

**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb
a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol**

—

**Equality and Social Justice
Committee**

Julie Morgan MS,
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Welsh Government

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6 December 2021

Dear Julie

Childcare and parental employment - the Co-operation Agreement and draft budget 2022-23

Thank you for your evidence to the Equality and Social Justice Committee on November 29th regarding our inquiry into childcare. We appreciate that you were not able to elaborate on the Welsh Government's Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru as detailed discussions on the extension of the childcare offer have yet to take place.

We have now completed our oral evidence and plan to publish our report in January. Anticipating our likely conclusions and recommendations, the Committee thought it might be useful to highlight some key issues in advance of the publication of the draft budget 2022-23 on December 20th.

Childcare

We hope to see information on the necessary capital and revenue resources to extend the childcare programme to two year olds included in the draft budget, with details set out in the accompanying explanatory notes.

In light of the Co-operation Agreement to ensure equity of access for more deprived communities in the expanded provision, and with the goal of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 in mind, the Committee would like to see pilots to achieve these objectives introduced as soon as is feasible, to help inform the rollout of the expansion.

In extending childcare to two-year-olds, we would like to see a child-focussed plan to avoid some children having their childcare withdrawn on becoming 3 years old, on the grounds that children are only eligible for statutory early years education from the term after their third birthday, and the current Childcare Offer is provided only to children with working parents. We expect plans which promote seamless transfers between different provision with the wellbeing of the child the main consideration.

Given the existing staff shortages in the sector, the recruitment campaign that Social Care Wales will be undertaking will be particularly important in ensuring that there are sufficient staff to deliver



the expansion. Whatever innovative approaches are used, I hope you will ensure the campaign is tailored to attracting interest from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and men who are currently under-represented in the childcare workforce.

A training and development budget will be needed to expand the childcare workforce which has the competencies required to deliver high quality, inclusive provision and improve the status, pay and conditions of the childcare sector.

School term dates

As the Co-operation Agreement intends to “explore options around the rhythm of the school day”, and to “radically reform school term dates to bring them more in line with contemporary patterns of family life and employment”, we would like to see how you plan to expand the co-location of childcare provision on school sites where possible, and the use of sites outside of school hours for childcare.

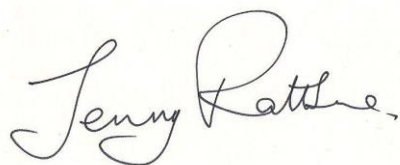
Race Equality Action Plan

In your evidence to the Committee on 29 November when referring to the Race Equality Action Plan, you stated that childcare will be “one of the parts of the strategy that we’ll be pursuing”. As the Committee heard concerns from others during its inquiry about the absence of childcare in the Race Equality Action Plan, we look forward to hearing how childcare will become a priority area within the Plan.

The Committee will elaborate on all these issues in our upcoming report on childcare and parental employment. I would welcome your response to the points raised in this letter at your earliest convenience.

I have copied this letter to Jeremy Miles as school term dates and the Welsh language fall within his portfolio.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Rathbone
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

CC Jeremy Miles, Minister of Education and Welsh Language

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Julie Morgan AS/MS
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Deputy Minister for Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref JMSS/3823/21

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5 January 2022

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee's inquiry into childcare and parental employment, and for your subsequent letter of 6 December.

Supporting children and families to access affordable childcare is a key priority for us, as demonstrated by the commitments set out within our Programme for Government. In order to honour our commitments, it is crucial that we maintain and develop the childcare and play sector, and particularly the workforce, to ensure we have a service that meets the aspirations of all those working within it and which provides high quality care for children of all ages.

The [draft budget](#) was published on 20 December and this clearly indicates that we are investing significantly in supporting our early years and childcare provision. In line with our Programme for Government commitment we will invest an additional £30m up to 2024-25 in Early Years and Childcare. This includes supporting more families with the costs of childcare where parents are in education and training, and increasing provision for two year olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision.

Alongside this we have provided an additional £40m revenue up to 2024-25 for early help and support, including for Families First and Flying Start. This includes funding towards training and development, both to maintain our current Progress for Success programme, funded from European Social Funds, and to build on that from 2023 onwards.

We will also invest a total of £70m capital up to 2024-25 in Childcare Offer and Flying Start settings, including Welsh language medium settings. You will be aware that our capital budget sits within the Education and Welsh Language MEG, alongside the budget for the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme (previously 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme). This long-standing approach allows us to better manage investment overall, and support the co-location of services. We will be continuing this

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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.

approach over the coming budget period, building on our commitment to Community Schools. This includes considering the wider use of school facilities, and I will continue to work closely with the Minister for Education and Welsh Language on both this programme of investment and the wider proposals around reform of the school day and the school year, to ensure they take account of needs of the childcare and play sector and the children who use their services.

I am scheduled to provide evidence on the draft budget allocations to both the Health and Social Care Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 13 January, which you may want to consider.

Plans to meet the commitment to provide funded childcare for two-year olds are under development, and I would be happy to share more information about those plans as they emerge.

Expanding Welsh medium provision is a key concern for us, building on our existing programmes of investment in both new settings and increasing the language skills across the workforce. We are also looking at transitions between and across funded programmes as part of our thinking, but it is important to note that the existing transition from Flying Start childcare, for example, is to the universal provision of early education, and that is consistent with our commitment to provide a simplified and holistic programme of Early Childhood Education and Care provision.

With regards to the concerns raised around recruitment and retention, and also the need to increase diversity within the workforce, the Social Care Wales 'We Care' campaign will be continuing. Discussions around how to target adverts and increase the level of information available to draw in as wide an audience as possible, and particularly from a more diverse range of potential applicants, are ongoing. The Cwlwm consortium is also continuing with their work to increase diversity across the workforce, and to improve the way in which they support children and families from a broad range of cultural backgrounds and ethnicities.

We will be including specific commitments in relation to the childcare and play sector within the Race Equality Action Plan, reflecting on the feedback from the consultation and the information shared with this Committee.

I look forward to seeing the report of the findings of your inquiry including any recommendations, and would like to thank you once again for the work you are doing in this regard and the opportunity to contribute to your considerations.

Yours sincerely



Julie Morgan AS/MS
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Deputy Minister for Social Services