



# Kickstart Paper on Childcare in Remote, Rural and Island Settings



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# 1. Introduction

The Improvement Service's [Remote and Rural Child Poverty Network](#) has identified the availability of flexible, affordable childcare in remote, rural and island communities as a barrier to wider work to tackle child poverty. This paper is intended to reflect the network's concerns and initiate wider discussion around the action needed at local and national level.

The network, led by the Rural Child Poverty Officer and National Coordinator for Local Action on Child Poverty, intends to take inspiration from the [service design approach](#) to identify shared barriers and potential solutions that might ensure wider access to high quality, flexible childcare to support child development and wellbeing, parental employment and economic growth in remote and rural locations.

## 1.1 Our approach

As part of the discovery phase, the Rural Child Poverty Officer carried out desk research including:

- A brief overview of recent policy and research developments (an overview of key Scottish Government policies on childcare can be found in Appendix I)
- 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

## 1.2 Overview of findings

The research and engagement with network members set out in this paper has been used to identify several shared barriers to childcare in remote and rural settings. We have re-framed these as 'problem statements' to initiate discussion at our workshops in May and June 2025. The five problem statements are:

- Problem 1: A lack of childcare settings and 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.
- Problem 2: The difficulty of measuring demand – and fluctuations in demand – make it difficult for childcare settings to be consistently viable or to offer flexible provision.

- Problem 3: Childminders are put off because of real and perceived financial and legal barriers. This further reduces the availability of flexible childcare options in remote and rural areas.
- Problem 4: There is perception that 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.
- Problem 5: 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.

## 2. Overview of barriers to childcare and emerging solutions in rural and remote Scotland

The Scottish Government's commitment to increase the availability of high-quality childcare provision (see Appendix I below) is intended to reduce child poverty by

- a. increasing the household incomes through employment
- b. reducing the costs of living

Engagement suggests, however, that these goals may not be being achieved as effectively in remote and rural areas compared to urban and semi-urban regions.

This section outlines the interconnected barriers identified through both existing research and recent interviews with local child poverty leads. It also highlights examples of how some of these challenges are being addressed at the local level. These findings are intended to provide a starting point for the RRI network to identify specific issues for further exploration.

**Table 1: Key barriers to childcare in remote and rural areas and emerging responses**

Barrier	Responses
1. Lack of childcare provision in remote and rural areas	Analysing local supply and demand to better understand gaps
2. Fluctuating demand makes it difficult to sustain services	A. Developing more flexible childcare models B. Promoting and supporting childminding as a solution
3. Poor coordination between pre-school, school-age, and holiday provision hinders parental employment	A: Supporting participation in the Early Adopter programme B: Taking a more strategic, joined-up approach to local childcare planning
4. Higher cost of delivering childcare in rural and remote areas	(Responses still emerging or under consideration)

## Barriers 1: lack of childcare provision in remote and rural areas

Interviews with local child poverty leads in remote and rural areas suggested a consensus that there is not enough provision within reasonable proximity of people's homes, particularly in more remote rural areas. This was attributed to both a lack of childcare settings and the difficulty of attracting and retaining staff.

Local child poverty and childcare leads cited recruitment and retention of nursery staff as well as trying to ensure ratios were covered when staff were absent. Significant challenge of retaining peripatetic managers who have to visit providers in person which entails long car journeys. [Chief Executive, Care and Learning Alliance (25/02/2025)]

The [Scottish Government-commissioned research](#) supports these concerns, identifying significant childcare gaps in rural and island communities—particularly in terms of flexible, holiday, and inclusive provision. It also found that the lack of alignment between childcare hours and the variable work patterns common in rural areas further compounds access issues.

The [RuralXchange research](#) similarly found that limited availability reduces household income, as parents—especially mothers—often reduce working hours or take lower-paid roles. These impacts ripple out, influencing local economic participation and discouraging new families from settling in rural areas.

[Research carried out by the Improvement Service](#) indicates that the number of settings available to deliver funded hours has decreased since last year with a reduction of 34 Local Authority settings, 49 private and voluntary partner settings (henceforth referred to as partner settings), and 158 childminders compared to April 2024. Of the 971 childminders in partnership, 208 were categorised as inactive (meaning they had no children registered to receive funded ELC) during the reference week. This was also the case for 8 Local Authority nurseries and 1 partner setting.

[A 2024 survey](#) highlighted that sustaining childcare provision is increasingly challenging. Barriers highlighted by local authorities included the cost of energy, staff, food and rent. A further 24% of local authorities also cited the cost of recruiting and retaining staff as decreasing sustainability, and 24% also cited parents' and carers' abilities to pay for places as decreasing sustainability.

Many of these issues are likely to be exacerbated in rural areas. [Findings of research](#) conducted with rural childcare providers, focusing on issues including facilities, transport and staffing show that there are a number of wider challenges in rural childcare provision.

