

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Scrutiny of Draft Budget 2015 – 2016 – Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

CYPE(4)–25–14 – Paper 1

1. Introduction

This paper provides comments and information to the Committee regarding Children and Young People future programme budget proposals outlined within the Draft Budget which was laid on 30 September 2014. The budget for this area sits within the Communities and Tackling Poverty (CTP) MEG.

2. Background

Compared to the indicative plans published at Final Budget 2014-15 the total DEL allocation for the CTP MEG has increased by £20.54m in 2015-16 to £737.44m.

This includes a decrease in Resource DEL of £11.41m to £342.074m, representing amounts transferred back to Reserves. There is also a net increase to the Capital budget of £32m to £395.42m following an allocation from central reserves of £2m to support the development of new and maintenance of existing Gypsy Traveller sites and £5m for the Home Improvement Loan Scheme.

The following summary financial tables show the overall effect on the CTP Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) baseline budget.

Summary Financial Tables:

CTP MEG	2014-15 Supp. Budget £000	2015-16 Indicative Plans Restated Final Budget £000	2015-16 Changes £000	2015-16 New Plans Draft Budget £000
Resource DEL	353,933	353,484	-11,410	342,074
Capital DEL	386,820	363,420	32,000	395,420
DEL Baseline	740,753	716,904	20,590	737,494

Within the CTP MEG, the specific impact on the Children, Young People and Families (CYP&F) budget is summarised in this separate table.

CYP&F	2014-15 Supp. Budget	2015-16 Indicative Plans Restated	2015-16 Changes	2015-16 New Plans Draft
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	£000	Final Budget £000	£000	Budget £000
Resource DEL	125,613	127,413	-969	126,444
Capital DEL	8,000	2,000	4,950	6,950
DEL Baseline	133,613	129,413	3,981	133,394

3. Budget Overview

The overarching aim of the Communities and Tackling Poverty Department is to unite the work of the Welsh Government and its partners in tackling poverty and achieving a fairer, more sustainable and better quality of life for communities, families and individuals, both now and in the long term.

The portfolio works to prevent poverty, help people out of poverty and help build resilient communities where families and individuals can access the support they need.

We are helping children to get the best start in life and supporting families. We aim to ensure that one of the most basic well-being needs - for a good home - is met, especially for people who would otherwise be excluded from the housing market. We are investing and working with communities in our most deprived areas, to improve their social, economic and environmental well-being. We are taking action to embed equality, including the rights of children and young people, across the Welsh Government and the public sector; and supporting the third sector to play its part in achieving the outcomes we are working for and want to see in Wales.

The Department has a number of specific priorities which reflect and support the delivery of the Programme for Government, many of which also have a direct impact on children and young people:

- supporting families and children, in particular through Flying Start and Families First;
- tackling poverty and promoting community resilience including Communities First;
- providing affordable, safe and warm housing for children and families through our Social Housing Grant Programme;
- improving the quality of the social housing stock in Wales through our Major Repairs Allowance programme;
- regeneration our towns and communities through Vibrant and Viable Places;
- providing assistance through our Supporting People programme to enable people to live in their own homes for longer;
- mitigating the impact of welfare reform;
- increasing financial and digital inclusion, including Discretionary Assistance Fund and Credit Unions;
- increasing the availability of quality, affordable childcare and play provision;
- promoting the rights and participation of children and young people
- promoting equality and inclusion;
- supporting the development of the Third Sector and enhancing its strategic relationship with Government; and

4. Programme for Government

In drafting our budget proposals for 2015-16, we have adopted an outcomes-based approach, ensuring that our proposed funding allocations reflect our overarching *Priorities for Wales*, with an emphasis on tackling poverty by working collaboratively with our partners to improve the futures of communities across Wales. It is preventative in nature, taking a long term view and working with communities.

Specifically, the Children, Young People and Families Action supports a number of key programmes including Flying Start and Families First, both of which focus on supporting children and their families. In 2015-16 we will be investing £126.4m (revenue spend). The Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) detail is attached at Annex 1.

Flying Start

Supporting Children, Families and Deprived Communities, in 2015-16 we will continue to provide budgetary support for Flying Start, our flagship Early Years programme, with £76.9m funding. In addition, we are increasing the capital budget for Flying Start by £4.95m to £6.95m. This additional funding will support Flying Start as it expands to provide support to double the number of children that it helps, from 18,000 to 36,000. The programme's expansion will ensure that, by March 2016, Flying Start's support will benefit the 25% of children in Wales under the age of 4 and their families who live in some of our most deprived communities. As of the end of 2013-14 we are already reaching over 31,000 children and their families.

