

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

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Ministerial Scrutiny Session: Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty

Flying Start

Funding

Prior to 2012-13, Flying Start funding was allocated to each local authority using the Children's Personal Social Services Standard Spending Assessment Formula, which draws on a range of indicators from the 0 – 18 age group. However, the data used to inform this method is now out of date. Further, being based on children aged 0 – 18 it does not fit with the age range of children eligible for Flying Start services.

While the existing provision will continue to be funded, to reduce turbulence within the existing target areas, the basis on which funding is allocated to local authorities for the expansion of the programme is derived from the assessed number of 0-3 year olds living in income benefit households in local authority areas.

The later approach to calculating local authority revenue allocations will be applied from 2015-2016.

The Flying start budget for this financial year and also the next three financial years is as follows:

Flying Start	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Revenue BEL	£61.550m	£72.1m	£77.1m
Capital BEL	£13m	£8m	£2m

Doubling the number of children benefitting from Flying Start by 2016

Flying Start operates in designated areas – areas that have been shown to have the highest proportion of children under four years of age living in income benefit households, and providing a universal set of entitlements to those families in the area with a child under the age of four. There is no means testing to access services.

Doubling the number of children benefitting from Flying Start is one of the Programme for Government's 'Five for a Fairer Future' commitments and is a targeted investment to support children and their families in the early years. This represents a staged expansion to increase the number of children under the age of 4 and their families benefitting from the programme from 18,000 to 36,000 by the next Assembly elections in 2016.

Following the announcement of the expansion of the programme, each local authority submitted a '3 Year Strategic Plan' outlining the arrangements for the expansion in their area.

The numbers of children planned to benefit from the programme for each year are:-

2012-13-----	19,086,
2013-14 -----	27,657
2014-15-----	32,657
2015-16-----	36,000

This staged expansion planned a comparatively small increase in numbers in 2012-2013 with the major stages of the expansion scheduled for the 2013-16 period. Each local authority has a cap number for its area year on year i.e. the minimum number of children which the programme must support in that LA in any given year. The above figures relate to the sum of the caps for all local authorities.

In 2012-2013, 23,579 children benefited from Flying Start Health Visitor services. This includes children who have moved in and out of the FS areas. This exceeded the target number of 19,086 for the first year of the expansion.

Figures have recently become available for April to August 2013 for internal performance management purposes. The figures show that in this five month period 19,626 children benefited from Flying Start Health Visitor services, on track to achieve the planned number of 27, 657 over the whole year.

Capital Expansion

Plans for expansion are dependent on the successful development of infrastructure to deliver services. Primarily this means settings to deliver the free, part time, high quality childcare element of the programme, and also venues to deliver parenting courses and language and play sessions.

The total number of projects due to be carried out is 146, varying in size from small refurbishments to significant new builds.

Work has taken place on a significant number of projects this financial year (2013-14) and it is expected that £13 million worth of work will be carried out, with projects in every local authority being completed. By March 2014 approximately 110 projects should have been carried out, leaving a small number of projects for completion in 2014-15.

By the end of 2015–16 we will have funded the development of settings to provide nearly 9,000 high quality, part-time Flying Start childcare places in total.

One example of the new facilities that are being created in communities as a result of the Flying Start capital expansion is the £105,000 project in Sealand. This has enabled the provision of the first Welsh medium childcare in this community with 24 new places. **Health Visitors**

An assessment of requirements indicates that the provision of health visiting services at the same caseload level as currently employed (i.e. one health visitor per 110 children) would require an additional resource of 160 new posts to deliver the manifesto commitment. As of August 2013 there were 233.3FTE Health Visitor posts within Flying Start representing 176.6 new jobs created by the Flying Start

Programme. The total Target workforce under the expansion is 327 FTE Health Visitor posts.

Welsh Government officials are working closely with colleagues from NHS Shared Services Partnership (formerly NLIH) and Higher Education providers to recruit and train new Health Visitors. Between April and September 2014, 60 new health visitors will complete training which commenced in 2013. The 2014 intake will recruit another 30 trainee Health Visitors. From 2015-2016 training will be based on filling vacancies created by natural wastage. This is estimated to be 5% of staff per annum and will result in an annual intake of 15 trainee Health Visitors. The Welsh Government continues to work closely with local authorities and NHS Workforce colleagues in order to ensure that Welsh-speaking Health Visitors are available in the areas in which they are needed.

Flying Start Outreach

Following a consultation exercise with the Flying Start Network, the Outreach element of Flying Start has been re-focused to integrate further with Families First, Communities First and other Tackling Poverty initiatives.

The Outreach funding remains at 2.5% of the uplift. Local authorities can now choose from a suite of options for delivering their Outreach providing them with the flexibility to deliver specific elements of the Flying Start programme to any child in their authority.

Flying Start Evaluation

Flying Start is subject to a robust programme of independent evaluation and a series of reports on the National Evaluation of Flying Start was recently published. This included:

- Results from the second wave of a longitudinal survey of over 2,000 families with children aged between two and four in Wales. Parents were surveyed about parenting, the development of their child, and family support services their family had used whilst bringing up their child;
- In-depth case studies were conducted with all 22 Welsh local authorities about the implementation and delivery of the programme;
- Interviews with high need parents about their experience of the programme and the impacts they believe it has had.

The reports provide us with important information about the delivery and impact of the Flying Start programme to date.

Findings from the qualitative research demonstrated evidence of all anticipated immediate outcomes of the programme. This includes the language development, social and emotional development and cognitive development outcomes for children. It also showed impacts for parents in terms of parenting behaviour, health and wellbeing and their perceptions of the local area.

