

EOC (2) 01-07 (p.3)Annex

Childcare Strategy Action Points and Progress

Action 1.

The Assembly will continue a dialogue with DWP in making the case for extra support to the most vulnerable groups.

The Assembly Government recognises the financial pressure on vulnerable groups. We have a good working relationship with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and we maintain our dialogue with them, within the framework of an agreed Concordat.

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions In August 2006 about Welfare Reforms stressing the need to ensure adequate safeguards are in place to protect our most vulnerable citizens, whilst providing positive help and assistance to help people achieve the often difficult transition into work.

There is also a clear relationship between the levels of state benefits and the rate of child poverty. The hardship resulting from benefits that are too low militates against our stated and shared aim of eradicating child poverty.

The need to improve awareness of and accessibility to existing benefits is an area that the deputy Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration has highlighted in his Child Poverty Strategy Implementation Plan, for joint action between the Assembly Government and DWP.

Action 2.

The NSF will set standards for inclusive play, and the Assembly Government will publish on its website exemplar practice of inclusive childcare and play.

The NSF for Children, Young People and Maternity Services has set standards for inclusive Play, and the Assembly Government has now published exemplar practice of inclusive childcare and play on its website. This can be found at;

http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning

Action 3.

CSIW's 3 year strategy will make children's experiences the central focus of regulation, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens.

CSIW has done some initial development work to make communicating directly with younger children part of the inspection process.

There are new regulations due to come into force in January 2007 which, as part of the quality assurance process, require providers to gather the views of children as well as parents.

CSIW has now reformed the inspection methodology for sessional care and childminders. The reduction in the normal frequency of inspection from 1 year to every 2 years for childminders has resulted in 1000 fewer inspections this year.

CSIW is now considering whether it should reduce the normal frequency of inspection for some other under 8's services. Work on the methodology for inspections of out of school care is ongoing with a proposed implementation of April 2007.

The reform of inspection for crèches, open access play and full day care will be dealt with during 2007-08.

Action 4.

The Assembly Government will support the development of a consistent quality assurance methodology across childcare and early years education.

The Assembly Government has held discussions with the main childcare organisations in Wales about the possible development of a unified care and education quality assurance scheme. Their views are now being documented and officials are discussing possible recommendations to be made to the ELLS Minister.

Action 5.

The Assembly Government has asked CSIW and Estyn to bring forward their considered proposals for a more complementary approach in settings which are inspected by both.

The Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) and Estyn have completed and evaluated a pilot that took place between January and March 2006. They are now working towards developing a proposal.

Action 6.

Subject to discussion with childcare organisations and the Care Council for Wales, we will consult on regulations to enable the CCW to open its register to early years and childcare workers.

Subject to formal consultation, draft regulations will be prepared under Sections 55 and 118 of the Care Standards Act 2000, to enable persons providing daycare for children aged under 8 to register with the Care Council for Wales.

Action 7.

The Assembly Government will ensure that parents who use childcare workers within their home that are registered with the Care Council for Wales can access the childcare tax credit.

We are proposing to create a single 'light touch' approval scheme for carers in this category. Carers that are approved under the new scheme will be able to provide qualifying care for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit and for the tax and National Insurance Contributions exemptions for employer- supported childcare. We expect to lay regulations early in 2007, and for the scheme to be in place for the tax year 2007-08.

Carers will have to have a recognised childcare qualification at level 2 or above in addition to a first aid certificate and satisfactory criminal records check.

Action 8

The Assembly Government will undertake research to review the range of out of school care available for children aged 8 to 14, how it can best improve children's long term outcomes as well as meeting parent's needs, and whether further regulatory action is needed to assure quality and control risk. Children will participate in this research.

This research will be commissioned by March 2007.

Action 9.

We will mount a communications campaign, working with all local Children's Information Services, childcare providers and primary health contacts to ensure they have accessible promotional material to provide to parents regarding the Working Tax Credit.

Officials have met colleagues from Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC), Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and the Children's Information Service (CIS) to discuss possible options for taking forward a publicity campaign for Working Tax credits.

Action 10.

We will work with Children's Information Services to strengthen their profile through a national publicity strategy. This will include the preparation nationally of a "Choosing Childcare" booklet for parents in Wales.

A new publicity strategy is being prepared in consultation with the Children's Information Services (CIS) in Wales.

The 'Choosing Childcare in Wales' booklet is completed and a successful launch took place at the

Urdd Eisteddfod in Denbighshire in June 2006. Booklets have now been delivered to each of the 22 CIS's across Wales and Jobcentre Plus who will distribute to the parents and carers of Wales.

Action 11.

Local Authorities will be under a new duty to secure sufficient childcare, supported by regulations and guidance appropriate to Wales.

The Childcare Act 2006 complements the childcare strategy for Wales "Childcare is for Children".

In Wales, the provisions of the Act can be seen in two parts, placing statutory duties on Local Authorities to –

- Secure sufficient childcare where this is reasonably practicable, and
- Provide information on children's services and childcare to parents

In determining whether the provision of childcare is sufficient a Local Authority must take the lead role in facilitating the childcare market to ensure it meets the needs of working parents; in particular the needs of parents in their area for –

- The provision of childcare in respect of which the child care element of working tax credit is payable,
- The provision of childcare which is suitable for disabled children, and
- The provision of childcare involving the use of the Welsh language.