Doubling the number of children benefitting from **Flying Start is one of the Programme for Government's 'Five for a Fairer Future' commitments** and is a targeted investment to support children and their families in the early years. International evidence supports this approach as an effective means of enhancing the life chances of our most disadvantaged children.

Flying Start is a key tackling poverty programme, aimed at ensuring that Flying Start children are healthy and thriving; capable and coping; and reaching their potential. This is achieved through providing four key Flying Start entitlements to children under four years old and their families: enhanced health visiting, parenting support, support for early language development (primarily in the form of language and play programmes) and free, high quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 year-olds.

In July we published the second Flying Start Statistical Release which provides key statistics from the Flying Start programme. The Release shows that in 2013-14, 31,322 children benefited from Flying Start, representing an increase from the figure benefiting last year of approximately a third (from 23,579) and is a significant achievement given the challenges represented by the expansion of the programme. It also exceeds the target number of children (27,657) to be benefiting from the programme at this stage of the expansion.

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. Evaluation data demonstrate evidence of all anticipated immediate outcomes of the programme. This includes the language development, social and emotional

development and cognitive outcomes for children. Findings from the qualitative research also demonstrated impacts for parents in terms of parenting behaviour, health and wellbeing and their perceptions of the local area. There is also evidence that some parents of children in the Programme benefit from the opportunities available to learn new skills and improve their employment prospects.

Greater engagement with early years services is important for building the medium and long term impacts that the programme is expected to deliver in the future.

There are currently more than 70 'live' capital projects and more will come on line when the additional capital funds are confirmed. Within the next six months almost 90% of the 'live' capital projects are due for completion, and the remaining projects will be completed in 2015-16. The work is helping to improve the local area often providing the only facilities available to families.

Flying Start also supports **Growth and Sustainable Jobs** by providing free high quality, part time childcare for 2-3 year olds. This increases the scope for parents to access training and employment. The investment in the programme is also supporting the creation of jobs in the construction industry, as well as in the childcare and health and other family support professional sectors. It is estimated the expansion of Flying Start will create approximately 740 jobs

Flying Start is subject to an ongoing programme of evaluation activity. Future activity will include an in-depth analysis of existing data sets to explore the impact of the programme over time and will also include case study work with families.

Families First

This is an innovative programme that promotes the development by all local authorities of effective multi-agency systems and support for families, with a clear emphasis on **prevention and early intervention** for families, particularly those living in **poverty**. The Welsh Government has committed to maintain the Families First programme during this Assembly term and we will be investing **£43.7m in 2015-16**. This is a reduction of £1.0m based on indicative plans previously published for 2015-16. By the end of this Assembly term we will have allocated **£183.9m** to Families First.

The programme is a key response to the Welsh Government's **Child Poverty Strategy** and a significant contributor to the objectives of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan. Local delivery plans prioritise action and support to reduce the numbers of families living in workless households; improve the skills of parents and carers and young people living in low-income households; and reduce the inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes for children who come from the lower socio economic backgrounds. Projects support a range of initiatives including targeting 16-19 year olds that have disengaged from education and training and providing personal support to develop their employability.

Families First is subject to an ongoing programme of evaluation activity. The final phase of our initial evaluation of Families First will be completed by the middle of 2015 and will also

consider whether the programme has provided value for money in its delivery of early intervention and preventative services for families.

Two key features of the programme are the requirement for local authorities to develop increasingly family-focused assessment and engagement processes through the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF), and to improve coordinated support through Team Around the Family (TAF) models. The JAFF assesses the families' strengths and needs in a number of areas and is used to design a tailored plan of interventions to help families overcome the problems they face. TAF is a model which brings together a wide range of professionals to work together with a family in order to help them address the breadth of challenges they are facing. The Families First Year 2 Evaluation Report shows that TAF models are now operational in all 22 local authority areas in Wales.

A further key element of the programme is a ring-fenced sum to be spent on innovative ways of improving services for families with disabled children and young carers. Local authorities are expected to provide for these families in all their services, but the ring-fenced funding is provided to ensure their specific needs are catered for. The Families First Year 2 Evaluation Report found that services for families affected by disability have improved as a direct result of Families First. The programme has funded new services, and led to better integration and co-ordination of existing services. Practitioners are now more aware of the range of disability provision available and the value of integrating disability services with mainstream and other provision.

