



Ein cyf/Our ref DB-PO-0316-24

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair
Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament

11 November 2024

Dear Jenny,

Many thanks for your letter in relation to the Welsh Government's response to the Equality and Social Justice Committees report: Their Future: Our Priority?

I welcome the opportunity to debate the report in Plenary in due course, but in the interim please see below the further clarification sought in respect to Recommendations 1, 3, 5, 8 and 9.

Recommendation 1:

When Teulu Cymru launched six months ago, an extensive stakeholder engagement exercise was delivered. To date, content on timely topics is well received and particularly content in relation to childcare, practical tips, parental well-being and online safety concerns. Teulu Cymru social media performance is closely monitored, and we continue to steadily increase our followers month on month from just under 15,000 at launch, to more than 18,000 currently. Performance of the messaging and content is also analysed alongside insights provided by social listening, and resulting evaluation learnings applied to content planning. We are, for example, seeing appetites for formats of content differing between Instagram and Facebook, and are beginning to design accordingly. We are also working on and testing improvements to the way we present our posts bilingually and to embed bilingualism into our content instead of separate Welsh and English language content.

We continue to work closely with the childcare sector and have discussed the complexities of the different funding streams and systems for Welsh Government funded childcare. The development of a single system for all Welsh Government funded childcare requires a significant programme of change, and carried out in close collaboration with the sector and local authorities and engagement with parents. The suitability and complexity of the current systems are issues being explored in several pieces of research relating to existing programmes and policy development that are already ongoing or planned. Any wider review will be in the next financial year (2025/26) and will be dependent on budget being available.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Dawn.Bowden@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@gov.wales

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.

Further, you asked about what consideration has been given to developing an integrated application service as part of the Streamlining Welsh Benefits work. We are currently engaged with work to design a Welsh Benefits system with an emphasis on improving outcomes for children and young people from low-income households, supporting them to have a better future and reach their full potential. We continue to support an integrated method for delivering front line services, where evidence, resources, and budget allow for such changes.

I want to assure that we are committed to taking action to simplify the different funding streams and systems for funded childcare in Wales.

Recommendation 3:

We remain keen to learn from the practice of other administrations on the support of the childcare workforce. Both the Scottish Government commitment to pay childcare workers the real living wage and the Welsh Government commitment to pay social care workers the real living wage is predicated on the structures underpinning their provision. Childcare provision in Scotland and social care provision in Wales is predominantly government funded and is commissioned via local authorities. In Scottish Government childcare and Welsh Government social care funding, the Real Living Wage commitment is delivered by local authorities who are asked to procure services that pay their employees the real living wage.

Childcare settings in Wales are predominantly run by third sector and private sector organisations providing a range of childcare services including childminding, day care, sessional care, after school clubs and holiday clubs. Within this broad sector the Welsh Government provides funded childcare for 2-3 year olds via Flying Start and 3-4 year olds whose parents are in employment, education or training. In addition, the UK Government provides tax free childcare for working parents accessing approved childcare provision.

Consideration of using the Welsh Government funded childcare mechanisms to secure settings paying their staff the real living wage has taken account of the structural limitations of our funding mechanisms, the potential costs to the Welsh Government and the cost to families for childcare that is not government funded.

However, we are currently reviewing the Childcare Offer rate which includes a review of evidence of the costs settings incur, including staffing costs. This will help to ensure that the rate provided by the Childcare Offer, supports settings to offer reasonable rates of pay.

The intention of the Childcare and Playwork Social Partnership Fair Work Forum is to consider key issues for the workforce, such as recruitment, retention, continuing professional development and career progression and explore steps that can be taken to develop fair work practice across the sector.

In addition, the Welsh Government continues to support sector viability through the provision of 100% business rates relief for registered childcare premises and the commitment to regularly review the Childcare Offer hourly rate, to ensure it can cover the costs settings incur, including staff costs.

Recommendation 5:

We are committed to breaking down the barriers to enable all children and their families to access childcare as required. As I said in my response to the report, Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare available in their area. In

determining whether the provision of childcare is sufficient to meet these requirements local authorities must have regard to the provision of childcare and consider the particular issues around access for families with disabled children or children with additional learning needs. When utilising the childcare and play element of the Children and Communities Grant, local authorities are encouraged to give special consideration and support to the childcare and play needs of low income families; families with children with additional needs; and families wishing to access provision through the medium of Welsh.

Most local authorities have Early Years Panels that accept referrals from, Health Visitors or the Early Years Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Lead Officer for children identified with emerging needs and those with ALN who live outside Flying Start areas. Children with ALN aged two to three years who require childcare to meet developmental needs can (subject to resources) be supported via Flying Start.

We expect those working in ECPLC to respond to children's developmental needs, prioritise early intervention, and surface children who may have ALN. Local authorities have a statutory duty to designate an Early Years ALN Lead officer, with responsibility for co-ordinating the functions under the ALN Act and Code in their area, for children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools. This role should be promoting collaboration with childcare providers and making arrangements for providing guidance and sharing information to providers on meeting the needs of children in their settings with ALN.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education made a written statement on 7 October making a commitment to take action to review the ALN legislative framework to ensure it is clear and understood and delivers for all children and young people in Wales. Consideration of early years implementation will be part of the review which will focus on the clarity and accessibility of the legislative framework.

In addition, work is underway to gather evidence of the practical challenges faced by delivery partners in implementing the ALN system. The next Estyn thematic review will start to surface how delivery is going in early years. This will be followed by a period of listening and working with the sector to understand the operational challenges to inform our next steps, scoping and prioritising of actions.

A Head of Policy for ALN Early Years and Post 16 has been recruited within the ALN Reform team and they will have the capacity to consider the feasibility of streamlining existing funding within existing resources.

We will also draw on the learning from our Early Years Integration Transformation pilot programme, due to formally come to an end in March 2025, to ensure children and their families are able to access the support they need at the right time, right place and right way.

Recommendation 8:

I'm pleased to say that on the 9th of October, the Welsh Government commissioned all local authorities across Wales to prepare expansion plans for the next phase of the rollout of childcare provision to 2-year-olds. Phase 3 of the rollout will involve local authorities across Wales extending Flying Start childcare provision to all 2-year-olds in the remaining areas of their local authority.

We took this important step of commissioning plans for Phase 3 as we know that local authorities and the sector value clarity about the future direction of travel of the programme. The Process Evaluation¹ of the programme so far recommended "longer preparation

¹ [Process evaluation of the phased expansion of Flying Start: main report](#)

timelines” for future phases of the rollout. Commissioning local authorities to plan earlier will allow them more time to plan and put arrangements in place for the next phase.

As you note in your letter, additional funding to extend childcare provision will need to be secured as part of the Budget exercise for 2025-26 which is currently underway. We will be contacting local authorities following the Budget settlement if we are successful in securing funding for Phase 3 in 2025-26.

Recommendation 9:

At this point in time, I can only reaffirm that any changes made to the current rate of £5.00 per hour per child will be implemented from April 2025. Announcement of this change will be made in line with agreement of the draft Welsh Government budget for 2025. As soon as I am able to, I am keen to provide certainty in this area and, will issue a written statement on this matter.

I hope the above information, provides a response to the unanswered questions and how some of the challenges highlighted in the previous responses are to be addressed.

I look forward to continued engagement with the Committee on this important matter and await confirmation of when this matter will be debated fully in Plenary.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care