**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.

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.[[1]](#footnote-1) 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](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-04/health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-wales-amendment-regulations-2020.pdf) . Practical guidance on how to apply these regulations to the workplace are available [here.](https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace)

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

familiesfirst@gov.wales

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.

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. They will be in place initially for 3 months with immediate effect and we will review whether they need to remain in place on a regular basis thereafter. We expect the Flying Start and Families First Programmes to return to delivering a full programme of activities when normal arrangements return. We may also need some Flying Start settings to remain open over the Easter period to support the children of key workers and / or vulnerable children.

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. Despite the disruption caused by COVID-19, 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 continue to 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.

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:

 

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. In line with this advice we advise that no face to face Flying Start parenting groups run until further notice. 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. Wherever possible, Local Authorities should provide one to one support virtually, 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

On 20th March the Welsh Government published [advice](https://gov.wales/written-statement-eligibility-ongoing-provision-children-who-are-vulnerable-or-whose-parents-are) 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 this advice and apply it to the provision of Flying Start Services.

The Welsh Government announced the introduction of the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme on [6 April](https://gov.wales/critical-workers-get-free-childcare). This scheme is designed to offer funded childcare places for pre-school [children](https://gov.wales/written-statement-eligibility-ongoing-provision-children-who-are-vulnerable-or-whose-parents-are) of critical workers and those covered by the Government’s definition of vulnerability.

This scheme is universally available to the priority groups listed above and, consequently, supersedes the provision of Flying Start childcare services while it is operational.

Flying Start funding is still available to Local Authorities for 3 months from March 18th and, as such, the Flying Start workforce should continue to remain engaged as part of their Local Authority’s Coronavirus childcare assistance scheme wherever possible.

Flying Start childcare services will return in line with guidance once the disruption caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 is over.

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

**Services**

Where possible Local Authorities should look to offer online support to parents and children who would normally attend childcare during this time.

Flying Start SLC

We recognise that Flying Start SLC will not be able to be provided in its current form. We encourage a practical and flexible approach and that wherever possible services are provided remotely.

Allied Health Professionals (AHP) should make assessments of priority 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.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Advice for AHPS looking to return to help in health and social care can be found here: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/registrants/updates/2020/how-we-will-continue-to-regulate-in-light-of-novel-coronavirus/>. 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.[[3]](#footnote-3)
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 people). Families First services will need to discuss the support available for these families with senior managers and other services in their local authorities.

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

**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.

The Welsh Government’s Funding Alignment team will contact you to confirm the timescales for the Quarter 4 claims for the Financial Year 2019-20. In Financial Year 2020-21, the first Progress Reports and Financial Claims for the CCG will not be required until October 2020.

These changes are a temporary measure in response to the unprecedented circumstances that we are currently facing and that we expect the Flying Start and Families First Programmes to return to deliver their full programme of activities once these temporary arrangements have been lifted.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://gov.wales/topic/980/latest [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)