

WELSH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT: FLYING START OUTREACH

The Welsh Government welcomes the report produced by the Children, Young People and Education Committee following its inquiry into Flying Start Outreach.

Our National Strategy, *Prosperity for All* identifies the early years as a priority area. We want children from all backgrounds to have the best start in life. Our aim is that everyone will have the opportunity to reach their full potential and maximise their chances of leading a healthy, prosperous and fulfilling adulthood, enabling them to participate fully in communities, the workplace, and contribute to the future economic success of Wales.

Flying Start makes a vital contribution to this vision. It aims to make a decisive difference to the lives of children in the most disadvantaged communities. It can and does change people's lives. The programme is based on sound evidence which shows for children from disadvantaged families, increasing the investment in their early years will have an improved impact on their health and educational outcomes in the short term. In the longer term the investment will improve their life skills and ultimately the gaps in outcomes for children living in poverty should be narrowed. And we are already beginning to see results.

Robust evaluation has provided evidence which shows Flying Start is making a real, positive impact on children – when they go to school they are ready to learn and are more confident at mixing with other children. The programme has led to better and earlier support for families, while contact with health visitors and other Flying Start professionals has led to parents being better informed and more confident.

Flying Start is currently being delivered to over 37,000 children under 4 years of age living in some of the most deprived areas in Wales. This equates to around 25% of all children under the age of 4 in Wales. Research demonstrates the potential long-term benefits of investment in early education and childcare for every child but especially for those who are disadvantaged.

Flying Start, of itself, is not designed to address all of the elements of disadvantage related to child poverty. Instead it focuses on improving support available for parents, through enhancing access to health visitors, childcare, parenting programmes and speech, language and communication support. The core entitlement of the programme is evidence based and drawn from a range of options that have been shown to influence positive outcomes for children and their families. It is anticipated that this will lead to long-term improvements in educational, social and health outcomes for children in disadvantaged communities. As with many early intervention programmes, however some outcomes may not be realised for a number of years. Whilst it is the Welsh Government's flagship early years programme, it is not the only

intervention and support for improving children's early years outcomes.

Healthy Child Wales is intended to provide a universal schedule of health visiting and school nursing contacts for every child from conception to age 7, with enhanced and intensive interventions delivered to those families and children with increased levels of need. It sets out the planned contacts that all families in Wales can expect to receive from maternity service handover to the first years of schooling and these contacts include monitoring and supporting child development. Full roll out is required across all health boards by October 2018.

Our key family support programme Families First provides holistic, multi-agency support to families with children of all ages, with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention. This family-focussed approach to assessing and tailoring family support is making a real difference to families and life chances are being improved as these families become more confident, resilient and independent. In 2016-17, 4,287 families across Wales agreed an action plan for multi-agency, coordinated support through the Team around the Family (TAF), which is a key element of the programme.

The First 1000 Days Collaborative Programme, run by Public Health Wales, is a vehicle to help develop and improve professional practice. . Currently 5 Public Health Boards are signed up: Wrexham, Torfaen, Conwy & Denbighshire, Swansea and Caerphilly.

All children in Wales have access to the Foundation Phase, a developmentally appropriate learning curriculum for 3-7 year olds and, in addition, we are rolling out our enhanced childcare offer for working parents of 3-4 year olds. All our early years' programmes are intended to support children and their families to bring about the best long term outcomes.

The outreach element of Flying Start provides a degree of flexibility for local authorities to provide Flying Start support to children and their families living outside designated Flying Start areas. The objectives of outreach 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.

In October, Ministers agreed to a rapid review of Flying Start to ensure it remains fit for purpose. We want to build on the considerable achievements of the programme and learn from what works well, not least in how we can deepen partnership, collaborative and multi-agency working arrangements across sectors in support of young children and their families. Work is progressing and we anticipate being able to update the Committee on this, later in the year.

