

# National Assembly for Wales

## Children, Young People and Education Committee

### CYPE(4)-16-15 - Paper 1

#### Scrutiny of the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

#### Evidence from : Welsh Government

#### Introduction

1. The Communities and Tackling Poverty portfolio brings together a number of key policy areas and programmes, to ensure support is available to provide families with good quality homes, the support they need to get into and stay in work, affordable childcare where it is needed and strong resilient communities
2. The Welsh Government has placed the rights of children and young people at the heart of all decisions we take. We believe that children have the right to grow up in communities which support them, provide opportunities for them to play and where they enjoy the best opportunities to reach their potential and grow up healthy. We are also committed to ensuring children and young people have their voices heard, are effectively represented and can raise their concerns at all levels.

#### Tackling Child Poverty

3. The Welsh Government is committed to using all available levers to tackle child poverty. Significant progress has been made over recent years:
  - The number of workless households has fallen;
  - We have achieved our target to improve the educational outcomes of pupils eligible for Free School Meals in the Foundation Phase and to reduce the gap which currently exists between pupils from deprived and non-deprived backgrounds.
  - We are on track to achieve our targets to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training; and
  - We are helping parents improve skills and find work, through programmes including Communities First, Lift and Families First.
4. More needs to be done, however, if we are to deliver on our ambition of eradicating child poverty by 2020. I reaffirmed our commitment to this target in March, launching our Revised Child Poverty Strategy. The Revised Strategy also includes two new objectives for tackling child poverty. One is to use all available levers to create a strong economy and labour market which supports the tackling poverty agenda and reduces in-work poverty in Wales. The second is to support families living in poverty to increase household income through debt and financial advice, action to address the “poverty premium” (where households pay disproportionately more for goods and services) and action to mitigate the impacts of welfare reform.

## Flying Start

5. The capital expansion programme has just entered its fourth year. Funding totalling £32.2m has been allocated to 263 projects across Wales. These projects include the development of new childcare settings, office accommodation and venues for group work, as well as the refurbishment / replacement of existing facilities and the provision of new equipment. Of these, 208 projects have been completed and the remaining 55 projects will be completed this financial year.
6. Work is on target to double the number of children benefitting from Flying Start to 36,000 by the end of this administration. This will represent approximately 25 per cent of children aged under four in Wales.
7. Whilst we will not know our final numbers for April 2014 to March 2015 until July, our latest data showed 32, 627 children had benefited from the programme last year up until the end of December 2014, representing 99% of the target for 2014-15 as a whole.
8. We have also taken steps to strengthen and improve the delivery of the key elements of Flying Start. To support local authorities and their partners we have issued comprehensive and updated guidance in relation to speech, language and communication, transition, parenting support and health support. These guidance documents are intended to ensure activity delivered to families is in line with the key aims and expectations of the programme and takes account of latest research, learning and good practice. It also aims to drive improvement in the uptake of the programme.
9. Flying Start is subject to an independent programme of evaluation. Reports already published have demonstrated the programme is having a positive impact on the effectiveness of family support services and on families' lives. The current approach to evaluation involves two strands. The first strand aims to gain a greater insight into families' experiences of their Flying Start journey as well as identifying impacts it can have on their lives. Independent researchers have been commissioned to follow 72 families over three years of Flying Start support. The first report of the three reports is expected to be published at the end of this year.
10. The second strand of activity involves a number of projects designed to use existing datasets to monitor and evaluate the programme. This includes drawing on data from local systems for tracking outcomes, additional analysis of children's developmental assessment results at a national level and an exploration of education and health datasets in Flying Start areas compared with non-Flying Start areas.
11. We have published two annual Statistical Releases for the Flying Start programme. Recent developments include the ability to publish all-Wales termly updates which provide up to date information during the year. These were published for the first time in October 2014 (Term 1 data) and February 2015 (Terms 1 and 2 data). We will next issue a Statistical Release in July 2015.

