

Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast  
BT4 3SQ

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

## Dear Childcare Provider

The letter from Minister Swann, which was published on the Department's website on 21 March 2020, is attached.

This additional correspondence is being issued for 2 purposes:

1. To announce the launch of a Bespoke COVID-19 Approved Home Childcarer Scheme; and
2. To ask daycare providers if you are able to continue operating in current circumstances.

### 1. BESPOKE COVID-19 APPROVED HOME CHILDCARER SCHEME

Guidance on the **Approved Home Childcare – Bespoke scheme for duration of COVID-19 Pandemic** is attached setting out what the Scheme is, who it is targeted at, how it will operate and when it will end is attached. It includes guidance for individuals who may seek to become Approved Home Childcarers under the Scheme and parents. It should be noted that it is intended to meet the childcare needs of key workers (defined within the guidance and set out below) in what is probably the most difficult time in their working lives. We are asking for the support of daycare providers to link parents with workers in their current employment. We need this to progress as quickly as possible. This will enable us to determine quickly how much residual need for childcare exists and we are in the process of finalising other options. The bespoke scheme will be kept under review and updated, if necessary, to ensure that we continue meet the needs of key workers. In addition, only one parent is required to be in a key worker role. In the event that we are unable to meet the requests of all parents, it will be necessary to prioritise the needs of certain

groups of parents. The list below is in order of priority and, if necessary, we will prioritise accordingly. It is also intended to prioritise key workers with babies or toddlers.

## **2. QUESTION FOR DAYCARE PROVIDERS – ARE YOU ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO OPERATE IN CURRENT COVID-19 CIRCUMSTANCES OR ARE YOU INTENDING TO CLOSE?**

The Minister's letter indicates that we are intending to keep daycare and childminding going to meet the childcare needs of key workers and vulnerable children.

**By key worker we mean the following.** Please note these are in order of priority.

- i. Health and Social Care workers providing clinical care for those who have tested positive for COVID-19);*
- ii. Health and Social Care workers social workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; and safeguarding;*
- iii. All other Health and Social Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (e.g. PSNI/NIFRS/Prison Staff/Social Workers/Teachers in schools remaining open).*

### **By vulnerable child we mean:**

A child currently known to social services, who is:

- *in need;*
- *in need of protection (on the child protection register; or*
- *Looked after.*

The definition includes young carers, disabled children and those with Statements of special educational needs. If providers have questions about whether or not a child falls within the definition, these should be addressed to their local HSC Trust.

**We are now asking you to tell us whether you are able to remain open or are intending to close.** We know that some settings are already operating with significantly reduced numbers and we understand that you will want to take this into account in your decision-making. A survey has been set up for this purpose and details are included below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/D37H5XM>

To help you make a decision about continuing to stay open or close, we have attached high level guidance – **COVID-19 Advice for Childcare Providers**. It describes what will be required of you in safety terms to prevent or reduce the risk of

COVID-19 virus spread. The guidance also describes how current Day Care Standards will be relaxed to assist you to function in these very difficult circumstances and provide care in a different but safe way to children. The guidance document **COVID-19 Advice for Childcare Providers** is attached.

### **PARTIAL CLOSURE – FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

We appreciate that the restrictions in numbers of children who you can care for and safety requirements more generally will effectively mean partial closure for those of you who decide to continue to operate. We also appreciate that this will have financial implications for you. We accept that financial relief will be necessary as a result. We are only asking you to give us an **indication of your intentions** at this stage and more detail on financial relief will follow.

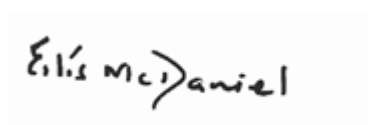
### **INDEMNIFICATION**

We understand that settings will not be covered by insurance if an event occurs, which is COVID-19 related. As a result, in line with the arrangement put in place between the Department of Education and schools, the Department of Health will indemnify settings, which agree to continue to operate. A formal letter of indemnification will issue from the Department of Health to those settings as part of an agreed arrangement with each setting.

### **WHAT YOU NEED TO DO NEXT?**

1. Share the Bespoke Approved Home Childcarer Guidance with your staff and parents and begin the process of linking staff and parents. Please do this as a matter of urgency.
2. Respond to the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/D37H5XM> by midday 24 March 2020.

Thank you for your ongoing support in unprecedented times.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eilís McDaniel".

**Eilís McDaniel**

**Department of Health**

