

Welsh Government Response: Equality and Social Justice Committee – Response to the Equality and Social Justice Committee Report: Minding the Future - The Childcare Barrier Facing Working Parents

Access to affordable and flexible childcare is often cited by parents, and particularly mothers, as one of the main barriers preventing them from working, or progressing further in their careers. The mixed model of childcare provision in Wales is intended to ensure there is choice and flexibility for parents in the type of care they use for their children. We look forward to working with the Committee, and other partners across the childcare sector and local government, in addressing the issues raised in this report.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been profound. It has impacted on the childcare sector in terms of places available and settings. We will need to work to collaboratively to address those issues, as well as responding to the exciting opportunity offered by the phased expansion of early years provision, to include all two year olds.

This is an exciting and ambitious period of time for Childcare in Wales and I hope the actions of Welsh Government and partners enable and support the sector to respond.

I would like to thank the members of the Equality and Social Justice Committee for their report on the childcare barriers facing working parents. I am particularly pleased to see the Committee's recommendations are in line with our current and future plans. In responding to the Committee's report I have provided direct information in response to the recommendation or conclusion, but also provided some comments in relation to the broader report which I hope you find helpful. I have set out my response to the Report's individual recommendations below.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response how it intends to work with local authorities and health boards to improve awareness and understanding of the childcare support available to new parents. Potential approaches could include:

- *writing to new parents or promoting the support available when parents register the birth of their child;*
- *providing information to parents in sufficient time ahead of the end of maternity leave to help them to make informed decisions about childcare; and*
- *developing a "one-stop shop" information service to allow parents to search which provision their child is eligible for at any point in time.*

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government agrees that it is important to ensure that parents have the information they need about the childcare options and support available to make informed choices about their childcare arrangements. There are already mechanisms in place to raise awareness amongst parents and “parents to be” of the various options available to them. However we acknowledge that there is more that could be done to enable parents to access and use information about provision and support.

One of the main sources of information to support parents and carers in making informed childcare choices is the local authorities’ [Family Information Services](#). This website allows users to enter their postcode and find information about the childcare options available to them in their local areas, whether that is childcare provision close to their home, or work location. The Family Information Services website also allows parents to access information in relation to play schemes, wrap around schemes, holiday clubs and other support services, such as speech and language, parenting or support with behavioural issues.

To improve this support, the Welsh Government provided grant funding to the CWLWM consortium in 2021-22 to undertake work to refresh the “Choosing Childcare” online booklet aimed at parents and carers. This includes information on the benefits of childcare, the different types of childcare available to parents and signposts to more information about what financial support is available to help with childcare costs. The refreshed booklet should be available to parents later in the Spring.

Working with sector partners we will consider other opportunities to raise awareness of childcare options. This will include ways of engaging with new parents and at key transition points when parents are likely to review their childcare arrangements, such as returning to or starting work, moving to education provision at 3, and moving to full time schooling. We will look to maximise existing engagement points including our plans for rolling out Baby Bundles to more parents, our ‘Parenting – Give it Time’ campaign and funded schemes such as Flying Start and the Childcare Offer.

Local Authorities are responsible for ensuring that Flying Start services are promoted within the communities who benefit from them. This is predominantly achieved through the work of dedicated Flying Start Health Visitors who engage with families as part of Flying Start’s enhanced Health Visiting services. Flying Start teams are also required to have other strategies for engaging with families and are expected to outline these as part of annual planning processes. Social media platforms are increasingly used by Local Authorities as a mechanism for ensuring that key messages are received by Flying Start families.

We continue to work with HMRC to update the UK Government’s [Childcare Choices](#) website which also provides parents with localised information about childcare options. The Childcare Choices website also provides a ‘Childcare Calculator’, which helps parents find out if any financial support schemes are available to them and helps to support financial decision making with regards to childcare and choosing what works best for their family.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Conclusion 1

The Committee welcomes the commitment in the Co-operation Agreement to expand the existing Childcare Offer to two year olds, but are of the view that increasing the offer beyond the current 20 hours per week will enable more parents to return to work, and therefore further reduce inequalities.

Response: Notes

Our updated Programme for Government (PfG) contains three commitments related to childcare and our longer term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) vision, as follows:

- Continue to support our flagship Flying Start Programme
- Fund childcare for more families where parents are in education and training or on the edge of work
- Deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all two year olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision

Since its inception, the primary aims of the Childcare Offer have been to enable more parents, particularly mothers, to return to work; increase the disposable income of those in work and help counteract poverty for those in low-paid jobs; and to encourage child development and school readiness.

Increasing support with childcare costs for parents in education and training reflects the value placed on supporting those seeking to improve their employment prospects by gaining qualifications, retraining or changing career paths. To this end, and in support of the PfG commitment, the Welsh Government has agreed to the [expansion of the Childcare Offer](#) to parents in education and training from September 2022, with an initial focus on those enrolled on higher and further education courses.

There are currently no plans to increase the number of funded childcare hours available under the Childcare Offer. However we will consider this within the ambition of our ECEC action plan.

As part of the Co-operation Agreement we are working to implement a phased expansion of early years provision, to include all two year olds in Wales. We continue to develop the delivery plan for the rollout of this commitment in consultation with stakeholders and further announcements will be made in due course.

Financial Implications – The Budget 2022-23 includes an allocation of up to £9m per annum to enable expansion of the Offer to parents in education and training.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans for addressing the gap in childcare between the end of maternity leave and eligibility for the Childcare Offer. This should include indicative timescales, and an evaluation of the financial and practical factors that would need to be taken into account in addressing this gap.

Response: Accept in principle

We launched our vision for a holistic Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in Wales in October 2019. Our aim is to increase access to ECEC provision in Wales over the next 10 years, to ensure more children and families can benefit from access to funded provision before statutory school age. However, we are conscious of the need to support and grow the sector in order to enable this.

The Childcare Offer is a key component of supported provision. The first step of this expanding provision is the work underway to broaden the Childcare Offer to support access to childcare for the parents/carers of 3-4 year olds who are in education or training. This was set out in our [written statement](#) issued on 2 March 2022.

This is in addition to the phased expansion of early years provision, to include all two year olds in Wales as set out in our updated Programme for Government and the Cooperation Agreement. While the policy is still in development, when fully implemented it would make the provision of childcare for 2 year olds in Wales the more generous of the home nations.

We will be producing an ECEC action plan later this year which will lay out the roadmap for the next 10 years and how we will ensure that the childcare and early years sector is supported to meet the ambitious aims of ECEC, including opening up access to more children and families. This will include our ambitions for childcare and play settings, as well as those who are delivering early education provision for 3-4 year olds. Any further expansions to support for parents to help with childcare costs will be considered in the context of affordability and informed by evaluation of initiatives to assess their impact.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets. Future decisions on policy changes will be informed by the availability of future budgets and form part of the normal budget rounds.

Conclusion 2

The Committee concludes that the Welsh Government should use their planned expansion of the Childcare Offer as an opportunity to review and reduce the eligibility of each parent earning up to £100,000 per year.

Response: Notes

The Childcare Offer for Wales was established to support working parents, with associated eligibility criteria. At the lower end, parents need to earn the equivalent of

16 hours per week at the relevant minimum wage and at the upper end they may not earn more than £100,000 gross income per annum per parent.

While moving to a household earnings cap, or reducing the upper earnings cap, might be considered to provide greater equity across the scheme, evidence from the [independent evaluation of the Offer](#) suggest the majority of parents accessing it do not earn close to this limit.

The median annual gross salary band of individuals accessing the Offer between September 2020 and August 2021 was £20,800 to £25,999. This is lower than the national average full-time salary of £28,158 per annum in 2020, recorded by the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (Office of National Statistics). Over half (at least 55 per cent) of parents accessing the Offer earned below the national average annual salary level for full-time workers. Furthermore, just over a quarter (27 per cent) of parents earned less than £15,600. Conversely, only a minority (6 per cent) earned £52,000 or above.

We keep all aspects of the Offer under review and will look at what more can be done to increase access to funded ECEC provision for all children as part of our longer term proposals to further deliver our ECEC vision.

In respect of expanding early years provision to all two year olds, this policy is still in development, but consideration of eligibility will form part of policy considerations.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response how it intends to address the eligibility criteria in the Childcare Offer to make it easier for parents employed in atypical hours, such as insecure work, shift work or on zero-hours contracts, to access provision.

