

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg Children, Young People and Education Committee

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



Lesley Griffiths AM
Minister for Communities and Tackling
Poverty

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
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CF99 1NA

29 October 2014

Dear Minister

Welsh Government draft budget 2015-16

Thank you for attending the Children, Young People and Education Committee's meeting on 23 October 2014 to discuss the Welsh Government's Draft Budget for 2015-16.

The purpose of this letter is to highlight the key issues the Committee has identified during the course of its scrutiny.

This letter will be shared with the Finance Committee to aid its overarching scrutiny of the Draft Budget. The Committee would welcome receipt of the further information requested in this letter as soon as possible in order to inform the final debate on the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2015-16.

Impact Assessment processes

1. The Committee notes that a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has not been undertaken for this draft budget. The Welsh Government has referred to its [Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment](#) for the draft budget 2015-16 saying that it 'jointly considers equality, tackling poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, children's rights and Welsh language'. In relation to the requirement to have "due regard" to children's rights, your paper states that:

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“The process of having due regard can range from thinking about the impact of decisions on children in the course of day-to-day work activity, through to the formal application of a structured impact assessment tool accompanied by a record of the outcome results”.

2. Given that a CRIA has not been prepared, the Committee would like your reassurance that children’s rights have been given appropriate consideration as part of the budget setting process. **The Committee requests a detailed explanation of the decisions relating to children and young people that have changed as a result of your impact assessment process.**

Flying Start

3. The Committee notes that the draft budget 2015-16 shows an increase of £4.8m revenue from the 2014-15 budget (from £72.1m to £76.9m) and a decrease of £1.1M capital from the 2014-15 budget (from £8m to £6.9m).

4. The National Evaluation of Flying Start was published in December 2013. Its findings included:

- ‘There was no statistically significant difference between Flying Start and non-Flying Start areas in terms of child cognitive and language skills, their social and emotional development and their independence/self-regulation.’
- ‘[...] no difference between parents in Flying Start areas and parents in comparison areas on parenting self-confidence, mental health or home environment measures’;
- ‘[...] no statistical difference between Flying Start and the matched comparison areas on immunisation rates’; and
- Children in Flying Start areas are no more likely to have been referred to or received help from professionals than those in matched comparison areas.

5. The Committee notes your view that it is difficult to assess the full impact of social policy, in particular where a large number of individuals are experiencing programmes. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government’s own evaluation report outlines a number of key areas of concern.

6. Further to this, it is clear that the Welsh Government does not know how many children have benefited from all four elements of the programme. Your paper states that:

“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.”

7. The Committee is concerned that the Welsh Government is not able to assess the effectiveness of this programme and whether it is providing value for money.

Flying Start take-up rates

8. In response to a question relating to the number of children in a Flying Start area who are not benefiting from Flying Start, the official accompanying you said that the information was not collected.

9. Again, we are concerned about the lack of data and information available relating to Flying Start. The lack of information in this instance means that it is not possible to determine the effectiveness of programmes in reaching all members of the community who are eligible. It also makes it difficult to compare and assess the reach of programmes in different areas.

10. **The Committee requests an update on the processes you have in place to evaluate the impact of Flying Start, including any plans you have to address the current lack of data in certain areas.**

Flying start capital programmes

11. Your paper states that:

“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”

12. The Committee recognises that premises may need to be provided or refurbished to ensure that Flying Start is delivered effectively, particularly in some communities where there is a lack of facilities. However, the Committee is concerned that there may be cases where capital projects are not necessary and that existing facilities can be used. The Committee is concerned about the robustness of the Welsh Government’s assessments in this regard. **The Committee requests more information on the assessment process for such projects.**

Families First

13. The Committee notes that the Welsh Government has reduced the budget allocation for this programme from £46.9m in the 2014-15 budget to £43.7m in the draft budget for 2015-16.

14. The Committee also notes that the evaluation of the Welsh Government's child poverty strategy indicated that the scale of current programming may not be enough to achieve the scale of changes needed. The Committee recognises that one of the ways that change can be achieved on a large scale is through additional funding. However, such funding is not available. Therefore, **the Committee requests further information about how you will approach this challenge differently, given the lack of additional funding.**

15. The Committee also noted that the 2014 national evaluation showed that of the "Team Around the Family" cases closed in the first 9 months of 2013, only 53% had a successful outcome in relation to their outcome plan. **The Committee requests further information on the steps you are taking to address the areas of concern identified in the evaluation.**

Child poverty strategy

16. The draft budget allocation for 'child poverty policy' for 2015-16 is £140,000, which is unchanged in cash terms from 2014-15.

17. The Welsh Government's final evaluation of its Child Poverty Strategy (July 2014) found that more could be done to link economic growth strategies with poverty objectives; that there is no strong evidence that the scale of programming is enough to make the scale of change that is necessary (as mentioned in paragraph 14, above); and that the duties placed on Local Authorities and other Public Bodies has had a limited impact in terms of new programming or allocation of additional resources to meet child poverty aims.

18. The Committee requests further information about how you will approach this challenge differently, given the lack of additional funding.

Children and Families Delivery Grant

19. The Committee notes that the recipients of the Children and Families Delivery Grant were announced in July 2014, with a number of organisations being told that they would no longer receive funding, including Play Wales and Funky Dragon.

20. The Committee notes that funding of £50,000 has subsequently been allocated to Play Wales. **The Committee requests further information on the nature of the grant award and what it is intended to be used to deliver. The Committee would also welcome an explanation about the process for awarding the Children and Families Delivery Grant, given that a further award was required after the Grant had been awarded.**

21. The Committee notes that Children in Wales has been awarded £1,874,527 to create a centre of excellence for children's rights. Its work will include ensuring

that the voice of the child is heard in decisions that affect them, raising awareness, establishing and promoting best practice and provide evidence based advice to issues related to children's rights.

22. The Committee requests further information on the steps you are taking to ensure that participation levels increase, in the light of the discontinuation of funding for Funky Dragon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke for the 'n'.

Ann Jones AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair