

Flying Start: Outreach

February 2018



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Flying Start: Outreach

February 2018



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016 to examine legislation and hold the Welsh Government to account by scrutinising its expenditure, administration and policy matters, encompassing (but not restricted to): the education, health and well-being of the children and young people of Wales, including their social care.

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1. Background

In May 2017 the Children, Young People and Education Committee decided to undertake a short inquiry into the outreach elements of the Flying Start programme. This inquiry emerged from of its **overarching work on the First 1,000 Days** of a child's life.

Our inquiry

1. Flying Start was introduced in 2007 and is regarded by the Welsh Government as one of its flagship programmes. The Welsh Government's programme for government for 2016-2021, 'Taking Wales Forward', commits to its continuation. Flying Start is delivered by local authorities and within defined geographical areas. Flying Start outreach arrangements (outreach) were introduced in 2014 in response to concerns that the postcode entitlement to the services was resulting in the exclusion of some children who may be in greatest need of support.
2. During the course of the inquiry, the Committee examined evidence drawn from responses to its earlier **First 1,000 Days consultation**, received four additional written submissions and held evidence sessions with five organisations. In November 2017, the Committee concluded its evidence gathering by scrutinising the Minister for Children and Social Care.
3. We would like to thank all those who have taken the time to contribute to this inquiry by giving evidence. Lists of those who gave oral and written evidence are included at Annexes A and B to this report respectively.

Terms of reference

4. The inquiry focused its work on the following key areas:
 - The outreach requirement for local authorities to identify children living outside defined Flying Start areas who would benefit from Flying Start services.
 - The extent to which sufficient Flying Start funding is provided to reflect outreach delivery plans and whether the workforce capacity is sufficient to deliver the programme and its outreach elements.

- The evidence on outcomes for parents and children in Flying Start areas compared to the outcomes for parents and children in areas that are most similar in terms of deprivation levels but are not Flying Start areas.

Why the Committee has looked at this issue

5. The early years Flying Start programme has been consistently emphasised as one of the Welsh Government's top priorities for tackling poverty. It has four key elements: free part-time childcare for two to three-year-olds, an enhanced health visiting service, access to parenting support and access to early language development support.

6. The programme has targeted areas according to measures of relative disadvantage, including the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, free school meals and the proportion of children under four in households receiving income related benefits. Flying Start therefore seeks to support the most disadvantaged families, communities and young children. Its services are universally available to all children from birth in the areas in which it runs.

7. The outreach aspect of the programme allows local authorities to deliver all four core elements of Flying Start to a small percentage of their population who live outside designated Flying Start areas.

8. However, whilst there is support for the Flying Start programme, responses to the Committee's pre-inquiry consultation on the First 1,000 Days of a child's life set out that geographical targeting of the programme has the potential to create further inequality by excluding a significant number of children living in poverty. Furthermore, the Committee noted the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014 Report's warning that:

“Around 1 in 5 of the people in income benefit households live in the most deprived 10 per cent of areas in Wales. This means that although it is true to say that deprivation is much more concentrated in some areas than others, 4 out of 5 people in income benefit households live outside these areas. This is important to remember when targeting resources, as targeting those ‘most deprived’ areas leads to some households in those areas who may not be deprived being included and many deprived households living in less deprived areas missing out.”¹

¹ Statistics for Wales, **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014: revised**, 2014

9. The Committee therefore agreed to take evidence on how effective existing outreach work is and whether the programme should be developed to increase its reach.

Our report

10. Due to the focus of this short inquiry, we have limited our reporting to evidence and our views in specific areas. We have not sought to provide a detailed summary of all of the evidence received – further details of this can be found via the annexes to the report. Such additional evidence would include discussion around the services provided in respect of the wider Flying Start programme, for example speech and language therapy.

2. The outreach element of Flying Start and the structure of the wider programme

This chapter summarises evidence relating to arrangements for the outreach element of Flying Start and its place within the structure of the wider programme.

Background

11. Flying Start was initially targeted on the catchment areas of schools in deprived areas. The expansion of the scheme from 2011 resulted in revised criteria and funding was allocated according to the estimated number of 0-3 year olds living in income benefit households in local authority areas in lower super output areas.²

12. In 2014, the Welsh Government issued Flying Start Outreach Guidance,³ requiring local authorities to identify children living outside defined Flying Start areas who would also benefit from Flying Start services. The guidance allows local authorities to choose from a suite of options in terms of outreach, which they are then required to outline within their Flying Start Delivery Plans. The guidance confirms that the objectives of outreach work are to:

- Extend the reach of Flying Start to families with identified need living in non-Flying Start areas;
- Provide an element of flexibility in the delivery of the programme by local authorities; and
- Provide continuity of support to children and families moving out of Flying Start areas, or for whom there needs to be continuity of provision before being in receipt of other services or provision.

² “Lower layer super output areas” (LSOAs) are geographic areas which enable a hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales. One LSOA will have population between 1,000 and 3,000, and contain between 400 and 1,200 households.