## Response: analysing local supply and demand to better understand gaps

Despite a lack of childcare supply being a concern, local authorities report difficulties gauging and anticipating demand in smaller communities. Indeed, a recommendation from the [Scottish Women's Budget Group](#) was that Local Authorities should ensure they better understand the demand for childcare services in their area, paying attention to the needs of urban and rural settings, and design services that respond to the challenges that arise in these settings (such as service connectivity and transport links) to guarantee both affordability and accessibility to childcare services.

Work at the national level is ongoing to better understand the availability and accessibility of early learning and childcare settings.

The ELC Expansion Team at Improvement Service works with Scottish Government, local government and their partners to strengthen, enable and assure the delivery of high quality, sustainable ELC services across Scotland, bridging the gap between national policy and local service delivery. The team is currently matching all 2,500 funded Early Learning and Childcare settings to the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) of the building they operate in. Using Data Hub and Ordnance Survey data. Once there is a UPRNs for each nursery, a walking and driving radii will be created around each one and observe this against where there may be areas high in child poverty but with poor physical accessibility to a nursery. This will allow for variation of access in rural and urban settings to be better understood.

Local authorities have a [statutory duty](#) to consult with parents of children under school age in their area and then in response produce a plan to outline how they intend to make early learning and childcare available.

**Aberdeenshire Council** has engaged with parents, schools, and the third sector to identify what provision already existed, the gaps, barriers for working parents, and future needs. The research also highlights good practice from other areas of Scotland and beyond. The recommendations of the research highlighted the need to support and increasing the workforce, sector development to include flexible wraparound care suitable for children with additional support needs. This report is being used to develop a Childcare framework which will outline options, resources and financial support for parents. Source: [Provision of Rural Childcare Research and Model Review for Aberdeenshire](#).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the review can be found in Appendix II.

## Barrier 2: fluctuating demand makes it difficult to sustain services

The [research commissioned by the Scottish Government](#) found that rural childcare providers face greater difficulty sustaining services due to inconsistent uptake, compounded by limited funding opportunities and reduced local authority support. In contrast, urban areas benefit from more stable demand and better access to financial support.

[RuralXchange's findings](#) show that lack of childcare has wider labour market effects—employers struggle to attract and retain staff, and parents limit their working hours which reduce the household spending power, with knock-on effects for the local economy.

Local example: Significant resource was put into setting up childcare provision in one corner of the island. A few families subsequently moved to different areas of the island, making the new provision redundant. [Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (16/01/25)]

Local example: In one island authority, a new nursery was built but there was no one willing to take on the tender and run it. This was linked to concerns as to whether this could be sustained as a business if the demand for service wasn't great enough. [Interview with local child poverty lead: 05/03/2025]

The flexibility of many local providers has, however, been curtailed by increasing costs. [Local authorities in Scotland report](#) that 'at least some' of their local childcare provider- had responded to increasing costs by reduced their opening hours (13%)

### Response A: developing more flexible childcare models

#### Shetland

Shetland are giving parents and carers the option to pay for additional hours for their child's placement at their ELC setting over the 30 funded hours per week threshold. This has been introduced in five settings so far. Shetland has introduced the option for parents and carers to purchase additional early learning and childcare (ELC) hours beyond the 30 funded hours per week. This approach has been implemented in five settings so far.

In Sandwick, the expansion of out-of-school provision has led to a notable increase in uptake, indicating strong demand. Parents and carers have reported that the consistent availability of this service has enabled them to

work additional hours—with some identifying it as the key factor in being able to increase their employment. The overarching aim of extending out-of-school and ELC provision was to enhance uptake and flexibility within the community. In doing so, it has not only supported families to improve their working patterns but also ensured children benefit from a consistent, high-quality childcare experience. The Early Learning and Childcare central team are continuing to work with other ELC settings with the aim to support childcare needs through offering additional hours where there may be a demand. Source: [Shetland Local Child Poverty Action Report – 2023-24](#)

### Highland

The Highland Poverty Reduction Group, 'Getting Started' sub-group's 'Flexible Model and Depopulation Action Plan': A flexible model report is being presented to the Education Committee as part of the depopulation action plan.

A successful funding bid focused on new models of delivering rural childcare. Part of the funding used to engage a rural consultant to support Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) in development of the integrated Single Care Model (SCM) pathway pilot. Source: [Highland Council Local Child Poverty Action Report 2023-2024](#)

## Response B: promoting and supporting childminding as a solution

A common response has been to explore the use of childminders. This is seen as a way to address small areas of demand, while also providing a flexible self-employment opportunity for local people.

### Highland

Highland Employability Service worked with Scottish Child-Minding Association (SCMA) to support people in areas of Highland with no or limited provision to become childminders, supporting training and initial set up costs. Source: [Highland Council Local Child Poverty Action Report 2023-2024](#)

Local authorities, however, have identified numerous barriers to increasing the supply of childminders both in residential and non-residential settings.

