



Ann Jones AM  
Chair  
Committee for Children, Young People and Education  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

12

November 2014

Dear Ann

Thank you for your letter of 29 October requesting further information, following my attendance at Committee on 23 October. This is set out below.

**Impact Assessment Processes**

The Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment process is a key part of the budget process to ensure any funding decisions do not disproportionately affect sections of our society. If there is an impact, the assessment aims to ensure the effect is fully understood and mitigating actions can be implemented where necessary. Children's rights, as part of the SIIA process, were considered by all Departments in determining draft allocations. The results are set out in the document published alongside the draft budget.

Despite the challenging budget settlement received by the Welsh Government there are only a small number of changes to the budgets within the Communities and Tackling Poverty MEG which support our key interventions to help children and young people.

The budget changes for the Children Young People and Families SPA have been fully disclosed to the Committee previously and are as follows:

Spending Area	Amount of reduction	Impact
Families First	956,000	Impact to be mitigated by reduction in evaluation provision and a degree of over-programming to ensure funds are fully utilised.
Support for Children's Rights	48,000	Work naturally come to a conclusion
Advocacy	15,000	Uncommitted funds. Contract for MEIC not affected
Childcare and Play	(50,000)	Feasibility Study
	969,000	

Budgets have been protected to maintain our support for our key interventions for children and young people. We are protecting the Flying Start resource budget of £76.89m which is our flagship Early Years programme.

The Welsh Government has also committed to maintain the Families First programme during this Assembly term and we will be investing £43.7m in 2015-16. The £0.956m reduction above will be achieved without reducing provision for front line service delivery.

### **Flying Start**

The Committee has previously asked we provide information on the level of take up of all four of the core Flying Start services. As explained in Committee, this is not possible without a unique identifier for the children and parents engaged with Flying Start, we cannot collect this data.

As you will appreciate, for many of the families we work with in Flying Start, the challenge is securing and maintaining their engagement in the programme, and ensuring we encourage them to access services available to them. Many already have a negative attitude to family support services, therefore, asking them to be identified in this way could be both stigmatising and potentially counter productive in the development of effective relationships between the families and Flying Start.

### **Flying Start Take Up Rates**

Firstly, can I clarify we collect extensive data within Flying Start and are able to monitor closely the take up rates of the entitlements for eligible children and their parents. I can assure you we will continue to monitor the uptake of Flying Start services and where we see data which suggests a lower uptake of services or a failure to reach families, we will work closely with Local Authorities to address this. We will also continue to develop a robust approach to the overall evaluation of the long term impact of Flying Start. The Committee highlighted a number of areas where the National Evaluation of Flying Start raised questions about the statistical significance of the findings of the evaluation.

As explained in Committee, there are challenges in evaluating national programmes such as Flying Start. However, what the evaluation has clearly demonstrated especially for high need families, is the reach of Flying Start into some of our most disadvantaged communities has been hugely successful. It also demonstrates we are achieving better outcomes for families.

The Committee also asked about data on the numbers of eligible families in Flying Start areas who do not take up services. This is not data which we routinely collect as essentially those families would be recorded by services outside of Flying Start – for example, potentially registered with ante-natal services or primary care. However, it should be noted not all families who have children aged 0-4 in a Flying Start area would be registered with these services e.g. if a family with a child aged 2 moved into a Flying Start area and was not accessing any primary care or similar service. I have asked my officials to look into this issue further and will report back to you.

### **Flying Start Capital Programme**

The UK Treasury's '5 Case Business Model' has been used to consider all bids to the Welsh Government for capital funding. Each Local Authority has been required to submit a Strategic Outline Programme (SOP), which required them to set out the strategic case, the economic case, the commercial case, the financial case and the management case for investment in facilities. In doing so, Local Authorities had to provide details of all the other options/buildings they have considered, before confirming the preferred way forward. We do rely on the information received from Local Authorities, as to what is and is not available in the local area, but the SOP submitted has to be signed by a responsible person within the Local Authority and any funding awarded as a result of the information contained in the SOP could be recovered if found to be incomplete or inaccurate.

