

## **COVID 19 Guidance for Flying Start and Families First Services**

**To: Directors of Education, Directors of Children’s Services, Heads of Families First Services, Heads of Flying Start Services and Children and Communities Grant Leads.**

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) presents unprecedented challenges to all of our families and services. Thank you for your hard work and professionalism at this particularly challenging time.

This document provides guidance on the provision of Flying Start and Families First services during this period. Please share this with your teams and provide assurance that we are working hard to ensure we provide guidance to support you in provision of services for children and families now and going forward as the situation develops.

We recognise that families will be under additional emotional, financial and psychological pressure at this time. For the safety and wellbeing of your staff and the children and families you support it is also crucial that services are delivered in a way that is consistent with the expert scientific advice being provided by the Welsh Government.<sup>1</sup> Please be aware that the scientific advice and, therefore, guidance may change.

You will also need to ensure that programme services are compliant with [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(Wales\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#) . Practical guidance on how to apply these regulations to the workplace are available [here](#).

Any queries relating to this guidance should be directed to the relevant programme mailbox:

[familiesfirst@gov.wales](mailto:familiesfirst@gov.wales)

[FlyingStart2@gov.wales](mailto:FlyingStart2@gov.wales)

### **Intended Audience**

This guidance should be used by all those involved in the design, commissioning and delivery of services funded through either the Flying Start or Families First programme, including Flying Start and Families First Coordinators, local authority service leads and delivery partners across all relevant sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-social-distancing-guidance>

The aims of this guidance are to:

- Encourage a flexible and practical approach to Flying Start and Families First services during the outbreak of novel coronavirus.
- Ensure that Flying Start and Families First services are resilient and relevant to the particular needs of the local population and services.
- As far as possible, enable Flying Start and Families First to continue to play a part in supporting children and their families during the outbreak
- Enable Flying Start and Families First services to cope appropriately with the additional burden novel coronavirus may place on service provision.
- Promote partnership working across the breadth of services that support families.

These changes are a temporary measure in response to the unprecedented circumstances that we are currently facing. The changes were initially in place for a period of 3 months from 27 March and have been reviewed in light of announcements about the operation of schools and childcare. This guidance will be subject to further review as the decisions related to coronavirus are taken in the coming weeks and months. We expect the Flying Start and Families First Programmes to return to delivering a full programme of activities when normal arrangements return.

Please note that, for the duration of the disruption to services, Welsh Government will be taking the disruption into account when reviewing performance against agreed performance levels in relation to caseloads and CAP. These services remain crucial to families across Wales so we expect every effort to be made to reach as many families as possible through appropriate means during this time. Guidance on grant requirements will follow in due course.

## **Flying Start Guidance**

We recognise that families will be experiencing additional stresses and unique challenges at this difficult time and appreciate that the provision of a full suite of Flying Start services delivered through normal arrangements may not be possible in light of the current scientific advice from Public Health Wales. The aim of this guidance, is to provide clarity on the framework of Flying Start services which can be delivered to support children and families in need, in line with the current scientific advice in relation to restricting the spread of the virus.

Guidance regarding provision of face to face support can be found in Annex 1.

The guidance is themed under the 4 core elements of Flying Start:

### **Flying Start Enhanced Health Visiting**

To recognise the additional pressures on Health Visiting services, Flying Start Health Visitors, and the wider health workforce (skill mix) should defer to the newly published Guidance for Flying Start and Generic Health Visitors (HCWP) provided below:



20200324 - Guidance  
for Health Visitors CO

Health professionals should take particular note of principle 4 relating to the management of safeguarding and high needs cases which, evidence has shown, are more prevalent in Flying Start areas

It is vital that Flying Start and generic health services prioritise resources in order to ensure that families receive the support they need, when they need it, during this challenging time. FS Health teams are encouraged to work collaboratively with generic as a seamless service during the outbreak.

