Frequently Asked Questions for West Sussex Early Years and Childcare Providers – COVID-19 response

Updated 20 March 2020

These questions seek to provide additional information specific to West Sussex early years providers. In this document, where we refer to settings or providers, this includes all early years providers, groups settings and childminders.

Please make sure you continue to check the information on the government website to ensure you have the most up to date information:
Gov.UK – guidance around 'key workers'
Gov.UK - COVID-19: guidance for educational settings
NHS111
Public Health England
Public Health England (blog)
West Sussex County Council

Department for Education coronavirus telephone helpline:

- 0800 0468687 (0800-1800 Monday-Friday)
- DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Do I need to close my provision?

On 18 March 2020, the government announced that all schools, nurseries, private schools and sixth forms would close at the end of the day on Friday 20 March 2020. However, providers should remain open to provide childcare for children of key workers and vulnerable children unless they are unable to remain open due to staffing or being unable to use their premises.

Children of key workers should be provided with early years childcare where they cannot be kept safely at home. This group includes children with one parent or more who work in the following sectors:

- Health and social care
- Education and childcare
- Key public services
- Local and national government
- Food and other necessary goods
- Public safety and national security
- Transport
- Utilities, communication and financial services

Further details can be found in appendix 1.

Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care plans (EHCPs). As a local authority, we are identifying the children within West Sussex who meet the criteria for vulnerability. We are working with providers to ensure that these children continue to have access to safe, high quality early years provision, unless they are needing to self-isolate.

The effort to stop COVID-19 will only work if everyone takes immediate steps to socially distance themselves where possible. The decision to close schools and childcare settings is part of this effort and, hard as it may be, it will help stop the spread of the virus and help the whole country to more rapidly return to normal.

Please see appendix 1 for details. The guidance relates at least one parent or carer only being a key worker, but if the child can be safely looked after at home, then parents should try and do this in preference to accessing external childcare.

Do we need to see evidence that a parent is eligible to access a place?

You must ask parents to confirm their eligibility. It is up to your setting how you choose to do so. Parents must be reminded that although they are a key worker, if there is an adult at home who can care for the child then they should not take up a place at the setting in order to minimise the spread of Covid-19.

What do I do if a parent asks me to give their child a place in my provision but they are not included in the category of key worker or vulnerable?

It is important to remember that this is a government directive which we all need to abide by, has been implemented in the public interest. Families who are not eligible for provision within your setting should be encouraged to keep their child at home in line with the current government and Public Health England guidelines.

Will I need to repay fees to families who cannot access non-FE hours that they have already paid for?

This will depend on your Fee Policy and any agreement that the parents have signed. We would encourage all providers to operate in as flexible a way as possible to support their families as we all work our way through these exceptional circumstances. In these unprecedented times, we would hope that settings would not change their terms and conditions or fee structures at this point in time.

If parents currently in receipt of Extended FE hours are not working, will they lose their access to the extended offer?

We would expect you to encourage all parents in receipt of Extended FE (30 hours) at your setting to renew their codes now (before 31 March). This is regardless of whether they expect their working situation to change or not. This means they will know their eligibility for Summer term.

If a parent falls out of eligibility during the Summer term, they will fall into their Grace Period. This means that even if parents are no longer able to work in the Summer term, or their workplace closes, the Grace Periods should also cover them to the end of Autumn term.

The Grace Period will always cover parents who fall out of eligibility for 30 Hours for a period of time after their code expires. Whilst this isn't a permanent solution, it will support both you and the parents until the situation resolves itself and we receive further guidance from central government.

The majority of our children will need to stay but I need more staff. Can we share staff with other providers?

During this time, we will all need to work together to ensure that we can meet the needs within our community. As a local authority we are currently collecting the information we need to plan the provision across the county, which may include working flexibly across different providers. Individual providers will need to take responsibility for ensuring that all statutory requirements are adhered to. This will include completing all necessary paperwork and induction processes. Please make sure you are compliant with your insurance policy.

We have a child with inclusion funding but due to staff absences we cannot provide an enhanced ratio. What should we do?

We encourage all settings to work as flexibly as possible to support children's needs at this time. Please carry out your own risk assessments and speak to your EYCA to plan your support for the child. Inclusion funding will continue to be paid for the immediate future.

I only have one or two children of key workers/vulnerable, can I signpost the parents to access a place elsewhere?

We want to ensure that we are working in the best interests of children and it is likely to be better for them to access the provision that they are familiar with where possible. This will also be a good solution to manage the spread of Covid-19 as this closely aligns with the priority of social distancing.

Can I join up with another provider to provide care on alternate days?

During this time, we will all need to work together to ensure that we can meet the needs within our community. As a local authority we are currently collecting the information we need to plan the provision across the county, which may include working flexibly across different providers. Individual providers will need to take responsibility for ensuring that all statutory requirements are adhered to.