Supporting children, families and deprived communities is fundamental to the objectives of Families First as an all-Wales programme. Children do better when they live in a good quality and safe home, have a close, positive and secure relationship with their mother, father or with a key adult. Families First aims to provide families with appropriate support to ensure they are self-sufficient and resilient. We have invested in support services to families and direct services that provide children with the ability to develop and parents with the support they need to cope with difficult family situations, help them address issues caused by poverty and to ensure that they have the right information and advice when they need it. Projects in Families First will, for example, identify families that are most at risk of remaining in long term poverty and target early and sustained support to the whole family, improving skills, developing aspiration and improving levels of household income.

We collect a comprehensive range of data for the Families First programme. Our latest data shows that between 1 April 2013 and 30 June 2014, 5,063 families had completed a Joint Assessment Family Framework assessment and 3,387 families had signed a Team Around the Family Action Plan. Our data also informs us of the reach of the programme beyond the JAFF and TAF elements, for example, in 2013-14 200 Families First projects were accessed 313,826 times by individuals. This may include individuals who access more than one project, and/or who access a project more than once. This figure, effectively illustrates the significant reach of the programme.

Despite a reduction in the budget it is expected local authorities will still deliver the key elements of the programme. Some of the required savings will be secured through the renegotiation of evaluation costs. Experience over the last two years also shows that revenue outturn is typically around 98% of budget. The aim in 2015-16 will be to maintain the actual

level of provision for Families First services. This will involve an element of over-programming in order to achieve 100% spend of the funding available.

Childcare and Play

The provision has additional funding of £0.05m to undertake a feasibility study in 2015-16 to inform a pilot childcare scheme for Further Education students in 2016-17. The remaining budget is being maintained at £2.7m in 2015-16 given its importance as a significant policy driver in relation to growth and jobs and in terms of tackling poverty. Successive evaluations have concluded that the availability of quality, affordable childcare is essential to support people who need to work, or acquire skills to enable them to work.

The development of affordable, accessible and high quality childcare is recognised in the **Programme for Government**, the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and the Early Years and Childcare Plan as key to ensuring that parents are able to access training and work. We will look for opportunities under the next round of European programmes (2014-2020) to take action in this area as part of our aim to promote social justice and combat poverty.

A reduction of £48k has been applied to the **Support for Children's Rights** budget in 2015-16. The reduction is a reflection of work that has come to a natural end primarily in relation to the consultation on the Children's Rights Scheme, which is now complete.

The **Children's Commissioner for Wales'** budget will be maintained at £1.7m in 2015-16. This demonstrates our on going commitment to ensure that the rights of children and young people are represented by the Commissioner and his particular focus on tackling poverty and advising government and other public bodies on this matter can continue.

The budget for MEIC – the advocacy and advice helpline for children and young people within the **Advocacy** Budget has been protected in 2015/16 as a front line service to children and young people.

5. Preventative spending

Preventative spend remains a key theme of this portfolio. It is at the heart of our tackling poverty programmes, in particular the Flying Start and Families First Programmes, and in our approach to tackling the inequalities experienced by those with protected characteristics. Because of the nature of these programmes, they are entirely aimed at early intervention and prevention, and the way that services co-operate and collaborate to deliver for children and their families.

Evidence suggests that investing in early intervention is one of the most financially sustainable and effective ways to tackle poverty, leading to better outcomes for the individual child or family as well as reducing the necessity for costly interventions in later years. Value for money from early intervention programmes, therefore, can only truly be assessed in the longer term. However, extensive international evidence supports our early intervention approach. More widely, this long-term view is consistent with the sustainable development approach embedded in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill.

Families First with a clear emphasis on **prevention and early intervention** for families, particularly those living in **poverty**, is designed to help working age people into employment and to help children and young people achieve their potential, and thereby decrease their reliance on benefits and other statutory services.

Flying Start, with its aim of improving the life chances of children from **some of the most disadvantaged areas across Wales**, will have a positive long term impact on the economy, not just because of the outcomes for children, but also in relation to **preventative spend** and the associated decrease in the need for more intensive and costly services that would otherwise need to be provided. The programme can also support improved social cohesion and community development, particularly when links are made with other support such as is available through Communities First.

The programme's expansion will ensure increased access to an enhanced health visitor service, which supports our priority of improving **Health and Well-being** through **preventative investment** in early interventions. Raising health standards is further supported through Flying Start's parenting programmes, such as 'healthy eating', which aim to reduce obesity and through targeted support to improve childhood immunisation.

The Children's Commissioner's role in scrutinising the government and ensuring that legislation, policies and decisions provide the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families again very much focuses on **preventative measures**. Likewise our funding allocations for Advocacy and Supporting Children's Rights have a strong focus on **preventative spend** – informing, reassuring and empowering children to make positive changes in their lives, and resolving issues without the need for undue and stressful escalation.

In addition, the budget for MEIC – the advocacy and advice helpline for children and young people - has been protected. MEIC provides an intervention that in many cases can result in situations not escalating for children and young people, and as a result they retain their places in their home.

6. Cross-cutting considerations

In applying sustainable development to the budget process within Communities and Tackling Poverty, decisions have been made that reflect the five key principles of sustainable development:

- *Collaboration* – recognising that many of the solutions to the 'sustainability' challenges Wales faces cannot be solved by one organisation. Maintaining our support for advice on sustainable development to all sectors will help in identifying opportunities for collaboration. We will also continue to pursue opportunities for collaboration across Government and with other partners, including the third sector, in order that programmes and services reach into the communities that most need them.
- *Integration* – our Flying Start, Families First and Communities First programmes have shared outcomes promoting prosperity and employment, learning and fulfilling potential, and health and well-being. They also help deliver objectives in our Strategic Equality Plan.

These outcomes are being brought together into a Common Outcomes Framework, which is aimed at promoting greater alignment of delivery across all three programmes.

- *Long term* – investing in early years and family support, since the evidence is that this will have greater benefits in the long term.
- *Prevention* – seeking to tackle problems at source, rather than tackling the consequences of these problems at a later date. Prevention and early intervention is an approach which not only benefits people and communities but has the potential to generate long term cost savings. This approach is at the heart of our tackling poverty programmes, in particular Families First, and in our approach to tackling the inequalities experienced by those with protected characteristics.
- *Citizen centred / engagement* – recognising the importance of involving people in the decisions that affect them: for example community involvement is a key feature of the Communities First programme.

Prioritising the needs of the poorest and protecting those who are most disadvantaged and most vulnerable is critical, particularly in the current economic climate. The Strategic Equality Plan and Tackling Poverty Action Plan provide an important framework for these efforts. In particular, action to tackle poverty and action to reduce inequalities not only complement, but also build on one another.

Evidence shows that people with certain protected characteristics are at greater risk of living in low income households and initiatives that tackle poverty will therefore have a positive impact on those groups. We also know that certain ethnic minority groups, disabled people, lone parents (who are predominantly women), and younger people who are not in employment, education and training are more at risk of living in low income households. In particular, disabled people are disproportionately represented in both economically inactive and workless households. We will continue to identify opportunities to “dovetail” the Welsh Government’s Strategic Equality Plan with the objectives in the Child Poverty Strategy and our Tackling Poverty Action Plan, and support those children and families with certain protected characteristics. There is already a greater emphasis on monitoring the outcomes of those groups at risk of living in poverty and those with protected characteristics within the programmes within the Communities and Tackling Poverty portfolio.

7. Commentary on Actions and detail of Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) Allocations

A summary of the Children, Young People and Families budget allocations at Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) level is attached at Annex 1. This provides a breakdown of:

- 2015-16 allocations;
- 2014-15 allocations - projected outturns for 2014-15, at this point in the financial year, are to budget; and
- 2013-14 final outturn figures.

To note, this Draft Budget round does not extend beyond the one financial year 2015-16. Therefore, there are no indicative figures available for 2016-17 at this time.

The significant changes from previously published indicative figures for 2015/16 for the wider Communities and Tackling Poverty MEG are as follows:

Action	BEL Title	2015-16 Indicative Plans Restated Final Budget £000	2015-16 Changes £000	2015-16 New Plans Draft Budget £000
Children, Young People & Families	Families First	44,608	-956	43,652
Communities and Tackling Poverty (Capital)	Flying Start	2,000	4,950	6,950
Supporting People	Supporting People Grant	130,218	-5,809	124,409

- Families First reduction of £0.96m

The impact will be in two areas. A reduction in evaluation spend – evaluation costs will need to be renegotiated. Secondly a ‘real time’ reduction of £2m in the budget available to local authorities. However, it is expected local authorities will still be able to deliver on the key elements of the programme as explained above.

