

A review of the current provision for early years education, childcare and play opportunities.

The Education and Children's Services Task and Finish function agreed to review the provision for early years education and play opportunities and if appropriate make recommendations for service change.

As noted in the report Early Years Education in Carmarthenshire is currently delivered through a mix of local authority maintained settings, and non-maintained settings delivered by private or not for profit organisations.

Some concern had been raised by elected Members and School Governors with regards to the variable nature of school start ages throughout the County and the impact that this was having on admission numbers in some schools.

The Task and Finish Group set out to review the current mix of provision, looking at the type and extent of the provision, the linguistic nature and the standard of provision. The Task and Finish Group also undertook to review the sufficiency of play provision within the County due to the clear role that play has, in conjunction with early years education and childcare, in contributing to child welfare.

As well as taking evidence from local authority officers, Welsh Government officials and representatives of key organisations such as Mudiad Meithrin and Wales Pre-school Providers Association, they also undertook site visits to maintained and non-maintained settings within the County.

During the course of the review the Welsh Government announced that the all-Wales Childcare Offer for 3 and 4 year olds would be rolled-out across Carmarthenshire from January 2019. This had a significant impact on the work of the Task and Finish Group, and the recommendations reached reflect this. Furthermore, we will now have to consider the impact of the [Labour/Plaid Cymru Cooperative Agreement](#) which notes the following-

Childcare – *Expand free childcare to all two year-olds with a particular focus on providing and strengthening Welsh-medium childcare.*

To date we are not aware of how this will be progressed.

The Task and Finish Chair noted that he hoped that the recommendations that we have made will make a positive contribution that will deliver improvements to early years education, childcare and play within Carmarthenshire.

Members agreed **the main aims of the review** as follows-

1. Review Foundation Phase provision

- Statutory requirements
- 3-11 and 4-11 Schools

- Non-maintained settings
- Gaps in provision
- Linguistic provision

2. Review the Standard of provision

- Outcomes of inspections
- Themes of success and improvement

3. Review the provision of play opportunities

- Statutory requirements
- Play Sufficiency Assessment and Strategy.
- Play opportunities across the County
- Gaps in provision
- Impact of Asset Transfers

4. Review the provision of Childcare

- Availability across the county
- Availability of Welsh language provision
- Gaps in provision

5. 30 Hour Childcare Offer

- Requirements
- Carmarthenshire Scheme

6. Carmarthenshire Schools Admissions Policy

- Statutory requirements
- Current Policy
- Adjoining Council policies
- School start age research and impact on partnerships
- The effect of a change to policy

7. Conclusions

- To formulate recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet

Following a series of meetings and evidence gathering the Task and Finish Report agreed on a number of recommendations in relation to early years provision within Carmarthenshire. These were as follows-

1. The Council should make representations to Welsh Government to introduce the childcare offer to all 3-4 year old children.
2. The Council continues to promote the childcare offer widely and should look to develop systems to directly target parents using all available data.