³ Welsh Government, **Flying Start - Annex: Outreach Guidance**, September 2014

13. More recent 2017 guidance⁴ states that three groups of children are eligible for outreach:

- Children moving out of Flying Start areas;
- Children outside of Flying Start areas; and
- Communities of interest, with Flying Start teams having autonomy to decide which groups in their areas would benefit most from specific elements of Flying Start.

14. Anecdotal evidence from committee Members' own constituencies and regions suggested that children in one area had not benefitted from spare capacity in a neighbouring Flying Start area.

Evidence presented to the Committee

15. Whilst respondents were supportive of the ability to offer outreach services as part of the Flying Start programme, the Committee heard some concerns regarding the targeting of resources resulting from the postcode restrictions, and the current limitations of outreach.

16. A key concern raised regarding the outreach service itself was its limited capacity resulting from budgetary restrictions. The financing of outreach is discussed further in chapter 3 of this Report. In written evidence, the All Wales Flying Start Managers' Network told the Committee that:

“The Outreach element has to be very carefully managed so as to not raise family expectations unrealistically due to the numbers being small nationally and targeted at the most vulnerable.”⁵

17. The relative size of outreach services compared with the wider Flying Start programme was explained further in oral evidence by Alison Cowell of Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board:

“It's very small. So, in some counties, you're talking five children that will be in receipt of the outreach elements.”⁶

⁴ Welsh Government, **Flying Start Financial Management Guidance 2017-18**

⁵ Written evidence, FS 03 – All Wales Flying Start Managers' Network

⁶ Children, Young People and Education Committee Record of Proceedings (“RoP”), para 7, 26 October 2017

18. A specific example of the difficulties arising from the size of the outreach service was given in written evidence by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists:

“...children living in poverty suffer disproportionately from transient early language delay... There has been significant progress in Wales in recent years on early language development....However we remain concerned that many young children living in poverty in Wales are unable to access the support offered by Flying Start given the limitations around outreach. Too many are entering school without the speech, language and communication skills needed to fully access the Foundation Phase.”⁷

19. A significant amount of the evidence provided to the Committee during the inquiry advocated increased flexibility in the wider Flying Start programme. Several respondents questioned the postcode basis of targeting resources. For example, the Welsh NHS Confederation told the Committee:

“Greater flexibility is needed to be given locally to use of Flying Start, and other funds. These programmes do not always enable Health Boards to reach the families with the greatest need due to the post code element of the programme...”⁸

20. Public Health Wales explained to the Committee that:

“While the rates of poorer outcomes are higher in certain populations; individuals and families with the same level of disadvantage will also be present outside of those communities and often in larger numbers. Targeting of support such as the Flying Start Programme at geographical communities has the potential to create a different sort of inequality, where families in high need do not get the same access to support because they live in the wrong area.”⁹

21. Advocating a more flexible approach to resource targeting, Amy McNaughton of Public Health Wales told the Committee:

“there is a real difference between what’s available if you’re in a Flying Start area and if you’re not in a Flying Start area, and that there is a

⁷ Written evidence, FS 02 – Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

⁸ Written evidence, FTD 22 – Welsh NHS Confederation

⁹ Written evidence, FTD 24 – Public Health Wales

feeling that, if the flexibility was there, that there might be more that health visiting and midwifery services could do to help families that were outside of Flying Start areas.”¹⁰

22. Alison Davies of the Royal College of Nursing Wales commented that:

“There’s definitely a role for greater emphasis on professional judgment, and there are a number of assessment tools, et cetera, that can be used that enhance professional judgment. So, that enables health visitors to undertake a full, robust assessment and then help families decide the level of need and intervention required based on that assessment. So, if there was greater flexibility within processes to allow that to happen, it would probably allow more families who need services to receive them.”¹¹

23. Regarding future changes that may be made to the programme, Public Health Wales suggested to the Committee that:

“There may be value in considering a mixed model for the future provision of Flying Start with some elements retaining a geographical focus, but others becoming more focussed on individual need. We would propose that Flying Start and similar programmes would have a greater impact at population level if the additional NHS services funded through these programmes were flexible enough to provide more intensive preventative interventions to all families where a defined level of need has been identified regardless of where they live.”¹²

24. In support of retaining the geographical targeting of the programme, Sarah Ostler of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, commented that:

“I do think that there is something to be said for the geographical approach though, in the sense that providing services to a whole community reduces the stigma of accessing those services—it creates a balance of families accessing them.”¹³

25. A further benefit of the geographical approach to resource targeting was referred to by Helen James of Powys Teaching Local Health Board, who stated that:

¹⁰ RoP, para 65, 26 October 2017

¹¹ RoP, para 292, 26 October 2017

¹² Written evidence, FTD 24 – Public Health Wales

¹³ RoP, para 515, 26 October 2017

“There are real benefits to having a geographical model. I think, for me, in Flying Start areas we’ve built some really strong communities and I think that’s been a real benefit of Flying Start.”¹⁴