- Flying Start capital increase of £4.95m

Transferred within the MEG to support the Flying Start programme as it expands to provide support for double the number of children, from 18,000 to 36,000. The additional funding will provide sufficient funds for each local authority to deliver all four elements of the programme, as well as ensuring there are high quality childcare facilities, venues for group work, such as parenting programme, and offices for Flying Start teams available in the local area.

- Supporting People reduction of £5.8m

This reduction will impact across all sections of the community who need our assistance through this scheme. This includes children and young people. We will work with our delivery partners to ensure we can mitigate the impact of this reduction through improved ways of working.

8. Children’s Rights

The Children & Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places the duty to have due regard to the UNCRC on all Ministers and they must be fully aware of the duty when they make their decisions, including budgetary decisions.

In May 2014 the WG updated its Children’s Rights Scheme which sets out the arrangements that the Welsh Ministers must have in place to ensure that they comply with the duty. The Children’s Rights Scheme 2014 establishes robust processes to ensure that the Ministers act in compliance with their duty under section 1 of the Measure.

However, the completion of a CRIA is not mandatory (the duty is to have due regard) but this is a tool that WG have developed to assist with compliance with the duty.

An Integrated Impact Assessment Approach has been undertaken for the 2015-16 budget, which incorporates consideration of all duties and mandatory impact assessments. Children's rights and the UNCRC have been considered as part of this Integrated Impact Assessment Approach.

This approach has been further strengthened by the introduction of the Budget Advisory Group for Equality (BAGE) and their work to improve the Impact Assessment process through an integrated approach; and the work they have done to help inform the budget decision making process.

In addition the Support for Children's Rights budget within the Children, Young People and Families Action is specifically aimed at taking forward children's rights and the Rights of Children and Young Person's (Wales) Measure 2011, supporting Ministers and officials to comply with the duty on Ministers to have 'due regard' to the UNCRC and further promoting knowledge and understanding of Children and Young People's rights. This includes:

- funding for the Children's Commissioner's Office,
- funding for Meic, the Advocacy and Advice Helpline for children and young people
- specific budget allocation to take forward the recommendations from the review of Meic
- supporting and funding the work of the Ministerial Expert Group for Advocacy and Young Person's Expert Group on Advocacy;
- delivering Young Persons Expert Group on Advocacy - extended meeting/conference;
- maintaining the contract to deliver an initiative which will improve awareness, understanding and promotion of independent professional advocacy to social services and other professionals working with vulnerable groups of children and young people across Wales;
- the participation element of the Children and Families Development Grant (CFDG) for the promotion of UNCRC, Participation and Advocacy;
- maintaining the contract for training professionals who have a training role themselves in children's rights, participation and advocacy; including lecturers, social work trainers, teachers, youth workers, health professionals, police etc.; and
- the continuation of the promotion of children's rights in line with Section 5 of the 'Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 by using (and developing) existing promotional tools including the Welsh Government website pages, the UNCRC Getting it Right website, the Participation Hub, the on-line training package, the CYP Complaints Procedure, the App and the YouTube clip.

9. Specific areas

Flying Start

Officials investigated the feasibility of collecting information which would show how many children had benefitted from all four elements of the programme. It was concluded that this information could not be collected without a significant extra burden on local authorities with little benefit in terms of added insight into the successful operation of the programme. We currently collect a large amount of information which assists in the management of the programme, much of which also informs the Flying Start Statistical Release. We now have a system of continuous improvement of the programme, through our Account Manager process, and have agreed a Quality Improvement Plan with each local authority. Account Managers

use the management information we collect to populate and inform this improvement process. Additionally, the evaluations of Flying Start contribute to our assessment of the value for money of the programme.

The evaluation of Flying Start has clearly demonstrated that the programme is having a positive impact. This is why we have committed the necessary funds to complete the expansion of the programme.

Children and Families Organisational Grant

The high-level aim of the Children and families Delivery Grant is to reduce inequalities in health, education and economic outcomes for children living in poverty.