This will include completing all necessary paperwork and induction processes for staff and children. Please make sure you are compliant with your insurance policy.

We are looking after children of key workers but have to close, who sorts out where they move to?

West Sussex will support the brokerage process to support children in need of a place with an early years provider to access this.

Please email family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk or phone 01243 777807.

Please share this attached letter to those families who are eligible for early years and childcare provision.

We don't own the building and the building is closing. How do we support our families?

We are working to identify the children who need provision in early years and where they can access early years provision. We will offer a brokerage service to enable the families who need this provision to access this. Please share the letter attached with this document to any families in the categories entitled to childcare. Please inform the Family Information as soon as possible of your intention to close.

Do term time only providers need to stay open in the holidays?

Where possible, we would encourage childcare providers to continue to look after key workers' children and vulnerable children. If you identify a need to open over the holidays, please investigate the options for this by checking if the premises are available, inform Ofsted and make adjustments to insurance. Consideration needs to be given to the funded hours available per child and arrangements for additional hours. This would only be for children who meet the key worker or vulnerable child criteria.

If I am open, will I need to take key worker children from another provider who is closed?

During this time, we will all need to work together to ensure that we can meet the needs within our community. As a local authority we are currently collecting the information we need to plan the provision across the county, which may include working flexibly across different providers.

If we are open for one key worker child, would we be able to stay open for the other children who don't meet the criteria as well?

The government directive is for all providers to close but open for the children of key workers and for vulnerable children where possible. Guidance from Public Health England is that where children can be cared for at home, then this should be the first choice.

If a child who doesn't normally attend my setting needs to attend during this period, what paperwork do I need to complete?

Please complete the paperwork that you would usually complete when a child starts in your provision. Please ensure that your agreements acknowledge the temporary nature of the arrangement as appropriate. We would encourage you to be as flexible as possible in your terms and conditions and hours offered at this time. Where possible, please collect information from their usual setting in order to enable you to provide the best care for the child.
Further guidance around Free Entitlement funding will be shared in due course.

Will I be expected to support children with EHCPs that don't normally attend my setting?

Parents of children with EHCPs will want to make a decision about what the best arrangements are for their child. For those children that need to access early years and childcare provision but are unable to attend their current setting, the local authority will provide support, which may include additional adults to increase ratios. Ideally, if a practitioner from the setting they currently attend can provide this support, that is likely to be the best support for them to access and for their needs to be met.

If I am working within a childcare setting, can my children attend the setting with me?

The government directive is for all providers to close except for the children of key workers and for vulnerable children. This is to protect the public, so settings are not able to take additional children, even if they have space. School aged children of key workers, which includes early years practitioners, will be able to access a place at school if they cannot be cared for at home.

What support is there to keep my business going over this period?

The government has announced a series of measures to support businesses – information for employers and businesses can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19

Many of the national organisations are offering advice and support to providers – www.pacey.org.uk
www.ndna.org.uk

The Department for Education have confirmed the continuation of Free Entitlement funding for children already accessing early years education. Further details will be communicated in due course.

WSCC will also continue to honour the Inclusion funding already awarded for children.

We will do all we can to support you over his period. If you have any specific queries about your business sustainability, please contact your EYCA for support.

Will I be able to claim on my insurance for loss of earnings?

Individual providers will need to contact their insurance providers to check on their policy. Funding will still be paid for FE hours and settings are being asked to support vulnerable children and children of key workers. As with all issues, there are not currently any clear answers, but the government has promised to provide financial support if needed. We plan to work in partnership with you to ensure support to the most vulnerable while also supporting your business sustainability. We will keep you updated as we get more information.

If you have any additional questions, please email us at family.info.service@westsussex.gov.uk and title your email "Covid 19 setting query". We will review the questions and post answers at least daily over the coming weeks via the broadcast email.

Appendix 1

Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response include those who work in health and social care and in other key sectors outlined below. Many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. And every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.
Please, therefore, follow these key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.
3. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.
4. Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.
5. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

If your work is critical to the COVID-19 response, or you work in one of the critical sectors listed below, and you cannot keep your child safe at home then your children will be prioritised for education provision:

Health and social care

This includes but is not limited to doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributers of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

Education and childcare

This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who must remain active during the COVID-19 response to deliver this approach.

Key public services

This includes those essential to the running of the justice system, religious staff, charities and workers delivering key frontline services, those responsible for the management of the deceased, and journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting.

Local and national government

This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services such as the payment of benefits, including in government agencies and arms length bodies.

Food and other necessary goods

This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines).

Public safety and national security

This includes police and support staff, Ministry of Defence civilians, contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic), fire and rescue service employees (including support staff), National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas.

Transport

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

Utilities, communication and financial services

This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure), the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage), information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response, as well as key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors.

If workers think they fall within the critical categories above they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.