Some local areas were keen to explore the option of several childminders operating from a shared location to allow for increased flexibility and continuous provision for children throughout the day. They have, however, faced challenges around permission for building use and legislation of childcare requirements.

Local authorities also highlighted the high standards required by the Care Inspectorate being difficult to meet in a residential setting. One key barrier for prospective childminders is the need to obtain landlord permission when operating from rented accommodation, a requirement for registration with the [Care Inspectorate](#). There is [anecdotal evidence](#) that some trained childminders have been unable to proceed due to landlords, especially housing associations, refusing permission, despite demand for local childcare provision. Landlords may have valid reasons to object to residents operating a childminding business, however, there is a lack of official data on how many landlords impose such restrictions and why.

One authority raised the example of a Housing Associations not permitting tenants to work as a childminder from their properties. [Moray Council (15/01/25)]

Delivering high-quality learning experiences is not a barrier for childminders providing out of school care, but the perceived administration and planning burden associated with meeting developmental expectations, especially where children only attend for short sessions were highlighted in discussion with Orkney Council (05/03/25)

In terms of regulation, childminders delivering funded ELC have long reported frustration with overlapping and sometimes duplicative quality assurance processes from both the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland. This concern was echoed in the [Muir Review](#), which cited the ELC and School Age Childcare sectors as particularly affected by the dual scrutiny of the Care Inspectorate and HMIE within Education Scotland. The Review found that this duplication was contributing to excessive bureaucracy and negatively impacting workforce retention and recruitment.

In response, a new [shared inspection framework](#) for early ELC services, including childminding is being developed. The [Quality Improvement Framework for Childminders](#) has been developed and is due to launch in autumn 2025. This framework forms part of a broader move toward a shared inspection approach between Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, aimed at reducing duplication and easing pressure on providers.

The [Early Learning and Childcare Audit 2024](#) published by Scottish Childminding Association identifies several additional barriers to childminding. It highlights the disparity between the number of childminders approved and those actually delivering funded ELC. This is attributed to local authorities not promoting childminding equitably alongside nurseries, and an increased tendency to promote places for two-year-olds in nurseries since the pandemic. The document suggests that increased collaboration between the Scottish Government, local

authorities, and the SCMA could improve uptake by promoting childminding as a viable option.

Another barrier is the variability in the tendering processes required by local authorities. Not all require childminders to undergo formal tendering, which has been a barrier to uptake. The document recommends exploring the feasibility of other local authorities adopting simplified processes to increase childminder participation in funded ELC.

Payment frequency also poses a challenge, as inconsistent payment schedules have previously undermined business sustainability. However, the audit notes progress, with the majority of local authorities now paying monthly or every four weeks, and suggests this practice be adopted more widely to support childminders effectively.

Budgetary pressures present additional barriers, especially following the removal of ring-fenced budgets. One local authority has already ceased supporting cross-boundary placements and taking on new partners. The document stresses the importance of maintaining a provider-neutral basis for delivery to ensure equitable service provision.

The decline in the childminding workforce, accelerated by the pandemic, represents another challenge. Solutions include the SCMA's ongoing recruitment and retention efforts, as well as initiatives like the Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future. These programmes aim to grow the workforce by introducing innovative measures for retention and expanding recruitment campaigns across local authorities.

The SCMA also noted that the impact of the deferral year on childminding settings is being closely monitored. Increased uptake in deferred placements may affect availability for new pre-school children.

### Area for further exploration

Care Inspectorate Inspections - How can we ensure that the difference in rural childcare settings is reflected through the Care Inspectorate inspections? Is there scope for a flexible approach to reflect local circumstances?

## Barrier 3: poor coordination between pre-school, school-age, and holiday provision hinders parental employment

Research and anecdotal evidence suggest that provision can be disjointed and that families with both pre-school and school age children can struggle to access

workable childcare solutions. This has a disproportionate impact on large families, one of the Scottish Government's priority groups in relation to child poverty.

One local authority lead gave the example of numerous families who have a child at a local primary school. Their younger siblings are offered nursery provision, but it is located too far away for the primary school and "logistics mean it's not feasible to take up the nursery place due to driving distances and/or lack of public transport" [Aberdeenshire Council (04/02/25)].

Some rural areas have sought to take a more coordinated approach to early years, primary and secondary and out of school care.

A local example of this was highlighted in conversation with Scottish Borders Council who have developed a new cluster model across their schools which aims to promote a consistent approach in use of the Pupil Equality Fund, to allow the use of school buildings as childcare hubs. [Scottish Borders Council (29/01/25)]

Provision of after school and/or wraparound care also presents challenges to parents trying to balance working and caring responsibilities. "*So many rural schools in Aberdeenshire miles away from nursery provision so I have to drive to two disparate places and have no after school provision.*" ([Survey respondent, SWBG, 2023](#))

[Scottish Government research](#) also found that the lack of flexibility, availability and the absence of wraparound childcare impacted on parent's ability to find suitable work. The cost of childcare, limited transport options and insufficient options for children with additional support needs were also limiting families. One of the contributing factors was the absence of childcare during school holidays.

