

Providers blast SNP childcare expansion plans

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Providers have blasted SNP plans to expand free childcare, warning businesses could be forced to close and parents will have less choice as a result.

A consultation into the increasing of funded childcare entitlement was published today, exposing concerns from those within the industry.

Fewer than half of those who responded to the Scottish Government document said the changes would “increase choice for parents and carers”.

And the report stated: “There was also a concern among respondents that the National Standard and the still-to-be determined funding rate may lead to some providers pulling out of the market and that this could eventually decrease the choice for parents.”

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has consistently set out her intention to increase free childcare entitlement from 600 hours to 1140 hours per year by August 2020.

But the Scottish Conservatives said that commitment is looking more like another empty SNP promise.

Private nurseries have already warned they could go out of business because the process is poorly planned, and that the SNP did not properly consider the additional costs involved.

The party added that parents should be able to access their free hours of childcare wherever and whenever they wanted, and that the current plans need to be more flexible to cater for modern working patterns.

Scottish Conservative early years spokeswoman Alison Harris said:

“The SNP’s pledge to increase free childcare is looking increasingly like another empty promise.

“It’s another example of Nicola Sturgeon making some grand claims, but her government failing to put the necessary work into ensuring it happens.

“Responses to this consultation show exactly what providers think of these changes, and how realistic they are.

“This botched expansion is a mess of the nationalists’ own making.

“It has to be sorted out as a matter of urgency or nurseries will be driven out of business, and parents relying on this policy will be left facing a

major struggle.”