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The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

SENT VIA EMAIL: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State,

Covid-19 Restrictions: Variations relating to Childcare

We write on behalf of the leadership of Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull Councils.

We are grateful for the support you and your team are providing to us, showing how a joined up public health system can work at a local and national level to protect the health of our residents.

As local councils in areas with national intervention we are acutely aware of the impact of restrictions on daily life. It is vital that any measures are applied in a way that people can build into their lives, as compliance at scale is key to managing COVID and reducing our rates. We are writing to ask for variations in the current restriction guidelines in relation to childcare to help with this.

We request that the childcare guidelines in areas with household visiting restrictions should be urgently updated to the following:

- Allow the social bubble to expand to a household and a single two-person household for the purposes of childcare: this would allow grandparents who are often active carers to continue childcare responsibility in a defined and limited way
- Update the national guideline to allow registered childminders or a single designated family member to provide child-care into the family home

We are all experiencing significant issues with compliance and concerns being raised about this issue, including in the public sector where the isolation of bubbles

of children from schools is already raising workforce capacity concerns in local acute hospitals and schools. This amendment would also be consistent with the current exemption for nannies, recognising that many families rely on family members for support.

It is important to highlight that in all three areas we have not seen any evidence of family childcare arrangements being a vector for transmission and the number of cases in children, especially young children, remains very low. We are however seeing significant levels of concern from public sector organisations and members of the public about the impact and we have included some additional data as an annex to this letter provided by our Directors of Public Health.

We are asking for your support in moving forward on this specific area at pace so we can find a pragmatic and practical resolution for areas that follow us into these national interventions.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Ward
Leader of Birmingham City Council

Councillor Ian Courts
**Leader of Solihull Metropolitan
Borough Council**

Councillor Maria Crompton
**Leader of Sandwell Metropolitan
Borough Council**

Data Annex:

Birmingham

- 67% (1208 out of 1802 cases) were aged 15 – 49 for the 2 week period from 30th of August to 12th of September
- 2.5% of cases were in the 0-5yr age group, a total of 50 cases in a population estimated at
- Transmission locally appears to be primarily large extended family or social gatherings behind closed doors and workplace transmission, there is no evidence for childcare arrangements driving transmission between households.

Sandwell

- Over two thirds of cases in the last 2 weeks were aged between 15 and 49, therefore very unlikely to be due to children being cared for by grandparents.
- 40% of our cases have been in households where there is at least one other case, suggesting transmission within the household.
- Our in-house contact tracing service is finding a significant proportion of outbreaks in large social gatherings, including large extended family gatherings. We have not yet had one which was caused by grandparents caring for children.

Solihull

- 60% of reported cases to date in September were aged 15-29 and our average age of cases has fallen to 36.
- 32% of cases have been due to household transmission, often involving a family members in their late teens or early 20s.
- Our in-house contact tracing identifying patterns of transmission linked a mix of workplaces, some hospitality and sporadic case but no identified links to informal childcare.