Local Authorities are to have specific regard to the needs of these groups. Childcare for an area could not be judged as sufficient unless it meets the needs of the community in general, and these three groups in particular.

They must also ensure people have access to the full range of information they need as a parent.

It is envisaged that the new duties will come into force in April 2008.

Draft regulations and supporting guidance for implementation of the statutory duties will issue for consultation in February 2007.

The new duties will be supported by funds transferred from the Cymorth grant scheme into Revenue Support Grant. The current budget for Cymorth in 2007-08 is £59.6 million. We have issued instructions and guidance to local partnerships requiring a level of Cymorth investment of at least 8.5% to fund childcare projects, including children's information services. The recommendations and new duties will therefore create no additional burden because the guidance supporting the duties can be made consistent with these resources.

Action 12.

The Welsh Assembly Government will work with the new Sector Skills Council for Care and Development to create a Workforce Development Plan for Wales.

The Care Council for Wales, as the relevant Sector Skills Council, is working closely with the Assembly Government on the production of a Workforce Development Strategy for the Early Years and Childcare Workforce. The results of a recent scoping study will contribute to improving the match between the needs of employers and what education and training providers deliver.

The Care Council for Wales has developed two posts to take forward the children's workforce agenda in Wales, one covering early years and childcare and the other the children's workforce more generally. Each post is funded by the Assembly Government for a period of 2 years beginning in 2006-07.

Action 13.

The Welsh Assembly Government will make available part of the "Flying Start" funding to support workforce development and the workforce recruitment campaign.

£4.1 million of the Flying Start expenditure for 2006-07 is allocated for planning and workforce development, with the majority intended for training to increase the overall size of the qualified early years and childcare labour force.

The Assembly Government are working closely with local authorities to ensure a joined up approach for both local and national actions regarding workforce development and recruitment.

Action 14.

The Assembly Government will ensure Genesis Wales delivers on its national targets:

- To assist 10,000 people in the Objective 1 area.
- To increase childcare places by 7,000 in the Objective 1 area.
- To assist 3,000 people in the Objective 3 area.
- To increase childcare places by 1,500 in the Objective 3 area
- 75% completing course / activities
- 50% of parents with children under 5 years in work for at least 6 months after ESF support.
- 10% of beneficiaries achieving NVQ level 2 or equivalent qualification.
- 10% of beneficiaries achieving NVQ level 3 or equivalent qualification.
- 20% of beneficiaries achieving a basic qualification

The Genesis Wales project is on track to deliver on its national targets. To date, it has reached 3,304 beneficiaries in Objective 1 areas, and 836 beneficiaries in Objective 3 areas.

Childcare places provided are 2,844 and 494 in the Objective 1 and 3 areas respectively.

At this stage, the number of beneficiaries achieving a positive outcome after receiving support from Genesis is 1,610.

As most beneficiaries are only part-way through their training, it is not, at this stage, possible to provide statistics for the percentage targets.

Action 15.

WEFO will disseminate information widely from the monitoring and evaluation of the childcare programmes that it is funding.

The Cross Cutting Themes Research Project (Objective 1 & 3) final report was published April 2006. The report includes an analysis of the effect of the creation of childcare places on participation in the labour market.

Although awaiting distribution, the report is available on WEFO's website (<http://www.wefo.wales.gov.uk/resource/RME-CCT-2006-e4535.pdf>).

Action 16

Through Children's Information Services we will establish baselines and monitor progress in the provision of Welsh language and bilingual childcare settings, in all childcare sectors.

A Task & Finish Group on Welsh Medium Childcare Provision was established in June 2006. The group was established to examine the challenges for Welsh medium childcare in areas where Welsh speakers are in the minority.

A report writer was contracted to produce the final report of the Group. The group will hold its last meeting in November 2006 where the final report will be presented to the group.

As part of the process of setting baselines, the Assembly Government is taking advice from its task and finish group on Welsh medium and bilingual childcare on how to establish definitions of Welsh medium, bilingual and other childcare. It will be important to be consistent with parallel work taking place to define schools in this way.

Action 17.

We will commission independent action research into the perceptions and take up of formal childcare by ethnic minority parents in Wales.

The research will be jointly funded by WEFO and the Assembly Government and will begin this year.

Action 18.

Advice linking childcare with the Communities First programme will be contained in the revised Communities First Guidance.

The draft Communities First guidance went out to consultation in late May 2006. It was distributed to Communities First partnerships and other key stakeholders for comment. It included advice on Flying Start and childcare in relation to jobs and inactivity.

The 12 week consultation period ran until 30 August 2006.

The final version of the guidance is to be issued early in 2007.

Action 19.

An Implementation Group of external partners for this Strategy and Flying Start will be set up.

An Early Years and Care Sub-Group to the Ministerial Advisory Group on Education, Lifelong Learning & Skills is being established. The Sub-Group will be chaired by Iram Siraj-Blatchford, who has extensive experience, including the internationally renowned EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) project.