### **Flying Start Parenting**

In light of the current scientific advice relating to the importance of social distancing, Local Authorities will have to make adjustments to the way Flying Start Parenting services are delivered. Please see the annex 1 for advice on providing face to face support. In order to meet the on-going and changing demand for support, Local Authorities will be expected to explore alternative and innovative ways of reaching children and parents and should prioritise on line open access parenting programmes and targeted provision which is more conducive to 1-to-1 delivery while ensuing social distancing advice is being followed. Local authorities should also consider the following guidelines when planning services during this period of disruption:

1. Local Authorities should use social media to get messaging and support out to their communities. This can be in the form of virtual groups on social media platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp.
2. Support and advice should be provided digitally via tips and infographics.
3. Local Authorities should provide one to one support in line with the current social distancing and hygiene guidelines as well as maximising the use of IT and digital technologies as part of service delivery.

The above list is not exhaustive as we recognise that Local Authorities may also have other approaches and ideas that they are considering. We ask that you keep Welsh Government updated on the types of provision in place.

## Flying Start Childcare

### **Background**

On 20<sup>th</sup> March the Welsh Government published [advice](#) relating to restrictions to service provision across the childcare sector following earlier announcements made in relation to school closures. Flying Start settings are, first and foremost, childcare settings and therefore should defer to Childcare advice and apply it to the provision of Flying Start Services.

The Welsh Government announced the introduction of the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (CCAS) on [6 April](#). This scheme is designed to offer funded childcare places for pre-school [children](#) of critical workers and those covered by the Government's definition of vulnerability.

In his statement of 19 June the First Minister stated the intention that childcare and play services increase their operations from 22 June as part of the Welsh Government's latest review of lockdown measures. This announcement signals the removal of existing restrictions on attendance at schools and childcare settings and enables services to scale up their provision to a wider range of children following a period of significant disruption.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services has agreed that Flying Start providers should start the process of increasing their provision from the 22 June in line with the wider childcare sector. In practice, this means that all children between 2-3 years of age, living in Flying Start areas and eligible for support, can now be offered Flying Start childcare services in line with previous arrangements for provision.

To help facilitate the return of increased attendance at childcare settings, including Flying Start childcare, the Welsh Government has published the [Protective Measures in Childcare Settings: Keep Children Safe](#) guidance document which provides advice and guidance to childcare providers on how to prepare settings in readiness for more children to attend while ensuring the safety of children and staff. The document places an emphasis on individual risk assessments and on effective hygiene control processes to inform safe practices in childcare settings.

In line with the wider childcare sector, all providers of Flying Start childcare services are required to adhere to these guidelines in the planning and delivery of Flying Start services until further notice.

## **Service Expectations**

On the 05 August 2020, the Welsh Government issued revised Protective Measures in Childcare Settings: Keep Children Safe guidance which, along with a number of other revisions, acknowledges the impracticality of social distancing for very young children and removes the 8 child limit on group sizes in childcare settings.

Flying Start teams should familiarise themselves with the revised guidelines issued for the sector and should apply them to the provision of Flying Start childcare services with immediate effect. We anticipate that the removal of the restrictions on attendance at childcare settings, outlined in the revised version of the guidance, should facilitate a far fuller return of services from September onwards and should see attendance returning to normal or near normal in a significant proportion of Flying Start settings.

The safety of children and staff remains of paramount importance and all settings are expected to conduct individual risk assessments to ensure that any increase to provision is safe and remains compliant with guidance.

Please note that our ambition continues to be to support as many children as possible within the Protective Measures in Childcare Settings: Keep Children Safe guidance and, as such, if a return to full Flying Start provision is safe and achievable within these guidelines Local Authorities should aim to restore full provision as early as possible. If children are unable to attend for some or part of the week due to local management of numbers their development should be supported through other means i.e. resources and activities to complete at home.

The national response to the disruption caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 has shown us that there are innovative ways of continuing to engage with children outside of formal childcare environments and we are very grateful for the efforts made by local Flying Start teams to date. Given the likely impact of sustained lockdown measures on some Flying Start families and the disruption to service provision already experienced, it is crucial that efforts are maximised to engage with Flying Start families over the summer holidays.

Therefore, we ask that local Flying Start teams do everything possible to engage with children over the summer holidays in readiness for their return to provision in September 2020. Existing programme guidance prescribes the need for 15 sessions of childcare or play to be offered to children and families over the holidays and it is more important than ever to ensure that sessions are offered to support families this summer, where it is practical and safe to do so. Local Authorities should ensure that processes are in place to enable them to keep in touch with all vulnerable children on a weekly basis, using childcare staff or the wider Flying Start workforce, over the holiday period.

We recognise that traditional engagement methods may not be possible this year due to social distancing and hygiene requirements and it is for Local Authorities to determine the best way of achieving this through a blended approach of formal

contacts and the continuation of the innovative methods used throughout the outbreak to date. These methods may include, but are not limited to, activity and resource drop offs and direct virtual contacts via telephone and social media.

## **Funding**

The flexibility for Local Authorities to deviate from their delivery plans and to claim for Flying Start childcare services from the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) based on expected costs initially ran to 30 June as part of the agreement in place for services covered by the grant.

To recognise the continued disruption to service provision caused by the outbreak of Covid-19, grant flexibility has been extended until 30 September 2020. This agreement enables Local Authorities to continue to fund Flying Start childcare based on expected costs which is vital in order for services to be scaled up gradually and to support providers who will be called upon to deliver fuller services in the autumn and beyond.

To continue to benefit from grant flexibility, Local Authorities will need to demonstrate that they are actively planning to ensure that Flying Start childcare services can resume fully at the start of the autumn term, albeit that 'full' services are likely to be restricted in line with the protective measures in place for the sector.

Please refer to the CCG COVID-19 guidance for further information relating to payment arrangements for Flying Start childcare services.

## Flying Start SLC

In light of the current scientific advice relating to the importance of social distancing, Local Authorities will have to make adjustments to the way Flying Start SLC services are delivered. We recognise that Flying Start SLC will not be able to be provided in its traditional form and we encourage a practical and flexible approach in delivering services remotely / virtually, where it is appropriate to do so. Please see the annex 1 for advice on providing face to face support.

Allied Health Professionals (AHP) should make assessments of the urgency and priority of work and stratify any identified risks. Professionals should follow up to date Guidance and support from Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and their professional bodies. All additional guidance will be added to the Welsh Government COVID 19 advice pages.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, there is rehabilitation guidance:

<https://gov.wales/health-and-social-care-services-rehabilitation-framework-2020-2021>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://gov.wales/topic/980/latest>

<https://llyw.cymru/fframwaith-adsefydlu-gwasanaethau-iechyd-chymdeithasol-2020-i-2021-0>

There is also additional advice on the HCPC Advice Hub:

<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/covid-19/>.

## **Guidance for Families First Services**

This guidance seeks to provide clarity on the services that should be delivered and the way in which they should be delivered at a local level.

We appreciate that in the current circumstances, it is unreasonable to continue to operate the Families First Programme in its current form. Until notified otherwise, Local Authorities should operate in accordance with the following principles:

1. Deliver Families First services in a way that is consistent with the guidance on social distancing that has been issued by the Government.<sup>3</sup>
2. Families First services will need to use professional judgement to identify which services remain priorities for families and how they can be delivered in their local areas during this period.
3. This is likely to mean that Local Authorities offer a greater number of services by telephone contact, social media and online.
4. Families First services will also need to use professional judgement to identify how to support at risk and vulnerable groups (like those with safeguarding needs and/or disabled children, young people and/or their families). Families First services will need to discuss the support available for these families with senior managers and other services in their local authorities.
5. As schools increase their operations, Families First services will need to ensure that they have robust referral and prioritisation processes to ensure that families are offered appropriate support as quickly as possible
6. Families First services should consider the needs of families over the summer holidays and explore ways in which to offer play and childcare opportunities to as many children as possible in accordance with the latest COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Although activity against your agreed delivery plan will change data should still be collected for services provided.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-social-distancing-guidance>

### **Monitoring and Funding for Families First and Flying Start**

Although activity against your agreed Children and Communities Grant (CCG) delivery plan will change, data should still be collected for services provided.

In Financial Year 2020-21, the first Progress Reports and Financial Claims for the CCG will not be required until October 2020.