



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Cost of living crisis: information for childcare and playwork settings

Advice if you need to make operational changes and where to go for further help and support.

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Introduction

This advice has been drafted to support childcare and playwork settings with potential impacts of the costs of living crisis.

The advice aims to support settings to make operational decisions that are appropriate and within the requirements of the National Minimum Standards, as well as signposting further advice and support.

Before seeking to make any operational changes, settings should ensure that they have a full and complete picture of their finances and where other cost savings can potentially be made. Any operational changes should be fully risk assessed before implementation.

Operational Impacts

How can I balance the increase in food costs with the need to ensure children have balanced meals and healthy snacks?

There are a variety of food and snacks that can be offered and still meet healthy eating guidelines, as outlined in [Food and Nutrition for Childcare Settings](#).

It is well understood that children need to eat the right balance of energy and nutrients to have healthy growth and development, to achieve a healthy weight and to help protect against certain diseases. The childcare setting can play an important part in this, by providing nutritious food in the right amounts and by creating an environment that encourages children to develop positive attitudes to food and their health.

All children under 5 years who attend approved day care facilities in Wales are able to receive 189ml (1/3 pint) of milk each day, free of charge under the **Nursery Milk Scheme**.

Settings may be able to access grants to support with food costs.

How can I continue to provide a range of quality play and learning activities for children?

Children attend childcare and play settings to experience a variety of nurturing and supporting experiences and to explore play. There is no prescription when it comes to what activities should be undertaken or what resources should be used but the NMS does emphasise the importance of activities and provides some key points to consider in Standard 7, including the importance of freely chosen self-directed play and play both indoors and outdoors.

Loose parts, for example, are essential to a childcare or play setting and children's holistic development. Loose parts are absolutely anything that children can utilise in their play; cardboard boxes, drain pipes, yogurt pots, plastic milk bottles, twigs, pebbles, leaves - the list is endless. Quality play and learning can be supported with everyday items and does not rely on expensive resources.

Further advice is available from:

- **Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY Cymru)**
- **Early Years Wales** (Early years settings)
- **National Day Nursery Association Cymru** (Day nurseries)
- **Clybiau Plant Cymru Kid's Clubs** (Out of school clubs and holiday provision)
- **Mudiad Meithrin** (Welsh medium provision)
- **Play Wales** (Open access play)

How can I look to make energy savings while still meeting regulatory requirements?

Settings should consider their current use of energy and whether any small steps can be taken to reduce costs (switching off lights when room not in use, using a timer for the heating etc).

Any significant change in the use of equipment such as boilers should be risk-assessed to ensure that requirements of the NMS can continue to be met. For example, if boilers are turned off over the weekend, settings need to ensure that they are switched back on in enough time to enable an appropriate temperature to be reached for the session start time.

The ability to store food safely and to have warm running water is outlined as a requirement in the NMS and so the switching off of fridges and boilers is not advised.

Turning off fridges, even temporarily, can impact the safety of food as fridges should (according to [Food Standards Agency advice](#)) have a temperature of less than 5°C.

The Food Standards Agency offers safe food advice for [small businesses](#) as well as a specific [guide for childminders](#).

[Business Wales](#) provide advice on approaches to reducing energy consumption that are also environmentally friendly.

I'm a childminder, can I spend the day at a play/activity centre or at another childminder's house to cut down on my energy usage?

Childminders are defined as providing a service from a domestic setting and so while visits to play/activity centres may form part of a childminder's provision, it would not be expected that a childminder would provide a full day of care from another location where they are not registered.. It is highly unlikely that spending all day at a play, or activity centre would provide children with a variety of experiences – including time to relax – sufficient to meet their needs.

If you choose to spend any part of the day at the home of a fellow registered childminder you and your fellow childminder must ensure that all requirements concerning the maximum number of minded children in the household at any one time are met. Parents of any minded children should also be informed in advance of any changes to either childminder's normal patterns of working. A childminder's registered setting should however, be the main location of their business.

What is the required legal minimum temperature of our setting for staff and children?

The National Minimum Standards set out a minimum indoor temperature of 18 degrees for childcare and play settings.

Settings would need to consider changes to the temperature of the environment in which they are operating and the service and activities on offer. This could include considerations of outdoor play, use of ventilation and whether children are appropriately dressed (particularly whether younger children and babies who are less mobile are warm enough).

My setting has an outdoor space. Is there a limit on how much time children can spend outside in the winter, if appropriately clothed? Is this different if the area is partially covered so doesn't get wet?

Outdoor provision is encouraged. There are no limitations on how much time can be spent outdoors, but use of outdoor provision should be proportionate to the children being cared for, the environment and weather conditions.

Can we ask parents to provide additional layers so their children can put them on if it get cold?

Parents can be asked to provide additional clothing for children if it is felt to be required, particularly if there is a mix of indoor and outdoor play.

Can the NMS ratio requirements be relaxed to help settings cope during this period?

There are no plans to relax any NMS requirements at this time.

Advice and Support:

I've done all I can, but I still can't afford the increasing costs. What financial help is there for my setting?

Settings (excluding childminders) are able to benefit from the energy cap for businesses which is set to be in place from October until April. It will be reviewed

following this date.

If you are still concerned about energy costs, we would advise that you speak to your energy supplier as a starting point and ask them if you can arrange a payment plan.

If you are renting a premises, we would advise you speak to your landlord.

Further advice for small businesses who are struggling with energy bills is available from [Citizens Advice](#). Settings can contact their [local authority](#) childcare lead who may be able to provide advice and support.

[Cwlwm](#) partners, [Community Foundation Wales](#) and Community Voluntary Councils may be able to support access to available revenue and capital grants.

I am worried about the impact of the crisis on the mental health and well-being of my staff. What support is available?

Support for settings and staff is available via Social Care Wales' [Health and Wellbeing Framework](#).

Support is also available from the following sources:

- [Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years \(PACEY Cymru\)](#)
- [Early Years Wales](#) (Early years settings)
- [National Day Nursery Association Cymru](#) (Day nurseries)
- [Clybiau Plant Cymru Kid's Clubs](#) (Out of school clubs and holiday provision)
- [Mudiad Meithrin](#) (Welsh medium provision)
- [Play Wales](#) (Open access play)

Further advice is available from Welsh Government on [help with the cost of living](#).

What support is available for parents?

Advice on the available [help paying for childcare](#) is available from the Welsh Government, this covers advice on Tax Free Childcare and support for students.

Parents may also benefit from the advice available on more [general financial support](#).

Where can I get help in planning for the winter and potentially unexpected events?

The Welsh Government has developed [Emergency Planning and Response Guidance for Education and Childcare Settings](#).

The Guidance provides non-statutory guidance to help all education and childcare settings respond to a wide range of emergencies. While it does not cover every aspect of what settings should do in relation to emergency planning, it outlines and provides advice on some key areas of consideration.

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