Response: Accept in principle

Since rollout began in 2017 the eligibility criteria underpinning the Childcare Offer have ensured it is open to all eligible working parents, whether employed or self-employed. This includes those with non-standard working patterns and those on zero-hour contracts. Apprentices are also eligible for the Offer.

In addition, the Childcare Offer has always provided flexibility for parents in terms of how and when they access it. To this end, the childcare element of the Offer can be accessed during any operating hours, night or day, including at weekends. This means that breakfast clubs, afternoon clubs and holidays clubs are also able to deliver the childcare element of the Offer, providing they are registered with CIW (or Ofsted if based in England). We do not, therefore, believe adjustments to the eligibility criteria for the Offer are required to allow parents to apply for or receive the funded provision.

We do, however, recognise that the ability to access the funding towards childcare under the Offer is not the same as being able to find childcare that meets the needs of individual families. Affordable, flexible and accessible early education and childcare is key to the Welsh Government's drive to increase economic growth, tackle poverty and reduce inequalities. Those who work on a-typical or zero hours contracts or work in roles with flexible working patterns often struggle more generally to find childcare provision that is right for their needs.

Local authorities, in completing their Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in 2022, will be establishing the childcare needs of parents working atypical hours and exploring any barriers experienced by these families in accessing childcare. Should there be evidence that there is insufficient or unsuitable childcare for these families, local authorities will be expected to identify actions which can be taken to address these gaps.

At a national level we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that there is provision across Wales to meet the needs of all parents and children.

Financial Implications –None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to strengthen guidance and legislation to deliver greater and more consistent provision of community-focused schools across Wales.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government includes a commitment to "invest in the learning environment of community schools, co-locating key services and securing stronger engagement with parents and carers outside of traditional hours".

Making effective use of educational facilities for children and the local community has always been a key aim underpinning education investment through the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme. All projects it supports need to show how their school facilities can be used to support their local community to make them accessible and shared resources across Wales' communities, both during and outside school hours; including the opportunity to innovatively co-locate services for their area. In building community facilities, stakeholders need to comply with the Education Act 2002 and Control of School Premises 2008 which outline specific responsibilities with regards community facilities. These are also conditions of grant under the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

A £15 million Community Hubs Pilot Scheme was made available in 2019-20. Managed through the Programme, it provide capital funding for 21 pilot schemes. To date 11 have been completed, 4 are under construction and 6 are due to start. The funding was allocated on the basis of three themes; widening family and community

engagement; extending the use of physical assets for community use; and co-locating services to form community hubs.

In the second wave of Programme investment, totalling £2.3 billion, one of the two investment objectives is to optimise the use of infrastructure and resources to deliver public services for our communities by 2024. This includes flexibility of assets so that space and facilities available to our communities are maximised; using their facilities to widen family and community engagement and co-locating services to form community hubs. Our robust business case scrutiny process assessment ensures a join up with wider Welsh Government ambitions for communities; and more investment in multi-use facilities, hosting Flying Start and ECEC provision, with options to also hold after school activities. This should include provision of inclusive play spaces, accessible outside of core school hours. The budget includes an allocation of £70m over the next three years which sits within the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, for childcare providers to access capital funding to support capital improvements, with a particular focus on co-location of services and Welsh medium provision.

The Welsh Government also continues to develop a policy framework and strengthen existing guidance by working with a number of stakeholders, including officials from cross-policy areas and externally, leaders and key groups in the education sector. Welsh Government officials have established a joint working group bringing together Health and Social Services Integration, Sustainable Communities for Learning, Housing and Community Schools teams. The group are looking at opportunities to co-locate public services in a way which best meets the needs of communities. Examples could be in co-locating health visitors, speech and language therapists and child mental health support services however this could also include services for the wider community such as GPs.

As part of the 2022/23 budget settlement, £20m has been allocated within the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme to drive forward community schools priorities including the co-location of support services/facilities.

Financial Implications – We will consider the need for funding to support community schools as part of future budget planning processes. Any additional capital costs will be drawn from existing and future programme budgets.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to place more Welsh-medium childcare on school sites, given that progression from Welsh-medium childcare to Welsh-medium primary education is higher when this occurs.

Response: Accept

The progression from Welsh medium childcare provision provided through cylchoedd meithrin is high at 90%. This is improved further to 96% where the cylch and school are co-located. In order to deliver on progress towards Cymraeg 2050, it is essential

that the importance of Welsh medium childcare provision is maximised as far as possible.