Reflecting the commitment in the National Strategy “to create: “a more joined up, responsive system that puts the unique needs of each child at its heart”, we have established a programme of work to explore how we create an early years’ system, both locally and nationally. This would mean every service that families and young children come into contact with being clear about how they support child development in the broadest sense. It will target parents as early as possible and sustain support where it is needed. A key component of this programme is an intensive co-construction project with two Public Service Boards to explore options to reconfigure the system for the early years locally. Our aim is to develop a coordinated single approach to early years, which will ensure that services are delivered in a more collaborative and integrated way. This will provide options for a holistic look at the future structure of early years’ provision.

Detailed responses to the report’s recommendations are set out below:

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.**

Response: Accept

As the Committee will be aware changes to the outreach guidance were introduced in 2014 to allow local authorities some flexibility. In November 2017, following discussions with local authorities and in recognition of the need some expressed for greater flexibility, Ministers relaxed the funding limit to allow authorities to use up to 5% of their full Flying Start budget allocation on outreach with immediate effect, this was in line with the amount that could be vired between programmes.

This was intended as a pragmatic response, based on preliminary findings from discussions with some local authorities that the 2.5% of the uplift funding was proving insufficient. It was, intentionally, a modest uplift to help balance the risk of spreading services too thinly within the same funding level. This could dilute the impact for the targeted Flying Start population and remove the ability to change outcomes significantly. We will maintain the 5% limit for 2018/19 to give us time to explore with

authorities the full implications of any further relaxation.

Local authorities suggested a number of ways that this reallocation of resources could bring benefits to service users. These included providing additional support for 'communities of interest' such as hostels for homeless people, traveller families and/or women's refuges. Several local authorities plan to refer families for outreach through their local Families First 'Team Around the Family' (TAF), using the 'Joint Assessment Families Framework' (JAFF) approach to assess the family's needs. Although at an early stage, this approach seems to be working well, ensuring that only the families who are in need of a Flying Start intervention go on to receive the service.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 2

That the Minister considers 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.

Response - Accept in principle

We are continuing to explore outreach options with local authorities.

Funding for outreach is met from the current allocated budget. It is not a separate fund and any increase in spend on families living outside of Flying Start areas means that there is less available for those in Flying Start areas.

It is vital, therefore, that any further changes are fully considered and well managed so that we learn from where this is working well and develop models of good practice, ensuring there are no unintended consequences regarding the overall integrity of the programme.

Guidance on targeting was refreshed in 2014. Specific postcodes can now be targeted within an LSOA if the local authority has local knowledge and evidence that supports their decision. Some authorities are making use of this additional flexibility. We will work with local authorities to explore this further.

Flying Start is intended to be a geographical, community based programme. The entitlement aims to reduce the stigma of families accessing social and health care services, help support increased socialisation and create a sense of community

amongst participants. Moreover it has logistical benefits, the infrastructure and workforce can be developed and established in Flying Start areas, with the co-location of services into multi agency teams providing greater efficiencies in the deployment of capital investment. This co-location aids collaboration and multi-agency responses to specific family needs. However, defined geographical targeting of Flying Start support will be considered as part of the Welsh Government's work on the Early Years system.

Financial Implications –None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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.**

Response: Accept

To help manage budgets, authorities were given the opportunity to over-programme in their initial 2018-19 budget profiles, submitted as part of their 2018-19 Delivery Plans. Following discussions with local authorities the majority expected to manage the 1.8% reduction to allocations in-year through underspends, for example resulting from vacancies in Flying Start posts, which can occur in the programme.

The new wider flexible funding arrangements agreed for 2018-19, which include Flying Start and Families First, are designed to help improve and integrate service delivery to better support vulnerable families and people across Wales. This flexibility allows local authorities to take decisions locally about the best way they allocate their funds to ensure delivery and will also provide more opportunities to better manage and minimise potential underspends.

The responsibility for managing programme budgets (including the 1.8% reduction to allocations and any proposals to over-programme) remains that of local authorities. Welsh Government officials will work with them to monitor this and the current bi-annual reporting and financial claim submission will revert to quarterly to improve monitoring of expenditure.

We have increased the level of flexibility to move funds within Flying Start without recourse to the Welsh Government, from 10% to 15% in 2018-19.

