

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

1st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 19
January 2022

PE1883: Open all toddler and baby activities
within Tier 3 of COVID-10/future pandemic
lockdowns

Note by the Clerk

Lodged: 28 June 2021

Petitioner Katrina Clark

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government
to allow baby and toddler activities to be considered equally with other
indoor activities in Tier 3 of future lockdowns.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1883>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [Wednesday 3 November 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government, Play Scotland and educational psychologists.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and responses to information requests are provided for the Committee's consideration.

Background

3. During its consideration of this petition, the Committee received 4 written submissions.
4. In its previous submission, the Scottish Government detailed a number of initiatives and programmes introduced by the Scottish Government to support children and young people through the pandemic, including in relation

to play and wellbeing. The Scottish Government also stated that due to the fluid nature of the pandemic, it was not in a position to rule out further Covid-19 related restrictions or advise on what these might be.

5. The Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government to seek its views on the petitioner's latest submission.

Scottish Government submission

6. The Scottish Government addresses each point raised by the Committee on the petitioner's behalf.
7. The Committee queried why if written guidance was in place in late 2020 to allow baby and toddler groups to re-open many of these did not re-open until spring of 2021. The Committee also asked whether the Scottish Government had carried out any analysis to establish why this might be the case.
8. The Scottish Government states that no formal analysis has been carried out in relation to baby and toddler groups. The Scottish Government has, however, engaged with member organisations for various baby and toddler activities and identified that the challenges in reopening specific activities were not always directly related to the pandemic.
9. Early Years Scotland, Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) and Play Scotland were included in the Scottish Government's £20m investment through the '[Get into Summer](#)' programme. It states that small grant funds were set up to support smaller organisations, where cost was one of the main barriers.
10. The petitioner noted that as restrictions eased, there appeared to be a divergence between different age groups being able to socialise – e.g. pubs and cafes were allowed to open, but soft play facilities were amongst the last to do so. The Committee asked the Scottish Government which factors contributed to this and how it would ensure that people of all ages were treated equally, should any future restrictions be required.
11. The Scottish Government states that the COVID-19 restrictions were informed by four harms considerations alongside advice from senior clinicians and public health experts which is set out in its [framework for decision making](#). It is noted Children's Rights Impact Assessments and for Business Regulatory Impact Assessments were undertaken at each stage of the pandemic. The submission lists the main risk factors taken into consideration for soft play centres.

12. The Committee also asked the Scottish Government to set out, in the event that indoor activities had to close again, how it would ensure that funding for outdoor activities was made more accessible to parents.
13. In response, the Scottish Government outlined several initiatives linked to outdoor play. These included:
 - The Outdoor Community Play Fund (launched in March 2020) for children and families in disadvantaged communities;
 - £500,000 available in the Fund to support 25 charities across Scotland in delivering organised outdoor play and equipment;
 - A commitment in its Programme for Government to invest £60m to renew playparks across Scotland.
14. The Committee also queried how children aged 0-3 years old would be prioritised in any Covid-19 recover plans, including in relation to socialisation.
15. The Scottish Government states in its submission that it is currently working with Public Health Scotland to understand more fully what impacts from the pandemic might be, using evidence gathered throughout, and actions that could be taken to ameliorate some of that impact.

Petitioner submission

16. In her most recent submission, the petitioner highlights that there are similar risks associated with baby and toddler groups to those assessed for soft play centres, yet soft play centres were allowed to open in Tier 3 and baby and toddler groups were not.
17. The petitioner also explains that many baby and toddler groups are run by people in the community who hire out spaces such as church halls. She suggests that this impacts on whether a community is located near a charity that can access resources such as the Outdoor Community Play Fund.
18. She also highlights concerns about health visitor support for parents of young children during the pandemic, as appointments were often taken over the phone.
19. The petitioner has suggested a further series of questions for the Scottish Government:
 - Will soft play centres be allowed to be open at tier 3 if future restrictions were to take place when it seems that they pose the same risk as baby and toddler groups?

- Will you make future funding like this available to other baby and toddler activities that have a non-charitable status but have a proven track record of doing good work for their group and provide a vital support for parents and their young ones?
- Will there be research conducted surrounding the effects developmentally of the pandemic on this age group of children and possible solutions/programmes to allow children to catch up with where they should be able to thrive?

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting –

- [PE1883/C - Scottish Government submission of 3 December 2021](#)
- [PE1883/D - Petitioner submission of 10 January 2021](#)