

Cynnig Gofal Plant Cymru Childcare Offer for Wales

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Cyngor Sir Gâr
Carmarthenshire
County Council





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The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny Committee Members with an update on the **Childcare Offer for Wales**.

Background and links with corporate strategic objectives

The Welsh Government recognises that the increasing cost of childcare continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing working families in Wales. Supporting families with high quality, flexible and affordable childcare supports economic regeneration, can reduce pressures on family income and help parents to participate in work, thus reducing a family's risk of poverty. It also supports the wellbeing of children by providing positive and rich childcare experiences.

Given the current cost of living crisis this funded offer is a much welcomed offer for working parents. As a Local Authority we remain committed to supporting, promoting and publicising this Offer in order to ensure as many eligible working parents and children as possible can benefit from this.

In Carmarthenshire we as a Local Authority have committed to delivering the Childcare Offer for Wales under :

- ***Wellbeing Objective 1 - Enabling our Children and Young People to have the best possible start in life - Start Well***

What is the Childcare Offer?

The Childcare Offer enables eligible **working parents of 3 and 4 year olds** to **access 30 hours a week of funded early education and childcare for 48 weeks of the year**. Currently Welsh Government already provide 10 hours funded Foundation Learning provision (term time). In effect this means an additional 20 hours of funded childcare for eligible children (term time). During holiday time this will increase to 30 hours of funded childcare which parents can select to use from up to 3 registered childcare providers (for 9 weeks). Hours cannot be banked/carried over. If they are not utilised each week they are lost. The number of hours each child is entitled to per week must not exceed 30.

Link provided below to current Welsh Government Childcare Offer Campaign Youtube video which explains the Childcare Offer in more detail:

<https://www.gov.wales/childcare-offer-for-wales-campaign>

The primary policy aims of the Childcare Offer are:

- To enable more parents, particularly mothers to return to work
- To increase the disposable income of those in work and help counteract poverty for those in low paid work
- To encourage child development and school readiness

In order to be eligible to apply for the Childcare Offer parents must be:

- Employed or self-employed earning at least the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the National Minimum Wage, able to up to £100,000 gross per year, per parent.
- Enrolled on a further education course or a higher education undergraduate or postgraduate course that is at least 10 weeks in length.

Further information regarding parental eligibility and Frequently Asked Questions can be found on the Childcare Offer page on the Carmarthenshire Family Information Service website.

[Childcare Offer for Wales - Carmarthenshire Family Information Service \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/childcare-offer-for-wales-campaign)

When was the Childcare Offer rolled out in Carmarthenshire?

A full roll out of the Childcare Offer in Carmarthenshire commenced on **7th January 2019**. Ceredigion County Council were selected by Welsh Government as the Delivery Lead Authority on behalf of ourselves, Powys and Pembrokeshire and have been responsible for checking eligibility, processing applications and payments to childcare providers. Carmarthenshire County Council were given Engagement Authority status and have been responsible for promoting and publicising the childcare offer to all working parents within the County.

From Summer 2022 a new National Childcare Offer digital service was launched. All parents across Wales now apply for the Childcare Offer via this service. This new service provides a streamlined and uniformed registration and application process, and a weekly fast payment claims service for providers.

(It is important to note that between March and August 2020 the Childcare Offer was temporarily paused and the funding re-purposed to enable the C-CAS ; *Coronavirus-Childcare Assistance Scheme* to be implemented to enable key workers to be able to access funded childcare as part of the Covid 19 Pandemic response.)

How many Carmarthenshire parents/children have accessed and benefited from the Childcare Offer since roll out?

Figures not provided for 2020-21 due to temporary pause in Childcare Offer funding due to COVID-19 Pandemic (April – September 2020).

Between the 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022 **777** Childcare Offer applications were approved for Carmarthenshire.

Between the 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023 there were 422 Childcare Offer applications approved for Carmarthenshire on the legacy system. Between 1st January 2023 and 3rd April 2023 there were 522 childcare offer applications approved on the new National Childcare Offer Digital system. A combined total of **944** childcare offer applications were therefore approved.

Between the 1st April and 31st December 2023 **961** Childcare offer applications have been approved for Carmarthenshire on the new National Childcare Offer Digital system. (Figures for remaining 3 months of the year (January – March 2024) will need to be added to the above.)

How has the Childcare offer supported eligible children with Additional Learning needs?

Additional funding has been made available year on year via the Welsh Government via the Additional Support Grant (ASG) to support eligible 3 and 4 year old childcare offer children with additional learning needs.

This funding can be utilised for 1:1 support, resources, equipment and training.

2021-2022: 12 children supported ASG funding spent £38,203

2022-2023: 9 children supported ASG funding spent £47,766

2023-2024: 18 children to date ASG funding spent £34,468

The Family Information, Childcare and Play Team promote this funding amongst childcare providers in order to ensure they are aware of this. Online information sessions held via Microsoft Teams on a regular basis to support Childcare providers with eligibility criteria and application process.

Payments made to Carmarthenshire Childcare Providers and how have they benefitted from the Childcare offer.

2021-2022 £1,776,658 ASG: £38,203 Total: £1,814,861

2022-2023 Legacy Childcare: £1,864,919 ASG: £47,766 Total: £1,912,685
Digital Service 1st January – 31st March 2023: **£133,247**

2023-2024 Legacy Childcare : £190,207 ASG: £34,468 Total: £224,675
Digital Service April 2023 – December 2023 Childcare **£1,423,650**

This represents a considerable saving for many local working families who may have been struggling to afford to pay for childcare.

This funding has also helped to sustain local childcare providers, providing a guaranteed regular income. Many of whom experienced a considerable loss of income during the Pandemic period due to closures and disrupted service.

