



Purpose	National Action Plan for Childminding – Steering Group – Meeting 8 (Interim Meeting)
Date	23 rd February, 5.15pm-6.15pm
Venue	WebEx
	Draft Minutes
Attendance	<p>In attendance: Anne-Marie Brooks (Chair, DCEDIY), Toby Wolfe (DCEDIY), Karen O’Sullivan (National Childminding Coordinator, DCEDIY), Michelle Grant (Childminding Development Officer), Martina McGovern (Better Start), Treasa Quigley (CCC Childminding Lead), Mairéad Hurley (Childminding Ireland) [standing in for Bernadette Orbinski Burke], Julie Ahern (Children’s Rights Alliance), Clare Downey (National Parents Council Primary), Fiona McDonnell (Tusla EY Inspectorate), Becky Sullivan Lynch (Childminder), Sinéad Moran (Childminder), Graeme McAlister (Scottish Childminding Association), Áine Brummell (CCI)</p> <p>Secretariat: Julia Pycinska-Taylor (DCEDIY)</p> <p>Apologies: Marc Bailie (Department of Health, Northern Ireland), Bernadette Orbinski Burke (Childminding Ireland)</p>

1. Minutes and matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting (30th November) were agreed.

The annual progress report for 2021-22 implementation of the Action Plan has been approved by the Minister and published on gov.ie.

In January Cabinet approved the Minister’s proposal to remove exclusions for childminders from the Child Care Act. It is envisaged that legislation will be enacted in early 2024, with the regulations following on at a later date.

2. Recommendations from the Advisory Group on Regulation and Inspection

The outstanding recommendations from the Regulation and Inspection Advisory Group were discussed. It was noted that the wording is not intended to be in the form of draft regulations, and that the recommendations will be revisited in light of consultations. A number of issues arising were discussed, including:

- Challenges in expecting GPs to sign off on a Fit Person declaration. It was noted that in Scotland and Northern Ireland there is a self-declaration but that a GP’s verification is still required, and that this has proved difficult to implement.
- Benefit of exploring maximum numbers of children and children’s ages in the focus groups, as planned.
- Rationale for requiring policies in complaints, given that childminders work single-handed. It was suggested that “complaints” be reworded as “concerns”.
- Expectations of Emergency Persons, who will only be called on in specific circumstances.
- Whether there is a need for a list of rooms (either in-use or not-in-use) to be provided.
- Risk of misinterpretation of reference to “learning”, and acknowledgement that context is different for school-age children.
- Tusla will be developing a new position on safe sleep in the next few months.
- Current absence of paediatric first aid standards approved by PHECC.
- Rationale for not leaving children unsupervised with unvetted adults visiting the premises, e.g. contractor, neighbour.



Action: A revised version of the document, taking into account issues raised at this meeting, will be submitted to the Steering Group for review at the next meeting.

3. Proposal on the commencement of regulation

It was proposed that a phased approach be used to introduce regulation: one date will be set for when the register opens to all childminders, and a second date later when registration becomes a legal requirement. The transition period between the two dates will give childminders time to adjust and to meet pre-registration requirements. It was noted that unregistered childminders will continue to work during this period and parents will not access subsidies while their childminder is unregistered; likewise, some quality improvement supports will not be available to unregistered childminders. It was suggested that during the transition period a way is found to encourage childminders to become garda vetted, to reduce the child protection risk during the transition period.

It was clarified that transition arrangements would also be in place for currently registered childminders, e.g. by allowing them to operate under the previous regulations during the transition period if they so choose.

Agreed: The Group agreed the proposal to introduce a phased approach to regulation.

4. Proposal for continuing consultations with childminders

It was noted that consultation played a major role in the development of the National Action Plan for Childminding, and that childminders and Childminding Ireland are present on the Steering Group and all the advisory groups. The need to continue engaging with childminders through consultations was noted. The proposed survey will increase our understanding of current practice. The focus groups will offer a space where the CCCs and Childminding Ireland will tease out potentially contentious regulation issues with childminders.

- It was clarified that open public consultations will be a more formal process and will be held at a later point, when a document of draft regulations has been prepared.
- It was suggested that there might be a case for some focus groups to be specific to Tusla-registered or voluntary notified childminders.
- In addition to consultation processes, the Stakeholder Engagement, Consultation and Communication Advisory Group will engage with a communications organisation to develop an engagement strategy, which will include actions to reach out to hard-to-reach childminders.

Agreed: The Group agreed the proposal to proceed with consultations with childminders to inform the new regulations.

5. Engagement with Media

The Steering Group were reminded of the confidentiality of the business of the Steering Group; if any member of the group is in doubt following being approached with a media query, they can contact the Childminding Coordinator or DCEDIY. It was noted that the Department is not always approached for comment when media attention is focused on public announcements.

6. AOB

There was no other business to discuss. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 15th March at 5.15pm.