Early intervention and preventative approaches are key aspects of Building Resilient Communities and our flagship programmes Flying Start and Families First are positive, multi-agency responses to the poverty agenda and to improving outcomes. That is the focus of the new **Children and Families Delivery Grant** which is intended to support the tackling poverty agenda by reinforcing the work of our key programmes together with that of the childcare, children's rights, play and participation programmes operated by the Welsh Government. The grant is complementary and adds value to the programmes managed by the Welsh Government's Children, Young People and Families Division in five specific priority areas. These areas are:

- **Childcare:** Increasingly, families across Wales can access affordable, quality childcare
- **Play:** There are increased opportunities for children in Wales to play.
- **Supporting Families - Informed:** Families are appropriately informed about financial and practical support available to them.
- **Supporting Families- Engaged:** 'Seldom heard' families are engaged and access the programmes, support and services available to them.
- **Policy and Strategic Development:** Support for Policy and strategic development in relation to Children, Young People and Families. Systemic opportunities for Children and Young People to participate in decisions that affect them and have their **voices heard** are increased.

The grant supports families in practical, measurable ways, with particular emphasis on building family resilience and capacity to become less reliant on persistent interventions.

All successful bids have been able to demonstrate ambition, value for money and clear deliverables contributing to the priorities. The bids also include appropriate performance measurement criteria against which the Welsh Government can assess progress. Successful applicants are expected to work closely with other Children and Families Delivery Grant recipients to deliver maximum benefit.

Funded Projects

Mudiad Meithrin - The CWLWM project has been awarded £4,324,396 over a 3 year period to provide innovative solutions to creating flexible childcare and play opportunities to meet the

needs of parents and families. The grant will fund a range of services and activities including childcare places, parenting training and research into childcare and play issues.

Groundwork Wales - The Sustainable Play Project has been awarded £1,410,028 to increase and enhance the accessibility and quality of children's outdoor play experiences across areas suffering from high levels of deprivation. Over 11,500 children are expected to be involved in project play activities as part of the projects work programme.

ProMo Cymru - The Informed Families project has been awarded £1,532,391 over a three year period to develop a bilingual, online information service for families. The proposed service will provide access through a range of digital routes including social media and allow access via both mobile devices and more conventional home based ICT equipment.

Tros Gynnal Plant – The All Wales Restorative Approaches Family Engagement Project has been awarded to £882,000 over a three year period to advise and deliver training on the Restorative Approaches methodology. Over 550 parents and practitioners will be involved in training during the life of the project.

Children in Wales - The Tackling Poverty and promoting Children's Rights project has been awarded £1,874,527 over a three year to create a centre of excellence ensuring that the "Voice of the Child" is heard. The project will promote children's rights, raise awareness, establish and promote best practice, inform and enable children and young people to participate and provide evidence based advice to issues related to children's rights.

Participation

The proposal from Children in Wales focuses on promoting children's rights and the participation of children, young people and people who work with them and represent them. They will use existing mechanisms such as county youth forums, school councils and other participation networks to enable the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. They will then effectively influence and contribute to policy development and support a better informed and engaged workforce to deliver Welsh Government Policy.

Child Poverty

The evaluation of the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy was only published in July this year so we have been unable to take it into account in any depth in decisions on the draft 2015 /16 budget. However the lessons from the evaluation will continue to inform our approach, as clearly identified in the revised Child Poverty Strategy which is currently out for consultation; and also in the work taken forward across different Departments.

Evidence from the evaluation of the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy suggests that the approach we are taking in Wales is likely to make an important contribution to tackling poverty, but that this is likely to be in the longer term. As a result, it is essential that we have a Child Poverty Strategy in Wales that continues to look for opportunities that improve the circumstances and outcomes of low income families here and now, as well as opportunities that ensure we prevent children currently growing up in poverty from becoming low income households in the future.

The evaluation suggested that scale of programming is currently not enough to have an impact at the required level, in terms of tackling poverty. It is critical, therefore, that we identify more opportunities that will enable us to deliver change at the levels needed. For example, our Tackling Poverty Action Plan recognises the role of housing and regeneration, public procurement and a community benefits approach, in terms of generating training and employment opportunities for those living in deprived communities.

The evaluation focussed on 20 programmes contributing to tackling child poverty in Wales. These programmes were chosen to include in the evaluation in 2012/13. Since then, new policies and programmes have been put in place to improve the outcomes of children and young people living in low income families. For example, the Minister for Education and Skills has since launched “Rewriting the Future” which sets out the Welsh Government’s approach for breaking the link between poverty and educational attainment. The Minister for Education and Skills has also announced £20 million for Schools Challenge Cymru – the Welsh Government’s flagship school improvement programme.

