

Press Release

Minister Zappone chairs fifth meeting of Advisory Group on planned reopening of childcare services

3 June, 2020

Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone this week chaired the fifth meeting of the expert Advisory Group on the planned reopening of Early Learning and Care (ELC)/School-age Childcare services (SAC). The Group, together with the recently established Reference Group, are advising Government as work continues to implement the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. The Government's Roadmap sees crèches, childminders and preschools opening in phase 3 (29 June).

At the meeting, the Group were updated on ongoing work by Government on the development of a funding model for the reopening of the sector. It was agreed that the Department of Children & Youth Affairs will continue to closely liaise with providers in development of this model, through consultation with the Advisory Group and the Reference Group. The Group were also updated on the issuing of the Programme Support Payment (PSP), a total support package of €13 million which will issue this month. The PSP payments recognise the additional time required of providers to complete the administrative work associated with DCYA-funded early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. Providers can apply for the PSP through the Pobal portal.

Following the fourth meeting of the Group and first meeting of the Reference Group last week, HPSC public health guidelines for reopening were issued by the Department to the sector. Further guidance will continue to issue to the sector in the coming weeks. Childcare service providers are being asked to apply the public health guidance to their settings, to determine what capacity they can offer. If there is insufficient capacity for all children whose parents want them to return to the service on 29 June (the initial phase of reopening), childcare providers will be asked to prioritise the children of essential and frontline workers and vulnerable children. If there is sufficient capacity, services will be able to provide places for children who previously registered in childcare services on 12 March, whose parents continue to need childcare for employment or training purposes.

Speaking following the meeting, Minister Zappone said:

“As we continue to work towards the reopening of services at the end of this month, continued consultation and conversation with the childcare sector is more important than ever. My Department will continue to support the sector in work towards an orderly, safe and sustainable reopening of services. Extensive consultation with the sector is a key part of delivering this, and I want to thank each member of the Advisory Group and the Reference Group for their hard work and engagement. I want to encourage parents and providers to make contact with each other as the date for reopening approaches, so we can have as much information as possible on the level of demand and supply we are dealing with. The voice of parents needs to be heard loud and clear as we continue to work to implement the Government's Roadmap.”

ENDS

Notes to the Editor

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is prioritising the actions necessary for reopening full and part-time childcare services on 29 June. Once these are advanced, priority will move to planning for the resumption of ECCE (free pre-school programme) at the end of August.

Consultation

The Department is undertaking extensive consultation and research in developing the plan for phased reopening of childcare services. This includes the establishment of an expert Advisory Group to review and develop proposals. The Advisory Group includes representatives chosen by the sector, specifically the Association of Childhood Professionals, the National Community Forum, Early Childhood Ireland, the National Childhood Network, PLÉ and Seas Suas. The group also includes Tusla, Pobal, SIPTU and Childminding Ireland. Collectively members represent tens of thousands of providers and staff.

The Minister has also established a Reference Group, to supplement the work of the Advisory Group on phased service reopening, and to give an opportunity for input to provider representatives who are not on this group. The Minister chaired the first meeting of the Reference Group on the 28 May.

The HPSC guidelines for childcare providers can be found on the DCYA website here; <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8ffc9-covid-19-infection-prevention-and-control-guidance-for-settings-providing-childcare-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

The Programme Support Payment (PSP)

Programme Support Payments (PSPs) were introduced by Minister Zappone in 2017. The payments recognise the additional time required of providers to complete the administrative work associated with DCYA-funded early learning and care and school age childcare programmes. The payment also recognises the time required to perform activities outside of contact time with children, such as preparing materials for early learning and care sessions and assisting parents.