

SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	9 th December 2021
Report Subject	Ealy Years and Flying Start programmes
Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader of the Council (Partnerships) and Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of early years services and the impact the pandemic has had on babies and young children. The report sets out: i) the 'response' we deployed to support parents and young children through Flying Start and speech, language and communication (SLC) support and ii) our work with partners to develop effective and seamless services as we enter the recover/rebuild phase of the pandemic and the associated service development .

The next phase of service development is critical. Whilst the pandemic has brought challenges, it has also brought opportunities for new learning and adaptation of service delivery to ensure families receive the support required. Our approach to rebuilding is aligned to the aims of the Early Years Pathfinder Integration and Transformation work, providing the best start for every child, to move beyond pre-pandemic services and structures to a nurturing society that supports the caregiving capacity of parents, to enable parents to help us design better systems, working in collaboration with partners. Our core priorities center on the continuation of support for the Flying Start programme; funding for childcare for more families; services to support relationships and mental health, SLC support and the development and use of partnership data to ensure an informed and targeted approach to service delivery.

This work forms part of wider system development and support and we are urging for longer-term, sustainable financial investment enabling inequalities faced by so many babies, toddlers and young children to be addressed. By doing so, these investments will improve outcomes, save money, reduce inequalities and provide multi-generational post-pandemic brighter futures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.	Members review and note the work of early year's services to proactively support young children and families during the response phase of the pandemic.
2.	Members support the continued work to develop effective seamless services with key partner as part of our recovery strategy to providing the best start for every child.

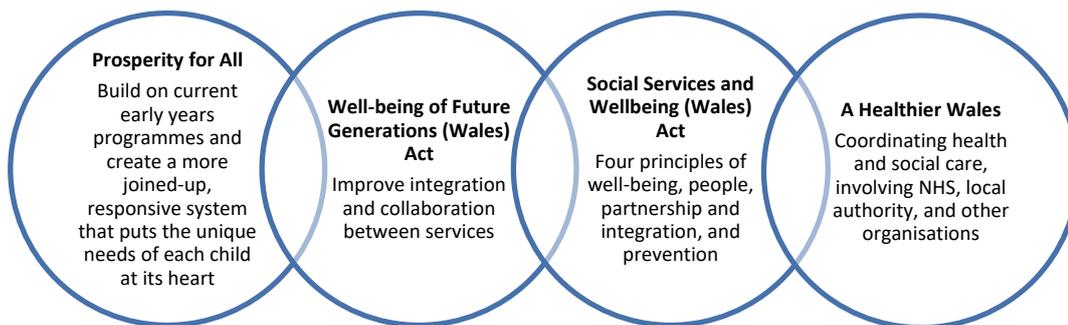
REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE EARLY YEARS FLINTSHIRE
1.01	<p>There are a variety of programmes and teams that provide early years and family support. The aim for all partners is for all Flintshire children, from all backgrounds, to have the best start in life, as it is during the earliest years that a large part of the pattern of adult life is set, creating a foundation for the future. The Flintshire early years population, as at 2020 was 14,064 aged 0-7 year olds, of these 8,373 were aged 0-4 year, of which 1,286 were living in a Flying Start area.</p> <p>The focus continues to be on improving outcomes for young children and their families by promoting child and family health; supporting quality relationships and family stability; reducing inequalities in child development; supporting children to be school ready; supporting parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and providing sufficient quality childcare in quality environments to enable children to flourish, and support communities and the economy.</p>
1.02	<p>The pandemic and policy context</p> <p>There are various reports exploring the impacts of the pandemic and lockdown on children and their families. There is concern that the voices of parents with new babies have been absent from key pandemic responses. Research shows there is a mixed picture, <i>shining a light on huge disparities between different families and their communities. (Babies in Lockdown).</i></p> <p>It is evident that both parents and children have been impacted by the change in service offer and delivery, and home and community circumstances within the context of the pandemic. The following is evident: isolation, lack of face-to-face support from frontline services, community groups e.g. playgroups, economic anxiety, some benefiting from a slower pace of life and more time together at home, others anxious, confused and feeling a loss. All parents navigating uncertainty.</p> <p>The pandemic has brought challenges, but has also brought opportunities for new learning and adaptation of service delivery to ensure families receive the support required within the restrictions of the Covid Guidance. This has meant ongoing adaptation and development focussing on child outcomes and policy direction. There has been a continued willingness to collaborate to deliver better outcomes for the child and family and move</p>

towards seamless provision, maximising on all funding streams and opportunities with the central focus on the child.

