**Flying Start and Families First Frequently Asked Questions**

The document has been produced to provide clarity and to support Flying Start and Families First coordinators during the COVID-19 outbreak. If you have further questions relating to delivery of your programme that are not covered below please contact your Welsh Government Account Manager directly or via mailboxes:

familiesfirst@gov.wales FlyingStart2@gov.wales

If you have any further questions relating to financial matters that are not covered below please contact the Welsh Government Funding Alignment Team: FlexibleFunding@gov.wales

**Redeployment and staffing**

1. **Some of our front line staff have been called to be redeployed elsewhere. What happens then?**

We recognise that some of the core elements of our programmes will be disrupted during the outbreak of COVID-19. We have produced and circulated revised temporary guidance to acknowledge this. You will need to keep a record of the staff and activities if they are diverted from their usual roles. For further information regarding payment arrangements please see the [CCG COVID-19 guidance](http://www.exchangewales.org/fs-ff-covid-19) document.

1. **Can Flying Start Childcare staff, be used to help out in settings as some are closing down due to lack of staff.**

Yes, every effort should be made to ensure that the local Flying Start childcare workforce is redeployed to best meet local demand where this is possible. Please refer to the [CCG COVID-19 guidance](http://www.exchangewales.org/fs-ff-covid-19) for recording such instances

1. **Speech and Language Therapists have been redeployed onto front line duties and the local authority does not have any cover for SLC within the Flying Start programme. What is the advice for families who are concerned about their child’s language development?**

All services can expect some degree of disruption during the outbreak of COVID-19 and we recognise that it is unrealistic to maintain the levels of additionality normally provided by our programmes. We have issued temporary programme guidance in response to the outbreak which advises that Local Authorities should use Allied Health Professionals to make assessments of priority work and manage any identified risks. Professionals should follow up to date Guidance and support from Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and their professional bodies.

Local Authorities should make parents aware of the reduction in Flying Start SLC services and put in place appropriate cover, where possible, from SLC teams / early language teams to field enquiries, providing advice for parents via telephone and signposting them to other information channels (Facebook, videos, Tiny Happy People).

Please refer to the CCG COVID-19 guidance for recording changes in staff roles

**Childcare**

1. **What are the arrangements for the continuity of payment to Flying Start childcare services?**

To ensure the sustainability of Flying Start childcare, you can continue paying registered and Local Authority run Flying Start settings for 3 months commencing 18 March 2020, as announced by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services.

A further announcement was made regarding the repurposing of the Childcare Offer on 6 April 2020 by the First Minister, stating free childcare will be offered to the children aged 0-4 for parents who are key workers to respond to COVID-19. To ensure there is no duplication of funding, Local Authorities should use the CCG to pay for Flying Start eligible childcare in the usual way, childcare provided in/through Flying Start settings for the purpose of supporting the Covid 19 response (children of critical workers and vulnerable children not within the Flying Start area or outside of the Flying Start childcare age range would be funded through the Childcare Offer.

.

1. **How should FS Childcare support the emergency childcare response during the COVID-19 Outbreak.**

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 set out 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 should return in line with guidance once the disruption caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 is over.

Please also see the answer to Question 4 above regarding continuity of payment.

1. **Can we close Flying Start settings if there is no demand for them?**

Flying Start settings should stay open for as long as there is a demand for childcare provision from priority groups. Flying Start settings will be expected to contribute to the local Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme and Local Authorities should ensure that Flying Start services are taken account of when planning services

locally.

1. **If a setting is out of Furlough but staff are refusing to come in to work (some have valid reasons, others don’t), meaning that we are paying them to care for the children but also having to pay for other staff to stand in for them in order to deliver childcare for key workers, what power do we have to try to alter this?**

Local Authorities and other employers engaged in the provision of childcare services are expected to manage staff absences via contractual arrangements as they normally would as part of the employment relationship. Local Authority childcare staff should be redeployed flexibly to help meet local demand for childcare which should help reduce the costs associated with backfilling staff.

1. **Can you confirm how absences should be recorded during the disruption caused by COVID-19**

We recognise that the disruption caused by the virus is likely to mean that gathering and recording the data accurately will have been challenging during this period. Our Knowledge and Analytical Service has contacted Local Authorities to advise that collection activities are currently paused in order to allow you to concentrate on managing service delivery in these challenging circumstances.

However, in order to provide consistency we recommend the following approach to recording Flying Start Childcare activity for the last few weeks of March 2020:

* If you are able to deduct the number of sessions that couldn’t be offered, due to restrictions and closures, from the number of sessions offered by Flying Start then you should do so.
* Any unexplained absences should be recorded as ‘authorised’ to reflect the fact that a significant proportion of them will have been unavoidable due to the outbreak of the virus.

Please be aware that the data collection process outlined above is a guide only and is not intended to create additional work at this time.

