

Guidance for Flying Start and Families First Services – COVID 19

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.

On Monday 19th October the First Minister [announced](#) Wales will enter into a two week firebreak in order to suppress the spread of the virus in Wales. The firebreak took place between 23 October and 9 November.

On Monday 2nd November the First Minister announced a range of measures that would be in place to cover the period immediately after the 17 day firebreak in Wales. The announcement can be seen [here](#).

This document provides guidance on the provision of Flying Start and Families First services during the post-firebreak period, and supersedes previous iterations of the temporary programme guidance issued during the pandemic until further notice. Please share this with your teams and be assured that we are working hard to ensure we provide guidance to support you in the provision of services for children and families now and going forward as the situation develops further.

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. Please be aware that the scientific advice and, therefore, guidance may change.

The Operation in a Covid World Working Group has considered the benefits of face to face services delivered in groups, which were reported as being particularly valued by families who found the opportunity to meet up with others in a similar situation beneficial to their mental health and well-being.

Group support offers a safe social outlet for families that may have become isolated during the course of the pandemic and is an opportunity to encourage and model positive behaviours in relation to staying safe such as social distancing. If groups are unable to resume within a protective environment there is a risk that families are more likely to look to meet outside these safer environments to socialise and for support. This guidance reflects the rounded benefits of delivering face to face support services within the parameters set by the regulations.

During this period you will also need to ensure that services are compliant with the latest regulations, [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 4\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#). See also the [FAQs](#) issued in relation to the new regulations.

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

familiesfirst@gov.wales

FlyingStart2@gov.wales

Any queries relating to funding should be directed to the Children and Communities Grant team:

FlexibleFunding@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.

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. This guidance will be subject to further review as the decisions related to coronavirus are taken.

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.

Overarching principles:

Those involved in the delivery of services funded through Flying Start or Families First should take account of the following principles when considering what support to provide to any child/young person/family that either is or becomes vulnerable:

- Services must work together to ensure all children and young people are safe, seen, heard, nurtured and developing;
- the decision should consider the impact on the child or young person's emotional, mental and physical health and development in the short, medium and longer term (not acting in the short term may have material impact longer term);
- the decision should consider how any risks, including reducing the risk of escalation to statutory services, could be mitigated through the most appropriate support for the child or young person and their family;
- the decision should take account of the views of the child or young person and their parents/carers, so their needs can be understood and delivered through the most appropriate support (including face to face support); parents and carers should be given clear information about all decisions reached;
- where necessary, children and young people should be prioritised accordingly for support;
- the risks to children and young people and their families should be regularly reviewed and monitored on a multi-agency basis.

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 restrictions in place during the post-firebreak period. 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 and the restrictions in place for wider society.

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

Flying Start Enhanced Health Visiting

In August, Health Boards received a letter in relation to the delivery of the Healthy Child Wales Programme (HCWP) from the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Wales. The letter clearly indicates that the Welsh Government now expects the full range of HCWP contacts to be delivered without exception with the flexibility to continue to deliver virtual contacts where this is deemed necessary following an assessment of family circumstances and in the professional judgement of Health Visitors.

In line with generic services, the full range of HCWP and enhanced Flying Start contacts should now be delivered by Flying Start Health Visitors and be delivered virtually where this is deemed necessary.

Flying Start Parenting

In light of the current scientific advice relating to social distancing, Local Authorities will need to continue to make adjustments to the way Flying Start Parenting services are delivered. The new regulations issued to cover the post-firebreak period permit the resumption of public services and lift some of the restrictions which have previously disrupted provision including face to face services and groups, subject to the completion of mandatory risk assessments. Accordingly, Local Authorities may resume or start the delivery of group and face to face support where this is deemed beneficial and appropriate. However, in order to meet the on-going and changing demand for support, Local Authorities will be expected to continue to explore alternative and innovative ways of reaching children and parents. Where the provision of face to face or group services is deemed not to be appropriate, blended delivery options – for example, digital engagement or using outside spaces, should be considered where this is possible. Where alternative delivery models are called for Local Authorities should prioritise on-line open access parenting programmes and targeted provision which can be delivered virtually and which is more conducive to 1-to-1 delivery. 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 – there are a range of resources available via the Welsh Government [Parenting. Give it Time website](#), with more planned over the coming weeks.
3. Where the delivery of face to face services is not appropriate, Local Authorities should provide one to one and group support virtually, maximising the use of IT and digital technologies as part of service delivery. However, Local Authorities need to be satisfied that any alternative to face to face services meets the care and support needs identified in any care and support plan.