26. Also commenting on the positive aspects of the geographical approach, Alison Cowell of Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board told the Committee:

“I think what we know is that Flying Start works in terms of that model of intensive health visiting and building up that consistent relationship with families on a community basis.”¹⁵

27. Responding to a query as to whether Flying Start could be developed into a scheme with a regional focus as opposed to administered by local authority area, Huw Irranca-Davies AM, Minister for Children and Social Care (“the Minister”), explained to the Committee in oral evidence that:

“there might well be some scope for regional working. We are not moving to that right now, but we’re open, I have to say, to listen to the experience of families that have been involved in this, and to front-line professionals and the people who deliver this programme on the ground. We wouldn’t rule it out, but we’re not going to force a mandate of a regional footprint on them and say that you have to do all the same, because the benefit of this programme is the flexibility in the way it accommodates local needs.”¹⁶

28. Discussing the continuation of the postcode basis of allocation of resources for the programme, the Minister said:

“...it is right that there are many, many children and families living in deprivation outside, but the geographic focus of this that remains as part of it at this moment is based on the fact that we do know...that whilst, in 2015, 25 per cent of children in non-Flying Start areas...were in deprivation, in the Flying Start areas in these geographic boundaries 53 per cent of children are in deprivation. So, that’s why we’re still, at this moment, sticking to the geographic area, but with more flexibility.”¹⁷

¹⁴ RoP, para 72, 26 October 2017

¹⁵ RoP, para 34, 26 October 2017

¹⁶ RoP, para 611, 30 November 2017

¹⁷ RoP, para 655, 30 November 2017

3. The funding of the outreach element of Flying Start and resourcing of the programme

This chapter summarises evidence relating to arrangements for funding the outreach element of Flying Start and the resourcing of the programme.

Funding

30. The Welsh Government has made allocations of more than £600 million to fund the Flying Start programme between 2007 and 2018. Over the last five financial years, the allocations have been as follows:

Financial year	Revenue allocation (£ million)	Capital allocation (£ million)
2013-14	£62.99	£12
2014-15	£72.1	£8
2015-16	£76.9	£6.95
2016-17	£76.9	£3
2017-18	£76.9	£1.2

31. Vaughan Gething AM, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services, confirmed to the Committee in oral evidence on 22 November 2017 that the allocation for Flying Start in 2018-19 is £76 million.¹⁸

32. Regarding the outreach element of Flying Start, the Minister for Children and Social Care told the Committee on 22 November 2017 that the funding arrangements would change from an existing allocation of 2.5 per cent of the uplift from 2012 funding levels to 5 per cent of the overall Flying Start budget with immediate effect.¹⁹

33. On 22 January 2018, the Cabinet Secretary and Minister wrote to the Committee to explain the Welsh Government's revised approach to local authorities' Flying Start and Families First allocations. The letter explains:

¹⁸ RoP, para 101, 22 November 2017

¹⁹ RoP, para 98, 22 November 2017

- local authorities' grant allocations have included an element of 'over-programming'²⁰ over a number of years to help ensure that budgets are fully spent and underspends are avoided;
- in 2018-19, local authorities will be given the flexibility to move funds between a number of grants which will "provide more opportunities to manage and minimise potential underspends";
- in light of a review of the approach to over-programming, the Cabinet Secretary and Minister have determined that the current level of over-programming is no longer required and "underspends will be better managed through utilising the funding flexibilities now available";
- as such, levels of over-programming will be reduced, meaning local authority allocations for 2018-19 will drop by 1.8 per cent.²¹

34. The letter goes on to state that the Cabinet Secretary and Minister do not expect the reduction to allocations as a consequence of this decision to reduce over-programming to impact on service delivery.

Evidence presented to the Committee

35. The limitations on the capacity of the outreach element of Flying Start are explored in chapter 2 of this report. In written evidence to the Committee Public Health Wales stated:

"Analysis carried out by Public Health Wales has shown that 37.5% of poor or income deprived people live within the geographical areas that are within the most deprived quintile in Wales. This means that nearly two thirds of people who are income deprived live out-side of geographical areas that are defined as deprived. It is there-fore highly unlikely that the relatively small proportion of Flying Start funding available for outreach work is sufficient to meet the needs of families living outside of Flying Start areas."²²

36. Amy McNaughton from Public Health Wales elaborated on this point in oral evidence:

²⁰ The Welsh Government describes 'over programming' as a tool that allows the funding allocated to a specific area to exceed, by a small margin, the budget available.