The [RuralXchange report](#) raised longer-term risks, noting that these gaps may contribute to educational disadvantage and rural depopulation, where young families choose to leave or avoid settling in areas lacking in childcare infrastructure.

Local Example: School age childcare is a significant challenge in Moray with only 9% of 5–12-year-olds attending school having access. [Moray Council (15/01/25)]

## Response A: supporting participation in the Early Adopter programme

**National Response:** Local and national Early Adopter Partnerships are intended to explore provision of School Age Childcare. Shetland and Fife are both involved in the phase 2 roll out, which should provide insight into rural barriers and solutions. (As with 2.4 above in relation to scope of this piece of work. Although very early stages for Shetland and Fife (However Fife pilot is not based in a rural area)

One Parent Families Scotland have also developed a Childcare Connector service that might be of relevance: [Edinburgh office serves as HQ for One Parent Families Scotland](#)

## Response B: taking a more strategic, joined-up approach to local childcare planning

Highland is exploring joint work with employability service on parental employability courses including providing childcare. The report highlights that childcare is key to local economic development. HIE has childcare in its delivery plan as does Highland Council. Green Freeport has also cited childcare as a key driver for success. The rural health care workforce strategy now includes childcare.

## Barrier 4: elevated cost of childcare in remote and rural areas

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the lack of supply in rural areas can drive up the cost of childcare, disproportionately impacting low-income families.

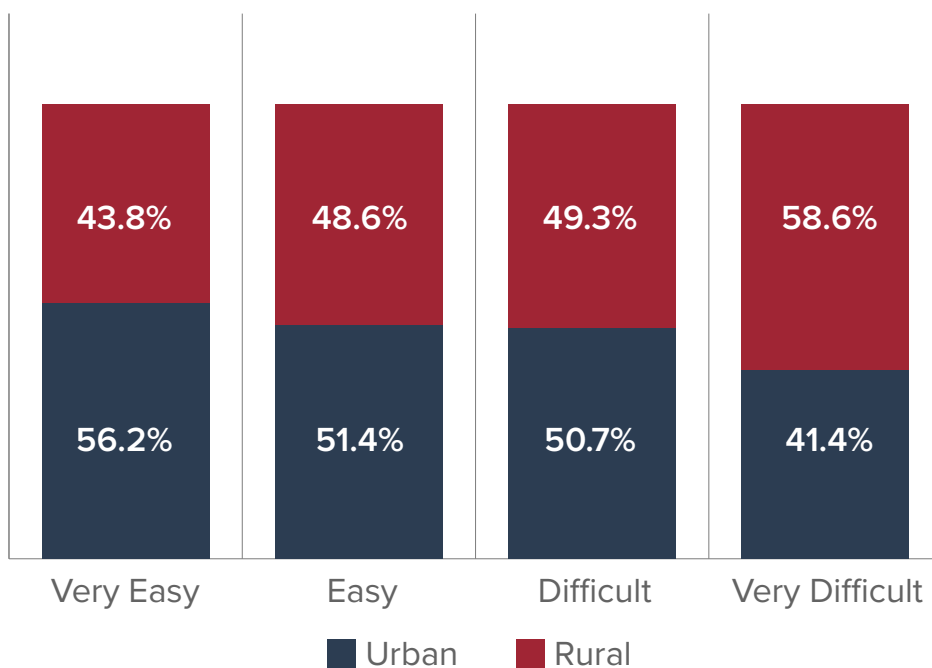
The [Inquiry into poverty in rural Scotland](#) by the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Poverty found that access to affordable childcare in rural Scotland is a major issue, driving poverty and causing stress for families. Limited availability, high costs, and lack of flexibility hinder parents, especially women, from securing employment. For example, in Aberdeenshire, childcare costs for under-twos average [£1,341.98 per month](#), posing a financial burden.

According to the [Rural Scotland Data Dashboard](#), 66% of parents in rural areas face difficulties affording childcare, compared to 61% in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Scottish Household Survey 2022 indicates that rural households are more likely to report finding it “very difficult” to afford childcare, with 58.6% facing this challenge compared to 41.4% of urban households (see Figure 1). This suggests

<sup>2</sup> Early learning and childcare - parents' views and use: survey findings 2022 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

that families in rural areas may face more significant barriers when it comes to accessing affordable childcare. Potential contributing factors could include higher travel costs to childcare settings, fewer available providers, or limited access to subsidised childcare services. Although the sample sizes are relatively small, these findings align with broader concerns in policy and literature about the unique challenges rural households face in accessing childcare services compared to urban areas.