3. The Council should develop closer working relationships with Mudiad Meithrin, Wales Pre-school Providers Association and all other relevant agencies when developing capital bids to Welsh Government and ensure member involvement specifically in relation to early years education/ childcare via the scrutiny function.
4. The Council work with its partners to move away from sessional care to delivering full day childcare, where possible, throughout the County.
5. The Council work with its partners to increase the number of settings which are able to provide Welsh medium childcare, as this would complement the council's corporate objective of increasing the number of Welsh speakers within the County. The Council should also identify and promote Welsh language training for childcare staff.
6. The Council work with Careers Wales and secondary schools to promote childcare as a career option in Carmarthenshire.
7. The Council build on the current RAG rating system and protect the hardship fund which assists settings facing financial difficulties.
8. The Council works with schools to develop after school clubs and wrap around care provision. Share the experiences of schools who provide successful after school clubs across the County.
9. The Council undertake a formal review of its current admissions policy for full time education for 4 year olds (the rising 4s policy). Financial and service impact modelling should be undertaken to inform any change to the policy, which should be along similar lines to other authorities within the ERW consortium.
10. The Council considers increasing its hourly rate paid to early years education providers, from £3.00 to £4.50, in line with the childcare offer payment.
11. The Council should review its current policy of having multiple admission dates for the start of full-time education.
12. The Council set a corporate ambition to provide early years education and childcare provision on all school sites. This vision should be delivered in partnership with non-maintained providers, but in the absence of a local non-maintained provider, the Council should work with schools, or a cluster of schools, and aim to develop school-managed early years education and childcare provision.
13. The Council works to ensure that every parent or carer receives an information booklet which outlines the benefits of Welsh medium education and bilingualism. The Council ensure that Welsh medium early years education capacity increases across the County, and that strategic planning is undertaken in conjunction with Mudiad Meithrin, WPPA and other partners.
14. The Council reviews its online school admission process and look to simplify the process for parents and carers, particularly in light of the roll out of the childcare offer.
15. The Council look to further developing work with early years providers to ensure consistent and effective mechanisms for sharing pupil information between non-maintained early years providers and schools during the transitional phase. Effective practice to be shared.
16. The Council develop consistency in terms of the number of hours of early years education being delivered by schools and other providers.
17. The Council review the process by which gaps in play provision are identified throughout the county.

18. The Council provides clarity and focus on areas of the County where play opportunities are deemed to be insufficient.
19. The Council work with schools and local partners to develop a model which would enable community use of school play facilities outside of school hours.
20. To lobby the Welsh Government to provide direction to allow community use of school grounds and facilities within school regulations.

As noted in the cover sheet, the Report was presented to Members of the Cabinet on two occasions when many of the recommendations were discussed and further information requested in relation to specific recommendations.

It has to be noted that the pandemic has impacted on taking the report through the Cabinet process however officers have continued to respond to the recommendations.

At the April 19th Pre-Cabinet Meeting Members noted their acceptance of and support for the majority of the recommendations. However, a request was made for officers bring back a paper to specifically address Recommendations 9 and 11 i.e.

Rec 9: The Council undertake a formal review of its current admissions policy for full time education for 4 year olds (the rising 4s policy). Financial and service impact modelling should be undertaken to inform any change to the policy, which should be along similar lines to other authorities within the ERW consortium.

Rec 11: The Council should review its current policy of having multiple admission dates for the start of full-time education.

The Scoping Document has been developed to address these issues. In addition it includes a recommendation as follows-

Recommendation

Establish an Officer working group to:

- Explore in more detail the current arrangements and issues outlined above.
- Develop alternative primary admission options and model the impact.
- Report on the findings and make recommendations for the way forward.

APPENDIX 1- Task and Finish Report

APPENDIX 2- Scoping Document

POLICY AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

| | RECOMMENDATION | POLICY IMPLICATIONS | FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS |
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| 1 | The Council should make representations to Welsh Government to introduce the childcare offer to all 3-4 year old children. | No implications for CCC but there would be policy implications for Welsh Government. | No financial implications for CCC but there would be for Welsh Government. The Cooperation Agreement between Labour and Plaid in the Sennedd will respond to this recommendation |
| 2 | The Council continues to promote the childcare offer widely and should look to develop systems to directly target parents using all available data. | No policy implications. | A grant is available to support the roll-out of the 30 Hours Education and Childcare. During 2021/22 we received £32,130 from Welsh Government to promote and publicise the offer. To fulfil the obligations placed on us as an Engagement Authority this will be spent in line with our Marketing and Communications Plan. |
| 3 | The Council should develop closer working relationships with Mudiad Meithrin, Wales Pre-school Providers Association and all other relevant agencies when developing capital bids to Welsh Government and ensure member involvement specifically in relation to early years education/ childcare via the scrutiny function. | No policy implications. | We continue to fund Mudiad Meithrin and Early Years Wales Development Officers (formerly known as Wales Pre School Providers) via a Contract Agreement (9k and 12k per annum respectively 2020-21) to support and maintain sessional and full day care settings including Cylchoedd Meithrin, play groups and day nurseries. This arrangement will be ongoing in 2021-22. Funding levels to be confirmed mid-February. |
| 4 | The Council work with its partners to move away from sessional care to delivering full day childcare, where possible, throughout the County. | No policy implications. | <p>Figures below have been updated for 2020-21:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of private day nurseries charge between £40 and £45 for a full day childcare place (8am-6pm). • Childminders charge between £3.76 and £6 per hour. • The average cost of a sessional care place per session is £9.00. <p>The average cost of after school care session is £5.16.</p> |

| | RECOMMENDATION | POLICY IMPLICATIONS | FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS |
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| 5 | The Council work with its partners to increase the number of settings which are able to provide Welsh medium childcare, as this would complement the council's corporate objective of increasing the number of Welsh speakers within the County. The Council should also identify and promote Welsh language training for childcare staff. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cymraeg 2050 • Carmarthenshire's WESP • Carmarthenshire's Strategy for promoting the Welsh Language | |
| 6 | The Council work with Careers Wales and secondary schools to promote childcare as a career option in Carmarthenshire. | No policy implications. | Whilst this is possible there will be costs associated with subject delivery and assessment. A national campaign to recruit new entrants to the early years, childcare and social care sector was launched mid-October- #wecarewales. We are currently linking in locally with our newly seconded Regional Community Career Connector. |
| 7 | The Council build on the current RAG rating system and protect the hardship fund which assists settings facing financial difficulties. | No policy implications. | We will continue to use our RAG rating system to monitor the sustainability of our registered childcare settings. Likewise, we will continue to offer Hardship/ Sustainability funding to support our registered Childcare settings. TOTAL AMOUNT OF FUNDING ALLOCATED TO SUPPORT LOCAL CHILDCARE PROVIDERS: £334,856.43 |
| 8 | The Council works with schools to develop after school clubs and wrap around care provision. Share the experiences of schools who provide successful after school clubs across the County. | Governing Bodies will need to consider their Lettings Policies. | The average cost of an after-school care session is currently £5.16. We currently utilise external grant funding (the new Children and Communities Grant) to fund a 30 hour Childcare Business Development Officer at a cost of £30,000 per annum. This post is pivotal in maintaining and growing the out of school childcare sector. This key post also enables us to secure external grant funding that the Local Authority cannot otherwise access for settings. Without this support a number of out of school childcare settings could close and this would impact significantly on working parents who depend upon this provision in order to maintain employment. |

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| 9 | The Council undertake a formal review of its current admissions policy for full time education for 4 year olds (the rising 4s policy). Financial and service impact modelling should be undertaken to inform any change to the policy, which should be along similar lines to other authorities within the ERW consortium. | This will entail a change to Carmarthenshire's Admissions Policy which will need to be consulted upon as part of the annual Admissions consultation round. | This is a major piece of work which will entail considerable officer time and input from a range of sections e.g. Finance, School Organisation. The impact on school funding will have to be modelled as learners will have one part-time term less in school. The local authority is currently funding provision earlier than neighbouring Councils and a change to this policy could generate an efficiency saving. |
| 10 | The Council considers increasing its hourly rate paid to early years education providers, from £3.00 to £4.50, in line with the childcare offer payment. | No implications to policy. | As from September 2020 the rate increased to £4.50 in line with the Childcare offer. Additional funding has been provided by Welsh Government to support Local Authorities in addressing this issue. |
| 11 | The Council should review its current policy of having multiple admission dates for the start of full-time education. | This will entail a change to Carmarthenshire's Admissions Policy which will need to be consulted upon as part of the annual Admissions consultation round. | This is a major piece of work which will entail considerable officer time and input from a range of sections e.g. Finance, School Organisation. The impact on school funding will have to be modelled as learners will have up to two additional part-time terms in school. The local authority is already funding provision earlier than neighbouring Councils and a change to this policy could generate extra costs. |
| 12 | The Council set a corporate ambition to provide early years education and childcare provision on all school sites. This vision should be delivered in partnership with non-maintained providers, but in the absence of a local non-maintained provider, the Council should work with schools, or a cluster of schools, and aim to develop school-managed early years education and childcare provision. | Generating more school managed early years and childcare provision would mean creating more 3-11 schools where they are currently 4-11. Whilst not a change in policy, this approach would require several statutory processes to be followed to create 3-11 schools – for Governing Bodies to manage early years and childcare provision where there are no external | On some school sites this will be possible without a considerable investment. However, in many schools, which are up to capacity, there would need to be a capital investment. This quantum is to be calculated, however, building a classroom with appropriate resources for a nursery would cost an estimated 350k. The impact on school funding will have to be modelled as there would be more learners accessing part-time education in 3-11 schools – a likely increase in the amount of revenue funding required. |

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| | | provider schools must be 3-11. | |
| 13 | The Council works to ensure that every parent or carer receives an information booklet which outlines the benefits of Welsh medium education and bilingualism. The Council ensure that Welsh medium early years education capacity increases across the County, and that strategic planning is undertaken in conjunction with Mudiad Meithrin, WPPA and other partners. | No significant policy implications. | Cost of printing and distributing resource. Increase capacity of Early Years Team |
| 14 | The Council reviews its online school admission process and look to simplify the process for parents and carers, particularly in light of the roll out of the childcare offer. | No significant policy implications. | Our system, Teacher Centre, is procured from Ceredigion. A new simplified application form was live from 14 th September 2020. |
| 15 | The Council look to further developing work with early years providers to ensure consistent and effective mechanisms for sharing pupil information between non-maintained early years providers and schools during the transitional phase. Effective practice to be shared. | This will require an agreed protocol for sharing information between partners. | We have identified that transition information from childcare setting to school is an area of work that requires further development. There is inconsistency which needs to be addressed. Undertaking this work would require additional staffing and there would be resource implications. Supporting settings to share effective practice would require funding to cover supply costs. |
| 16 | The Council develop consistency in terms of the number of hours of early years education being delivered by schools and other providers. | Policy needs to be developed and implemented. | This has been addressed as part of the rollout of the Childcare Offer. From Summer term all 3-11 schools have selected to offer either 10 or 12.5 hours education. |
| 17 | The Council review the process by which gaps in play provision are identified throughout the county. | Play Sufficiency Duty (Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure | Welsh Government have allocated £10k to each Local Authority across Wales to be used to support Local Authorities in completing their Play Sufficiency Assessments. We have successfully commissioned Pleydell Smithyman to support us in completing the assessment, Executive summary and Action Plan. The specification for this work includes a gap analysis of play provision. Welsh Government have extended the deadline for submission of the assessment to June 2022. |

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| 18 | The Council provides clarity and focus on areas of the County where play opportunities are deemed to be insufficient. | Play Sufficiency Duty (Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure | Whilst we can identify gaps in play, funding is required to address these gaps. There is no designated funding stream for play, and we are therefore heavily reliant on slippage funding from Welsh Government (end of year) and other ad-hoc sources of funding including Section 106 monies, public health grants etc. |
| 19 | The Council work with schools and local partners to develop a model which would enable community use of school play facilities outside of school hours. | Developing a model of good practice could potentially assist with the introduction of a policy at Welsh Government and Local Authority level to allow and facilitate increased community use of school buildings within school regulations. | We can support and encourage community use of school buildings however some schools will need to charge organisations for use of the resource to cover associated costs- cleaning, energy, repair and maintenance. The discussion here is about keeping school playgrounds (where no other facilities available) open for use by school children at end of school days e.g. whilst schools still open to cleaning staff/ caretakers until 4.30-5pm when able. Sharing pilot experiences and a policy direction in terms of expectations from the Council could be an area taken forward. |
| 20 | To lobby the Welsh Government to provide direction to allow community use of school grounds and facilities within school regulations. | Governing Bodies will need to consider their Lettings Policies. | This could be an income stream for Governing Bodies. |