²¹ **Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services and the Minister for Children and Social Care to the CYPE Committee**, 22 January 2018

²² Written evidence, FS 01 – Public Health Wales

“...we know that there’s a significant population that could benefit from the sorts of things that Flying Start is able to offer, but, with a 2.5 per cent cap, you’re not going to be able to reach all of those families.”²³

37. Lesley Lewis of Cwm Taf Local Health Board also made similar comments:

“The fundamental issue is that we have families with an assessed need that will benefit from Flying Start and, because of the way it is currently configured, are unable to access it because the cap does not meet the full need. It is an issue around resource.”²⁴

38. In its written evidence, Ceredigion County Council provided a specific example of how outreach funding is used:

“Ceredigion welcomed the opportunity to provide some outreach services. Our budget is very small – just £13,000. Approximately half of this is spent on ‘Communities of Interest’ – Homeless Hostels and Refuges that are within FS areas....The other half of the funding is used to support families who are referred for outreach via a range of agencies (mainly generic Health Visitors) or families moving out of Flying Start who have ongoing needs.”²⁵

39. Discussing the increased budget allocation to outreach services made during the course of this inquiry, the Minister told the Committee:

“...it’s an actual increase of £2.84 million. Now, previously, the spend on the 2.5 per cent of the uplift equated to approximately £0.96 million. So, it’s an increase of £2.84 million. That, we think, should give ample opportunity for those who have requested to use it. But I should say as well that it’s ‘up to’. So, some of them might choose not to use it, and here’s one of the challenges and the difficulties for the committee, as well as for us, and I’m glad you’re undertaking this inquiry. It’s not to say they will have it. Not all have said, ‘We will use the whole of it’, but it gives them the ability up to 5 per cent, and then we, as part of our review of it, will see how effective that flexibility has been.”²⁶

²³ RoP, para 32, 26 October 2017

²⁴ RoP, para 74, 26 October 2017

²⁵ Written evidence, FS 04 – Ceredigion County Council

²⁶ RoP, para 614, 30 November 2017

40. Karen Cornish from the Welsh Government explained that:

“the uplift is to 5 per cent of the current allocated budget. So, it’s not further budget; it’s within the current allocation.”²⁷

41. In response to the Committee observing that it is unusual to change funding arrangements for a programme part-way through a financial year, the Minister explained:

“It was immediate, and I know it’s unusual, but it wasn’t unexpected. It had come from discussions that were going on, and we do not anticipate any problems with this, because local authorities and front-line providers could continue exactly as they are. But what they have now got is the ability, either immediately, in response to demand they’ve already identified, or over the next few weeks and months, to tailor the need to the geographic area and some of those outside as well.”²⁸

42. Responding to a query from the Committee about expectations as to use of the outreach funding by local authorities, the Minister said:

“we cannot say definitively right now what it’s going to be used for, what elements of the Flying Start programme will be used and for how many families, but this is the appropriate amount that we’ve been asked for in terms of flexibility.”²⁹

43. When questioned about the extent of consultation with Flying Start stakeholders regarding the revised budget for outreach, Karen Cornish from the Welsh Government explained:

“So far, I have met with 21 out of 22 local authorities. I have met with the co-ordinators and had discussions. We also have regular quarterly meetings with all of the Flying Start co-ordinators. During those meetings, most raised the issue of additional funding flexibility, and that’s why we have responded in the way that we have.”³⁰

²⁷ RoP, para 621, 30 November 2017

²⁸ RoP, para 642, 30 November 2017

²⁹ RoP, para 623, 30 November 2017

³⁰ RoP, para 635, 30 November 2017

Resourcing

44. The Committee also received evidence regarding the non-financial resourcing of the Flying Start programme.

45. An enhanced health visiting service is one of the four key elements of Flying Start. Health visitor caseloads for Flying Start are capped at 110 children compared to generic health visitors who may have up to 350 children on their caseloads. The latest Welsh Government annual headline statistics on Flying Start state:

“During 2016-17 there were a few issues with recruiting and retaining health visitors within the Flying Start programme across some Local Authority areas. These issues are mainly due to the programme significantly increasing the number of health visitors needed in Wales over recent years.”³¹

46. Commenting on health visitor recruitment, Alison Cowell, Clinical Director of Children’s Community Services at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, told the Committee:

“We are short of health visitors nationally....Because the Healthy Child Wales programme also requires some health boards to recruit additional health visitors, certainly for us in north Wales, that’s quite a significant issue. So, we haven’t got enough health visitors out there to fill all of the jobs that there are.”³²

47. The Committee also heard evidence regarding potential future issues with numbers of health visitors due to the age demographic of the health visitor profession. Lesley Lewis, Head of Nursing Primary Care and Localities at Cwm Taf University Health Board, told the Committee:

“...we have very experienced staff, who actually could retire should they choose to, and I think that is going to be a critical issue, not just for health visiting, but for NHS Wales, in the next five to 10 years.”³³

48. Referring to the difficulties regarding numbers of health visitors, Sandra Dredge representing the Welsh Heads of Health Visiting and School Nursing Forum, stated:

³¹ Welsh Government, **Flying Start summary statistics 2016-17**, July 2017

³² RoP, para 206, 26 October 2017

³³ RoP, para 208, 26 October 2017

“But that’s not just a funding issue. That’s about other things, such as more health visitors now retiring earlier, doing retire and return, going down to part-time hours, and higher case loads as a result. Higher case loads are impacting on people’s well-being, and so they’re retiring perhaps earlier than they would have done. So, there are all sorts of issues that come into play there, but, essentially, we haven’t got, across the board, enough health visitors.”³⁴

