



Ein cyf/Our ref: MA - P/HID/3719/18

Lynne Neagle AM
Children, Young People and Education Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

29 October 2018

Dear Lynne,

Update to CYPE Committee following your report on Flying Start: Outreach

In my response of 4 April to the CYPE Committee report on its Inquiry into Flying Start Outreach I agreed to provide you with an update in October 2018 on the findings from the review of Flying Start, plans for Flying Start evaluation activity and progress on the Flying Start Data Linking Pilot Project. I am also able to provide an update on Flying Start Outreach.

Flying Start review update – Phase 2

Phase 2 of the review between March-June 2018 was used to test proposals identified during the early scoping and surveying of local authorities which took place in Phase 1. Testing took the form of one-to-one meetings with individual local authorities and dedicated workshops with Flying Start Co-ordinators in North and South Wales. This culminated in a presentation of the findings to the Flying Start Co-ordinators Network on 7th June.

Phase 2 has also included a review of the financial processes and grant requirements underpinning the programme and a refocusing of the Welsh Government Account Manager role.

The main focus, however, has been the consultation on the issues of: geographical targeting; outreach and childcare. An update on the findings and how we propose to take forward actions is attached to this report.

Alongside these actions, Phase 3 of the Review will consider the programme's key elements of Speech, Language and Communication, Health and Parenting. This will culminate in the revision, if necessary, of key programme guidance documents. My officials will continue to work closely with Flying Start Co-ordinators during this new Phase. The aim is to complete Phase 3 by the end of the financial year.

Extension of Outreach flexibility

The Committee recommended that I consider extending the Outreach funding flexibility beyond the then agreed 5 per cent allocation.

Following consultation with Flying Start Co-ordinators and the subsequent completion of Phase 2 of the Flying Start review in August 2018, I agreed that local authorities should be allowed to meet their full CAP limit, which is currently +/-10%. This means that a local authority with a CAP of 1,000 currently reaching 900 could use the 10% to support an additional 100 children to meet their CAP number. It would also allow local authorities to go above their CAP if they were already reaching 1,000 children to a maximum of 1,100, depending on budget commitments, available funding and local capacity.

It is, however, very important to recognise that some local authorities are already operating to their CAP limit so increasing the flexibility will not make a discernable difference in extending Outreach provision in these areas. In some authorities, extending this flexibility around Outreach provision will not allow for any extension of the programme into non-FS areas beyond what they may already have in place.

My officials have communicated my decision to increase flexibility around Outreach to local authorities and I have written to Assembly Members and MPs providing clarity on the geographical provision of Flying Start and the Outreach component of the programme. Officials will monitor the use of Outreach through quarterly reporting and regular meetings with Flying Start Co-ordinators to ensure there are no unintended consequences regarding the overall integrity of the programme.

In my response to the Committee report, I noted that guidance on targeting Flying Start was refreshed in 2014 to allow local intelligence and discretion to review the LSOAs to better reflect local circumstances. I undertook that we would work with local authorities to explore this further. The Flying Start review identified differing practice across Wales in using local evidence and information such as population and public health data. As a result, revised guidance on Outreach will be published by the Welsh Government in December.

Whilst at the time of responding to the Committee report data on Outreach was not collected at an all Wales level, my officials have sought this information from Local Authorities, retrospectively for 2016-17 and for 2017-18 as part of the end year reporting process. In 2016-17 679 and in 2017-18 603 children received at least 1 element of Flying Start via Outreach. The difference between these figures could be due to the number of referrals received for Outreach and on whether local authorities had already reached their CAP. Data collection on Outreach numbers will now form part of the standard reporting arrangements for the Programme.

Flying Start Data Linking Pilot Project and plans for Flying Start evaluation activity

I acknowledged the Committee's views about evaluation data for the wider Flying Start programme and specifically the availability of results demonstrating the quantifiable benefits of Flying Start services.

I would reiterate my previous comments that Flying Start has in fact been subject to a robust independent programme of evaluation, providing both quantitative and qualitative measures of impact and delivery. I welcomed the Committee members' comments in Plenary on 23 May which recognised the programme makes a real difference to the lives of those children and their families whom it supports.

Our current approach to evaluating Flying Start is consistent with the recommendations set out in the Evaluability assessment of Flying Start . This includes:

- continuing to use qualitative research to understand the perceptions of families living in Flying Start areas;
- piloting a new system for collecting individual level data about Flying Start children to facilitate a better understanding of children's engagement with the programme; and
- developing and testing an approach to link this data with other data sets to enable us to identify outcomes for Flying Start children to evaluate the programme.

Hearing about the difference Flying Start can make to the lives of children and families is extremely important. This was evident in the most recent evaluation report published this July . This research followed Flying Start families through their engagement with the programme over three years. It was especially pleasing to read that parents reported a positive impact on their child in terms of their speech, language and communication skills, school-readiness and social skills and behaviour. Additionally, parents highlighted improvements to their approach to parenting skills including how they support their child's learning and manage their behaviour.

I agree individual level data on engagement with the programme would be valuable and I reported to the Committee that we are exploring this via the Data Linking Pilot Project. As I outlined previously, the first part of the project involves getting in place an agreed, consistent set of data items about Flying Start children to be collected by the six pilot local authorities. This includes core data and some information about their engagement with each entitlement of the programme as well as a proposed field on outreach. Given the range of professionals, departments and systems involved in collecting this data it is important to reach an agreed consistent format in which this data can be recorded and linked together to provide coherence. This is a complex and iterative process. While it has taken longer than initially envisaged local authorities are currently considering the latest draft and will provide feedback on the practicalities of collecting this data in the near future. A completed feasibility report on the ability to introduce individual level data collection at a national level is expected early in the New Year.

The second part of the project is to explore an approach to import the individual-level Flying Start data, from the six pilot local authorities into the Welsh Government core funded SAIL (Secure Anonymised Information Linkage) Databank at Swansea University. Once imported this data will enable linking with other datasets such as routine health and education records to identify future outcomes for Flying Start children. The approach being explored will install an 'automated linking engine' into the pilot local authorities. This device is designed, among other functions, to automate the sharing of data between local authorities and SAIL such that, once the right arrangements are put in place, the

data sharing and subsequent monitoring and evaluation reports can become a regular routine task with minimal ongoing burden to local authorities. Work is ongoing to put the appropriate information governance and information security arrangements in place for the six pilot local authorities. The device has been successfully installed and Flying Start data imported in one pilot area. Work continues towards set up with the other pilot areas. Exploratory analysis to test the linking approach with different datasets is underway.

Taking an administrative data linking approach to evaluation is time-consuming to get right. However, if the process is successful and rolled out nationally, a routine collection of standardised individual level data on Flying Start children will facilitate a greater understanding of their engagement with the programme as well as enabling a reliable, cost-effective ongoing method for evaluation. I believe that strengthening our current data collection process and maximising the use of existing administrative data is the best approach for determining the effectiveness of programmes like Flying Start. To help drive this work forward a Data Manager has recently been appointed within the Children and Families Division. They will support the collection and analysis of monitoring data and provide specialist support.

I will provide further information about the Flying Start Data Linking Pilot Project in the next update in 12 months time.

I would like to thank you and the Committee for your work on this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Huw Irranca-Davies AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Plant, Pobl Hŷn a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care



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UPDATE ON THE FLYING START REVIEW



Thank you for all your input to **Phase 2 of the Flying Start Review**.

During March-June 2018 this Phase was used to test some initial proposals identified in the early scoping and surveying of Local Authorities which took place in Phase 1. As you will be aware, this testing was taken forward via one-to-one meetings with individual local authorities and dedicated workshops (in North and South Wales) with Co-ordinators. This culminated in presenting the proposals and findings to the Flying Start Co-ordinators Network on 7th June.



Phase 2 has also included a review of the financial processes and grant requirements underpinning the programme and a refocusing of the Welsh Government Account Manager role.



The main focus, however, has been the consultation on the issues of geographical targeting; outreach; and childcare; an update on the findings and how we propose to take forward actions is attached.



As well as taking these actions forward, **Phase 3 of the Review** will look to widen the focus to look at the programme's key elements of Speech, Language and Communication, Health and Parenting. We will continue to work closely with Flying Start Co-ordinators in this new Phase.

Kind regards
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FLYING START REVIEW - PHASE 2 ANNEX



Geographical targeting

There was strong support for geographical targeting from those Local Authorities (LAs) who responded to the survey carried out in Phase 1 (16 out of 22), with 75% in favour of it. However, LAs felt this approach required some refinement.



Although programme guidance published in 2014 allows flexibility at the local level in refining Flying Start areas, the workshops identified variation in how LAs use Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) data. Some exclusively use the LSOA lists to identify areas, some supplement them with other criteria and soft intelligence, and some use LSOA data purely as a starting point. There was a difference of opinion on whether the Welsh Government allowed such refinement despite the guidance stating it is permissible.



The majority of LAs did not think their areas would be much affected by forthcoming updated LSOA lists, but there was a request for the Welsh Government to provide access to updated lists.



A strong and consistent message from the workshops was that should any major change to current Flying Start areas be proposed this would have significant, long-term implications including:



Early and detailed exit strategies – to incorporate all those impacted by Flying Start - families, staff and contractors - Equality Impact Assessments would be required;

Childcare sufficiency – the cost and practicalities of locating suitable premises in new areas and managing the supply of private (childcare) providers;



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Capital investment/de-investment – there would be a time-lag in setting up appropriate quality provision;

Communication and political consideration/criticism – there would need to be a clearly communicated rationale behind any major adjustments to ensure ongoing support for the programme, communicated to politicians, LA staff and families;

Impact on other services – removing Flying Start services from an existing area would likely increase pressure on other services to deliver in these areas; and

Lengthy decommissioning processes – should there be significant changes to current provision; decommissioning services and areas could take between 2-5 years.

Actions:



The Welsh Government will provide the latest LSOA lists to LAs when available for them to consider appropriateness of current FS areas. Any potential significant changes to FS areas and any possible implications would need to be discussed, in detail, with the relevant Welsh Government Senior Account Manager.



The Welsh Government will review, revise and reissue guidance on the flexibility to use local intelligence to LAs, taking into account current good practice, by December 2018.



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Outreach

The consultation identified significant variation in how LAs use outreach, with a variety of criteria being used to identify families in need of outreach. Some LAs believe families need to be in need of all four FS elements; however the outreach guidance clearly states this is not a requirement. Other LAs use outreach as a way to offer support to those who have moved out of a FS area or to Communities of Interest, as outlined in the guidance.

Funding for Outreach is currently set at 5% of Local Authorities' full revenue limit. This was introduced in Autumn 2017 to reflect the then level of flexibility LAs had to vire money between the programme elements (e.g. childcare, parenting etc) without recourse to the Welsh Government.

Whilst there was no strong consensus from the workshops on extending the flexibility, it is proposed that LAs be allowed to meet their full CAP limit, which is currently 10%. This means that an LA with a CAP of 1,000 currently reaching 900 could use the 10% to support an additional 100 children to meet their CAP number. It would also allow LAs to go over their CAP if they were already reaching 1000 children to 1100, depending on their budget and available funding.

Some LAs are already operating to their total CAP limit so increasing the flexibility arrangements is unlikely to make a difference in their ability to extend outreach provision. It is important to ensure the ethos and integrity of the programme are retained. It was felt that should further flexibility become available expectations would need to be managed through sensitive communications.

It became apparent over the period of consultation that, given the variation in practice, and under current financial restraints, increasing the threshold of outreach alone is not the answer. Consideration therefore needs to be given to how we can ensure better join up of Flying Start with universal services to ensure children and families in non-Flying Start areas are able to access appropriate support.



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Actions:



The Welsh Government will review, revise and reissue guidance on outreach flexibility to LAs by December 2018.



The Welsh Government will allow up to 10% flexibility on outreach provision in line with the current flexibility around the CAP.
The Welsh Government will ensure messaging around this increased flexibility is robust in explaining its limitations, i.e. in some cases this may mean no further increase or being able to reach only a small number of additional children.



Local Authorities to provide data on numbers of children supported through outreach (as required from 2018-19). This will be monitored closely by the Welsh Government to understand the impact of this flexibility.



The Welsh Government and partners to consider how Flying Start and other services can be better joined up as part of the Early Years integration programme and specifically to consider the learning from the co-construction project in Cwm Taf.



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Childcare

→ Across Wales the average attendance rates for childcare places, accounting for authorised and unauthorised absences as a percentage of filled sessions in 2016-17, totalled 75%. However, there was significant variation, with the lowest LA at 68% and the highest at 84%.

→ It is recognised Flying Start childcare delivery models vary across Wales (i.e. delivered in-house, contracted out or a combination) and these models appeared to be significant in the ability to manage attendance and unused spaces effectively. In addition, there is also a fair degree of variation between the local attendance management policies LAs are required to have; more robust processes outlined in these policies appear to have a notable impact on absence rates.

→ Whilst there is considerable variation in practice and commissioning across authorities, it is evident that some clearer guidelines and the sharing of good practice will enable improvements to be made. The workshops allowed this exchange of practice to begin around the use of attendance management policies, better engagement with parents and key workers such as Health Visitors and childcare providers; the potential for reviewing commissioning models, proposals for improving provider quality. Whilst allowing greater agility in addressing attendance rates it is important changes introduced do not impact adversely on the integrity of the programme.

→ Using the national average of 78% as a guide, agreement has been reached with the Flying Start Co-ordinators to set national targets for attendance:

75% target minimum

80% target average

85% target top-end



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Whilst these interim targets have been agreed with LAs, the overall target aimed for, of 95% in line with school attendance, would still be the expectation for both LAs and parents. We will work with LAs to agree an achievable timescale.

Actions:



The Welsh Government will review, revise and reissue guidance on childcare to LAs by Spring 2019.



In advance of this, the Welsh Government will issue e-briefings to LAs on key areas and good practice around the delivery of the programme's childcare element including attendance management policies.



Local Authorities will seek to reach the agreed targets for attendance by March 2019, depending on their current attendance levels. Targets will be agreed with and monitored by the relevant Senior Account Manager.