Figure 1: Distribution of urban vs rural households by perception of childcare affordability in Scotland<sup>3</sup>



In some areas there are not enough childminders to meet demand and there was some anecdotal evidence that those who do deliver a service charge high rates due to lack of competition. [Orkney Council (05/03/25)]

Responses: Still emerging. However, there is a growing recognition of the need for:

- Targeted rural funding models
- Support for shared services
- Flexibility in resource allocation to reflect higher delivery costs

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government, Ipsos MORI. (2024). *Scottish Household Survey, 2022*. UK Data Service. SN: 9294, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-9294-1>, own analysis.

## Next steps

Based on the findings presented above, the Improvement Service will facilitate a series of workshops in swift succession. We will take a Design Based Approach to identifying shared challenges to ensuring low-income families can access the childcare that they need in remote, rural and island communities.

To initiate discussion we have identified the following 5 problem statements which we would ask you to consider:

- Problem 1: A lack of childcare settings and 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.
- Problem 2: The difficulty of measuring demand – and fluctuations in demand – make it difficult for childcare settings to be consistently viable or to offer flexible provision.
- Problem 3: Childminders are put off because of real and perceived financial and legal barriers. This further reduces the availability of flexible childcare options in remote and rural areas.
- Problem 4: There is perception that 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.
- Problem 5: 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, limiting their ability to sustain employment.

We will use the three sessions to consider, refine, rewrite these statements and to prototype solutions to the agreed shared problems.

### Session 1:

- Learning more about the most pressing problems identified through the Remote, Rural and Island Child Poverty Network
- Agreeing shared ‘problem statements’ that encapsulate the difficulties faced by remote and rural communities in relation to these priorities.
- Participants asked to consider these problem statements between meetings and come to the next meeting ready to prototype solutions.

### Session 2:

- Groups work together to propose shared solutions

- Groups present their proposed solutions back to the wider group.
- The wider group then vote and discuss further which was the preferred solution and any actions required.

### Session 3:

- Prototype list of recommendations was shared with the group for consideration and approval.

# Appendix I: Overview of Scottish national policy relating to ELC and school age childcare

## 3. Background: childcare policy in Scotland

### 3.1. Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2022–2026)

Childcare is a central part of Scotland's [child poverty strategy](#), recognising that high quality, affordable, accessible, and flexible childcare supports:

- Parents/carers into employment, education, or training, particularly mothers and lone parents
- Children's development, supporting long-term outcomes

#### **Key commitments:**

- Expansion of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) provision
- Development of a wraparound school age childcare system, especially for low-income families
- Support for community and third-sector childcare providers

### 3.2. Programme for Government

The annual [Programme for Government](#) reiterates commitments to:

- Deliver free childcare for 2-year-olds, beginning with those who need it most (e.g., low-income households)
- Scale up access to wraparound childcare before and after school
- Continue delivery of funded ELC for all 3- and 4-year-olds, and eligible 2-year-olds (1,140 hours/year)

Focus remains on:

- Removing cost barriers for families in poverty
- Creating jobs and training in the childcare sector

### 3.3. Early Learning and Childcare

Scotland is committed to providing 1140 hours of free, funded ELC annually for 3-4-year-olds and eligible 2-year-olds. This initiative ensures that every child can access a minimum of 30 hours of free childcare per week, which is available during the academic year, as well as in some holiday periods.

The Scottish Government's approach, articulated in their [Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland 2022-26](#), focuses on tackling child poverty by reducing inequalities and supporting parental employment and education. By providing affordable and accessible ELC, parents are supported to pursue work, training, or education, contributing to Scotland's broader child poverty reduction strategy. It aims to narrow the attainment gap between children from wealthy and disadvantaged families by prioritising access to high-quality early learning and childcare for those facing socio-economic challenges.

The strategy aims to support holistic child development in the early years. It emphasises a child-centred rights-based approach, focusing on learning through play, early literacy and numeracy, and fostering social and emotional skills that are foundational for future success.

To ensure quality provision, the plan also includes a strong focus on improving the workforce. In particular, Priority 3 of the Best Start strategy acknowledges the importance of a sustainable, diverse and thriving sector and profession accompanied by Priority 4, fair funding and outcomes frameworks, robust data and organisations that work together to support good outcomes for children and families.

This includes training and qualifications for ELC professionals, improving working conditions, and attracting new talent into the sector. Local authorities are empowered to adapt the delivery of services to meet specific community needs, whether through partnerships with third-sector organisations or community-based childcare models.

### 3.4. School Age Childcare (SAC) Delivery Framework

The [SAC Delivery Framework](#) aims to establish a national system of affordable, accessible and flexible school age childcare. It seeks to reduce child poverty by enabling parents, especially those in low-income households, to engage in work or education while ensuring that children receive the necessary support for their development. The framework prioritises childcare solutions that align with family needs, including holiday care and after-school programmes. The emphasis is on flexibility, ensuring that services cater to varying schedules, particularly for the six priority family groups, identified as being most at risk of poverty.

