

P-06-1362 Match the new childcare offer in England of 15 hours for 2 year olds from April 2024, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 30.11.23

Thank you for sharing the letter from the deputy minister for social services. The letter is extremely disappointing as it refers heavily to flying start, and does not refer to working parents/families at all until the final paragraph about the existing offer. Once again it does not adequately address the issues raised. Let me draw attention to a statement from the UK government;

Hundreds of thousands more working parents living in the United Kingdom will be supported through an extension of the free childcare currently on offer, more than doubling the current support in place. This will help mums in particular to stay in work and keep the economy growing. The UK government know that childcare is one of the biggest costs facing working households, which is why they want to make it cheaper and more accessible, to reduce the barriers preventing some parents from going back to work. They are expanding the scheme so that working parents of all children over the age of nine months are also entitled to free 30 hours of childcare. This is a transformational change that will make a difference to families across the country.

The Welsh government are choosing not to implement this, and to invest in deprived area's instead via flying start, which subject to postcode lottery does not help working families or encourage mums to stay in work. We want to know why this discrimination is happening? It is particularly hard in the border counties with neighbouring working parents in England benefiting disproportionately from the UK offer and families living in Wales being denied.

Questions

1) In paragraph 5, Julie refers to expanding early years provision. How are the Welsh government doing this – in practise? In truth Wales is suffering from devastating losses with closing provisions, 300,000 less places in Aug 2023 than 12 months prior. What is your response to this? Are you denying this is the case?

2) In Paragraph 10 Julie mentions the local authorities have been informed about flying start expansion plans. Gary Major, Planning and Performance Manager at Denbighshire County Council said "Recently, Welsh Government has asked us to expand the childcare element of Flying Start into new areas – with the prospect that in the future, we will be supporting all 2-year-olds in Denbighshire. However, we don't yet have a clear timescale or guidance for this." When are you going to provide this information to local authorities?

3) In paragraph 12, it is said that parents will only be able to access provision in line with the scope of the Childcare Offer for Wales and will not be able to access any expansion to the English Childcare Offer as this is determined by rules set by the UK Government. Is this not postcode discrimination? I thought we were a "United" Kingdom. Why are Wales separating off and choosing to act in isolation from the other united nations?

4) In paragraph 11 you mention prioritising provisions in "pram pushing" distance in flying start area's where not many parents work. However In areas with heavy % of working parents in desperate need of any form of childcare within DRIVING distance, i.e. here in Llangollen there is no

provision at all for 0-2. With no local childcare provision, how are we supposed to work? How are our children supposed to attend education hours when there is no wrap around childcare? Children are suffering and the childcare system is crumbling.

5) The figures in the consequential would be enough to provide 12.5 hours to 2 year olds, so is it not the case that money provided by the UK govt. has been invested in flying start instead? It is not lack of funding, as you've said it is how it is "allocated" and the Welsh ministers have chosen to turn their back on struggling working tax- paying parents and mums in particular.

6) My final and most pressing question would be, never mind flying start, what about WORKING parents who keep the economy turning? 10,000 plus are in agreement with us.

As a working mum it would make more financial and practical sense for me to quit my well paid job, stay at home with my children and claim benefits. Is this what the Welsh government would like us to do? Soon we will be left with no choice. It is what many mums I know in this area have had to do since their childcare provision closed.

Childcare for working parents is in absolute crisis in Wales. Provisions closing, schools lack of wrap around care or lack of space, lack of under 2 provisions, to name but a few.

We need financial support as much as people living in England, if not more, and we need it now.

Please address this and what you are doing to help us, before it's too late.

Kind Regards,

Madelaine Hallam