1. **Is there an expectation from Welsh Government that we try to protect the time of our FS teams to ensure that our most vulnerable families continue to have some level of support?**

During this unprecedented time it is vital that the Flying Start team makes a contribution to support children and families as part of their Local Authority’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. Flying Start teams and Health Boards should consider the needs of their populations in the round and should deploy resources on a case by case basis that best meets the needs of their children and families locally. We recognise that the pressures being put on local services as a result of the crisis mean that the additionality of the Flying Start programme may not always be possible for the time being but Flying Start managers should ensure that the voice and needs of Flying Start families are represented as part of the local Covid-19 effort.

**Furlough enquiries**

1. **Can FS childcare providers furlough staff working on FS?**

Staff funded through the CCG grant should continue to be paid through grant funding and they should not be furloughed. If Flying Start childcare providers have taken the decision to furlough staff already, Local Authorities should contact them to inform them that Welsh Government funding for Flying Start is still available to them.

We recognise that settings delivering Flying Start childcare services are not always fully funded by CCG grant money and it has been confirmed that the Job Retention Scheme (JRS), which has been introduced to help employers furlough staff rather than making them redundant, should be accessed on a proportionate basis

For further information please see the Welsh Government’s *Job Retention Scheme and Childcare Guidance*issued to programme leads on 23rd April 2020

1. **How much Public funding does an organisation have to receive to bar it from Furlough?**

It has been confirmed that the Job Retention Scheme (JRS), which has been introduced to help employers furlough staff rather than making them redundant, can be accessed on a proportionate basis.

For further information please see the Welsh Government’s *Job Retention Scheme and Childcare guidance*issued to programme leads on 23rd April 2020.

1. **Where settings have closed and remain unavailable due to staffing furlough do we pay for existing / newly eligible children?**

Staff should not be furloughed if they are fully funded via the CCG. For mixed setting, see the answers provided above.

Where staff are not able to carry out their usual work, employers should be making every effort to redeploy staff to assist with the Coronavirus response or maintain essential services, either within that organisation or to another part of the public sector. It is essential that these efforts continue throughout the current crisis to maximise the effectiveness of our response.

Local Authorities are able to cover Flying Start childcare costs they expect to incur due to their commitment to deliver Flying Start for 3 months from 18 March

**Childcare – Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme**

1. **Clarification of eligibility of key worker childcare, does it need to be both parents?**

Under the Coronavirus – Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS) we will be allowing households where a critical worker, with a pre-school child, to be eligible for the scheme. Where one parent is a critical worker and the other parent is not, then the other parent should provide safe alternative arrangements at home when possible. In discussion with LAs we are finding that there are a relatively small number of specific reasons why it has not been possible for the parent who is not a critical worker to provide safe alternative arrangements. This also includes workers in refuges and other forms of supported accommodation for victims of domestic abuse. Vulnerable children are also eligible. This guidance is in line with the letter dated 14 April, issued by Steve Davies the Director, Education Directorate, to all Directors of Education in Local Authorities.

 A copy of the critical workers list can be found [here](https://gov.wales/coronavirus-key-critical-workers)

1. **Can you write to settings informing them that if funded through WG the childcare providers should not be furloughing and advise of an appropriate way forward (we LAs would obviously send the letter out) but it needs to come from WG.**

The guidance on JRS and public funding has been issued to settings via CIW.

**Monitoring and reporting**

1. **Is there flexibility to routine end of year monitoring and reporting arrangements?**

Local Authorities were contacted recently to confirm when they wanted to submit their Q4 claims for 2019/2020. The majority of authorities will still submit their claims in April, with a few opting for May and June 2020

1. **If financial claim is submitted in April can we still submit monitoring data in May or would you prefer them to come in together?**

The CCG claim and evidence of delivery included in the monitoring form will need to be submitted together. If resource issues are impacting upon submitting the Monitoring form then please contact the Flexible Funding team to discuss alternative arrangements.

1. **Can we have guidance around what should be included in the Q4 claim e.g. are we including ordered but not delivered goods, are we including commissioned training and how do we deal with activity which has paused but not been cancelled.**

Further [guidance](http://www.exchangewales.org/fs-ff-covid-19) will be issued shortly from the Funding Alignment team in relation to your quarter 4 claim this will include activities which were paused or cancelled in 2019-20, and whether unspent funding can be used in 2020-21. In the meantime, please keep a track of activities and associated expenditure you want Welsh Government to consider.

1. **What constitutes a Health Visitor contact as virtual contacts are not usually counted but the majority of families will move to virtual contacts through phone calls or video calls.**

Our Healthy Child Wales Programme colleagues at Welsh Government have confirmed that Health Visitors are encouraged to count virtual contacts in the same way as they would have counted face to face contacts previously during this period of time.

**Budgets**

1. **Can we accrue funding from 2019-20 to 2020-21 for courses that have now had to be postponed until later in the year?**

Due to social distancing requirements to stop the spread of COVID -19, we are aware that some planned activities such as training courses, group sessions or similar needed to be cancelled, which has resulted in funds not being allocated to services as intended.

It is permissible to utilise the planned expenditure from the final few weeks of 2019-2020 (which would usually form part of your quarter 4 claim) on activities which needed to be postponed as a result of the impact of COVID -19 in the 2020-21 financial year.