The Welsh Government, 'Programme for Government' recognises that demands on care services continue to grow and the need to protect, rebuild and develop services for vulnerable people. It prioritises the continuation of support for the Flying Start programme; funding for childcare for more families; relationships and mental health.

The following policy continue to be the drivers for delivery of early year's services.



1.03 **The Flying Start Programme**

The Flying Start programme has strong leadership in Flintshire and has continued to develop services for the best outcomes for children. The deliverable programme elements have continued to be: ante-natal; health visiting (1:110 children ratio); parenting; speech, language and communication and quality childcare.

The team continue to focus on supporting children to reach their developmental milestones and preparedness for school through the delivery of the Flying Start programme within targeted areas; the Flying Start outreach programme for children identified with a need outside of the Flying Start areas, and what support could be offered by Flying Start or with/through partners; and working alongside partners to integrate and transform services and the early years system through the Early Years Integration and Transformation Pathfinder and the Early Support transformation (Funding Flexibilities, Children and Communities Grant).

1.04 **Flying Start - Pandemic Response 2020/2021**

In 2020/21 the resilience and dedication to Flying Start families and children and commitment to multi-agency working was completely evident. The commitment and dedication of staff galvanised to ensure:

- All centres were kept open for key works and critical health and safeguarding contacts.
- Covid safe environments were developed with enhanced protective measures.
- Health and Safety and risk assessments were developed and are reviewed and updated as required.

Throughout 2020/21 the average Flying Start caseload across the four locality bases was 1,213 children aged 0-4, with support provided to just over 1,800 children. 13,530 contacts were made face to face (17%) or

	<p>virtually (83%) to 1,539 children aged 0-4 years. There were 307 new births and it is these children that are being given attention, along with children not meeting their developmental milestones due to life circumstances and heightened by the pandemic. The services are being delivered and the right early intervention and prevention being offered working with key partners.</p> <p>During 2020/21, 28 childcare settings delivered Flying Start childcare (17,106 childcare sessions), 35 children were supported through the Flying Start outreach programme (873 sessions), 14 children were identified and received 1:1 support and 36 children received additional funded childcare (1,108 sessions), all supported by the Childcare Advisory team. The team also provided direct advice to 401 families.</p> <p>Interestingly, this September has seen the highest take up for childcare (available the term after their 2nd birthday), with parents requesting the full five days. This will enable children to interact with other children, develop their social skills, cognitive and motor skills and their speech, language and communication.</p>
1.05	<p>Flying Start - Recovery Phase 2021/2022</p> <p>The continued success in 2021/22 includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for essential childcare provision and funding working with key partners has been enhanced to best meet the needs of individual children. • A continued focus on children meeting their developmental milestones with an increasing number of children showing development delays and concerns. • Operational assistance has been provided to Flintshire foodbank and team working from the Flying Start Family Centres. • Clinics have been established within Flying Start Family Centres to allow face to face contact via an appointment system. <p>There continues to be capital investment with a new modular underway in Aston planned for occupancy March 2022, opening of a new childcare facility in Garden City (September 2021) now at full capacity, enhanced facilities at the Westwood Family Centre, Buckley being used for group work and family contacts, and support to other childcare providers including Bagillt Merllyn, which opened October 2021, and is at full capacity, with 29 children registered.</p> <p>Parenting programmes have been adapted to provide for delivery via virtual platforms, and progress is being made on face to face delivery in a safe environment. This is at the request of parents. The current parenting programme offer has evolved with a current review of the parenting programmes framework and a move to programmes that provide more understanding of the impact of early relationships, brain development and attachment as well as sharing learning with key partners and family workers on positive parenting, social learning theories, engaging families and collaboration; building positive relationships between parent and child and strategies for redirecting negative behaviours. This will be a pilot with a selected cohort of workers across Flintshire in collaboration with Bangor University.</p>

