cover 5 setting no matter how small those settings are.

Need an appropriate model for rural, such as location and transport compound the issue.

Yes - but it's not the whole story or all these challenges that families face.

Registration - The 2 hour boundary on out of school activity does not give much leeway for alternatives.

Not necessarily lack of settings but lack of viability and therefore lack of extended hours/extended age group

Fully agree - add that we have fewer adults of working age to fill roles. There are only 3 childminders on the island and no out of school care. Many parents would like to work or increase hours but cannot do so. Registration and inspections are off putting.

Sufficient ELC provision but this is term time and only for 9am till 3pm - Moray

Problem statement:

- g. The difficulty of measuring demand – and predicting fluctuations in demand – make it difficult for childcare settings to be consistently viable or to offer flexible provision.

There are often not enough children living in a rural or island area to sustain a service without subsidy. e.g., Have to carry a manager's salary and auxiliary staff salaries e.g., cook and cleaner

Agree. The structure is still required in childcare settings who have only a few children and it is difficult to consolidate care to one area without transport arrangements.

Perhaps not just fluctuations in demand - but low demand in a particular area.

Absolutely, we have around 30 settings with fewer than 5 children, sometimes 1 or 2 sometimes none

Peripatetic management approach - distances being travelled, approach not liked by care inspectorate (feel management shouldn't have to travel over 1hr, this isn't feasible)

Have to admit that in some areas it will not be viable to have ELC provision - how can we use data to understand where there is no coverage but there are a viable number of children, to prioritise focus/work?

Problem statement:

- h. Childminders are put off because of entering the profession because of real and perceived financial and regulatory barriers. This further reduces the availability of flexible childcare options in remote and rural areas

High start-up costs and delays:
Setting up a childminding business can be expensive, and long waits for application decisions from the Care Inspectorate can create further uncertainty.

Legal and regulatory requirements can be complex, unclear, and are often seen as burdensome or difficult to navigate, particularly for new or prospective childminders.

Childminding is frequently seen as limited to early learning and childcare (ELC), but it also plays a key role in providing school-age childcare. Additionally, it is not just a “job” but a small business, requiring entrepreneurial skills, planning, and investment.

There is a widespread misconception that childminders are not qualified professionals. The profession is also impacted by gendered assumptions and societal attitudes, with its predominantly female workforce contributing to its devaluation in public and policy discourse.

A lack of tailored, local support further discourages people from entering the sector, ultimately reducing the availability of flexible, community-based childcare for families.

Financial sustainability in rural areas: In very rural communities, low population density can affect financial viability—subsidies or tailored funding models may be essential to support rural childminders.

Problem statement:

- i. Higher running costs and lack of supply has resulted in childcare in remote and rural areas being more costly than in urban areas, driving up the cost of living for low-income families.

Difficulty in securing grant funding, more competition for those grants that are available

Consideration of LA outsourcing provision to provide a year-round offer, but this leads to concern around losing the nursery, losing the school- people want to protect this

Scarcity of availability of provision and sustainability of services, costs not normally felt by families

Perception or factually accurate?

Model is more expensive to run with lower volumes (both families and staff)

Cost of living is higher- difficulty retaining staff and them being able to afford to live in the area (on 1 year contracts, not able to get a mortgage for example)

Problem statement:

- j. The provision, location and timing of ELC, school-age education and wraparound care is uncoordinated, meaning parents have to come up with complex, costly and time-consuming childcare arrangements, which limit their ability to sustain employment.

Agree with this statement. The added issue with coordination in a rural, remote and island setting is the distance between the different settings

Better communication is required to explain the situation with parents in regard to not losing provision but development a new model, so that they don't vote against it.

Some island provision has been mothballed or there are not services available to go beyond stat provision and to be able to take e.g. babies.

It limits employment, because in rural settings it can be hard to get from ELC provision to workplace.

Parents don't fully understand what the provision might look like if a LA nursery is mothballed. (they want additional provision, not 'instead of').

Funding for statutory provision is spread very thin in rural and island areas because delivered across a much different geography.

Appendix 2: Key messages from Argyll and Bute's Citizens' Panel

Local Voices - Cost of Rural Living in Argyll and Bute citizens' panel

Barriers

- Pressure on grandparents – feel it's a duty because there are no alternatives locally. Guilt.
- Lack of availability (full or non-existent)
- Parents needing to go part time so they can “tag team” – but can't afford to.

Changes needed

- Have more clubs in the schools so parents don't need to move them from one place to another.
- Different starting and finishing times for schools? Schools being more flexible?
- Flexible employers. Jobs.
- Adding transport to out of school activities would help parents (time and logistics)

Practice examples

- After school club help – at community hub in Lochgilphead. Gives parents / carers longer than school hours.
- Support staff at some schools paid extra hours to run after school care



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