

Lesley Griffiths AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00141/16

Ann Jones AM
Chair, Children Young People & Education Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

February 2016

Dear Ann

Thank you for your letter of 26 January seeking additional information on a number of points further to my appearance before the Committee on the 21 January. I have set out below my response to each of the points the Committee has identified.

I am pleased the Committee welcomes the Welsh Government's investment in the early years. Families First and Flying Start are our key early intervention programmes. Both programmes are improving outcomes for families across Wales and ensuring children from some of our most disadvantaged communities have the best possible start in life. A report published by the Early Intervention Foundation last year highlighted the fiscal cost of missed opportunities to provide early, targeted support to children and young people. The report concluded "early Intervention is the smart and realistic choice for using ever scarcer public money". One of the key priorities of this Government has been investing in prevention and early intervention, ensuring foundations are in place for future generations, which is why we have continued investment in Flying Start and Families First.

In preparing the Draft Budget 2016-17, we built on the approach taken in previous years to ensure children's rights have been fully considered throughout the decision making process for the Budget. The duty on Ministers is to have due regard to children's rights, rather than to complete a CRIA.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

English Enquiry Line 0300 0603300
Llinell Ymholiadau Cymraeg 0300 0604400
Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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 terms of our Draft Budget, Ministers have decided to complete an Integrated Impact Assessment which takes into account children's rights alongside impacts on equality, Welsh language and socio-economic disadvantage. This approach was informed by recommendations from a range of stakeholders including the Assembly Committees, the Budgetary Advisory Group for Equality and the EHRC. The Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA) highlights where such impacts were identified.

As I reported at Committee, I launched a project to look at whether there were opportunities to further align our tackling poverty programmes. I have agreed a number of recommendations to be in place for 2015/16. As well as streamlining processes, there will also be opportunity for funding flexibility to support delivery of programme outcomes.

In terms of your specific questions:

- 1. Whether the monitoring systems currently in place can evidence improved outcomes for children and their families, and in turn whether the data you have means you can show you are achieving the intended outcomes and therefore the value for money of the investment.**

I am confident Flying Start is making a difference to children's lives. The qualitative evaluation report published in January 2016 identified a range of positive outcomes parents felt Flying Start had made to their families' lives. For example, parents whose children had attended Flying Start childcare believed they had more confidence and were better prepared for school. In addition, previous independent evaluation research conducted by Ipsos Mori, suggested outcomes for families living in Flying Start areas may now be on a par with outcomes from families in relatively less disadvantaged areas.

Alongside research and evaluation, the monitoring systems we have in place allow us to analyse the performance of the programme as a whole and the performance of individual Local Authorities. As I have mentioned previously, this process is supported by the account management process we operate, where Account Managers hold Local Authorities to account for their performance.

As I referred to at Committee, we are piloting a new approach to recording data for Flying Start. This new system will capture more detailed information about the level of support and engagement each child receives and link this to their future educational outcomes as they move into and through school. This will enable us to build a better picture about the long-term impact for children who have benefitted from the Flying Start programme.

- 2. That the Department remains in a position where it cannot quantify the number of children benefiting from all four Flying Start entitlements and that the take up rates of the Flying Start 'speech and language entitlement' is defined 'as a course offered to an individual parental figure who attended the first session'.**

Support for early speech, language and communication development is one of the four core entitlements in Flying Start. It is well established proficient speech, language and communication development is fundamental for positive outcomes for children. All Flying Start parents are offered a universal intervention to support early speech, language and communication development. This may be delivered in one to one session or in a group, within the home, in Flying Start settings or in childcare.

Flying Start delivers a number of structured language and play courses and also ensures messages about parenting and Speech Language and Communication are embedded into all parts of the programme, it is not just about one course.

In addition to monitoring the number of parental figures who enrol and attend the first session of these courses, the Flying Start monitoring system also monitors the take-up rates of the service. It includes recording the numbers attending over 50% of sessions and numbers attending over 75% of sessions. As with the other data we collect, this is collected on a termly basis. The programme delivers a number of formal and informal parenting courses, which include an element of speech, language and communications activity, although this varies according to course.

As with other elements of the programme, the delivery of the Speech, Language and Communication is subject to account management oversight, where Account Managers scrutinise decisions made to ensure services are delivered at the right time to those most in need.

As described above, the new approach for collecting Flying Start data to be piloted will allow us to quantify the number of children who have received support through each of the programme's elements, including their attendance rate at courses delivered through the Speech Language and Communication entitlement.

- 3. Whilst we welcome your decision to include an outreach element to Flying Start, we are concerned that there is no system in place to assess its value for money. An evaluation of this important element would enable informed decisions about whether to scale up the current approach to outreach or whether alternative approaches are needed.**

The outreach element of the programme provides Local Authorities with flexibility to support families in need. Since expansion the funding level has been set at 2.5% of the allocated revenue and is currently being delivered to around 450 children aged 0 to under 4 years living outside Flying Start areas.

Outreach can be used to support families in crisis and families who are most in need of additional services and it allows Local Authorities to extend the reach of Flying Start to families with identified need living in non-Flying Start areas. It also provides continuity of support to children and families moving out of Flying Start areas, or for whom there needs to be continuity of provision before being in receipt of other services. Most requests from parents for outreach provision are for the childcare element only.

The account management process includes consideration of the delivery of Flying Start services through outreach. Outreach is by its nature specific to individual families and, therefore, evaluating the specific impacts presents challenges. The new approach to data collection, however, will allow us to identify the support received for outreach families and the education outcomes for children as they move into and through school. Each Local Authority must ensure robust systems are in place to enable the children who are most in need to receive the outreach service. These systems are assessed by the Account Managers throughout the year.

- 4. We also note that there is no system in place to monitor the attainment of the cohort of children who have benefited from Flying Start on their journey through primary and secondary school and in the important transition between the two phases. We would welcome feedback on future discussions you may have with the Minister for Education and Skills to explore the potential for monitoring such individual level pupil outcomes for Flying Start beneficiaries, and the possibility of taking this forward in the short and longer term.**

The new approach to recording data on Flying Start children will include ensuring Flying Start data can be linked with education data once Flying Start children have entered school. This will facilitate a better understanding of outcomes for pupils benefited from Flying Start in their early years.

In addition, my officials have worked with those from the Education department on the development of the Early Years Developmental Assessment Tool. The work involves strengthening the data transfer process between Flying Start teams and schools. We will be piloting the new approach from April 2016 with three Local Authorities with a view to rolling out the new data collection system from April 2017.

During the Committee session, we agreed to provide detail on the formula which will be used to apportion allocations within the Families First programme. I can confirm the funding allocation for the Families First programme is based on the Children and Young Persons (CYP) Personal Social Services (PSS) funding formula, which comprises:-

0.699 x dependent children in out of work families;
0.135 x dependent children in social rented housing;
0.099 x dependent children in overcrowded housing;
0.055 x population aged under 18 in wards with weighted density greater than the Welsh average;
0.012 x dispersion threshold 300.

Allocations for 2016/17 have been made using this formula. I am copying this response to the Chair of the Finance Committee.

Regards
Lesley

Lesley Griffiths AC / AM

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