

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 March 2020

Dear Mr Williamson,

We note the publication of the above guidance, primarily intended to provide clarity as to what sectors of the workforce are defined as “key” to our ongoing national response to the COVID- 19 crisis and who may therefore require assistance to ensure that they are able to continue to work rather than now remain at home to look after their children.

We are disappointed to note that there is no specific mention of local government Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) or Port Health Officers within this list and we would wish to raise our concerns in terms of the impact on public safety and health protection if the EH workforce is not afforded this support in the same way as other key professionals in the public health workforce.

We note that the guidance differs from the statement made by the NI Education Minister yesterday evening which we believe much better included those EHPs working at the front line of public health and protection within local authorities, not just in Northern Ireland, but across the UK.

Specifically, the NI Ministers statement as far as local government is concerned said “ key Local Government staff”. That clearly in our view would have included EHOs. That should have been the line in the guidance issued by your department in our view. However the guidance issued this morning states, in relation to Local Government, “this only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response, or delivering essential public services, such as the payment of benefits.”

We would therefore ask for your confirmation that EHOs in local government, including those working in Port Health, right across the UK, are included in this definition of key workers.

I look forward to your response

Kind regards,

Gary McFarlane

CIEH Northern Ireland Director