

(p5)

Date: Wednesday, 26 June 2002
Time: 9.30am
Venue: Committee Rooms 3&4, National Assembly Buildings
Title: Childcare Arrangements in the National Assembly

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee on Equality of Opportunity of the current childcare provisions available to staff at the Assembly and to provide information on the Childcare Review currently being undertaken.

Summary

2. The National Assembly for Wales currently provides its staff with two forms of subsidised childcare, Lilliput Day Nursery and the Spice playscheme. These are both based in Cardiff. A Childcare Review is currently underway to provide options to meet the childcare needs of Assembly staff. This paper does not cover the provision of subsidised childcare for Assembly Members and their staff, which is a matter for the House Committee.

Timing

3. The Committee has asked for a paper on the childcare arrangements in the National Assembly to be provided for this meeting.

Issues and Considerations

4. The National Assembly for Wales aspires to be an example of best practice in relation to equal opportunities. Subsidised childcare arrangements within the National Assembly have been in need of review; Ministers and staff at regional offices have highlighted this issue.
5. Subsidised childcare is only provided in Cardiff. Lilliput Day Nursery in Gabalfa provides 30 full time places at a subsidised rate and caters for children under 5. The Spice play scheme is run during school holidays with 60 places for children aged 5 – 14 at a subsidised rate.
6. The main issues are:
 - That only staff in Cardiff have access to subsidised childcare facilities and only a limited number of staff benefit from what is provided.
 - What is provided is not flexible. The subsidy provided by the Assembly can only be used through the two providers and parents have to sign up to the terms and condition of use, such as opening

hours, activities.

7. The Childcare Review is considering three options, all involve continuing with Lilliput Day Nursery and the Spice holiday playscheme at least until the current contracts need renewing. The options being considered are as follows:
 - No change
 - Introduce childcare vouchers on a graduated scale providing a high value of vouchers for the lowest grades
 - Introduce childcare vouchers to all staff at an equal value.

The Executive Board's Personnel and Support Services Committee will be considering the options on 17 July 2002

Consultation

7. The Childcare Review has involved consultation with staff through focus groups and 2 childcare surveys. The focus group where held at Cathays Park, Cardiff Bay, Colwyn Bay, Carmarthen, Caernarfon, Aberystwyth and Llandrindod Wells approximately 150 people attended. Over 1000 people responded to the childcare survey for all staff (over 700 with no children aged 14 or under) and 258 people responded to the survey for parents with children aged 5 years and under, both surveys where sent electronically so all staff could reply.
8. To identify best practice, a number of organisations have been contacted:
 - The Daycare Trust (a national childcare organisation);
 - Pat Campbell, Head of PCS Equality Health and Safety Branch.
 - The National Assembly's Trade Union Side
 - The Cabinet Office and various Government Departments through the inter-departmental working group on childcare.

Way Forward

Once the results of the consultation have been considered and a proposed way forward devised, it will need to be discussed with Trade Union Side. The financial implications will need to be considered by the Finance Minister in the current budget planning round.

Other Childcare Assistance

Assembly staff benefit from a number of arrangements aimed at helping them to meet their childcare responsibilities. These are:

- Maternity leave; paid maternity leave of 18 weeks, followed by a further 34 weeks unpaid maternity leave which may be shared with the father if he also works for the Assembly.
- Paternity leave; paid paternity leave for 10 days.
- Parental leave; 13 weeks unpaid leave for children born on or after 15th December in 1999 and under 5 years old, however only a maximum of 4 weeks can be taken for each child in any one year.
- Fostering and adoption; paid leave is available ..
- Flexible working hours; the flexible working conditions allow staff to work between the hours of 0700 and 1900 with core hours between 1000 and 1145, and 1400 and 1500.
- Internal job advertising; the policy includes an assumption that all jobs are amenable to part time/ job share working, unless a specific business case is made.
- Care of dependants; 5 days special leave entitlement is available to staff who have to care for dependants with emergency ill health.
- Networking opportunities; networks for carers, part time workers and women are being planned as part of a networking event on 25 July.

Action

10. The Committee is invited to note the current childcare provisions within the Assembly and the Childcare Review that is underway.

Sarah Bell