Flexibility between programmes has also been set at 15% across 5 grants (Supporting People, Flying Start, Families First, the Legacy Fund and Communities for Work Plus) for non-pathfinder areas. For pathfinder areas it is 100% across the 10 programmes included in the Flexible Funding pilot (additionally Promoting Positive Engagement for Young People, Childcare and Play, Homelessness Prevention, Rent Smart Wales Enforcement and the St David's Day Fund).

The Flying Start revenue allocation for 2018-19 is £74.683m; the Flying Start capital allocation is £0.566m.

Financial Implications – None.

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.**

Response: Accept in Principle

Flying Start has been subject to a robust independent programme of evaluation. Evaluation to date has included quantitative and qualitative measures of impact and delivery including in depth interviews with high need families.

Evaluation evidence suggests the programme is making a real difference to the lives of Flying Start families. In recent qualitative research, parents identified a range of improvements in their children's development. This included talking and communication, reading and counting, practical issues and behaviour and attitude. In addition, almost all parents interviewed felt Flying Start had a positive impact on their families' overall level of well-being.

Our current evaluation activity follows the recommendations of the Evaluability Assessment of Flying Start report published in November 2016. The report concluded that future evaluation should include the collection of individual level data on

engagement with the programme and also explore options for linking with other datasets including educational data.

The ongoing Flying Start Data Linking Pilot Project, therefore, has two parts:

- to develop and pilot a standardised approach to collecting individual level data on Flying Start children; and
- to establish the secure flow of anonymised data on Flying Start children from (six pilot) local authorities into the Welsh Government Core-funded SAIL (Secure Anonymised Information Linkage) Databank at Swansea University.

In relation to the third bullet point of Recommendation 4, the first part of the pilot project involves working with six local authorities to develop a consistent set of data items about Flying Start children that they will pilot collecting. This includes core data and some information about their engagement with each of the entitlements. Whether the child received support through outreach funding is one of the fields we have asked local authorities to pilot. This will facilitate a better understanding of children's and families' level of engagement with the programme.

In relation to the first bullet point of Recommendation 4, the next part of the pilot project is to test the feasibility of importing the individual level Flying Start data, including the field on outreach, from the six pilot local authorities into SAIL. Once the data is in SAIL, it will enable exploration of Flying Start children's outcomes which could include: immunisations, hospital activity, school attendance and educational attainment. Therefore, if the pilot project is successful, the next phase of evaluation activity will involve rolling out the approach and developing a research proposal for exploring outcomes for Flying Start children at the all-Wales level. This may include outreach if the data item is deemed feasible through the pilot work. As outlined in response to Recommendation 5 below, six monthly updates will be provided to the committee on the progress of the pilot and plans for future work.

In relation to the second bullet of Recommendation 4, and as mentioned above, the next phase of evaluation will be determined by the outcome of the pilot work. Further information on the future evaluation approach for assessing the success and value for money of the programme will be provided in an update in October 2018, once the pilot project has have completed its first full year.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 5.

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

Response - Accept in principle

The first update will be provided to the Committee on evaluation activity for Flying Start in October 2018. To allow time for the pilot work to be taken into consideration and potentially rolled out further, a more meaningful update would be provided 12 months later rather than after a further 6 months.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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.

Response - Reject

To reduce the reporting burden on local authorities Welsh Government has reduced and streamlined the amount of data required focussing on what's necessary to produce the annual Flying Start Statistical Bulletin.

Data on outreach is not collected at an all Wales level. As noted above in response to Recommendation 4, the Flying Start Data Linking Pilot Project is working with six local authorities to test the feasibility of collecting outreach data in a consistent way. Progress will be provided in the next update to the Committee.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

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.**

Response - Accept in principle.

The timescales proposed in this recommendation would be too soon to provide a meaningful overview for the Committee and would impose additional reporting and data collection burdens on local authorities.

Welsh Government will provide an update to the Committee in October 2018 on the findings from the review of Flying Start and as noted above, progress on the Flying Start Data Linking Pilot Project and plans for Flying Start evaluation activity.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Huw Irranca-Davies AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Gofal Cymdeithasol a Phlant
Minister for Children and Social Care