

Written evidence submitted by from Bethany Power, witness and petition signatory (GRC0015)

With some feedback from other Mums and having the time to reflect on the meeting we had on Thursday 7th. I thought I would express my views and concerns. It may help, it may not.

Regarding the Parliamentary meeting we had on Thursday 7th with the Committee, I think it went well considering the time however it still felt limiting with the amount of time we had to speak. Lots was mentioned about the help we are currently missing as new Mums, the mental health impact on Mums, babies, virtual classes and health care help.

Many good points were made. They were interested in what's happening with getting virtual help, care and classes, which will help, as we are currently living in a 'make do' situation and this would be the next best thing. It was great they were taking mental health seriously.

Within the meeting a couple of points were a little off topic. I think a little more should have been said about the difficulties with looking after a young baby at present, with no family/friend help whilst some Dads are key workers. Making new Mums feel even more isolated. Also the difficulties of returning to work, which for us working Mums is a very important topic. For most, We don't live in a generation where it is possible to live on a single wage, still able to afford mortgages and bills.

Finding a nursery at present is very difficult. It would have been hard before but now even more so. Nurseries are having funding difficulties and lack of staff issues. Where I live there are more children than Nurseries already. Nurseries at present are not comfortable in looking after babies due to social distancing measures and there is not enough equipment. It's impossible to social distance themselves, whilst looking after our vulnerable babies or young children, giving the care of 1-1 handling, feeding & changing. Or even for young babies and children to social distance themselves from each other or from toys. Very concerning whilst we want to protect everyone from Covid-19, it's heart-breaking. Childminders looking after babies from different households is very worrying, until we have a vaccine or treatment. There is a possibility of nurseries having to look after babies / children at a much lower ratio is probably the action they are going to have to make. Certainly, unable to provide a service for all safely. Due to covid-19 Nurseries don't allow nursery tours or introductions. Us new parents will be so heartbroken to be expected to leave our babies at the front door without any introduction into that setting! Surely it would have a massive negative effect on our babies if this had to be done?

Following from nurseries, more should of been said about the worry and lack of social developments for our babies. We feel we are just expected to cope with our

babies not having no social interaction with others for months or at all. We are worried as they haven't had no introduction to the outside world. We are worried about them being left without Mum or Dad. The worry about them being left with strangers. The worry of them finding it difficult to engage with other babies. All things that our babies have missed completely since they were perhaps born or from the near beginning, like my baby. Returning to work in that sense is so scary for new parents and babies! With no means of preparing or easing them into the world.

It's sad that our free health care classes are shut down due to covid-19. Most virtual classes are to be paid for. Meanwhile I do think it's great there are so many companies doing so with many to choose. They can aid in how you can bond and play with your baby. Help to improve some of their developments and to help you find interesting items around the house that you thought was junk for them to play with. However like many of us Mums I know haven't fully enjoyed them. Many of us have had to stop halfway to feed, change or rock baby, however at least when attending a physical class our babies could still hear and watch the class happening. With virtual classes there is a massive socialising gap for parents and babies. This is probably one of the main reasons why we join, alongside learning. There is lack of help for a parent trying to do a class with baby, with lack of support and equipment. Let me speak more on my experience, I paid for a block of 7 Baby Sensory Classes before lockdown, where after 3 of them they had to shut down the facilities and go virtual. Completely understandable, I think they did the best they could. Meanwhile myself and other Mums didn't enjoy our experience of virtual classes but absolutely loved the physical classes! I wish I explained this better in the Parliamentary meeting when this was spoken about. The biggest thing all of us Mums found hard for us and baby, the music isn't good through listening to someone else's speaker through a tv or laptop and trying to get baby engage via a screen isn't great! Due to both of us trying to engage and learn from a screen our babies becomes irritable and we find we have to stop constantly. We still found it difficult when we attended a free one from another company. It just felt ineffective. During this lockdown, each day feels like survival. Many times us Mums are feeling low, whilst trying to hold it together. Going to a physical class would pick us Mums up and help to better our moods. I think to even make virtual classes work there needs to be more work and funding. Although we can't forget the benefits of physical classes that help Mums and babies massively (socially, developing, bonding and supporting). Also giving the babies and young children a familiar feel of what perhaps a nursery setting would feel like. We also can't forget the classes we can't make virtual i.e. swimming lessons.

I definitely think we need more help from Health Visitors, more now than ever. Our free weigh in clinics, breastfeeding clinics and weaning courses have all been stopped. There needs to be a way where we can get breastfeeding, feeding & weaning support and able to get help if we feel at all worried or concerned. Currently we are ringing up our health visitors, leaving a voicemail, whilst waiting days for any response. Some of us Mums are dealing with babies with bad colic, reflux, CMPA or

undiagnosed condition or disabilities. Our weigh in clinics used to help us Mums speak about our worries of baby and reassure that our babies are weighing and developing correctly.

Us Maternity Mums too, get free NHS dental care. Which for most haven't been able to use yet due to Covid-19. With our maternity leave ending, we could be faced to not being about to afford to get our teeth looked at, when they are most vulnerable due to hormonal changes.

Although some will not understand unless they are faced with this situation. We are so distraught of the experience of our current Maternity Leave, something that was planned. Like me, most of us Mums are still healing from labour, physically and mentally (PTSD), unable or difficult to see our GP's, physiotherapist or gynaecologist for diagnosis, treatment or support. Some mums are dealing with premature babies, whilst they are classed to be the same weeks as full term babies. Our first precious moments that we should be having have been dampened by some elements of fear, loneliness and mental health issues. Many new Mums, including me are scared to have anymore children, as we don't want to go through this difficulty ever again.

Under the Furlough scheme, staff receiving 80% of their pay. The company I work 'Health and Leisure' aren't currently working at the moment. Us Mums have found it hard not to compare the difference of wages between Furlough and Maternity. However we can't be furloughed as our protection of Maternity Leave on a Furlough contract would be gone. Our protection of leave is far more important. However my employment company contacted me, as I get Company Occupational Maternity Pay for some part of my Maternity Leave. Due to COVID-19 I have been told, "As my employer pays contractual maternity pay, they can put me on furlough during my maternity leave. This will allow your employer to claim up to 80% of the cost of your contractual maternity pay. However, you are not entitled to normal 'remuneration' (salary) during maternity leave so you cannot ask to be put on furlough during your maternity leave in order to receive normal pay instead of SMP. If you want to stop receiving your maternity pay you will need to give notice to end your maternity leave and pay but bear in mind that this means you will have to return to work when furlough ends". This certainly makes us vulnerable new Mums, who worked hard prior and planned to have time off on Maternity Leave at a further financial strain whilst trying to pay for a mortgage and bills.

In conclusion, whilst we can't control COVID-19 until we get a vaccine or treatment. Us Mums feel to even have continuation of paid Maternity Leave from 39 to 52 weeks until our babies are at least 1 years old would support us massively. It would hopefully aid more time for the Government and Health community to help all parents and babies. It would give us more time to find a nursery and hopefully support baby into the world before returning to work. It will hopefully aid us Mums

more time to speak to our employer who are on furlough leave for when they return and to not to have us vulnerable Mums made redundant with our employer also.