

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a
Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol
Gofal plant a chyflogaeth rhieni: y
pandemig a thu hwnt
CPE(03)
Ymateb gan Cynor Sir Benfro

Welsh Parliament
Equality and Social Justice Committee

Childcare and parental employment:
the pandemic and beyond
CPE(03)
Evidence from Pembrokeshire County
Council

Introduction

Pembrokeshire County Council has delivered the 30-hour childcare offer since April 2019. Pembrokeshire has seen a significant uptake of the scheme within working parents. The percentage of families within the County drawing down on the 30-hour childcare offer is currently approximately 375 of the 1081 birth rate. Within recent months, End Child Poverty Coalition named Pembrokeshire County as one of the Welsh Local Authorities with increasing rates of child poverty between 2015 and 2019. This increase narrates the amount of adults in unemployment as reported by the Department Work and Pensions 2020. Deliberation must be awarded to the increase of unemployment and child poverty agenda, when considering the responses below.

The extent to which current childcare provision in Wales sufficiently supports parents, particularly mothers, to enter, remain and progress in employment, and what changes might be needed to improve the effectiveness of childcare provision in doing this.

An increase to zero hour's contracts has been seen by Local Authority Officers when supporting parents/carers in the 30 hour childcare scheme application process. Due to this restriction, it has prevented parents drawing down on the scheme, which results in the family in work poverty due to the cost of childcare. This can then promote parents accessing non-regulated childcare provision, which does not adhere to any standards.

What impact the Childcare Offer in particular has had in achieving the Welsh Government's objective of "helping parents, particularly mothers, to return to work or increase the hours they work".

In addition, the starting age of the scheme at three years of age, prohibits those parents wishing to start work earlier. Many show interest in returning to work when a child is aged approximately one year or eighteen months old, though due to the pressure of the cost of childcare, this delays the start date or the parent/mother does not return to work at all.

The impact of limited childcare availability on Wales' productivity levels.

Since the pandemic, many practitioners have left the workforce to pursue alternative careers, leaving the sector in a very precarious position. Many childcare

settings have to decline children attending, as they do not have the staff to meet the ratios. It is not that there are limited spaces; regular audits are carried out to monitor this within the County. The practitioners are reporting they do not have staff to operate the required ratios as set in the National Minimum Standards.

How childcare arrangements have affected parental employment during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly in relation to mothers. What lessons might be applied to provide better support during any future lockdowns or increased restrictions.

In reviewing the process around the CCAS scheme. Points to consider are for the current administration to set costings and amounts awarded. This will then prevent conflict and confusion between border Counties. Clearer keyworker criteria set, as discrepancies and awards could be given to parents/carers not necessarily in work or on shift at that stage of the pandemic. Finally a digital system that the administration would operate, as Local Authorities did not have the systems established to manage this if they were not a delivery authority.

Whether Welsh Government-funded childcare provision is flexible enough to support employment of parents, particularly mothers, in different demographic groups and experiencing different circumstances.

The impact of high-quality formal childcare provision on reducing the attainment gap, and the potential benefits of extending childcare provision to tackle inequalities.

We understand that the development of the policy for the ECEC is still ongoing, though it is considered that until this is in place and childcare and education are combined confusion will remain amongst parents. The system of 20 hours plus 10 hours is not relevant to parents. Parents want their children to be happy and learn in a safe high quality setting.

There is still a considerable amount of work to be carried out within the Early Years Sector to improve quality. One system/framework needs to be introduced, that all practitioners can work towards to raise standards. Also with no restrictions/criteria in place to deliver the 30 hour childcare offer, there is no requirement/criteria set for good or high quality for childcare provisions to raise their worth, whether that's through inspection or with the Local Authority. Research shows that children reduce the attainment gap in high-quality Settings.

What Wales can learn from other models of childcare provision operating in the rest of the UK and internationally and emerging practice in terms of supporting parental employment, and the extent to which these models might be transferrable to the Welsh context.

Deliberation to be given to revising the current Flying Start model. Consideration to family need must be in place instead of the existing format-postcode. Also lowering of the start age of children accessing the 30-hour offer. As previously

mentioned many parents would want to start employment earlier, though are prohibited by the work poverty linked to childcare.

How financial and practical implications such as availability of childcare would need to be considered by the Welsh Government in any future policy developments to extend childcare provision.

Consideration must be given to register the workforce as a profession and encourage the increase of the hourly rate. Since the pandemic, many practitioners have left the workforce to pursue alternative careers, leaving the sector in a very precarious position, where some standards of childcare are slipping.