The delivery model encourages collaboration between public, private, and third-sector partners to ensure that services are locally relevant and effectively reach those who need them most. The framework includes pilot programmes in several communities to test and refine new childcare models. These pilots, known as Early Adopter Communities, are implemented in partnership with

local authorities and community organisations. The pilots aim to identify successful strategies that can be expanded across Scotland.

The Early Adopter Communities<sup>4</sup> include:

- Clackmannanshire (Alloa South East): Offering wraparound and holiday childcare with integrated employability support.
- Dundee (Linlathen): Providing funded childcare linked with employment and benefit support services.
- Glasgow (Drumchapel and Carntyne): Expanding access to funded places in collaboration with local providers.
- Inverclyde (Port Glasgow): Developing new childcare models with private and third-sector partners.

In 2024/25, Fife and Shetland have been announced as additional EAC

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<sup>4</sup> Further details about the approach used in some of the EACs are available in Appendix I.

# Appendix II: Local Examples of Taking a Holistic Approach to Childcare Delivery

The following examples are taken from Year 6 of the Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPAR). You can find the complete list of published LCPARs on the Improvement Service's website.

## Highland

Highland area integrates childcare into economic development strategies, such as the Green Port initiative. This involves partnership working among childcare providers, employability services, and economic development sectors to ensure that childcare is a key driver for success, facilitating parents' participation in the workforce and supporting local economic goals.

Caithness Pilot Project aims to support parents in gaining work experience, this pilot involves local employers and focuses on creating flexible childcare solutions that promote workforce participation.

Highland Employability Service worked with Scottish Child-Minding Association (SCMA) to support people in areas of Highland with no or limited provision to become childminders, supporting training and initial set up costs. This initiative resulted in 9 new childminders coming on stream by end March 2024.

## Aberdeenshire

Lack of affordable, accessible childcare, especially in rural areas, is a substantial challenge for working parents. High costs and limited access to flexible options make it difficult for parents, particularly lone parents, to gain and sustain employment.

The Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Partnership conducted research on rural childcare, examining existing gaps, barriers, and future needs. Recommendations from this research focus on increasing the workforce, flexible wraparound care, and integration of policy at local and national levels.

A strategic Childcare Framework is being developed to provide resources and financial support, highlighting a comprehensive approach linking various stakeholders and sectors.

Initiative Outcomes included the introduction of a mentoring scheme to increase the number of childminders, particularly in rural areas, was introduced. Additionally, the Employability Support Team facilitated a Childminders initiative, attracting new participants and developing funding for setup costs.

## Renfrewshire

Renfrewshire's approach to childcare encompasses integration with employability support and community needs assessments. For instance, the outreach programmes link childcare services with employment opportunities, helping parents access training and jobs. In areas like Gallowhill, data-driven strategies are employed to tailor services to the community's specific needs, demonstrating a commitment to adapting policies based on local requirements and feedback.

To tackle the shortage of childminders Renfrewshire Council has partnered with the Scottish Childminding Association. This collaboration focuses on recruiting and training new childminders, supporting them through funding to set up and sustain their services. By investing in the childcare workforce, Renfrewshire aims to enhance availability and meet community needs more effectively.

Additionally, Renfrewshire runs free holiday camps and activity programmes during school breaks. These initiatives provide essential childcare support, especially for low-income families and working parents who need reliable childcare during holidays. These programmes are designed to include meals and engaging activities, ensuring that children have access to both nutrition and development opportunities during their time away from school.

The Council also supports third-sector organisations with funding to deliver daycare and out-of-school services.

## North Ayrshire

One significant initiative is the allocation of £20,000 by the Child Poverty and Cost of Living Board to explore sustainable childcare solutions. This funding supports efforts to develop more resilient childcare options that can adapt to community needs and changes in work patterns, particularly in rural areas where access can be limited. The Council is also dedicated to improving wraparound care for school-aged children.

The region is invested in a holistic approach by integrating various support systems with childcare services. For example, the "No Wrong Door" initiative ensures that families have streamlined access to a variety of supports, including childcare. This integrated system is designed to provide cohesive support across multiple fronts, ensuring families receive the help they need without unnecessary barriers.

As part of a broader effort to alleviate the cost burden for families, North Ayrshire has expanded its free school meal programmes. This initiative not only ensures that children receive nutritious meals but also supports families financially, indirectly contributing to a more comprehensive childcare strategy by addressing one of the significant expenses for families.

## Clackmannanshire

The Child Wellbeing Partnership in Clackmannanshire, as part of the Scottish Government's Early Adopter Community, focuses on childcare as a key aspect of reducing living costs. In 2023-24,

the partnership supported 239 children from 165 families, providing up to 125 holiday programme spots during school breaks. These efforts target priority family groups, ensuring access to childcare aligns with policies to tackle child poverty. The partnership collaborates with the Scottish Childminding Association to recruit new childminders, addressing shortages in specific areas. This approach aims to enhance childcare availability and support low-income families, ultimately reducing living costs for parents.