	<p>Welsh Government have recognised the increasing demand and various funding streams have been made available to support working earlier in a child's life and addressing issues when they first appear. The current situation is showing the need for parent intervention and support as parents aim to 'recover' and work out their own circumstances. Further developments to support social and emotional development will include the piloting of programmes such as GroBrain and Video Interactive Guidance (VIG), with a local evaluation about continuation. This is being done in collaboration with Health partners including CAMHS Early Years.</p>
1.06	<p>Speech, Language and Communication</p> <p>The development of early year's speech, language and communication (SLC) is a key outcome in reducing health inequalities and essential for positive health, wellbeing, education and employment outcomes. Promoting SLC in the early years can reduce the impact of social disadvantage across the life course. The ability to understand and use language is a fundamental life skill. Communication is a complex process consisting of a number of skills. Receptive language (understanding) typically precedes expressive language (spoken language or talking); speech clarity is the way that words are spoken and communication is how we interact with each other. Research shows that children living in poverty suffer disproportionately from delayed language as poor skills are passed down from parent to child.</p> <p>Through the Early Years Pathfinder, Flying Start, Speech and Language Therapies there is a particular focus on pathways and what works for under 4s and primary school. This is supported by the national guidance, 'Siarad Gyda Fi' 'Talk with Me'. We want every child to have the best start in life. Supporting children in the early years makes a real difference to their futures. We do not want children to face lifelong challenges as a result of poor speech, language and communication skills.</p> <p>The Flintshire plan through the Early Years Integration and Transformation work for the SLC element is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop referral pathways aligned with Flying Start, Flying Start outreach, Health Visitors and Early Help Hub. • To increase access to information, advice and assistance, creating a model of knowledge about useful approaches and strategies, resources and services. Building upon the work undertaken by Flying Start and BCUHB Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT). • To increase workforce confidence, when to help, and when to seek help and where from. Developing Elkan programme and Wellcomm assessment, alongside other packages which are good for early education onwards including Talk Boost. This will enable the workforce to offer basic language support and prompt referral to SaLT service when required. • Provide joint role for service provision and service development. Offering direct therapy and 'fast track' for advice and support. <p>This work started pre-Covid working with key services including childcare settings, early foundation phase education and third sector and has continued to develop. Its aim is to increase the confidence in the workforce, and to implement evaluated and evidence-based, manualised</p>

	<p>intervention, with expertise in working with young children, providing support by specialist staff to enhance and develop practice and expertise in learning through play and working in partnership with parents and carers.</p>
1.07	<p>Speech, Language and Communication Pandemic Response 2020/2021</p> <p>For the speech and language entitlement, the Wellcomm screening tool continued to be used at 20 months. 226 children were screened, with 77 parents given additional support for their child's speech and language. Of those parents who completed a targeted package of support 90% recorded a positive distance travelled, that there had been a positive benefit. Speech and language was also encouraged through provision of age appropriate activity packs, hand delivered by Family Workers and virtual Stay and Play drop-in, with most parents attending at least two drop-in's. Comments received from parents have shown the value of these activities. Settings are also supported to use the Wellcomm screening tool at 36 months with 37 children being screened and appropriate action taken based upon the results. The speech and language offer continues to be developed and is aligned to the Early Years Pathfinder work, supporting ongoing development, integration and transformation.</p>
1.08	<p>Speech, Language and Communication Pandemic Recovery 2021/2022</p> <p>As part of our ongoing plan for SLC and the development of the workforce the Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost Key Stage 1 have continued with further cohorts of school staff being trained seeing an additional 22 schools (153 staff members) across Flintshire accessing Early Talk Boost and/or Talk Boost KS1 training between 14/04/2021-06/05/2021. Support is provided through a weekly 'Talk Boost Advice Line' and Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost KS1 in cohort 1 and 2 via a virtual Talk Boost Community meeting, giving the opportunity for settings who have been trained to share ideas, tips and give feedback as well as providing Tracker update virtual sessions to schools who have already been trained.</p> <p>There have also been Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost KS1 overview sessions for those schools invited to attend future training, A Smart Survey has been compiled and sent out to schools who have been trained in Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost KS1 to gain information around the implementation of the intervention within their setting. The information from this survey was used to determine which schools required additional support to develop practice, practice support or implementation support.</p> <p>The results of this delivery is being captured through I-CAN and the results so far as showing significant impact in a child's SLC development. Further work is being undertaken to explore and better understand the results to support future developments.</p> <p>Building upon the work of Flying Start and their work with childcare settings, the Wellcomm training has been provided to the Early Entitlement team and some settings. However, this has been halted due to the wider work being undertaken by Welsh Government to look at screening tools. This will be reviewed following the published results from the national SLC screening tool study. Learning is also being shared with Blackpool Better</p>

Start. In the meantime, it has been acknowledged that there is a need for SLC training to be provided to setting staff which would include underpinning knowledge and strategies for supporting children. This is an ongoing piece of work and the impact will be assessed in 2022.

