

## **Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1883](#): Open all toddler and baby activities within Tier 3 of COVID-19 /future pandemic lockdowns, lodged by Katrina Clark**

### **Background**

This petition is 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 (more usually called level 3 in Scotland) of any future lockdowns.

The petitioner states that, while they understand the need for public health restrictions over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is also a need to ensure that children are not unfairly disadvantaged. The petitioner goes on to state that soft play centres should be able to reopen at the same time as other indoor activities, following good hygiene guidance and using the test and trace system. Waiting lists for baby and toddler groups are also highlighted, and the petitioner states that young children have been isolated as a result of not having access to these groups.

The petitioner states they have contacted Scottish Labour MSP Jackie Baillie, who responded via email to give her full support.

### **Parent and baby groups**

In September 2020, the Scottish Government issued guidance on parent and baby groups, which stated that no more than five adults could attend a class. [The guidance has since been updated; the list of updates can be viewed on the Scottish Government website.](#)

In October 2020, a petition on restrictions on attendance to parent and baby classes being capped at five adults maximum resulted in MSPs highlighting the issue in the Scottish Parliament. [Scottish Liberal Democrat MSP Alex Cole-Hamilton raised the issue at First Minister's Question Time on 1 October 2020, asking for the cap on numbers to be reviewed.](#) First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP agreed to do this, and the Scottish Government published updated

guidance on 5 October 2020. [This stated that the maximum number of adults present in groups where children were under 12 months could change to 10. For groups where children were over 12 months, the limit would stay at 5.](#)

Announcing the change, the First Minister stated that the government understood the “vital importance of parent and baby groups, especially for supporting mental health and wellbeing in the early months after having a baby”.

She added that the updated guidance sought to strike the right balance between supporting mental health and wellbeing and trying to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Over the winter lockdown from 4 January 2021 until 12 March 2021, a Stay at Home order was in place and parent and baby groups were not permitted. [Upon easing in March 2021, for those living in Level 4 areas, only outdoor parent/baby and toddler groups could go ahead, with no more than 15 adults present at any one time with a group of under 5s.](#) For those living in Level 3 areas, indoor parent and baby groups were once again permitted.

The Scottish Government website currently states the ‘guidance is under review and will be updated to reflect the current situation’.

## **Soft play**

Under the Scottish Government COVID-19 restrictions, soft play centres are required to remain closed in levels 2-4, but can re-open in levels 0 and 1 if they comply with guidelines around ventilation, face coverings, cleaning, managing and operating the soft play frame, taking bookings and holding parties. [Guidance for the soft play sector is set out on the Scottish Government website.](#)

Many soft play centres have been closed since March 2020. [Soft play business owners held a demonstration outside the Scottish Parliament on 8 June 2021 in protest at the ongoing restrictions.](#) The Scottish soft play owners’ management group said that the reasons why restrictions for the sector were tougher than for other leisure activities, such as ten pin bowling, were unclear.

[The Scottish Government announced in October 2020 that one-off grants of up to £50,000 were to be made available to soft play businesses, with grant awards based on rateable value.](#)

[On 2 June 2021, Finance Secretary Kate Forbes MSP announced additional funding for Local Authority Discretionary Funds, which included £7.5m to support hospitality, including soft play in Level 2 areas.](#)

[On 15 June 2021, the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland commented that further delay to the reopening of soft play centres in Level 2 areas would be “unforgivable” without further support.](#)

## **Key Organisations and relevant links**

[Change.org petition: Increase adults permitted in parent and baby classes so they can run](#) – Petition from October 2020, which attracted over 17,000 signatures and led to the Scottish Government reviewing the guidelines. This petition has now closed.

[Parent Club](#) – The Scottish Government’s website for parents.

[Play Scotland](#) – Organisation developing and promoting play for children and young people in Scotland.

[NCT](#) – The UK’s leading charity for parents

[Federation of Small Businesses Scotland](#) – Membership body representing small businesses in Scotland.

**Lynne Currie**  
**Senior Researcher**  
**14/07/2021**

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe),  
an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The  
Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP