

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 22 nd October 2019
Report Subject	Supporting Families to Access the Free Childcare Offer
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report provides an update to Members on the 3-4 Year Old Funded Childcare Offer and the work undertaken to support families to access the Offer.

The aim of the Offer is to support families with quality, flexible and affordable care. It also supports economic regeneration and reduces pressures on family income helping parents to participate in work and reducing a family's risk of poverty. It is also helping to sustain and remodel the childcare sector.

The Childcare Offer has been successful in Flintshire, benefitting families, the childcare sector and our communities.

The number of children who have accessed the Offer since September 2017 is over 2300. The following has been paid to childcare providers, with the positive impact on children, families and household and sector income.

Year	Childcare Providers Grant	Additional Support Grant
2017-18	£622 134	£29 576
2018-19	£2 592 204	£43 884
April – June 2019	£984 948	£17 782

Due to the success of the uptake for the Childcare Offer additional funding was requested from WG. This has been approved and award variation letter was received on 17 September 2019 as follows.

County Name	Childcare Costs Grant 2019-2020	Additional funding variation	Total Funding 2019-2020
Flintshire	£1,969,000	£1,100,000	£3,069,000
Wrexham	£1,929,000	£450,000	£2,379,000
Denbighshire	£1,278,000	£600,000	£1,878,000

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Cabinet to receive the report, and acknowledge the work being undertaken to support families to access the Offer.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	CHILDCARE OFFER FOR WALES, FLINTSHIRE
1.01	Twelve months ahead of schedule the Welsh Government has achieved its undertaking to provide working parents with up to 30 hours of government-funded childcare and early education for 3 and 4 year olds by the end of the current Welsh Assembly in 2021. This has been a collaborative approach between local authorities and government. Applications from eligible parents were processed in Flintshire June 2017, for children to access the Offer from September 2017. The Offer enables eligible parents and guardians of children ages 3 and 4 to apply for up to 30 hours combined childcare and education during term time, and up to 9 weeks of childcare during school holidays. Flintshire was one of the Early Implementer Authorities; and is a Delivery Authority for Wrexham Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council. Flintshire have built a bespoke IT system to administer the Offer.
1.02	The Offer supports the wellbeing of children through positive and enriching childhood experiences. An additional Grant is available to support parents of children with an additional need. This is 3% of the Settings Award. Payments are made for extra hands, resources and training.
1.03	In 2018 Welsh Government made £60M capital available across Wales under the Childcare Offer Capital Grant Programme. The primary purpose of the capital programme is to facilitate and support the co-location of the Foundation Phase education and childcare provision to create a wraparound childcare provision wherever possible to support working parents. Flintshire has been awarded £6.46 million (14 schemes). This also includes £500,000 for small grants, from which childcare providers can apply, based upon Welsh Government Guidance.

	<p>This is in line with the Welsh Government's Prosperity for All commitment to introduce Community Learning Centre's which provide extended services with childcare, parenting support, family learning and community access to facilities built around the school day.</p>
1.04	<p>Financially the Offer can make a real difference to a family, of up to £5,535 per annum. Many parents have confirmed a return to work or an increase in working hours as a result of being in receipt of the Offer. Some parents have fed back that they have had less financial hardship as a result of the offer.</p>
1.05	<p><u>Progress in Developing and Delivering the Childcare Offer for Wales, Flintshire</u></p> <p>Flintshire submitted a bid to Welsh Government in the Autumn of 2016 and was selected as one of seven authorities to become an early adopter of the Offer in June 2017. The Offer was fully implemented across all of Flintshire by May 2018. Parents were supported in accessing the Offer through a variety of media and communication channels and from 4 September 2017 to September 2018 over 1100 children had accessed the Offer. Currently 1200 children are accessing the Offer.</p> <p>A new model of delivery was proposed by Welsh Government effective September 2018. Flintshire were asked to become the Delivery Authority for Wrexham and Denbighshire. Wrexham implementation began in July 2018 with full implementation by December 2018. Denbighshire implementation began January 2019, with full roll out of the Offer. There is a Collaborative Agreement between the Delivery Authority and Engagement Authorities, developed by Flintshire and Agreements have been signed by Wrexham and Denbighshire. The Agreement expiry date is 31 March 2020, with an option to extend for 1 year plus 1 further year with no further extensions; although it is possible for a new Agreement to be put in place.</p> <p>As at April 2019 the Offer was available in all 22 Local Authority areas, with 10,112 children accessing the Offer. Of the 10,112 children, 2603 children have applied and been accepted through Flintshire, which equates to 25.74%. Also there were 1714 childcare providers nationally of which 641 were processed by Flintshire, which equates to 37.40% of the national figure.</p> <p>As of the August 2019, the number of applications processed for all 3 counties was 3934; the eligible application in Flintshire was 1678. Also, 642 childcare providers are delivering childcare through the Childcare Offer, of which 306 are registered as providing the Offer to Flintshire children (this includes childcare providers out of County including Wrexham, Denbighshire and Cheshire). The Offer in Wales follows the child, and provides parents with flexibility.</p> <p>Recently, Welsh Government requested a review of the national Guidance due to the experience of staff within the Authority, and their input into national meetings and developments. The aim is to assist parents further in their ability to more easily access the Offer.</p>

1.06	<p>Information and Engagement Communication Plan</p> <p>In line with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, information, advice and assistance is available to parents in relation to the Offer.</p> <p>During the early implementation consultations were held with parents regarding the system development, design and processes. Any feedback received is considered to further develop the system and processes, in line with the Welsh Government Guidance for the Offer.</p> <p>With the implementation of the Engagement and Delivery model, funding was received to employ additional capacity to promote the Offer, through the role of an Information and Engagement Officer. The role has oversight for promotional materials and media, working closely with the Family Information Service and promoting the Offer through a variety of Outreach events, stakeholder meetings, and social media including the FISF Facebook page. There is a dedicated website accessed via the Flintshire County Council's website where parents can read about the Offer and make an application.</p> <p>FISF staff are experienced in responding to general enquires on the Offer. Complex enquiries are passed to the Early Years Support team, who deal with both childcare and education enquiries.</p> <p>Information, advice and assistance is also available to parents and childcare providers through working with the childcare sector CWLWM partners including Early Years Wales, Childminders, Day Nurseries) and Mudiad Meithrin.</p>
1.07	<p>Capital</p> <p>In February 2019 Flintshire was awarded with £5.96 million from the Welsh Government for Childcare Offer Capital Grants for 14 sites, to be able to increase the wraparound care in Flintshire. Feasibility studies are currently being undertaken, and the new builds have to be completed by 31 March 2021.</p> <p>In addition to the large grants Flintshire has also been awarded a further £500,000 for small capital grants in which Childcare Offer settings can apply for up to 10k each year for two years, based upon eligibility criteria. Applications will be open from September 2019.</p> <p>The aim of the Capital Grants is to introduce Community Learning Centre's to extend current services to include wraparound childcare on one location, with the opportunity for extending to parenting support, family learning and community access to facilities.</p> <p>Any new building or refurbishment will create an indoor and outdoor environment for children ages 3-4, other children, parents, staff and other community users which will be calm, uplifting, safe and attractive but will also be efficient, tough and flexible and represent good value for money for the lifetime of the building. Head teachers are involved with ongoing development.</p>

1.08	<p>Flintshire Childcare Offer Software Licence Agreement</p> <p>Cardiff County Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council have bought licences to use Flintshire's Childcare Offer System. This system will be used until September 2021, subject to implementation of a national system. This has made a significant difference to their ability to provide the Offer to families.</p>
1.09	<p>National System</p> <p>Delivery Authorities are working in partnership with Welsh Government on the design of the new digital platform. Engagement Authorities are being asked for their views on the current effectiveness of the model and arrangements post September 2021.</p>
1.10	<p>Early Entitlement pilot of £4.50 per hour</p> <p>Flintshire were asked to pilot an equal rate per hour for childcare provision and education provision. The expectation of the funding was to ensure FPN1 places in non-maintained settings were put on equal funding basis as child care offer places.</p> <p>This provided an extra £1.59 per hour, per child, to non-maintained childcare providers for Spring and Summer 2019 terms. Welsh Government have visited a number of the childcare providers to assess the impact, and the outcome of the pilot should be known late October 2019.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>There are no financial implications for Flintshire County Council resulting from the Childcare Offer as this is a fully grant funded programme by the Welsh Government. The Childcare Offer Capital Grant is also fully funded by WG, so consequently requires no capital intervention from the Council. The grants are administered by the local authority as the accountable body.</p> <p>Should in the future Welsh Government decide to end the scheme, as in all such cases there may be some redundancy costs or reallocation of grants to cover posts.</p>
2.02	<p>The Welsh Government continue to provide a budget for the administration of the offer. Flintshire now have a full quota of staff to administer the offer for all 3 counties. There is also a separate grant for SEN for the offer that is funded by Welsh Government.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>Risks to the project:</p> <p>Not having sufficient registered childcare settings to provide places for all eligible children in Flintshire and to meet the demand for other programmes including Flying Start and Foundation Phase education.</p>

	<p>There was originally concern that there would be a shortage of childcare provision during school holidays. To date, this concern has not been realised, although it will be continually monitored.</p> <p>Both situations are monitored.</p>
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Locally, the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment continues to be completed annually, the results of which are used to plan to ensure sufficient childcare is available in all parts of Flintshire to meet demand for childcare and Foundation Phase education. Family Information Service are actively working towards increased consultation and feedback from parents.
4.02	Regular provider events and 'surgeries' continue to be held by the Childcare Offer Team to ensure existing and new providers are kept up-to-date with the latest developments of the Offer and to ensure providers have an opportunity to feedback their experiences of the Offer to the Childcare Offer Team.
4.03	The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research who is commissioned by Welsh Government to gather the views of settings who provide the offer and parents who receive the Offer. In June 2019 an email containing a survey link and unique access code was sent to settings inviting them to complete a short 15 minute online survey. The information collected will help to improve early education and childcare in Wales.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Gail Bennett, Early Years and Family Support Manager Telephone: 01352 703953 E-mail: gail.bennett@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>The Offer: 30 hours of funded childcare and early education for 3 and 4 year olds, in working families for up to 48 weeks a year; as well as up to 9 weeks, of up to 30 hours funded childcare within the school holiday period (pro rata).</p> <p>Working parents: both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family), with each parent earning, on average, a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW) and no more than £100k per parent. Some of this is still to be defined as the work develops.</p> <p>Foundation Phase: the statutory curriculum for all 3 to 7 year olds in Wales, in both maintained and non-maintained settings.</p> <p>Delivery Authority (Flintshire): responsible for processing applications from parents, determining eligibility and informing them of the outcome. They also process and make payments to childcare providers delivering the Offer. And provide monitoring to Welsh Government.</p> <p>Engagement Authority (Flintshire; Wrexham; Denbighshire): responsible for promoting the Offer to parents and childcare providers within their areas, training their Family Information Service (FIS) to deal with enquiries on the Offer and provide delivery Authorities with any information they require to process applications and administer the Offer.</p> <p>Childcare Sufficiency Assessments: A report that brings together a range of different data and information to develop a picture of the current childcare market and to identify whether there are any gaps in supply.</p> <p>Cwlwm: 'Cwlwm' is made up of five organisations with Mudiad Meithrin as the lead organisation. 'Cwlwm' organisations are Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Mudiad Meithrin, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru), PACEY Cymru and Early Years Wales.</p> <p>SEN: The term SEN 'Special Educational Needs' is used to describe learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for children to learn than most children of the same age.</p>