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Dear Care Service Provider,

I am writing to providers of early learning and childcare (ELC) including childminders and school aged childcare about winter planning during this time of COVID-19, to let you know about the range of scrutiny we may undertake with your services during the coming months. I also want to share with you key areas of concern we have found during our recent scrutiny activity, to support you to prepare well for the coming months.

I and all my colleagues in the Care Inspectorate recognise the extraordinary effort and work of the childcare sector across Scotland in maintaining critical childcare throughout the summer and in meeting the unprecedented challenges of reopening the sector during the of the worst public health crisis in living memory. For the childcare sector, the past months have been extremely challenging, and we want to support the continued delivery of safe childcare for children and families as we move through the next stages of the pandemic.

### **Scrutiny activity**

We have a critical part to play in ensuring that care services in Scotland are of high quality and promote good experiences and outcomes for the people who experience care. Because of the impact of COVID-19, we have reviewed how we work so we can ensure our scrutiny work continues to put children at the heart of what we do while recognising the changes in service provision and challenges presented during the pandemic.

Where we undertake activity in a service, we now choose from a range of scrutiny interventions best suited to meet the current risk, regulatory history of the service and any intelligence we hold. In all cases, the scrutiny approach we identify will be proportionate and provide us with clear evidence of the outcomes for children who are experiencing care and learning. We used technology to provide assurance about care services during lockdown in Scotland and we have further developed our use of technology in how we undertake scrutiny. For all ELC services, including childminders, we are using three different scrutiny approaches, all of which focus on supporting improvement.

### **Self-evaluation**

[Operating an early learning and childcare setting \(including out of school care and childminders\) during COVID-19](#) is a self-evaluation tool that can support you to gather information and continually evaluate your progress in supporting staff, children and families to have confidence in the provision of your service. This will support you to specifically evidence how your service complies with and implements the national COVID-19 guidance for safe operation of ELC. We will use your completed self-evaluation to assess how well your setting is managing during the

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pandemic. If we decide no further scrutiny work is needed, we will send you an assessment of your self-evaluation. We are also developing a system to have these assessments on our website, but we will not attach evaluations to self-assessments at this time.

Please do not send us a completed self-evaluation until we ask you for it.

## Virtual scrutiny

If we undertake virtual scrutiny in your service, we will gather all data and evidence remotely using digital technology. The information and evidence we gather will support our evaluations and decision-making process. This may include video meetings to visit services, remote interviews of staff, children, families or other professionals involved in your service. We will also ask for any information to be sent to us by email. We will assess the evidence and report our assessment to you in a draft inspection report, we will evaluate our findings on our grading scale.

## On-site inspection

Where we carry out an on-site inspection, we will keep the time spent in your setting to a minimum, to undertake any observations required. In most cases, our inspection will focus on the content of [Operating and early learning and childcare setting \(including out of school care and childminders\) during COVID-19](#). We will also follow up on any previous areas for improvement or requirements. As we will be limiting our time in services, we will gather any further information remotely using digital technology. At the end of the process, we will issue an inspection report following our normal procedures.

When the inspector contacts you, they will explain to you what type of scrutiny work is being undertaken and work with you to gather the relevant information required. Please take the opportunity to discuss our new approaches with your inspector.

## Implementing the national guidance

Over the past few months, we have undertaken several scrutiny interventions, maintained contact with services and shared information with local public health teams. These have focused particularly on services' implementation of the national guidance and children's wellbeing. Of course, we have seen some really good practice, but we also identified some common themes of concern. It is important we let you know about these so you can make sure you manage these correctly.

When we have identified serious concerns, these have often been about:

- infection prevention and control - practice and knowledge
- hand hygiene
- lack of physical distancing between staff
- care of children in consistent groups
- communal facilities
- staff knowledge and implementation of national guidance.

We strongly encourage you to use the self-evaluation tool to monitor your compliance with the national guidance as you continue to operate during the pandemic. It is crucial that everyone in your service is knowledgeable about the national guidance to minimise the spread of infection. Our findings show that implementing the guidance will support mitigating the spread of the virus; you must operate in a safe manner at all times to reduce the risk to staff, children and families.

COVID-19 will be with us throughout winter and this presents further challenges and risks to all of us. I urge you to plan and prepare now, to anticipate and mitigate any risks. Take account of all relevant national guidance and address the areas that I have highlighted above. Of course, we want to support you to do this and I have included links to relevant guidance and resources developed by Scottish Government, SSSC, and the Care Inspectorate to support the workforce. We will continue to update you on developments and guidance, on our website COVID-19 pages and in our Provider Update emails to you.

Thank you for all that you and your staff teams are doing. Please take care of yourselves and be assured, we will continue doing all we can to support you to deliver high-quality care.

Yours faithfully



**Peter MacLeod**  
Chief Executive

### **Helpful links**

[Care Inspectorate COVID-19 information for services](#)

[The Care Inspectorate improvement support website The Hub](#)

[Health Protection Scotland Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare Settings \(Daycare and Childminding Settings\)](#)

[Scottish Government note for all childcare providers](#)