

Julie Morgan AS/MS

**Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services**



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

11 February 2021

To all providers of day care, child minding and play services in Wales

Last August I wrote to you to express my sincere thanks for everything you had done since the start of the pandemic, and to express my gratitude in particular to those of you who had continued, despite everything, to provide invaluable services to the children of critical workers and vulnerable families.

With the autumn term came some sense of normality again, with many of you able to reopen your doors to more children, including Childcare Offer children from September 2020. It was encouraging to see all our children go back to schools and childcare where they could thrive and enjoy the company of peers. As a Government, we have remained committed to keeping children in school and childcare, wherever possible, because we know there are so many benefits for children from being in such rich and stimulating environments.

As we approached Christmas and the New Year, we faced yet more challenges, with Covid-19 case numbers steadily rising again in Wales and the emergence of new strains of the virus. I want to thank you all for the efforts you have made this winter to ensure that parents in Wales have access to childcare where this is important or essential for them to be able to work. I remain of the view that it is not necessary at this point in time to restrict access to childcare and that it is better for the sector and for parents, for providers to remain open, providing care, support, early education and rich play opportunities for all children.

In my statement of [18 January](#) I addressed the very real concerns many of you have and set out all the measures we have been able to put in place since the start of the pandemic to keep settings safe for staff and children. It is extremely important that you take all reasonable steps to apply the protective measures described in our [guidance](#), from regular hand-washing and cleaning of the premises and equipment, to minimising contacts and letting in as much fresh air as possible. You will also want to follow our latest guidance on undertaking workforce [risk assessments and workplace assessments](#). Keeping ourselves and others safe should be our number

one priority and I'm confident that if we all take the appropriate steps that we will get through this together.

As I write this, it seems the tide is starting to turn again. With good progress being made to vaccinate our priority groups and case numbers now falling steadily, there are reasons to be optimistic here in Wales. As with the rest of the UK, we are working to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) priority schedule for vaccination roll out. I can confirm, however, that childcare staff (including Flying Start) who provide intimate personal care on a regular basis to those who are clinically vulnerable to Covid-19 will be prioritised for vaccination as part of priority group 2 and guidance has been made available this week to local authorities and health boards on how such staff should be defined and identified.

We have also confirmed that all those who work in childcare and play settings, whether that be day nursery or a childminder, will be offered the opportunity to take part in twice weekly [testing](#). Undertaking a quick and easy test twice a week will enable the sector to build on the control measures already in place through our Protective Measures guidance to ensure that those who have Covid-19 but have no symptoms are identified and self-isolate. This will help reduce the risk of transmission, not only in settings but in the wider community.

More detail will follow on how you can access the test kits and the logistical arrangements that will be involved. At the moment, the tests cannot be delivered to a person's home but we are working with partners to determine logistical solutions. We have developed some [FAQs](#) to answer any questions you may have. Further advice and guidance on the testing offer will follow.

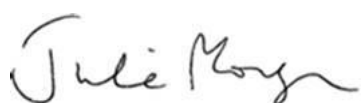
You, our childcare providers, are an invaluable asset here in Wales and I remain committed to ensuring that we do all we can to support you through these uncertain and challenging times. We have recently written to local authorities to confirm that they can continue Childcare Offer payments in a number of scenarios where Covid-19 is impacting on your capacity to offer normal services. We have also made an additional £5.3million available this financial year to local authorities through the Children and Communities Grant to enable them to offer financial support to providers that are facing additional barriers or costs as a result of the virus or who are seeing a fall in demand for places. I would encourage you to speak to your local Family Information Service or your childcare contact in your local authority to explore all the options available to you. Your umbrella organisation will also be able to assist you with advice and guidance should you need further information on the support available.

You may also have seen our announcement on 1 February that we will be making additional funds available to local authorities. This will enable them to increase funding to the non-maintained sector for early education (Foundation Phase

Nursery) to support alignment with the current Welsh Government funding rate for childcare (£4.50) within the Childcare Offer. This decision is especially important after a difficult 2020 where the sector has been absolutely critical in our fight against the pandemic and in supporting our children and critical workers. This decision also reflects our commitment to maintain high quality care and education provision by continuing to give children the very best start in life and supporting parents. You can read the full statement [here](#). I know you will also be keen to learn more about our progress in terms of reviewing the hourly rate for the childcare element of the Offer. We have not been able to move as fast as we would have liked on this piece of work as a result of everything else we have been doing this last year to support the sector in other ways. However I am hopeful that we will be able to update you on this within the next few months.

It is important to us that we hear your views on the matters that concern you. We have heard from many of you over recent months and we receive regular feedback on the issues which impact on all of you through our partners in local authorities, the umbrella bodies which are part of the "Cwlwm" consortium and through the inspectorate, Care Inspectorate Wales. I am also grateful to those of you who responded to our Provider Survey back in the summer. We have now issued the second phase of this survey and look forward to hearing more about how you and your businesses have been impacted or how you have changed the way you work in response to the pandemic. This information is invaluable to us in formulating our policies and in trying to maximise the effectiveness of our interventions. I would encourage as many as possible of you to take the time to respond to this next round of the Provider Survey. I will keep listening and ensuring that your voice is heard here at the Welsh Government.

Many of the families you support will be involved in occupations which keep this country afloat, whether they are health or social care workers or food retailers. I'm conscious that it can be felt that your contribution as childcare providers often goes unnoticed or un-thanked, but I can assure you it **does not** and this is why I wanted to write to you personally to update you on key developments, but most of all to say "thank you". I am immensely grateful for the way you have carried on with unwavering determination and dedication. Thank you all.



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