Strict monitoring will need to be in place for a clear audit trail to demonstrate the cause of any underspend, the amount carried forward, and clear links to expenditure for the ‘carry over’. You will not be able to claim for more than the outturn provided in your Q4 estimate submitted to the Funding Alignment team in March 2020, and any expenditure relating to 2020-21 planned activities should be claimed in that financial year.

If you wish to carry over funds from 2019-20 to 2020-2021 on the basis described, please contact the Funding Alignment Team. More advice on how to claim this will be issued separately.

1. **Will funding for Flying Start childcare be paid after Easter for those children who would be newly eligible to start in April or is it just those who are already registered at a setting?**

Yes, costs you expected to incur as a result of your commitment to deliver Flying Start Childcare services can be claimed from the Children and Communities Grant.

1. **If we are forced to close settings, are we able to claim from the CCG?**

Staff employed through the CCG funds should be paid in full throughout this 3 month period as per the UK Government criteria set out in their Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance. You will need to check for updates regularly via the following link. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

1. **Can we carry over any unspent funds in the 2019/20 financial year to 2020/21?**

Please see answer to Question 10.

1. **Can we pay for services as per contracts even if they cannot operate or when staff have been redeployed/repurposed (we need to support these so they are fit to restart once this is over)?**

Staff employed through the CCG funds should be paid in full throughout this 3 month period as per the UK Government criteria set out in their Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance. You will need to check for updates regularly via the following link. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

1. **How do we make sure we are not paying for places twice with the new commitment from Welsh Government for Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme funded places?**

To ensure the sustainability of Flying Start childcare, you can continue paying registered and Local Authority run Flying Start settings for 3 months commencing 18 March 2020, as announced by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services.

A further announcement was made regarding the repurposing of the Childcare Offer on 6 April 2020 by the First Minister, stating free childcare will be offered to the children aged 0-4 for parents who are key workers to respond to COVID-19. To ensure there is no duplication of funding, Local Authorities should use the CCG to pay for Flying Start eligible childcare in the usual way, childcare provided in/through Flying Start settings for the purpose of supporting the Covid 19 response (children of critical workers and vulnerable children not within the Flying Start area or outside of the Flying Start childcare age range would be funded through the Childcare Offer

Capital

1. **Is there any flexibility with Capital for some outstanding work not able to complete in 19/20 due to COVID-19 can we carry funding over to 20/21 or reserve in L.A accounts?**

We are seeking financial guidance regarding projects which have been delayed due to the Coronavirus, we will issue you with an update as soon as possible.

1. **Please can we have some indication of decisions surrounding Capital funding FS for 2020–21?**

An email was issued from Welsh Government on 17th April regarding 2020-21 projects within which the following information was requested:

* The names of settings for the capital projects bid for in 2020-21 that have remained open and/or are currently open for the children of critical care workers and/or for vulnerable children.
* Out of the capital project bids for in 2020-21, and assuming that we will return to some kind of normality by quarter 3, which projects do you anticipate being realistically completed this financial year.

When this information has been received and analysed Welsh Government will be in a position to provide further advice and clarification.

**Families First**

**Budgets**

1. **Training has been postponed due to COVID-19 and we want to run the courses later in the year. Can we carry forward funding from 2019-20 FY to 2020-21?**

Please see answer to Q10

1. **We’ve commissioned services from 3rd sector providers which have been cancelled due to COVID-19. Can we still pay our 3rd sector providers?**

Please see answer to Q14

1. **When will Local Authorities receive the final Grant Offer letters for CCG and HSG?**

Final Grant Offer letters were issued week commencing 6th April 2020.

**Staffing and redeployment**

1. **When Families First staff are redeployed to front line/statutory duties, does the programme still pay their salary?**

Yes, staff should still be paid via the CCG budget. Changes such as these will need to be recorded for audit purposes and you will also need to record the rationale for the decision and associated timescales. With the exception of the CfW+ programme who need you to complete the ‘Redeployment tracker’ as part of the wider employability agenda, you will not be required to submit this information to Welsh Government, but you will need to retain the information and Welsh Government may request to see this information at some stage in the future. The information should include:-

(a) Who – note the details of the staff members to be re-deployed, including which programme they are funded from within the CCG;

(b) When – note the time period of redeployment i.e. start and end dates (latter where known);

(c) What – note the redeployment role and note a brief description of the activities they’ll undertake.

(d) Why – Provide rationale for the decision

For further information regarding payment arrangements please see the [CCG COVID-19 guidance](http://www.exchangewales.org/fs-ff-covid-19) document.

**Data and monitoring**

1. **Is there flexibility to routine end of year monitoring and reporting arrangements?**

The Q4 claims for 2019-20 are due April 2020, however, the Funding Alignment Team has recently contacted Local Authorities to establish if you wish to extend the timeframe for submitting the 2019-20 Q4 claim.

Flexibility has been provided in relation to the reporting of programme monitoring data. As advised the Knowledge and Analytical Services Team, which manages Flying Start data have delayed the deadline for submission, however you should still record your data.