49. The Committee also noted from the evidence that the nature of the contractual terms offered to health visitors working in the Flying Start programme may deter health visitors from applying for posts. Helen James, Head of Children’s Public Health Nursing and Paediatric Services at Powys Teaching Health Board, told the Committee:

“...the other issue we have is because Flying Start is a grant-funded scheme, with a three-year cycle of funding, we do have staff on fixed-term contracts. So, that’s not always very attractive if it’s up against a permanent post. So, again, that can create some difficulties for us.”³⁵

50. Discussing the issue of fixed term contracts, and the staffing requirements of the Healthy Child Wales programme, Sarah Mutch, Chair of the All-Wales Flying Start Managers’ Network, told the Committee:

“I think there is a difference between different health boards. Some health boards will offer permanent contracts regardless of whether health visitors are grant funded or not... Other health boards—our health board—won’t. So, if they’re grant funded, they’re on one-year fixed term contracts. So, I’m advertising now and those staff are going to be given a six-month contract until the end of March....They’re not going to come. And they are recruiting for the Healthy Child Wales programme, so they’re offered a permanent contract or a fixed-term. So, unless they really want to stay in Flying Start...that is an issue.”³⁶

³⁴ RoP, para 363, 26 October 2017

³⁵ RoP, para 207, 26 October 2017

³⁶ RoP, paras 589, 591, 593 and 595, 26 October 2017

4. Evaluation of Flying Start

This chapter summarises evidence relating to the evaluation of Flying Start.

51. There has been extensive evaluation of the Flying Start programme, but not specifically in relation to the more recently introduced outreach element.

52. There is also a lack of data concerning take up of each of the services within the Flying Start programme. The CYPE Committee of the Fourth Assembly queried whether the Welsh Government’s definition of beneficiary was an accurate reflection of the extent to which children received the combination of Flying Start services. This was on the basis that a ‘*beneficiary*’ of services is defined as the ‘*cumulative count of individual children receiving health visitor Flying Start services*’. Given that health visiting is only one of four elements of the programme, and that each child is automatically allocated a health visitor, it has been suggested that the headline statistics may not reflect how many children access all four services within Flying Start.

53. The *National Evaluation of Flying Start: impact report* (December 2013)³⁷ reviewed the overall effectiveness of the programme and amongst its findings were:

- “There was no statistically significant difference between Flying Start and non-Flying Start areas in terms of child cognitive and language skills, their social and emotional development and their independence/self-regulation”;
- “[...] no difference between parents in Flying Start areas and parents in comparison areas on parenting self-confidence, mental health or home environment measures”;
- “[...] no statistical difference between Flying Start and the matched comparison areas on immunisation rates”.

54. The *Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families: Wave 1 report*³⁸ was published in January 2016 and its overall conclusions were:

³⁷ Ipsos MORI, **National Evaluation of Flying Start: Impact Report**, December 2013

³⁸ Arad Research, **Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families: Wave 1 report**, January 2016

- “Overall, the evidence suggests that a majority of parents are satisfied with their experiences of engaging with services delivered under each of the Flying Start entitlements. Most parents feel that Flying Start has had an impact on at least one aspect of their child’s development and their own knowledge and approach to parenting”; and
- “Given the nature of the study sample (focusing on parents with a youngest child aged below 30 months), it is perhaps unsurprising that many parents felt it too early to judge whether Flying Start had an impact on their child. However, the longitudinal nature of this study provides an opportunity to revisit these issues with parents in 2016 and 2017 as their child develops and makes the transition to the Foundation Phase”.

55. The *Educational Outcomes of Flying Start*³⁹ report was published in February 2017 with the aims of developing an analytical approach to evaluating Flying Start using existing datasets, and to attempt to determine if living in a Flying Start area is related to educational outcomes. It stated:

- “The regression and matching analysis suggests that there is no significant direct impact of Flying Start on educational attainment”.

56. The *Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families: Wave 2* report⁴⁰ was published in January 2017. It was the second report from a three-year qualitative research project with Flying Start parents. The research aimed to explore experiences and perceived impacts for families throughout their engagement with the programme. It describes parents’ experiences of Flying Start and identifies their perceived outcomes for themselves and their families. It found:

- “The findings of Wave 2 interviews show that most parents continued to access at least one of the entitlements they accessed during Wave 1, an indication of families’ sustained engagement with Flying Start. Most parents continued to have high levels of satisfaction with services delivered under the four entitlements and provided examples of positive experiences of staff, service delivery and facilities or locations. In addition, most parents felt

³⁹ Welsh Government and The Administrative Data Research Centre – Wales (ADRCW), Cardiff University, **Flying Start Evaluation: Educational Outcomes**, February 2017

⁴⁰ Arad Research, **Qualitative Research with Flying Start Families: Wave 2 report**, January 2017

that Flying Start has had a positive impact on their child’s development and was making a positive contribution to their own skills and knowledge as a parent.”