One of the main priorities for funding during the last phase of the Childcare Offer capital grant programme was funding Welsh medium settings. Over half of the £80m investment for childcare was allocated for Welsh medium provision and we approved 53 proposals across Wales to develop new or to refurbish Welsh medium school-based settings.

We are currently developing the successor programme to support capital investment in childcare settings (2022-23 to 2024-25). The budget includes an allocation of £70m over the next three years for childcare providers to access capital funding to support capital improvements, with a particular focus on co-location of services and Welsh medium provision. We will continue to work with local authorities to identify improvements to Welsh medium childcare provision, including co-location on school sites.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that:

Welsh Government publishes a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the new, expanded childcare offer.

- *The CRIA must demonstrate how the concerns of the Children's Commissioner about the Children's Rights Impact Assessment for the Childcare Funding (Wales) Act 2019 have been taken account of and addressed.*
- *The EIA is required to ensure that equality is mainstreamed into the development of childcare expansion, and to enable stakeholders and the Committee to scrutinise the extent to which this has been achieved.*
- *Both the CRIA and the EIA should be completed and published as soon as possible and as a minimum at least one month before the new, expanded childcare offer goes live.*

Response: Accept

Welsh Government has agreed to the expansion of the Childcare Offer to parents in education and training from September 2022, with an initial focus on those enrolled on higher and further education courses. As part of the work to deliver this expansion, the Integrated Impact Assessment for the Childcare Offer, which includes both a Children's Rights Impact Assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment will be updated. The Integrated Impact Assessment will be published at least one month before the new expanded Offer goes live.

In respect of expanding early years provision to all two year olds, policy officials have commenced a full Integrated Impact Assessment, to include a Children's Rights and

Equality Impact Assessment, in order to allow a full range of impacts to be taken into account as part of the development of this far reaching policy. The Integrated Impact Assessment will be refined as a live document throughout the policy lifecycle of the commitment to expand early years provision to all two year olds to ensure the diverse needs of children and families in Wales are kept at the heart of the decision making at key milestones. The Integrated Impact Assessment will be published at least a month before the extended offer goes live.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to work with local authorities to ensure that Family Information Services provide resources in community languages other than, and in addition to, English and Welsh

Response: Accept

The Family Information Service (FIS) in Wales has been developed to provide free, impartial information and advice on a wide range of services for children and young people (from birth to 25 years old), parents and families. This includes information on a wide range of Childcare, Support for Children and Families, other Family related issues and, where relevant, a signposting service for all parents, carers and guardians. The target audience for FIS includes parents and carers, children and young people, professionals, employers, existing and prospective childcare providers who may be looking for information on a wide range of services that have an impact on the lives of children and their families.

Local Authorities are ideally placed to understand the needs of their local communities and deliver a quality service to all, regardless of demographic or community background. Welsh Government also meets regularly with Heads of Family Information Service. In order to support further progress in this area, we will highlight the important findings and recommendations in this report to FIS services across Wales, including the need for more inclusivity and the need to provide accessible information to everyone in their community. We recognise the opportunity to build on good practice from areas such as Cardiff that provide information in a number of languages beyond Welsh and English and we will highlight this effective practice in our discussions with FIS services.

The Welsh Government is currently revising its “Choosing Childcare” online booklet aimed at parents and carers. This includes information on the benefits of childcare, the different types of childcare available to parents and signposts to more information about what financial support is available to help with childcare costs. The refreshed booklet should be available to parents shortly. Initially, this will be published in English and Welsh. However, we will explore the need for translation to other languages where this is appropriate.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that:

In order to address widespread concerns around the lack of ethnic diversity in the sector, the Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans for:

- *their new race disparity unit to build an evidence base around the level of ethnic minority representation in the childcare workforce; and*
- *the development of an action plan, including ambitious targets, for increasing the number of ethnic minority staff in the sector.*

Response: Accept

Welsh Government have pledged to work towards becoming an anti-racist nation by 2030. We have made a commitment in the Programme for Government to implement and fund the commitments made in the Race Equality Action Plan.

The formal 16 week consultation of the draft [Race Equality Action Plan](#) was held during March 21 to 15 July 2021. The consultation received 320 responses. Those responses are now being analysed and being used to strengthen the draft Plan.

The original Plan did not contain actions specifically under a Childcare and Play sector heading, although the Social Care and Education sectors did. Many representative bodies and individual childcare and play settings helpfully contributed to the consultation and raised concerns about the absence of any specific actions within the Childcare and Play sector. Since then we have been working to scope some initial proposed actions for Welsh Government and partners in the sector to ensure that we are able to contribute to the aims and ambitions of the Plan as future iterations are developed.

The Race Equality Action Plan will be published by May 2022 and we will continue to work in partnership to develop proposed actions for the Childcare and Play sector. The Action Plan will be a live document that will evolve and be updated and the Childcare and Play actions will be incorporated once stakeholder engagement has concluded.

We will review our 10 year plan for the childcare, playwork and early years workforce, published in December 2017, to see if in light of recent developments a refreshed plan is required. Alongside this we will build on work already underway by CWLWM partners to develop and produce resources and training relating to anti-racism principles, as well as the promotion of childcare in ethnic minority communities, to develop resources, including webinars and training to support childcare practitioners.

We will work with key partners to improve promotion of the childcare sector and awareness of career opportunities with ethnic minority groups in Wales.

We will work with the Race Disparity Unit to identify an evidence base for the childcare sector in order to better understand the current profile of the workforce and to be able to measure future progress.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response a plan which requires all childcare providers to undertake cultural and diversity awareness training, such as that being developed by CWLWM, and to ensure that it becomes part of continuous professional development within the sector.

Response: Accept

The proposals we are developing as part of the childcare and play sector's contribution to the Race Equality Action Plan will be the first stepping stone towards addressing these entrenched issues, but that is not to say those steps will be small. It is important to acknowledge that we must ensure that our foundations are strong to allow us to take greater steps in the future.

We must all work together to deliver change and ensure that we do not continue to fail our ethnic minority communities. The responsibility of its success lies with us all. Work is already underway with our CWLWM partners to support a more culturally diverse childcare sector. Through Welsh Government grant funding, the CWLWM consortium are developing resources and providing webinars and training to the sector to enhance understanding of diversity, equality and anti-racism principles and promote good practice across the sector.

In reviewing our 10 year workforce plan we will work with stakeholders and social partners to determine how we can best support the sector to be more culturally diverse and what training and resources may be required to do so.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing or future programme budgets.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to develop and strengthen the childcare provision for children with additional learning needs, including increasing the amount of funding available through the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant to improve provision for children with disabilities and/or additional or complex needs.

Response: Accept in principle

The Childcare Offer for Wales includes specific provision to support children with additional learning needs under the Additional Support Grant. This Welsh

Government funding, which is not subject to an upper cap, is available to support a range of support needs including additional staff costs, the purchase of equipment or the provision of training, and local authorities ensure alignment of support across the education and childcare elements of the Offer.

Local authorities will be completing Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in 2022 to establish the extent to which there is sufficient childcare in their local authority area to enable parents to work or train. A fundamental part of this process is establishing the needs of families with children who have additional learning needs or a disability, as well as the barriers experienced by these families in accessing childcare. Should there be evidence that there is insufficient or unsuitable childcare for children with additional learning needs, local authorities will be expected to identify actions which can be taken to address these gaps. These assessments also inform the funding required to respond to these needs. The Welsh Government provides £2.2m annually to local authorities to support activity in their areas to address gaps in provision identified in their Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, particularly where this relates to provision for children which need additional support. This funding sits within the Children and Communities Grant.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets. Future decisions on policy changes will be informed by the availability of future budgets and form part of the normal budget rounds.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response how it will ensure sufficient funding is available in the expansion of the childcare offer under the Co-operation Agreement to allow two year olds with additional or complex needs to fully access provision.

Response: Accept in principle

As we look to the phased expansion of early years provision, to include all two year olds in Wales, this will include consideration of those with additional or complex needs. We will ensure that these requirements are fully considered in scoping plans to offer this support and in rolling out provision, with appropriate allowances within budgets to provide this support.