## **Support for Families**

### Families First

12. Families First continues to provide integrated support to families and reach out to some of our most vulnerable families. Between 1 April 2013 and 31 December 2014, 7,307 families completed a Joint Assessment Family Framework and 5,109 families signed a Team Around the Family Action Plan. In the same period, 2,736 action plans were closed with a successful outcome and more than 200 Families First projects were accessed 465,681 times by individuals. Although this figure may include individuals who access more than one project, and/or who access a project more than once, it illustrates the significant reach of Families First across Wales.
13. The second evaluation report for Families First was published in June 2014. I was particularly pleased with the findings of the report, which concluded:
- commissioning of services through the Families First programme better reflects the needs of families than previous projects;
  - families who have received support via the Team Around the Family approach felt there was a tangible difference in the type of support offered compared to their previous experiences;
  - services for families affected by disability have improved as a direct result of Families First, with new services, and better integration and co-ordination of existing services and increased positive outcomes recorded; and
  - clear evidence to show agencies are working together more effectively under Families First than they did in the past.
14. The third and final evaluation report will be published in September 2015 and will have a greater focus on the impact Families First has had upon families and family support services.

### Family Information Services

15. To support the Welsh Government's priority of tackling poverty and supporting families, a new two year contract to support the Family Information Services (FIS) network in Wales was awarded to Children in Wales in partnership with Cardiff FIS and Gwynedd FIS on 25 March 2015. The contract will provide a central source of support to the FIS network and promote quality and consistency of FIS in Wales.
16. I have agreed up to £12,000 for the training of FIS professionals on marketing, the impacts of welfare reform on families; and evaluation and monitoring. I also agreed a budget of up to £5,000 to enable a joint national FIS and Youth Information Services Conference, which was held on 18 March 2015.

### Communities First

17. The Communities First – Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund supports the building of stronger links between the Communities First Programme and schools. It aims to improve the outcomes of young people who live in poverty and support better engagement of their parents/carers. The fund encourages innovative and evidenced-

based interventions and collaboration between Communities First Clusters, working with both their local secondary schools and their feeder primaries. Forty projects are currently underway, with improvements in academic performance and school attendance already observed.

## **Early Years, Childcare and Play**

18. Affordable, accessible, high quality childcare as prioritised within the Child Poverty Strategy, the Tackling Poverty Action Plan and the Early Years and Childcare Plan, enables parents to work or access training, and supports our drive to increase economic growth, tackle poverty and reduce inequalities.
19. In line with our commitment in the Early Years and Childcare Plan, we are currently reviewing the Local Authority duty to conduct Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs). We have undertaken a consultation on a proposal for the future development of CSAs in Wales. A working group has been established with key stakeholders to further examine these issues and inform the way forward.
20. We are also keen to see a system of regulation for childcare that provides the best environments for children to develop, but which also makes it as easy as possible for providers to operate. A 12 week public consultation on the registration framework for childcare provision in Wales closes on 5 June.
21. We have also consulted on a draft 10-Year Plan for the Early Years, Childcare and Play Workforce in Wales. The draft plan was developed through a process of engagement with key stakeholders and identifies our long-term goals for this important workforce. It outlines how we will address the workforce development needs of all types of registered early years, childcare and play provision, in both the maintained and non-maintained sectors. An ESF operation is in development alongside the draft 10-Year Plan for the Early Years, Childcare and Play Workforce in Wales.
22. The Welsh Government supports Local Authorities in meeting their duty to provide sufficient childcare, with funding provided through the Revenue Support Grant. In addition to this, the Out of School Childcare grant has been made available to Local Authorities in Wales since 2012, totalling £2.3m per year.
23. A further £400,000 was awarded to Local Authorities for 2014-15 to provide out-of-school childcare for families across Wales. £2.3m has also been provided in 2015-16 to help address existing gaps in childcare provision across Wales.
24. In line with Welsh Government priorities, Local Authorities have focused on offering out of school childcare, including holiday play schemes, to children from low income families, and to children who have a specific need. Funding has been used to provide support for childcare provision through the medium of Welsh. Start-up and sustainability grants have also been provided, to promote, encourage and sustain childcare provision, particularly in rural areas.
25. The Welsh Government provides support to third sector organisations to support the childcare sector and for childcare provision through the Children and Families Delivery Grant. Under this grant the CWLWM consortium made up of 5 childcare organisations 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.