As discussed at the Committee, there have been incidences where new settings had to be established even though there were other facilities nearby. This has happened for a number of reasons, for example, where a Flying Start childcare setting needs to be available 5 days a week between specific hours, if the existing community centre is already well used, it may not be able to guarantee its premises could be used Monday to Friday for a set period.. There have also been cases of existing childcare providers not wanting to offer Flying Start spaces because they would only be paid for a maximum of 5 hours a day (one childcare session is 2.5 hours a day and there will usually be one in the morning and another in the afternoon) whereas it may be paid for 9 or 10 hours if it takes the child of working parents.

The statistics show less than 10% of all the projects being undertaken as part of the capital expansion are new builds, the remainder involve work to refurbish, adapt and enhance facilities which are already within the Flying Start communities.

### **Families First**

As indicated above, front line provision for Families First services will be maintained. In addition my evidence paper referred to the fact programmes across my portfolio, including Communities First, Flying Start and Families First, are working more closely together. This greater integration is intended to increase the impact of the resources we have to support children, families and communities and tackle poverty.

As far as outcomes from Families First are concerned, it is important to note positive outcomes may be achieved without the need to prepare a plan. The figure of 53% captures only those instances where a plan was prepared. We are continually considering how to improve programme delivery and as I explained in Committee, we will look to work closely with Local Authorities. We also drive learning in the programme through national, regional and Local Action learning approaches. Our most recent national learning event on Families First took place on 10 November in Cardiff which I attended

### **Child poverty**

The lessons from the evaluation of the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy have informed the development of our revised Child Poverty Strategy, which was published for consultation on 6 November 2014. The evaluation was supportive of the approach being taken in Wales and its focus on the early years and improving educational attainment. However, it recognised this was more likely to have an impact in the longer term. As a result, our revised Child Poverty Strategy continues to look for opportunities to improve the circumstances and outcomes of low income families "here and now". Specifically, it prioritises food poverty, childcare, in work poverty, action to mitigate the impact of welfare reform and housing and regeneration.

### **Children and Families Delivery Grant (CFDG)**

You asked for clarification of the process undertaken to award the grants under the above grant scheme. There were five priority areas identified for funding: childcare, play, supporting families, engaging families and policy/strategic development. Applications were invited from Third Sector organisations in Wales, with the ability to operate on a national basis. The applications were assessed by a panel, led by my officials and other officials with an understanding of tackling poverty, equalities and diversity and public service delivery. Five grant awards were made, however in all areas the bids were collaborative and, therefore, we are funding more than five organisations through the programme.

Play Wales was not successful with its CFDG application. Play Wales has since made a case to me where, although supportive of the grant we have awarded in the Play priority and agree this will deliver play opportunities for children, there are areas of policy and delivery which will not be delivered through this grant. This is not a failure of the CFDG process but reflects the applications submitted and assessed. I have agreed to provide funding to Play Wales for specific activities which will support the Welsh Government's policy agenda for play. This is not core funding.

The £50,000 you refer to in your letter is not funding Play Wales. This is funding in 2015/16 to fund the development of a new programme to support childcare for young people. I will be able to provide the Committee with more detail on this programme in the near future.

### **Children and Young People's Participation**

National Participation Structures have changed recently with Children in Wales now leading on a National model for the participation of children and young people and the National Participation Standards. As a result, there has been a need to update information and my officials have been working with Children in Wales, the Children's Commissioner and Local Authorities to make sure the new model is promoted and implemented. We expect these recent changes to have a positive impact.

The Participation Hub will continue to be supported and promoted by Children in Wales. It sets out clearly what is meant by participation, outlines the structures to support workers and provides participation resources and materials.

In terms of setting out the local and national structures to support participation, we have re-issued Shared Purpose – Shared Delivery, the statutory guidance for Local Authorities and their partners in developing Single Integrated Plans (SIP). This now includes an Annex which sets out the statutory guidance for providing and promoting children and young people's participation under Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 within the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

**Lesley Griffiths AC / AM**

Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi  
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty