

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Christine Chapman AM
Chair
Communities Equality and Local
Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

13 June 2013

Dear Christine,

At the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee meeting on 23 May 2013, I agreed to provide the Committee with a note on a number of issues. Please find the information requested below.

Role of Welsh Government in the delivery of the work programme in Wales

The Welsh Government has working arrangements in place with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through the 'Joint Employment Delivery Board'. The key purpose of the Board is to provide a forum for bringing together the strategies and policies of the DWP and the Welsh Government. Membership of the Board is made up of representatives from the Welsh Government, the DWP and Jobcentre Plus. The Board also has a number of experts from key stakeholder organisations such as the Welsh Local Government Association and the two Work Programme providers in Wales.

The Board considers delivery arrangements for Wales where there is a joint interest and this includes the delivery of the Work Programme in Wales. For example, the Board was consulted on DWP proposals for the Welsh contract footprint for the Work Programme. Following their appointment, both Work Programme Providers accepted an invitation to attend the Board meetings. As part of wider considerations, the Board has, and will continue to have a keen interest in the overview of the delivery of Work Programme in Wales.

Discussions regarding implementation of Flying Start within Swansea

At the end of March 2013 Mike Hedges AM wrote to me expressing his concern that Plasmarl Primary School is not in a Flying Start area despite, he says, that nearly two thirds of the children attending are receiving free school meals. The Assembly Member raised this issue again in Committee and went on to question the criteria for determining which areas

benefit from Flying Start services. The information below includes the content of my response to the Assembly Member and includes more detail on some issues.

The Welsh Government recognises the need to provide support to more families through our Flying Start programme, and that is why we are committed to doubling the number of children and families supported through the Flying Start programme during this term of Government.

We are continuing to work closely with local authorities to ensure that Flying Start support reaches those who need it most. Flying Start is not a means tested entitlement and so the programme needs to be carefully targeted to maximise benefits to disadvantaged communities. It is a geographically targeted programme and so this does inevitably mean that the boundary will fall somewhere and families in some areas will not be eligible for Flying Start services.

The programme operates only in defined areas that have been identified as being the most disadvantaged within each local authority and the basis for targeting the expanded Flying Start programme within Local Authorities is linked to concentrations of children under 4 living in income benefit households. The Local Authorities are best placed to make the decisions as to which areas the programme should expand into and their decisions are based on the data and their local knowledge of needs. This is the criteria set by the Welsh Government and the City and County of Swansea has confirmed that the areas selected as part of the expansion of the Flying Start programme have been selected in line with the guidance issued by the Welsh Government. These areas were determined by Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) with the highest numbers of income benefit households with children under 4 years of age.

It is worth noting that Flying Start is not a school based programme and whilst some local authorities like Swansea choose to locate services in or near to the local primary schools, this is not the case in every local authority area.

As I outlined at Committee, any kind of measure used to determine areas of the greatest deprivation is always going to be imperfect and there will always be anomalies. Swansea is not the only area to have LSOAs with areas of great need which contain pockets of affluent properties. We are not in a position to means test every household in Wales and the Welsh Government believes that the proportion of income benefit households within an LSOA coupled with local knowledge is the best way of determining where Flying Start services should be concentrated.

The City and County of Swansea has informed the Welsh Government that it has previously made contact with Plasmarl Primary School. Support in relation to childcare and parenting programmes has been offered by the Local Authority given that the school and surrounding area is not eligible for Flying Start.

It is regrettable that not all families are able to benefit from this programme and I appreciate the disappointment this can cause. As part of the expansion of the Flying Start programme, we will be building a small element of outreach work to support the most vulnerable families living outside Flying Start areas and this will be based on a robust referral process. We do recognise that these are challenging times for families, and that there are still more families in Wales that need our support.

Information on the provision of bi-lingual services as part of Flying Start

Welsh language provision continues to be an integral part of Flying Start and the guidance has always placed a requirement on local authorities to respond to parental choice, and to deliver Welsh-medium provision where required. The new Flying Start strategic guidance continues this commitment by making it clear that local authorities must put in place arrangements to meet the preference of parents for Welsh-medium and / or bilingual childcare.

The Flying Start programme was devised ensuring that it complied with Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006. This requires local authorities in Wales to secure sufficient childcare to meet the needs in their area and in determining whether the provision is sufficient the local authority has to take account of the needs of parents whose preference is for the provision of childcare through the medium of Welsh.

All the local authorities must set out in their Flying Start plans the arrangements they have made in relation to the provision of Welsh medium and / or bilingual childcare, where parents have expressed a preference. Whilst the local authorities are not statutorily obliged to provide childcare through the language of choice, all try to comply although there are times when demand exceeds capacity.

Within the on-going monitoring process local authorities are required to regularly provide information on a range of issues. In relation to the Welsh language provision, they are asked to record the number of children where the parent or guardian has expressed a preference as to whether they wish the childcare element to be delivered in Welsh or English. The data collected at the end of 2012-13 shows that there were 609 specific requests for childcare through the medium of Welsh and of these 576 were met.

Nineteen of the 22 local authorities were able to fulfil all requests for childcare through the medium of Welsh. There is an account management structure in place whereby officials meet with the local authorities to discuss a range of issues highlighted by the monitoring process and this includes working with the local authorities to ensure that they are better able to meet demand for childcare in either Welsh, English or bilingually.

As part of an on-going monitoring process, officials are currently undertaking an audit to establish the language used in Flying Start childcare settings. This will provide us with the number of places in each setting and the language of that setting, in accordance with the five definitions within the Childcare Act 2006.

With regard to the other key elements of the Flying Start programme, local authorities strive to respond to the language preference expressed by parents. This includes delivering parenting and early language development courses through the medium of Welsh when requested.

The enhanced health visiting service is a fundamental part of the Flying Start programme and the local authorities are working to ensure that they have sufficient health visitors to deliver services in Welsh when requested. I am aware that a number of local authorities have had difficulties recruiting Welsh speaking health visitors and my officials are working closely with the National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (NLIAH) to ensure that we are training sufficient health visitors and in particular those able to deliver services through the medium of Welsh.

Update on the current position of the Fuel Poverty advisory group

The Minister for Natural Resources and Food is responsible for energy policy including the provision of grants to aid energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty; and will be writing separately regarding the Fuel Poverty advisory group.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis', is positioned below the text. The signature is fluid and cursive.

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