A developing initiative with the Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention, Bangor University is underway for two Book Sharing studies. The first will be for parents and children ages 2.5 – 5. The second will be for children ages 10 – 18 months. Dialogic book-sharing (DBS) is an interactive form of shared reading in which the adult follows the child's interest, asks open questions, follows the child's answers with further questions, repeats and expands on the child's responses, and provides praise and encouragement for the child's participation. This increases children's interest in books and encourages their attention and language skills.

It has strong research evidence and practical applications and demonstrates increased expressive vocabulary and oral language skills both for typically developing children and for those who are considered at-risk. DBS significantly benefits child cognitive development, and the strongest evidence for its value comes from studies where instruction has been provided to carers to improve the quality of their book sharing skills, either in one-to-one interventions, or in small groups.

Dialogic book sharing programmes have reported benefits for parents with low literacy skills as parents can share a book regardless of their level of literacy skills because the approach focuses on describing and talking about the pictures rather than reading. It is found that parents who could not read shared books with their children more frequently and parental vocabulary improved. And benefits for teenage mothers, with an increase in the quantity and quality of words that mothers used with their infants during book sharing and improvements in infant language. With regards to older children who already have some language, more complex conversational turns are promoted.

Current data is showing an increase in speech, language and communication needs post-pandemic. This is being monitored, as is the impact of the work above, and other developments to ensure the best start can be provided to each child.

1.09

Early Years Data Project

In collaboration with Nesta Cymru we are currently identifying data availability for the early years (ages 0-4), collecting available data and analysing data. Three data themes are currently being considered for analysis and subsequent action. As this is a short term collaboration in the first instance, it is likely that Theme 1 or Theme 2 and Theme 3 could be addressed through a separate project, subject to capacity and priorities.

Theme 1: Early Childhood Education and Care in Flintshire

Theme 2: Understanding the Flying Start/non-Flying Start populations

Theme 3: Parenting programmes – supporting the redesign of the Parenting offer.

In collaboration with Public Health Wales we are currently collecting information and data on the early year's population in Flintshire and

	<p>available services and pathways. There is no central point for the overall view.</p> <p>Systems work is helping to develop this thinking, with an improved understanding across partners and action plan for continuous improvement to ensure we build back better and provide strong foundations for children.</p>
1.10	<p>The Way Forward</p> <p>In collaboration with partners every aim is made to make the best use of funding opportunities and develop, transform and integrate services for an improved child and family journey whether that be universal, early intervention and prevention or targeted support. The challenge is the multiplicity of funding streams and eligibility, working towards a shared vision and principles of operation, taking forward a shared action plan and goals.</p> <p>Our collective approach will be made communicated through social media, websites and new solutions e.g. DropBox as well as the Family Information Service e.g. Dewis, Health and Wellbeing Wales app for workers.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no immediate financial implications for Flintshire County Council.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Provision of services outlines in this report will impact positively on structural and social inequalities.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>Consultations have been undertaken with key partners to form the baseline assessment for the Midwifery and Early Years Maturity Matrix.</p> <p>It is aimed to do further consultations during 2021-22 to identify service and population needs to support the development of the Early Years Strategy and Model. This will include work with Chester University to assess the impact of Covid on parents of children ages 0-4.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Flintshire Flying Start Highlight Report 20210/21

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: 01244 551052 E-mail: gail.bennett@flintshire.gov.uk</p> <p>Hayley Wilkes, Flying Start Manager Telephone: 07775544965 E-mail: hayley.wilkest@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>(1) Early Years: defined by Welsh Government as children pre-birth to 7 years old.</p> <p>(2) Flying Start: Welsh Government flagship programme for supporting children ages 0-4 based on locality and need. There are four entitlements: Health; Parenting; Speech, Language and Communication; Quality Childcare for children the term after their 2nd birthday and for children with identified needs.</p>