Evidence presented to the Committee

57. The Committee received a range of evidence about the evaluation of outcomes for the Flying Start programme.

58. One theme concerned the difficulties in evaluating Flying Start outcomes due to the inherent nature of the interventions funded by the programme. For example, when discussing how best to evaluate the programme, Amy McNaughton of Public Health Wales told the Committee:

“what we need to be looking at, actually, for children when they reach school age, is: are we seeing improvements in school readiness? Are we seeing improvements in speech and language and other developmental milestones when they’re having checks at younger ages? Those are the sorts of things that are really key in terms of actual outcomes...”⁴¹

59. Referring to a need to assess the programme on a qualitative basis, Alison Cowell of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board commented:

“...I think that, from our perspective, we would want to see distance travelled being looked at—so, you’ve got the family need and then actually what services are required to meet those needs and what distance travelled has been created, what difference has it actually made. We’re not collecting that qualitative data...the cold, quantitative data is not reflective of the importance of this initiative.”⁴²

60. The Committee also received evidence indicating the difficulty associated with linking specific programme interventions with defined outcomes. In written evidence, Public Health Wales told the Committee:

“When families access a range of services and support it can be difficult to provide evidence of the causal links between specific interventions and improvements in outcomes.”⁴³

⁴¹ RoP, para 199, 26 October 2017

⁴² RoP, para 143, 26 October 2017

⁴³ Written evidence, FS 01 – Public Health Wales

61. Amy McNaughton commented on this issue in oral evidence, explaining to the Committee:

“one of the challenges with something like Flying Start is that when you’ve got multiple different interventions, it’s very difficult to put your finger on which one it is that’s made the difference. It may be the fact that it’s a combination of all of those that have brought a family to a place where they are able to make a change.”⁴⁴

62. Sandra Dredge, representing the Welsh Heads of Health Visiting and School Nursing Forum, noted that evaluating outcomes was further complicated by their dependence on the needs of the individual child:

“thinking about Cardiff as an example...we have a really high BME community.....when they start school a lot of these children don’t speak English. In the first year, the class teachers are struggling even with basic communication. So, you can’t compare a Flying Start area in Cardiff with Powys; there are completely different populations. Some of the fundamental social issues might be the same, and the safeguarding issues and all of that, but there will be different influences depending on where these children live.”⁴⁵

63. The Committee also heard evidence highlighting a lack of data collected for evaluative purposes from the early days of the Flying Start programme. Public Health Wales referred to an absence of comparative data, stating that:

“It is also difficult to measure the impact of programmes and initiatives designed to improve outcomes if insufficient focus has been given to evaluation from the outset or where evaluation approaches have not included a comparison group. This has been a challenge with the Flying Start Programme and we are aware of very little analysis that has been able to compare outcomes for families in Flying Start areas with outcomes in areas experiencing similar levels of deprivation which are not Flying Start areas. Any adaptations to the future delivery of Flying Start should build in consideration of the evaluation of impact from the beginning.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ RoP, para 196, 26 October 2017

⁴⁵ RoP, para 334, 26 October 2017

⁴⁶ Written evidence, FS 01 – Public Health Wales

64. Acknowledging historic issues with data collection, the Minister told the Committee:

“...one of the difficulties, originally, when we started on this 10 years ago...was the lack of baseline identifiers...[to] track a child.”⁴⁷

65. Referring to the lack of comparator data with non-Flying Start areas, Richard Thurston, Deputy Chief Social Research Officer, Welsh Government, explained:

“...it’s worth saying that it was very difficult and would have been ethically interesting to have this discussion at the time of allocating Flying Start to some groups of children and not others in an experimental sort of way. That could have been considered, but it wasn’t at the time. ...but, as the Minister says, we didn’t have that data early on, so we quickly recognised that that was an issue and are addressing that, of course, now.”⁴⁸

66. Commenting on the findings of the 2013 impact report referred to in paragraph 53, the Minister said:

“...when we peer backwards down the telescope and we look at what we found from the 2013 peer review study, which, for example, showed that there was no significant difference between the educational outcomes of children within Flying Start and non-Flying Start areas, well, you could say, ‘That’s a failure’. When you look at the families and the children that they are intervening on, the very fact that there is no significant difference in the Flying Start areas in areas of high deprivation between those educational outcomes, their propensity to turn up at school, to attend school, the identification early on—earlier than normal—of special educational needs and so on—that is a measure of outcome as well.”⁴⁹

67. During the course of evidence, the Committee also received an update on work currently underway to strengthen the evaluation of the Flying Start programme. In oral evidence, the Minister told the Committee about the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage Databank (SAIL) initiative, explaining:

⁴⁷ RoP, para 674, 30 November 2017

⁴⁸ RoP, para 675, 30 November 2017

⁴⁹ RoP, para 664, 30 November 2017

“The essence is we’re working with five local authorities, but also with Swansea University’s SAIL unit ... They are pulling together the way in which we analyse Flying Start. This has long been an issue of how you best evaluate the outcomes, so we have a project working with them to try and develop a new set of standardised, individual-level data on Flying Start children—what the interventions are, what the outcomes are, what the success is. So, as that is taken forward, that should give us a more robust understanding of the impacts of Flying Start, and as that is taken forward, we’re more than happy to share that with the committee, then, as well.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ RoP, para 89, 22 November 2017.

