**Essex Early Years**

**Guidance for Early Years and Childcare settings on working in Partnership to support key worker and vulnerable children during COVID-19 response**

During the COVID-19 lockdown period, we are aware that a number of childcare settings have been asked or wish to provide continuity of care for key worker children. As a number of childcare settings having to close, you may wish to offer places to children whose usual setting is now unavailable.

To work in line with Government guidance, for childcare settings, and for businesses, there are a range of points to consider if you are intending to keep your business open.

Points for consideration;

* **Registering new children:** you need to follow your usual process for registering children to ensure your setting has all the appropriate permissions and relevant information for the child. You will need to discuss with the parent, the short-term nature of this placement so they are clear that this is a temporary measure.
* **Sustainability:** if you are staying open for key worker children, you may be operating at a lower than usual occupancy. You will need to calculate and forecast how long you can remain at least at breakeven point. Bear in mind:
  + The setting will be receiving FEEE as per your headcount
  + You are able to keep your fees in line with your business model and existing fee structure. However, please be mindful of ‘new’ parents that may not have the ability to make upfront payments such as deposits or registration fees.
  + If you are operating with a lower than usual staff number, you are able to furlough staff members who are not needed, with HMRC due to pay 80% of salaries (up to £2500)
* **Multiple/chain nursery provision working together to consolidate care offer - C**onsideration in this instance is for “chain” settings to pool resources to ensure at least one provision in an area remains open and adequately staffed
* **Childcare Settings “sharing” staff** - Are you able to start having some conversations with other childcare providers in your area? An opportunity may exist here for staff to pull together and be based at one location if this will enable one of the childcare settings to remain open.
  + Under existing registration arrangements a Childminder is able to work in a childcare setting under the 50% rule
  + If you are currently waiting for a DBS disclosure for a member of staff or volunteer, they can care for children if they are supervised by a member of staff who has a DBS check
  + If a staff member from another setting or childminder is registered for the live update service, you can use this
  + You will need to consider safeguarding, insurance and all Ofsted requirements in this instance
  + If your setting has workers from another setting, you need to agree with their employer, what personal information should be shared. As a minimum it should include personal contact information and identification, DBS disclosure reference number, emergency contacts, job description and qualification level.
  + We would recommend that you continue to pay your own staff, whilst they are working in another setting. This needs to be agreed by all parties.
* **All settings working to latest Health Guidelines –** Any and all staff working together must work in accordance with the latest Government guidance. There is an Essex Early Years checklist to support the implementation of these.
  + If a Paediatric First Aid certificate was due to be renewed after 16th March 2020, but the individual has not been able to access training and re-certified due to COVID-19, its validity can be extended up to three months.
* **Advertising places:** If you are open for key worker children and find that you have temporary vacancies then it is acceptable to advertise. However, you must be clear with families that they must be key workers and agree acceptable settling in arrangements. Contracts should reflect the temporary nature of the care where possible, to avoid confusion around availability of the place at a later date. Your regular registration process for a child should be followed.
* **Brokerage:** ECC Children’s Community Development Officers (CCDL’s) to facilitate locally, by supporting parents who are in need of a childcare place, and to identify nearby settings who are currently open for key worker children. CCDL’s will be communicating with open settings around the following:
  + What will your offer look like and how are you communicating and marketing this?
  + Is your provision open across the Easter Holiday Period and May Half term, including bank holidays?
  + Do you have the capacity to offer an out of school provision to siblings, or in partnership with a nearby school?
  + Understand the conflict to settings to stay open with greatly reduced occupancy.
* **Childminder Guidance:** We understand that Childminders have been advised to close by PACEY in line with Government guidance. If a childminder wishes to provide care for key worker children, they can which can include FEEE. As a Childminder you may wish to work in partnership with a school or childcare setting.
  + Childminders can work in a local group-based setting if there is a need. There needs to be an agreement as to whether they are paid as a self-employed subcontractor or as an employee
  + A Childminder can work in a childcare setting for up to 50% of their operating hours if they already have permission from OFSTED
  + Childminders who do not already have approval to work up to 50% of their time on non-domestic premises will need to seek approval from Ofsted, after seeking initial support from their CCDL.
  + Up to three Childminders can work together in the same domestic premises. If more than three childminders work together, they will need to apply to Ofsted to register childcare on domestic premises.
  + Four or more childminders (or a mix of four or more childminders and assistants) can work together in the same domestic premises, which would enable them to care for larger groups of children and still meet ratio requirements. Further details of [requirements for childminders and childcare on domestic premises](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/childminders-and-childcare-providers-register-with-ofsted/childminders-and-childcare-on-domestic-premises-registration#childcare-on-domestic-premises) is available.
  + Where possible, consider working throughout the Easter and May Half term holidays if you usually work term time only. Some childminders are also registered for overnight care and accommodate shift patterns including weekends.
* For any childminder working at home, on their own or with other childminders, you must consider:
  + How to adhere to the health and hygiene practices, including for family members.
  + How to communicate with parents regarding self-isolation guidelines
* **Business Financial support:** Government guidance is being updated daily as to how businesses will receive support through
  + Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will pay 80% of staff costs if they are unable to work due to the current crisis. This will be done through PAYE and back dated to 1st March 2020, to June 2020 initially. We are awaiting guidance on when and how this will be paid.
  + If you are registered with your District Council for Business Rates, your business may be eligible for a grant payment of either £10000 or £25000, depending on rateable value and if you currently have any exemptions or reductions. There has not been a date set for payments to be released. We advise that you regularly check information on your District Council website.
  + Any businesses that are registered for Business Rates, will not pay them for 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. You do not need to apply for this, as the district council should be able to process this automatically.

Guidance is being reviewed and changed frequently as this is a constantly changing situation. Therefore, we would advise you to check sources of information and support for you as a childcare provider and small business regularly, including:

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-business-support-grant-funding

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/covid19-coronavirus>

[www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)