

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JM/01579/20

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair
Petitions Committee

5 November 2020

Dear Janet Finch-Saunders MS,

Thank you for your letter of 30 September regarding Petition P- 05-985 - Provide key-worker childcare equivalent to what was available prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We welcome the opportunity to update the Petitions Committee on our plans for the provision of education and childcare including that of key or critical workers in the event of any future lockdowns. We were also interested to hear the petitioner's views on how local authorities should approach future school closures or lockdowns.

Please be assured that keeping schools and childcare settings open remains a key priority for the Welsh Government. This is vital for our young people's education, their overall wellbeing and for parents and carers to work or train.

The transmission rates within schools and childcare settings remains low. Evidence here and indeed worldwide shows that there is no significant relationship between schools reopening and Covid cases in the community. However, coronavirus rates are continuing to rise across Wales and as a Government we are continually reviewing the arrangements in place to manage both infection and transmission. This is critical to ensuring we go through the rest of the autumn and winter without overwhelming our NHS.

We will shortly publish the Coronavirus Control Plan for Education and Childcare Settings. It sets out our expectations for the operation of education and childcare settings at each of the stages in the wider Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales. It is intended to provide education and childcare settings with the information they need to plan for each stage of the response, and to put in place appropriate arrangements to ensure that they continue to meet their statutory duties and responsibilities.

The plan includes advice on the issues to take into account should we need to limit the numbers of children on site, and confirms that schools and childcare settings should look to prioritise the children of critical workers as well as vulnerable children and those who may

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

be digitally excluded. The plan also includes information and advice about the definition of vulnerable children and critical workers to help schools and settings with their forward planning. We are keen to reflect the outcome of the current firebreak within the plan and will publish it as soon as we have been able to do that, in partnership with stakeholders.

We hope this information shows the committee and the petitioner that the childcare needs of key/critical workers have been fully considered and taken account of in our plans for any future lockdown situations.

We would also like to update the committee on the current levels of childcare provision available across Wales. Of the 3,548 childcare settings registered with CIW in the week commencing 12th October 2020, 3,252 (92%) are currently thought to be open. Given that at one point during the initial lockdown around half of all registered childcare providers had closed as a consequence of the pandemic this is very welcoming. We are extremely proud of the way settings have stepped up to the challenge against a rapidly changing backdrop of advice and guidance, adapting their businesses and staffing arrangements to operate safely. As the petitioner says in their letter wrap around care is essential to enable parents to work and it is encouraging to see how schools and childcare settings have worked in partnerships often in challenging circumstances to ensure that parents and carers can access wrap around and out of school childcare at either end of the school day.

As has been said previously the local authorities have been integral to delivering our Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS). This Welsh Government grant paid via local authorities to registered childcare providers supported over 900 vulnerable children and 9,600 critical workers' children (based on the latest estimates from local authorities between April and August 2020).

An independent review of C-CAS is being undertaken as part of the third annual evaluation of the Childcare Offer. During the evaluation parents and childcare providers will be contacted and asked for their views on both schemes and their use of childcare. Information will also be gathered from local authorities regarding the administration of the scheme and its take-up. We are hoping to publish a full evaluation report early next year.

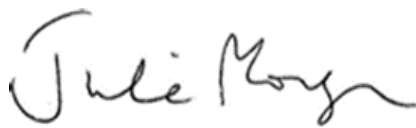
We are sorry that the petitioner was disappointed in the response by local authorities to summer holiday childcare provision. The £2.6m was split into two separate funds. £1.6m was directed via the Local Authority Emergency Hardship fund to enable local authorities to enhance the childcare and play opportunities for children and young people aged five to sixteen in their areas. The focus was predominately on those children and young people who needed additional support over the summer. Officials are gathering data on the outcome of the scheme and will report on this later in the year. A further £1m was allocated to fund provision for children and young people over the school summer holidays to help them to re-engage with education, giving them the opportunity to take part in activities which they might have missed out on whilst not at school such as socialising with their peers and physical activity. The funding was managed by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) on our behalf and we are expecting a report on how funding was used shortly. Local authorities were given flexibility to use the funding to benefit those who need it most in their areas but, priority was given where it could be demonstrated that funding was targeted on those who have missed out most whilst they were not attending school and there was also a requirement for activity to focus on the needs of vulnerable children in deprived communities.

We know that the pandemic has had and continues to have a profound impact on all our lives. Welsh Government announced last week a £320 million financial package to help

support our priorities and in particular to help support those most adversely affected by the Covid -19 crisis. Of this funding package £3.8 million in revenue funding has been allocated to support the childcare and play sector both in terms of recovery from the impact of Covid-19 and ongoing sustainability. The funding will help ensure that children have access to quality childcare and play provision and that families are supported with their childcare needs, enabling parents to work. £5m in capital funding has also been allocated to help settings meet the costs of adaptations to ensure premises can operate in a Covid-secure manner and for additional investment in play facilities to support access to play opportunities for children adversely impacted by the pandemic.

We hope the information we have provided has been helpful for both the committee and petitioner.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Morgan', written in a cursive style.

Julie Morgan AS/MS

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Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services