4. Where face to face support is assessed as being appropriate please follow all guidelines on covid safe environments including the Protective Measures guidelines below and the guidance for workplaces and premises available [here](#).

The above list is not exhaustive as we recognise that Local Authorities may also have other approaches and ideas that they are considering.

Flying Start Childcare

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 addition, further guidance in relation to keeping children safe in childcare has recently been published and is available [here](#).

In line with the wider childcare sector, all providers of Flying Start childcare services are required to adhere to the Protective Measures guidance, and all other relevant guidance as applicable, in the planning and delivery of Flying Start services until further notice.

Service Expectations

On the 19th October the Welsh Government announced that, despite the restrictions in place for the wider society, childcare services would remain unaffected by the firebreak measures. This was announced to ensure that children were able to continue to benefit from developmental experiences gained through their attendance at professional childcare settings and to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on young children and their families.

In line with the announcement for the wider childcare sector in Wales, Flying Start childcare settings remained open for business for the duration of the firebreak, as far as was practicable under the circumstances and safe for both children and staff. This position remains unchanged following the First Minister's announcement of 2nd November.

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. These Protective Measures continue to apply during the post-firebreak period.

The safety of children and staff remains of paramount importance and all settings are expected to conduct individual risk assessments to ensure that 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.

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 the coronavirus 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.

Funding

The Flying Start and Families First programmes are funded through the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) along with 5 other early intervention, prevention and support programmes.

Ministers allowed all programmes within the CCG to diverge from the detail of their delivery plans to respond to the impact of the pandemic between 1 April to 30 June which included the commitment to fund CCG staff and Flying Start services covered by the grant. Welsh Ministers extended this flexibility up to 30 September 2020.

From 1 October 2020, Local Authorities have revised CCG Delivery Plans to reflect how services would be delivered safely in light of the pandemic for the remainder of the 2020-21 financial year. In these latest Delivery Plans, Local Authorities set out how services would be delivered during local or national lockdown situations, which included the continuation of funding Flying Start settings whether they were able to operate or not. Welsh Government recognises the importance of retaining the staff and services to be able to deliver services safely in line with the Protective Measures guidance.

Please refer to the CCG guidance (October 2020) for further information and any funding queries can be forwarded to the flexible funding mailbox, please ensure local CCG leads are kept informed of any communication relating to programme funding with Welsh Government.



CCG Guidance
October 2020 Final ve

Flying Start SLC

In light of the current scientific advice relating to social distancing, Local Authorities will need to continue to make adjustments to the way Flying Start SLC services are delivered. The new regulations issued to cover the post-firebreak period permit the resumption of public services and lift some of the restrictions which have previously disrupted provision including face to face services, subject to the completion of mandatory risk assessments. Accordingly, Local Authorities may resume or start the delivery of group and face to face support where this is deemed developmentally beneficial. However, in order to meet the on-going and changing demand for support, Local Authorities will be expected to continue to explore alternative and innovative ways of supporting children and parents. Where the provision of face to face or group services is deemed not to be appropriate, flexible delivery options should continue.

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.¹

In particular, rehabilitation guidance can be found here:

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

<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/>.

¹ <https://gov.wales/topic/980/latest>

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. However, the new regulations issued to cover the post-firebreak period permit the resumption of public services and lift some of the restrictions which have previously disrupted provision including face to face services and groups, subject to the completion of mandatory risk assessments. Accordingly, Local Authorities may resume or start the delivery of group and face to face support where this is deemed beneficial and appropriate.

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 regulations in place for the duration of the post-firebreak period.²
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. However, Local Authorities need to be satisfied that any alternative provision meets the care and support needs identified in any care and support plan or Team around the Family (TAF) plan.
4. Where face to face support is assessed as being appropriate please follow all guidelines on covid safe environments including the Protective Measures guidelines and the guidance for workplaces and premises available [here](#).
5. 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.
6. Families First services will need to continue to work with schools to ensure that they have robust referral and prioritisation processes in place to ensure that families are offered appropriate support as quickly as possible.

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2020/1219/contents/made>

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, Progress Reports and Financial Claims for the CCG are required at three stages: 23rd October 2020, 22 January 2021 and 30th April 2021. Monitoring data will not be required to be submitted until April 2021 for both programmes.