

FMQs: Anger over £10m childcare funding cut ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Nicola Sturgeon's flagship proposals to transform childcare provision in Scotland has been branded a "con" after it emerged that funding has been slashed by more than £10 million.

But the First Minister again pledged that will push ahead with plans to effectively introduce full-time universal childcare for all pre-school youngsters in Scotland by the end of the decade.

Labour leader Kezia Dugdale claimed the SNP leader has "failed to deliver" key pledges on the childcare as they pledged during First Ministers Questions today.

Figures from Holyrood researchers which show the SNP's budget for councils next year to deliver the childcare pledge has fallen by £10.5 million (5.3%). This includes a cut to the capital budget for nurseries of 57%.

Ms Dugdale said: "Nicola Sturgeon's own poverty advisor has rightly said that affordable, flexible childcare is key to helping people out of poverty. The SNP's solution to the problems with childcare in Scotland is to slash the budgets for childcare and local services. Only in the world of the SNP will that deliver a childcare revolution.

"Cuts to local services will hurt the poorest most. Those children who are already at a disadvantage risk getting left even further behind.

"Nicola Sturgeon wants to be judged on her record – on childcare she has failed to deliver on promises, cut budgets and let parents down. It's clear that instead of delivering what families need the SNP's childcare plan is just a great big con."

Ms Sturgeon has promised every child 1140 hours of free childcare by 2020.

The campaign group Fair Funding For Our Kids has confirmed this would require the equivalent of 650 new nurseries to be built, and mean allocation for an extra 26,000 children. The Scottish Government's plans to cut half a billion pounds from councils next year will also hit childcare provision, Ms Dugdale added.

A report by the First Minister's poverty advisor Naomi Eisenstadt yesterday called for childcare to be extended to school age youngsters.

Ms Sturgeon said today: "The Government currently funds 16 hours a week of childcare for three and four-year-olds and vulnerable two-year-olds.

"I have said in the past and it remains the case that as well as funding that provision in a global sense we will work with councils to improve the flexibility of that provision so that it better fits in with the working patterns of parents.

"We are also determined and this was reflected in the poverty advisor's report yesterday, over the life of the next Parliament, should the people of Scotland re-elect us in May, to double provision of childcare for young people.

"This is important to parents."

-reprinted from The Scotsman

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