

Economic Development and Transport Committee

Date: 13 October 2004
Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay
Title: Item 5: Childcare Working Group – Interim Report

Purpose

1. Members of the Economic Development and Transport, Education and Lifelong Learning, Health and Social Services, Social Justice and Regeneration and all Regional Committees are invited to consider the Childcare Working Group's Interim Report. Comments will assist the development of the Group's final report due at the end of the year.
2. Dr Brian Gibbons as Chair of the Childcare Working Group, has undertaken to keep the Economic Development and Transport Committee updated on childcare issues. Related information will assist in informing the Committee's considerations in relation to its review of economic inactivity in Wales.

Summary / Recommendations

3. The Interim Report of the Childcare Working Group was the subject of a statement in plenary session on 7 July. This marked the start of a 12-week public consultation, which ran from 7 July until 30 September. Committee members are encouraged to consider the questions posed within the Interim Report and to provide feedback to assist the Group as it begins to develop its final report.

Background

4. Since the establishment of the Group in January 2004, 7 meetings have been held to date. The Group has received presentations on and has so far discussed the following issues:
 - The Needs and Rights of the Child
 - The Foundation Phase
 - Regulation Policy and the operational role of the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales
 - Action to Build, Train and Develop the Workforce
 - Training and Qualifications in Early Years and Childcare
 - Business Support and Childcare Enterprises

- Using European Structural Funds to Increase Childcare Provision in Wales
 - Views from Caerphilly Parent Focus Group.
 - Tax credits/Sure Start consultation in England on extension to Home Childcarer Scheme/ implications for Wales.
 - Childcare and the needs of children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds.
 - Factors affecting the development of good quality, affordable and accessible childcare in rural areas.
 - Community Focussed Schools
5. The Assembly Government has contracted with the Daycare Trust to provide support by drafting both the interim and final reports, including the review of the preliminary meetings and the collation of existing written sources on childcare and best practice. This will enable the reports to have an internal consistency, and will provide re-assurance that the group's reporting deadlines may be met. The Daycare Trust is well known across the UK for its championing of childcare, though this is the first time that they have undertaken work in Wales.
 6. The interim report is in the nature of a stock take of the issues covered by the Group's terms of reference. It invites comments on some of the key issues for childcare currently, in order to provide a basis for the Group to develop recommendations through the Autumn months.
 7. The Assembly Government hosted a childcare symposium on Thursday 23rd September in Cardiff, for members of the Childcare Working Group and other stakeholders. The purpose of the event was to provide an information day for the Group to broaden their knowledge and illustrate examples of best practice. The programme for the event included speakers with strong UK-wide credibility, covering the following aspects:
 - Aspirations for universal childcare
 - Assessing the impact of childcare upon children's development
 - International perspective of childcare development
 - Integrating childcare with early years education, play and family support
 - Group work around the question "Do we need bricks and mortar buildings to integrate services?"
 8. Monthly meetings of the Group will continue through October to December. The October meeting will take the form of an evidence-taking session to further inform the Group's knowledge of the relevant issues. At this stage, the Group will also be in a position to consider the responses to the public consultation on the interim report. This information will assist the development of the Group's final report, which will be the subject of a debate in Plenary in February 2005.

Financial Implications

9. There are no financial implications at this stage.

Cross Cutting Themes

10. The Interim Report discusses issues that have an impact on small businesses, local government, voluntary sector and private sector childcare providers. Issues including diversity and the Welsh language are also addressed. Membership of the Group is drawn from local government, other government departments, the NHS, business and the voluntary sector, with additional members being invited to join when appropriate to the Group's discussions.
11. There are unlikely to be Human Rights Impact or significant Sustainable Development considerations.

Action for Subject Committee

12. The Committee is invited to discuss the Childcare Working Group's Interim Report and to provide comments which will assist in the development of the Group's final report.

Dr Brian Gibbons AM
Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport

Contact Point: John Abraham, Children and Families Directorate, tel: 029 20 823504