5. Our views and recommendations

This chapter summarises the Committee's views in relation to Flying Start and, specifically, the programme's outreach element. The Committee makes a number of recommendations and commits to following up on progress within one year of this Report's publication.

68. The Committee believes that the Flying Start programme is an important source of support to the children and families that are able to benefit from it and welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to early years' provision. Anecdotal evidence from users and front line service providers demonstrates that the programme is valued and has a positive impact on a number of its participants. The Committee acknowledges the commitment of those staff who work to deliver all aspects of the Flying Start programme.

Funding

69. The Committee notes that, during the course of this inquiry, the Welsh Government took action to increase the allocation of outreach service funding within the overall Flying Start programme budget to 5 per cent. The Committee is pleased that the light it has shone on this matter is already starting to result in some progress. However, the Committee is unconvinced this additional flexibility will be sufficient to meet the needs of service users (or children and families that should be service users).

70. The Committee was very disappointed to discover, during the course of taking evidence, the limited extent to which outreach services were benefiting children in many local authorities in terms of number of participants – in some cases as few as five children in an authority area. This is of particular concern to the Committee given that outreach should be a key tool in:

- overcoming targeting issues resulting from the postcode basis of allocation of resources in the wider programme; and
- delivering the step change in programme reach required to allow those most in need of Flying Start services to access support.

71. Whilst the Committee notes the reasons for the decisions to continue to align support along broadly geographical areas, we continue to have significant

concerns that this approach restricts the ability of the funding to reach many children who are most in need. Members are mindful that the majority of children living in poverty fall outside defined Flying Start areas, and so are less likely to be able to benefit from Flying Start services. The Committee remains to be convinced that retention of the postcode allocation of resources is the most appropriate basis on which to continue administering the wider programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. That, in view of the Committee's concerns regarding the geographical focus of the Flying Start programme and the sufficiency of the revised level of flexibility allocated to outreach funding, the Minister:

- provide further detail regarding the process by which 5 per cent was agreed as the appropriate level of increase in outreach funding allocation following the Welsh Government's recent review and discussions with local authority programme coordinators; and
- explain how it was demonstrated to the Welsh Government by those local authorities that this limited reallocation of resources from the wider Flying Start programme to outreach services would bring benefits to service users.

Recommendation 2. That the Minister consider extending the outreach funding flexibility beyond the recently announced 5 per cent allocation. The Committee requests that the Minister confirm in his response to this Report whether, in light of the evidence gathered during this inquiry, additional increases to the outreach funding allocation are now required or whether the geographical focus of the Flying Start programme needs to be reconsidered in order to enable those most in need to access support.

Over-programming

72. The Committee notes the Cabinet Secretary and Minister's correspondence of 22 January 2018 explaining the decision to reduce the ability to over-programme Flying Start and Families First in 2018-19 (see paragraphs 33 and 34 of this Report). The Committee is concerned to ensure that the flexibility between grants enables the same level of expenditure on Flying Start as the over-programming mechanism allowed previously.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation 3. That the Minister, in relation to the reduction in over-programming of Families First and Flying Start in 2018-19:

- outline the steps the Welsh Government has taken to reassure itself that this change will not impact on service delivery;
- confirm that the flexibility between grants will enable the same level of expenditure on Flying Start as the over-programming mechanism allowed previously; and
- clarify the revenue and capital allocations for Flying Start in 2018-19.

Evaluation

73. The Committee is concerned that, based on the results of evaluations of the Flying Start programme published to date, much of the data presented shows limited hard evidence of benefits to children and parents receiving support. The Committee also notes that limited baseline data was collected from the inception of the programme.

74. The Committee acknowledges that the Government is currently piloting ways of strengthening data collection and analysis in relation to Flying Start and intends to monitor closely developments in this area. This work is particularly important given the increased budgetary allocation to outreach announced during the course of this inquiry.

75. Whilst the Committee acknowledges that the nature of outcomes expected from the programme may not be easily quantifiable, and are by their nature potentially longer term, we nevertheless urge the Welsh Government to pursue all available means of strengthening data collection to allow meaningful evaluation of whether the programme is able to demonstrate value for money.