The outcomes from Child Wellbeing Partnership in 2023/24 include a series of collaboratively designed charters. This initiative began with children, aligning with the principles of the UNCRC, leading to the creation of the Children's Charter for School Age Childcare. Through co-design sessions with parents/carers, the Parents'/Carers'/Guardians' Charter for School Age Childcare was then developed. Subsequently, both charters were used by private and third sector partners to establish a Providers' Charter for School Age Childcare. This comprehensive effort has resulted in a well-informed childcare proposal for 2024/25 to expand school aged childcare beyond Alloa South and

A holistic approach is evident through the integration of childcare services with wider family support initiatives. The Tackling Poverty Partnership links childcare with employability programmes, supporting parents in securing and sustaining employment.

## Dundee

Through the Early Adopter Communities Childcare Project, Dundee provides integrated services with a Family Key Worker, connecting childcare with broader support like employability and education.

Dundee Women's Hub is a multi-agency hub offers childcare alongside services addressing substance abuse, homelessness, and other challenges, ensuring comprehensive support.

## Edinburgh

Childcare services are strategically coordinated with employability programmes to assist parents entering or returning to the workforce. This integration ensures that while parents gain access to flexible childcare, they are also supported in finding and maintaining employment, addressing a significant barrier for many families.

Community engagement is a key aspect of Edinburgh's strategy. Local communities are actively involved in the planning and development of childcare services. Edinburgh collaborates extensively across multiple sectors, including education, health, and social services. This collaboration creates a seamless support system for families, addressing various aspects of family wellbeing in a comprehensive manner.

Six projects having been funded through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to support the whole system transformational change needed to reduce the need for crisis intervention and move towards prevention and early intervention including

- The Family Hub Collaborative which will provide bespoke holistic whole-family support throughout the early years;
- The Parent Infant Partnership focusing on the first 1,000 days of a child's life, where the level of risk and need is high;
- The Edinburgh Family Support Partnership will focus on providing families with early and preventative help in their local community;
- The Whole Family Wellbeing Hub to support families with a child or young person with a disability;
- Youth Work and Mental Health Hubs (Time to Talk) supporting and improving young people's mental health and well-being; and
- Parent-led affordable out of school childcare to increase resilience and capacity within existing out of school care providers and deliver pilot parent-led out of school provision in one part of the City.

## Inverclyde

Inverclyde, in collaboration with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) and the Scottish Government, has initiated a campaign to recruit local childminders in Port Glasgow and Greenock East. This effort aims to address childcare shortages and expand the availability of services, ensuring more accessible options for families in need.

The Early Adopter Programme in Inverclyde has supported 33 families, encompassing 43 children from Port Glasgow. This initiative is dedicated to providing flexible and affordable childcare, directly impacting parents' ability to work or study. Outcomes of the programme are promising, with a 100% increase in parents' capacity to engage in employment or education. Additionally, 88% of participating families have increased their working hours, and 44% have sought financial advice, highlighting the program's role in improving financial stability.

The No One Left Behind (NOLB) programme demonstrates Inverclyde's commitment to inclusive support, engaging 565 individuals, including a significant proportion living with disabilities and parents. This data-driven focus ensures that priority groups receive the necessary support to improve their socio-economic conditions.

## Fife

Key initiatives include large-scale benefit uptake campaigns to help families maximise their income, which supports greater access to childcare services. The region also promotes Tax-Free Childcare, helping families save 20% on childcare costs.