We will also ensure that this support sits within the wider early years landscape, drawing on the full range of early years programme available to children and families. This is seen in our Flying Start programme, where children and families benefit from access to support with speech, language and communication as well as additional access to health visitors and parenting support.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets as the programme is developed. Future decisions on policy changes will be informed by the availability of future budgets and form part of the normal budget rounds.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to ensure the long-term capacity plan for the Welsh-medium sector, which the Welsh Government will explore as part of the Co-operation Agreement, is undertaken alongside work for the English-medium sector. This should reflect the impact that staff shortages are having on both the English-medium and Welsh-medium sector.

Response: Accept

There are well documented issues in terms of workforce capacity for the childcare and play sector. These focus particularly around recruitment and retention, but also career progression. These issues are exacerbated for Welsh medium provision.

We are committed to supporting the childcare sector to grow, ensuring access to flexible and affordable childcare for all families. Central to that is expanding the workforce, and ensuring those working across the sector have access to the training and support they need to develop their careers. Working with key partners including local authorities, CWLWM and Social Care Wales we will be taking steps to ensure a career in childcare is open to as many people as possible, drawing in a broad range of skills and experiences.

We have been speaking with key partners about the recruitment and retention challenges currently faced by the sector. These are varied, and there are some specific issues for both the Welsh medium sector and the English medium sector, but there is also much commonality. Our childcare practitioners want to be respected and to feel valued for the important work they do to support our children. They want to be paid appropriately, and to have terms and conditions of employment which are fair and reasonable. And they want access to learning and development opportunities to allow them to progress in their careers.

We will undertake a mid-term review of our 10 year workforce plan, reaffirming our commitment to developing a high quality ECEC sector, with a respected and highly skilled workforce. As part of this review we will work with key partners to increase the diversity of the workforce, develop new pathways for those looking to enter the workforce or retrain within it and attract people from a broad range of backgrounds into the sector. This may require us to refocus existing training and development programmes, tailor new investment as the Progress for Success programme comes to an end and direct capital investment in new facilities into areas where there is currently insufficient childcare.

Looking specifically at the challenges for Welsh medium provision, we are undertaking analytical work to the current profile of services as well as to provide projections for the size and profile of the Welsh medium workforce over the next 5 years. This will inform planning around the size of the Welsh medium workforce needed to meet commitments outlined in Programme for Government and the Co-operation agreement. Once this work is complete we will discuss the findings with key partners, and work with them to develop plans to support and increase Welsh medium provision.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans for a review of the promotion of careers in the Welsh-medium childcare and early years sector, and how further education and work-based learning can be used to ensure that it has sufficient staff.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government have funded CWLWM partners, particularly Mudiad Meithrin, to undertake a variety of activities to support and promote Welsh medium childcare careers from career building schemes to specific courses for potential Welsh medium practitioners with schools and FE colleges.

A commitment to continue and build on the promotion and support for the Welsh medium workforce will be included in the refreshed workforce plan.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plan to deliver a sufficient increase in the hourly payment to providers under the Childcare Offer to enable an increase in staff pay, and a timeframe by which all childcare workers will be paid the Real Living Wage, learning from the Scottish Government's incorporation of this into their childcare expansion plans.

Response: Accept

Following a review of the hourly rate paid for childcare under the Childcare Offer, the Welsh Government has agreed that the rate will increase from £4.50 to £5.00 per hour from April 2022. This was announced in a [Written Statement](#) issued on 22 February. In addition, the Welsh Government has committed to review the Childcare Offer hourly rate at least every three years.

As part of this commitment additional funding has been agreed to support the continued alignment of Foundation Phase Nursery and childcare funding rates under the Childcare Offer, alongside additional investment in Flying Start childcare.

Most childcare settings in Wales are private or charitable providers and so Welsh Government does not have the ability to set pay levels. However, we recognise the key role of government funding in supporting settings to create good working conditions. One of the aims of the upcoming increase in the Childcare Offer hourly rate for childcare is to support settings ability to offer reasonable rates of pay to their staff.

Financial Implications – The Budget 2022-23 includes an indicative allocation of £10m for each of the next three years to fund the rate increase.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plan to ensure their upcoming workforce plan is developed with social partners, and includes a focus on improving working conditions in the sector as well as developing the workforce.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government's 10 Year Workforce Development Plan was published in 2017 and will be refreshed later this year. This will review the work to date as well as identify new aims and objectives that take into account the impact of the pandemic and new commitments arising from the Programme for Government and Co-operation agreement, all of which affect the childcare workforce and the structure of childcare provision.