How have we as a Local Authority promoted and publicised the Childcare Offer to ensure the maximum number of eligible working parents take up and benefit from this offer?

The Family Information, Childcare and Play Team have promoted and publicised the Childcare Offer throughout Carmarthenshire since full roll out in line with their annual Marketing and Communications Plan agreed by Welsh Government. This aligns closely with Welsh Government's national Childcare Offer Communications Strategy and is reviewed annually to ensure consistency of messaging.

As an Engagement Authority our **key aims and objectives are:**

- To promote the Childcare Offer to the target audience
- Engage with parents and childcare providers to communicate key childcare offer information
- Ensure that the parents eligible for the Childcare Offer claim what they are entitled to
- Raise awareness of Childcare Offer key messages and key information

Target audience

- Working parents of 3 & 4 year olds
- Childcare Providers
- Primary schools
- Professionals working with pre-school children

Our communication methods include the following :

Carmarthenshire Family Information Service website - designated **Childcare Offer page** which is regularly reviewed and updated.

Carmarthenshire County Council Corporate website - tab on the homepage of the CCC website directing parents/carers to the correct information.

Social Media – Twitter and Facebook – used to share QR Code/ key Childcare Offer messages / WG Childcare offer video clips/assets and childcare offer deadline dates for applications etc.

Internal and external advertising including advertisements in **local press and on local radio.**

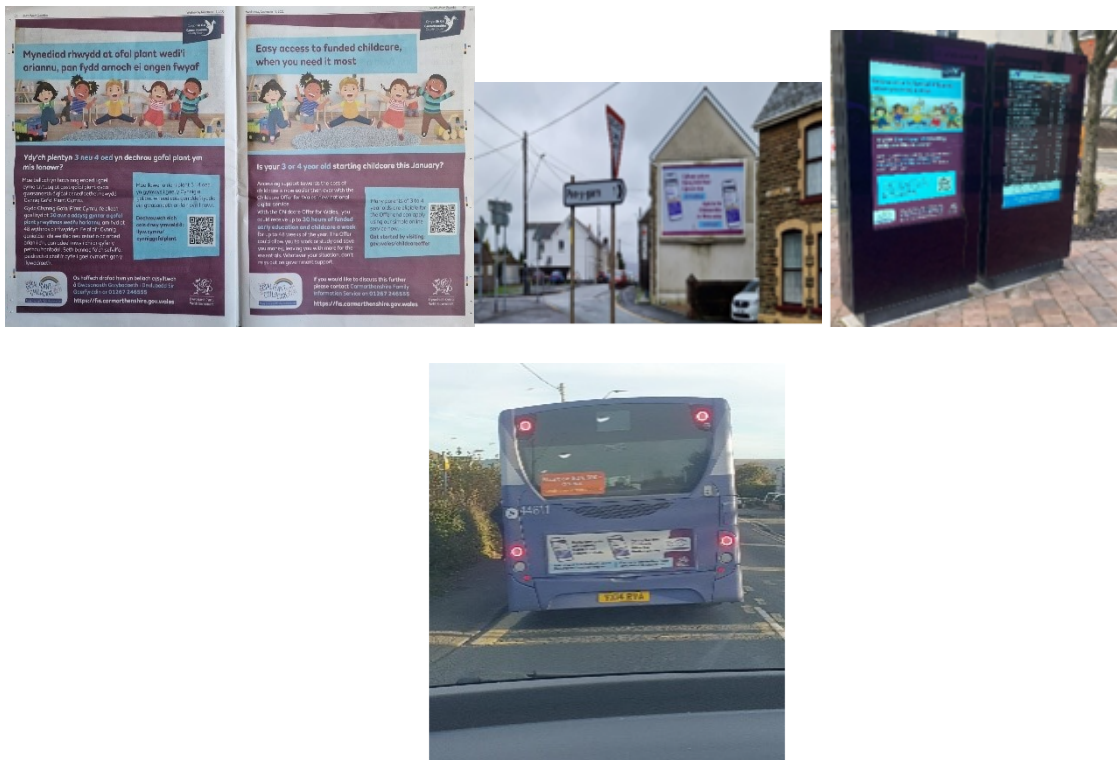
Electronic Digital Display Screens /Boards at bus and train stations and libraries in Llanelli, Carmarthen and Ammanford.

Adverts on Buses (agreed bus routes including rural routes).

Large Childcare Offer Banners erected at Leisure Centres and in areas of high footfall e.g Trostre.

A4 and A5 posters and digital posters issued to all primary schools and childcare settings to raise awareness.

Attendance at various community events, employment events/ jobs and careers fayres, schools and college events to promote the Childcare Offer.



A selection of recent quotes received from local Childcare providers

"The childcare offer is absolutely brilliant for myself as the nursery manager and parents. It is very beneficial as several families have increased their days since being eligible, as it allows them to be able to work extra hours and not have as much to pay-out on nursery fees. Also I have noticed that parents who have had childcare offer and do extra days are now paying invoices on time, and have pointed out that it has helped them out financially. It has also improved the nursery financially as money comes in on time." Day Nursery, September 2023

"On behalf of our Holiday Club, from staff parents and children alike, I would like to thank yourselves and the Welsh Government for their constant support always. The 30 hours free childcare offer has helped us immensely as a club to continue to remain positive and open. Not only is it amazing support financially for the parents but it also introduces new children to the club for many years to follow. In this climate we live in , it's a positive incentive created by the government to help further support the younger generation, to enable parents to continue to work, knowing their children are well cared for and easing the burden financially. It also helps some children interact socially during school holidays whilst parents are out working. Also helps staff to continue working as it enables us financially to remain open during difficult times. From all of us we thank you for this beneficial childcare offer. So appreciated by all who use and need it. " **Holiday Club, Summer 2023**

Lisa Grice

19/01/24