### Play Policy

26. The second part of section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 was commenced on 1 July 2014. This places a duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, having regard to their play sufficiency assessments.
27. *Wales a Play Friendly Country* – Statutory Guidance was published to support Local Authorities in complying with this duty and implementing their Play Action Plans. Local Authorities Report annually on their Play Action Plans and will submit the next Play Sufficiency Assessments in March 2016. The Securing Sufficient Play Opportunities Grant provided £1.5m to Local Authorities in 2014-15 to support the implementation of their Play Action Plans.
28. We are also supporting the third sector. The Sustainable Play Project, delivered by Groundworks Wales and SNAP Cymru, has been awarded £1.4m over a 3 year period from 1 October 2014, 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. The programme also includes training for playworkers on inclusive play for disabled children.
29. Play Wales has also been granted funding of up to £400,000 for an 18 month period from 1 October 2014. The funding will enable Play Wales to provide support to Welsh Government in four main areas, covering:
  - advice in relation to all policy areas where there are links to play;
  - provision of strategic support to Local Authorities and their partners in the implementation of the Play Sufficiency Duty;
  - development of an international centre of excellence around play; and
  - advice and support in the development of the play workforce.

### Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE)

30. To help reduce the number of families living in poverty across Wales, we have submitted a business case for European funds to help move parents into work where childcare is their main barrier. Under PaCE, Parents will be offered individual support and solutions to meet their childcare needs through community-based Parent Employment Advisers, facilitating a route into sustainable jobs. It is hoped a trial will begin from July 2015, with all Local Authorities hosting this project from Autumn 2015.
31. PaCE will directly contribute to the Revised Child Poverty Strategy, by engaging and supporting workless parents into training and employment opportunities, and by providing access to and funding for childcare.
32. The target is for PaCE to engage 7,932 participants over a three year period, supporting a target figure of 1,586 of those into work with a further 1,983 participants

looking for work and 1,983 gaining a qualification upon leaving the operation. PaCE will work intensively with participants to an ambitious target of 1 in 5 into employment, representing significant value for money.

33. PaCE will complement the ESF supported Communities for Work (C4W) operation underway in Communities First areas, where Parent Employment Advisers are already in place.

### **Children and Young People's Rights and Entitlements**

34. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 states that we will publish a report every 5 years on our compliance with section 1. Following our commitment to report on compliance every 2.5 years in the revised Children's Rights Scheme 2014, I will be introducing our latest Compliance Report to be debated in Plenary on 30 June. It will then be available on our Website.

35. Welsh Government is committed to listening to the views of children and young people in Wales. To enable this to happen £1.8 Million of funding over 3 years has been provided to Children in Wales (CiW) to create structures to enable children and young people to have their opinions heard and influence our work. Their participation model, Young Wales, was launched at the end of March. It is not a replica of Funky Dragon. It will focus on gathering the opinions of hundreds of children and young people to inform Welsh Government legislation, policy and programmes. We continue to visit Local Authorities to ensure the duty to enable the participation of children and young people under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 is implemented.

### **Children's Commissioner for Wales**

36. The Independent Review into the role and functions of the Children's Commissioner for Wales was published in December 2014. Dr Mike Shooter led the review. The aim of the review was to take a broad look at how and why the Children's Commissioner's role and functions have developed, the impact the office has made, value for money, and whether the current legislative and governance frameworks in place support a Commissioner to fulfil the role to best effect.

37. The review makes 41 recommendations, some of which are for the Welsh Government and which I am currently considering. Other recommendations are for the Commissioner and her office and some for the National Assembly and some.

38. Professor Sally Holland took up post as Children's Commissioner for Wales on 20 April 2015. This year, she'll be focusing on issues in relation to LAC children and young people, a report to the UN on the state of children's rights, responding to the Review, and rolling out the "biggest ever consultation" with children and young people in Wales from September, to help inform her first corporate plan.

### **Future Priorities**

39. Looking ahead to the remainder of this Assembly, my key priorities in this area are to

- Deliver the commitment to have 36,000 children on Flying Start health visitors' books by end March 2016;

- Deliver the actions on childcare envisaged, including the launch of EU funded operations; development of a pilot scheme for young parents where childcare is a barrier to participation in further education; and new arrangements in place by February 2016 for the registration of childcare for children over eight; and
- Formulate proposals in response to the independent review of the office of Children's Commissioner for Wales.

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