The refreshed plan will be developed with sector stakeholders and social partners and have a continued focus on supporting and developing the workforce, whether that be the size, shape and diversity of the workforce or the skills and knowledge of individual practitioners.

Most childcare settings in Wales are private or charitable providers and so Welsh Government does not have the ability to define working conditions directly. However, we recognise the key role of government funding in supporting settings to create good working conditions. One of the aims of the upcoming increase in the childcare offer rate paid to settings is to support settings ability to offer reasonable rates of pay to their staff. Other Welsh Government support such as the 100% business rates relief for registered childcare settings, capital funding investments and support, as well as sustainability grants available from local authorities are aimed at supporting settings with overhead costs to support them in being able to offer reasonable rates of pay.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plan to ensure that the upcoming childcare recruitment campaign by Social Care Wales reaches and attracts groups such as ethnic minorities and Welsh speakers who are under-represented in the childcare workforce.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government works with a range of partners to promote childcare careers in Wales and this work is under continual review. To help attract people with the right skills and behaviours into the sector and to be recognised and valued for the work

that they do, we provide funding to Social Care Wales for their national recruitment and retention campaign: [WeCare.Wales](#).

This aims to raise the profile of the sector, to show what it's really like to work within it and showcase the career opportunities on offer. This is supported by a national stakeholder group which comprises membership from childcare and play umbrella bodies.

In light of the pandemic, Social Care Wales are now taking forward an always "on" campaign which allows for responsive action in relation to any attraction, recruitment and retention issues. This is building on their recent [TV advert](#) showcasing the qualities and skills required to work with children and their [#diolch](#) work where children and parents recognised and thanked practitioners for all they do for them.

Social Care Wales have also developed WeCare.Wales Ambassadors who raise the profile of working in early years, childcare and play. Ambassadors are volunteers from a variety of backgrounds who are working in the sector. They help people explore the different career options and progression opportunities available within the sector. The work of an Ambassador can involve presentations to school or college students; informal talks or discussions; attending career or job fairs, events or conferences.

WeCare.Wales aims to attract a diverse range of people to the childcare workforce, we will work with Social Care Wales to ensure a renewed emphasis on diversity and ensure Ambassadors are drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plan to deliver universal wrap-around care, including after-school clubs that can accommodate all those who want to benefit from them.

Response: Accept in principle

Local authorities, through their Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, gauge the level of demand for out of school childcare in their area, and what services are available to meet that demand. The Welsh Government also funds local authorities to support their efforts to meet any unmet demands for childcare in their local areas, which can include activity to increase wrap-around and out of school childcare and playwork activities. The Welsh Government funds Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids Clubs as part of the annual grant to the CWLWM consortium to support and advise the out of school sector in Wales, helping new clubs to be established and become registered with Care Inspectorate Wales. This includes the expansion of Welsh medium out of school provision.

In terms of after school provision, the Welsh Government has provided a £6.4m Winter of Wellbeing package for all schools to provide more sessions in and around

the school day to promote physical, mental and emotional wellbeing through increased access to creative, sporting, play and cultural activities in English and Welsh. This is intended to create a better environment for learning and progression and seek to re-build confidence in all learners, particularly those most disadvantaged by the impacts of the pandemic. This wider package will also give us valuable evidence and information for future policy development.

We are also Funding a small scale trial, which guarantees over 1,800 learners five hours a week of additional enrichment activities around the school day. This trial will help us to consider how we can best support learner and staff well-being, narrow educational inequalities, and better align with modern living and working patterns. The learning from this trial will help expand the evidence base around the structure of the school day.

We will continue to work with our key stakeholders to identify where there are opportunities for Government to support work to strengthen wrap-around and out of school provision.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government sets out in its response its plans to undertake the full consultation on the Exceptions Order that it committed to in 2019 in order to address concerns around the negative impact it has had on registered providers and on the safeguarding of children.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is planning to undertake a consultation on the Exceptions Order during 2023, building on the findings of the Call for Evidence already undertaken. It is also important that the consultation takes into account the findings and any actions arising from the Ministerial Review of Play. We will work with the sector to ensure they are engaged in the development of proposals and the formal consultation.

Financial Implications – None. Any additional costs will be drawn from existing programme budgets.