We are currently consulting on a revised Child Poverty Strategy which commits us to continuing to reflect on the findings of the evaluation – to ensure that the policies and programmes we are taking forward to tackle poverty can have maximum impact and maximum benefit for those in need of support. It is essential that departments continue to develop and adapt the work they are taking forward, based on the best available evidence, to directly address child poverty. The revised strategy also has a commitment to help people into sustainable employment through direct support to business; facilitation of private sector jobs growth by improving the overall business environment; and help to create the conditions and framework for the private sector to flourish.

We cannot ignore the fact that the Welsh Government does not have all the levers available to influence poverty levels. Some of the most important levers – such as changes to the tax and benefits system – are the responsibility of the UK Government. The latest independent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies says even when tax and benefit changes are taken together they are still expected to result in an annual loss of around £720 million in Wales in 2015/16. The average weekly loss per household per week is around £11. The impacts of welfare reform are significant and will continue to hit poor people in Wales the hardest. Nonetheless, there is much that the Welsh Government can do – particularly in terms of improving educational attainment, increasing skills, reducing worklessness, and improving health outcomes.

Children’s Commissioner for Wales

The budget for the Children’s Commissioner for Wales has been protected for 2015/16. In terms of the independent review, this will conclude in December 2014 at which point the reviewer will present his findings to the Minister. We would not want to pre-empt the findings of this review and therefore it is too early to reflect in the allocations of the Draft Budget for 2015/16.

Advocacy

A full evaluation of MEIC has been completed and the findings are very positive. It found that MEIC should still be funded as there is sufficient evidence to show that it is making a positive difference to children and young people. The current MIEC contract comes to an end in March 2015. The recommendations from the evaluation have been built into the new specification that has been out to open tender.

The budget for MEIC has therefore been protected in line with the government's commitment to protect front line services that are effective and have proven to make a positive difference.

The relevant aspect of the Minister's portfolio relating to advocacy is MEIC and the promotion of advocacy as a support mechanism for children and young people.

In evaluating MEIC, the contracted organisation interviewed stakeholders including professionals who work with Children and young people, non-government organisations, local authorities and the Children's Commissioner's office. They also ran 5 focus groups across Wales with children and young people. The outcome of the evaluation was very positive and whilst the recommendations have been built into the new specification, the budget has been protected to reflect the outcome of the evaluation and the evidence that it made a positive difference to children and young people.

Play Policy and Childcare

We are increasing the Childcare and Play budget in 2015-16 which demonstrates our commitment to invest in childcare support and to support the development of the childcare sector, critical to ensuring that people are able to access training and or employment and also that children benefit from quality childcare experiences.

Lesley Griffiths AM
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

RESOURCE BUDGET - Departmental Expenditure Limit							
SPA	Actions	BEL Title	2013-14 Outturn	2014-15 Supplementary Budget June 2014	2015-16 Indicative Plans Final Budget	2015-16 Changes	2015-16 New Plans Draft Budget
Children, Young People and Families	Children, Young People and Families	Children's Commissioner	1,715	1,715	1,715	0	1,715
		Families First	45,779	46,908	44,608	-956	43,652
		Flying Start	60,535	72,094	76,894	0	76,894
		Childcare & Play Strategies	4,074	3,016	2,716	50	2,766
		Support for Children's Rights	573	805	405	-48	357
		Advocacy	904	1,075	1,075	-15	1,060
		SPA/ACTION Total	113,580	125,613	127,413	-969	126,444
	Total Resource		113,580	125,613	127,413	-969	126,444
CAPITAL BUDGET - Departmental Expenditure Limit							
SPA	Actions	BEL Title	2013-14 Outturn	2014-15 Supplementary Budget June 2014	2015-16 Indicative Plans Final Budget	2015-16 Changes	2015-16 New Plans Draft Budget
Communities and Tackling Poverty	Communities and Tackling Poverty	Flying Start	11,186	8,000	2,000	4,950	6,950
		SPA/ACTION Total	11,186	8,000	2,000	4,950	6,950
	Total Capital		11,186	8,000	2,000	4,950	6,950
	Total DEL		124,766	133,613	129,413	3,981	133,394