76. The Committee looks forward to receiving updates from the Welsh Government in respect of the SAIL Data project. We hope that this work, alongside other evaluation mechanisms, will urgently address some of the historic deficiencies in collecting data and enable the Welsh Government to better assess the impact of its significant investment in the Flying Start programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 4. That, given the concerns about evaluation data for the wider Flying Start programme identified during the course of this inquiry, and the limited quantifiable benefits of Flying Start services demonstrated in published evaluation work to date, the Minister:

- formalise what the Welsh Government is proposing to measure in terms of outcomes via the SAIL data project for both the wider Flying Start programme and its outreach element;
- confirm what key performance indicators will be used in future to demonstrate the success (or otherwise) of the programme and its value for money going forward; and
- measure the number of children benefiting from the Flying Start programme and its outreach element by counting the total number of engagements with any of the four elements of the Flying Start programme, not only contacts with the health visitor, as is currently the case.

Recommendation 5. That the Welsh Government provide six monthly updates on the data and evaluation strengthening work currently underway.

Recommendation 6. That, given the likely increased regional divergence in approaches to intervention resulting from additional flexibility, the Welsh Government publish regular monitoring reports detailing any revisions to service provision by local authorities.

Follow up

77. As noted in paragraph 68, anecdotal evidence from users and front line service providers demonstrates that the programme is valued and has a positive impact on some of its participants. Given the amount of funding allocated to this programme, the Committee is keen to see evidence move from the anecdotal to the empirical. The Committee is also concerned about:

- the significant number of children in need of support who live outside areas covered by Flying Start, and the limited number who – in such circumstances – can be reached by outreach services,

- the issues reported to it regarding the recruitment of health visitor professionals into the Flying Start scheme,

and wishes to keep a close eye on these issues.

78. To this end, the Committee commits to revisiting this inquiry in a year to consider:

- The evaluation and data collection processes resulting from the Welsh Government's ongoing work in this area;
- Whether the recent revisions (and any further revisions) to the outreach funding allocation are being used, where they are being used, and whether they are having a positive effect on front line services and the reach of the outreach element of the programme;
- Whether the programme as currently structured remains appropriate in terms of overall funding allocation, services provided and participation criteria; and
- The updated outlook for health visitor recruitment into the Flying Start scheme

Recommendation 7. That the Minister report in writing to the Committee six months and 12 months from the publication of this Report to illustrate how the Welsh Government has monitored and reviewed:

- the effectiveness of front line Flying Start services;
- the reach of the outreach element of those services (as a result of the increased flexibility now in place in the Flying Start budget and any further flexibility put in place in response to recommendation 2 of this Report); and
- the availability of staff to support the programme.

Annex A – Oral evidence

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee’s website, via the links below.

Date	Name and Organisation
26 October 2017	<p>Welsh NHS Confederation and Public Health Wales Lesley Lewis, Head of Nursing Primary Care and Localities, Cwm Taf University Health Board Alison Cowell, Clinical Director, Children’s Community Services, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Helen James, Head of Children’s Public Health Nursing and Paediatric Services, Powys Teaching Health Board Amy McNaughton, Consultant in Public Health, Public Health Wales</p> <p>Royal College of Nursing and Welsh Heads of Health Visiting and School Nursing Forum Alison Davies, Associate Director Professional Practice, Royal College of Nursing Wales Nicola Milligan, Royal College of Nursing Welsh Board Member and Specialist Health Visitor, Cwm Taf University Health Board Sandra Dredge, Welsh Heads of Health Visiting and School Nursing Forum</p> <p>Flying Start Network representatives Sarah Mutch, Flying Start Manager, Caerphilly County Borough Council, and Chair of all-Wales Flying Start Managers’ Network Liz Wilson, Flying Start Health and Social Care Manager, Carmarthenshire County Council Hannah Fleck, Service Manager Community Wellbeing, Conwy County Borough Council Claire Lister, Head of Integrated Adult and Community Services, Conwy County Borough Council Sarah Ostler, Flying Start Co-ordinator, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council</p>

<p><u>30 November</u> <u>2017</u></p>	<p>Welsh Government Huw Irranca-Davies AM, Minister for Children and Social Care Karen Cornish, Deputy Director, Children and Families Division, Welsh Government Richard Thurston, Education and Skills Research, Welsh Government Joseph Wilton, Social Researcher, Welsh Government</p>
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Annex B – Written evidence

The following organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All relevant evidence can be viewed on the Committee’s [First 1,000 Days \(FTD\) consultation page](#) and [Flying Start: Outreach \(FS\) consultation page](#).

Reference	Paper
FTD 15	Response to the First 1,000 Days of a Child’s Life Consultation from the Royal College of Nursing Wales
FTD 22	Response to the First 1,000 Days of a Child’s Life Consultation from the Welsh NHS Confederation
FTD 24	Response to the First 1,000 Days of a Child’s Life Consultation from Public Health Wales
FS 01	Response to the Flying Start Outreach Inquiry from Public Health Wales
FS 02	Response to the Flying Start Outreach Inquiry from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
FS 03	Response to the Flying Start Outreach Inquiry from Members of the All Wales Flying Start Managers’ Network
FS 04	Response to the Flying Start Outreach Inquiry from Ceredigion County Council