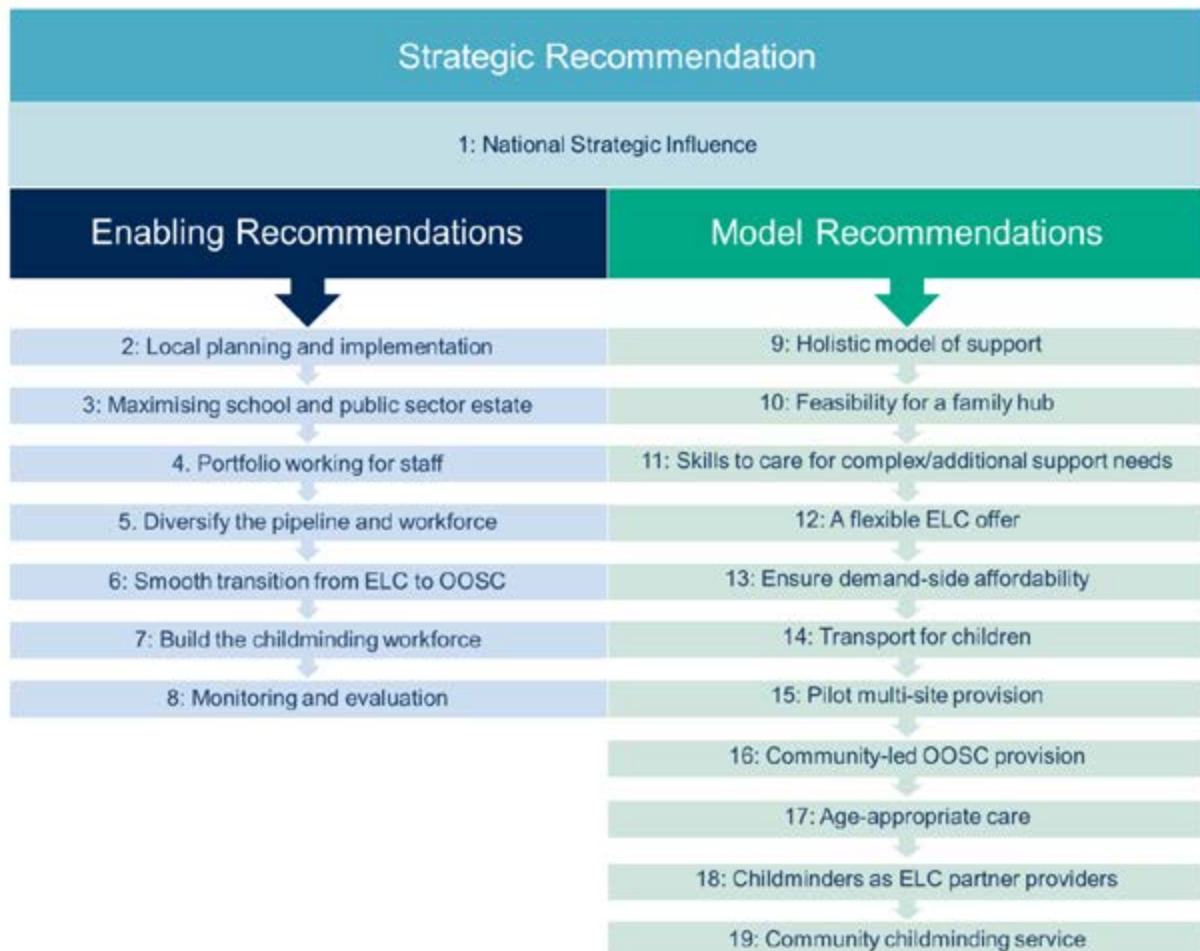
The area's Early Adopter Community Work, particularly in Levenmouth, aims to ensure sufficient, affordable, and sustainable childcare options. By collaborating with the Scottish Government, Fife targets specific local needs, ensuring comprehensive support for working parents.

Fife adopts a holistic approach by integrating childcare with broader financial and social services. Campaigns to increase the uptake of benefits, such as the Scottish Child Payment, address childcare affordability and support the financial wellbeing of families. Fife embeds income maximisation advice into maternity services and other community support mechanisms.

Community-driven initiatives are essential to Fife's strategy, with programmes adapting to meet local needs through continuous community feedback. By working with health, education, and welfare sectors, Fife creates a cohesive support network for families. Through initiatives like the No-Wrong-Door approach, Fife makes it easier for families to access a range of integrated services, further contributing to family wellbeing and reducing barriers to sustainable employment.

# Appendix III: Findings from the Provision of Rural Childcare: Research and Model Review Report

Figure 1: Recommendations for Childcare in Aberdeenshire<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Mawhinney, R., Reid, P., Easton, J., & Gover, H. (2024). Provision of Rural Childcare: Research and Model Review Report. Ekosgen. p.55. Retrieved from <https://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/TPI-ekosgen-Provision-of-Rural-Childcare-Research-and-Model-Review-Report-30-01-2024.pdf>

**Table 2: Examples of innovative childcare models from different countries<sup>6</sup>**

The table below summarises the key findings from innovative childcare models from different countries, specifically focusing on rural areas.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Overview</b>
Nordic Childcare Model	Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland	Public health-based approach to childcare, with national variances
Ode to Parents Campaign	Netherlands	Government campaign to engage friends and family in informal childcare and other parental support
Eastern Kings Early Childhood Academy Initiative	Canada	Wraparound childcare in rural areas, recognising seasonal employment such as agriculture and fishing
The Year of the Preschooler	Poland	New childcare settings in rural areas combined with legislation to ensure childcare promotes equity for women
Freedom Childcare	UK (SW England)	Range of childcare provision across rural areas such as the Isle of Wight
Wraparound School Care	UK (Greater Manchester)	Childcare that wraps around the school day
Rights-based Model	Germany	Childcare as a basic human right for children in Germany, and the implications
Informal Childcare Grants	USA	Charity and NGO providing grants and funds for informal childcare providers
Flexible Childcare Model	Iceland	Standard childcare options with significant flexibility in both operating hours and location
Family Day Care	Sweden	Settings where families can take their children free of charge to access classes and other forms of care

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.48-49.

Programme	Country	Overview
Indigo Childcare	UK (Glasgow)	A childcare setting that encompasses ELC, OOSC, and youth services, with flexibility built into their model

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