

Julie Morgan AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1359
Ein cyf/Our ref JMSS/00536/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

20 September 2023

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your correspondence on 22 August, regarding the petition from Jade Richards asking the Welsh Government to expand childcare support in Wales to match the proposals that the Chancellor announced for England in his Spring budget.

I recognise that high-quality provision in the early years plays an important role in ensuring that every child has a wonderful experience of childhood, has the best start in life and fulfils their potential.

You will be aware that through our revised Programme for Government, we have already committed to expanding funded childcare to two-year-olds, and this is being taken forward through our Flying Start programme. The Flying Start programme is making a real difference to the lives of children in some of Wales' our most disadvantaged communities and from independent evaluation evidence, we can see Flying Start is having a positive impact on families' lives and has been life-changing for some 'high need families'. These parents have stated Flying Start has had a positive impact on their child's development as well as making a positive contribution to their own skills and knowledge as a parent.

The provision of funded, high quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds is integral to Flying Start. This is why we have chosen to focus our expansion of provision through the Flying Start programme rather than through the Childcare Offer for Wales.

The Childcare Offer is available to eligible families of 3- to 4-year-old children and provides support for 48 weeks per year, compared to England's 38 week Offer, whilst this does include a minimum of 10 hours for early education during term time, 30 hours childcare is available each week for 9 of the holiday weeks.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

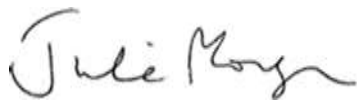
In September 2022, the eligibility criteria in Wales was widened to include parents in education and training. This expansion supported more than 500 additional families in its first year and reflects the value we place on supporting those who are seeking to improve their employment prospects by gaining qualifications, retraining or changing career paths.

As part of the Spring Budget the Chancellor announced that Wales was receiving an additional £178m over the next two years (2023-24 and 2024-25) as a result of all the spending decisions made in England, not just to the expansion of funded childcare. This meant that our financial position was up to £900m lower in real terms than what we expected – and what the UK Government said Wales needed – at the time of the last spending review in 2021.

When we made our budget for 2023-24, we drew on all our available resources to protect frontline services and provide targeted cost-of-living support to individuals and the economy. Ministers are now having to make very difficult decisions to make sure we can balance the budget and prevent a breach of our spending limits, while ensuring we honour all our legal commitments, including pay deals for teachers and NHS staff.

You will be aware of the written statement which the First Minister issued in August, about the significant pressures Welsh Government is currently facing, consequently we are not currently in a position to confirm any new developments to childcare and how we will support families with childcare costs in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Morgan', written in a cursive style.

Julie Morgan AS/MS

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