Similarly, quantitative data suggests that children in Flying Start areas have similar language and cognitive skills and social and emotional development post intervention to those living in the less disadvantaged comparison areas.

Some key findings relating to each of the Flying Start key elements are discussed below:

- **Health Visitors** – local authorities reported that the Flying Start health visitor caseload ratio, of 1 health visitor to 110 children, which is substantially lower than in the generic Health Visitor service, enabled Flying Start children to receive a number of benefits. This included: additional home visits; a more comprehensive and faster assessment of need; more focused, family-centred support; and referral to a wider range of additional services. Practitioners in all Flying Start areas suggested that the health visits with families were longer and more intensive, and that it was this, rather than the increased number of visits, that was key to better provision.
- **Childcare** - Flying Start has had a positive impact on the range and quality of childcare provision. The high need parents interviewed felt that Flying Start childcare resulted in their children showing improved social skills, becoming more independent and confident and learning a range of literacy and numeracy skills.
- **Parenting** - 89% of parents in Flying Start areas reported that they had enough advice and support on how to look after their child and to keep them happy and healthy. Many Flying Start areas have now established a continuum of provision for parenting support. This includes programmes to enhance parenting skills and strategies amongst parents with low levels of need and intensive support for parents facing particular challenges.
- **Early Language Development** - Many parents interviewed felt that Language and Play sessions led to their child talking more often and clearly, with an improved vocabulary and provided an opportunity for children to practice their Welsh. Evidence also shows that the Language and Play (LAP) sessions often presented an opportunity to do activities that families did not normally undertake at home, and gave parents ideas about imaginative and inexpensive ways to help their children learn.

Ongoing Monitoring of FS Programme

We have implemented a comprehensive system of data collection relevant to the programme. Local authorities submit their performance management data to the Welsh Government on a termly basis along with their claim for payment. This data is used within the Welsh Government to assist with the performance management of the programme.

The data submitted is subsequently collated into a 'dashboard' which identifies in a manageable format the performance of the programme on an all-Wales basis and also at the level of individual local authorities.

Each local authority has been allocated an Account Manager who meets with each of their Flying Start Co-ordinators on a regular basis to discuss progress and any concerns that either party may have.

Since October 2013, Account Managers have drawn up an Improvement Plan for each local authority. These have been agreed with the local authority Flying Start co-ordinator, and are used to identify areas of concern and outline the activities they are undertaking to improve performance.

We are also monitoring the take-up of childcare provision in Flying Start areas. We have a commitment to increase the take up of Flying Start childcare provision to 95 per cent by 2015. Interim milestones on the route to this target have also been set, to increase the take up of Flying Start childcare provision to 85 per cent in 2013 and to 90 per cent in 2014. (In 2012-2013 90% full or reduced offers of childcare in a Flying Start childcare setting were taken up, exceeding the interim milestone to increase take-up to 85% by 2013)

Child Development Assessments

Flying Start children are assessed at age 2 and at age 3 using the Schedule of Growing Skills 2 Development Assessment tool. The development assessments provide an indication whether the child's development is at or close to the norm for children of that age, or whether they need additional support.

Information on the assessments is collected through the data collection system referred to in the preceding section. Local authorities have now been given targets for the rate of assessments that should be undertaken within a month of the child's birthday.

The monitoring system and the targets for assessments will be used to monitor the Flying Start target in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, which is that by 2016, it will increase the proportion of 3 year olds receiving Flying Start services who have achieved or exceeded their developmental milestones by 5 percentage points.

In 2012–13, 55% of children in the Flying Start programme reached or exceeded their developmental milestones at age 3, establishing this as the baseline upon which to gauge future performance of the programme and of this target.

Flying Start Summary Statistics Bulletin

In September 2013 we published the first Flying Start Summary Statistics bulletin which provides key national statistics from the programme for each of the authorities in Wales.

Statistics collected include data on health visitor caseloads, contacts with health visitors, levels of immunisation of children in Flying Start and non-Flying Start areas, and the development of children in receipt of Flying Start services (at age two and three).

There is a link to the Bulletin on the Welsh Government website here:

<http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/flying-start/?lang=en>

The Flying Start Summary Statistics bulletin provided the opportunity to monitor the performance of Local Authorities on key indicators and has focused our attention on areas of work where improvement can be achieved in the delivery of the programme.

The next issue of the Bulletin is scheduled for July 2014.

Implications for delivery

The findings from all research and evaluation activity in conjunction with internal monitoring data will be used to inform programme guidance and to support the development of Flying Start as we expand the programme.

We have already initiated our response to the evaluation report by holding a National Learning Event for stakeholders last December. The event started the process of shared learning, providing a valuable opportunity to respond directly to the positive, as well as the more challenging findings and recommendations emanating from the suite of evaluation reports. The action centred learning approach provided a valuable opportunity to inform and improve the future delivery of Flying Start.

The statistical bulletin “Flying Start Summary Statistics 2012–13” indicated that, on average, immunisation rates in Flying Start areas were lower than in non-Flying Start areas (for children fully immunised by their fourth birthday). Rates for children living in Flying Start areas averaged 76% across Wales, whereas rates for children living in non-Flying Start areas averaged 82% across Wales. In response to this, in January 2014 we agreed funding of up to £200,000 to be made available to support additional activity to improve childhood immunisation rates in Flying Start areas. This is a short term intervention (January to March 2014) to immediately improve immunisation take up. In the longer term, we will consider further work with Public Health Wales.

Communication Activities

Findings from the Evaluation reports highlight the variance in knowledge amongst Flying Start families of the Flying Start service offered. To increase awareness of the offer within current Flying Start areas, expansion areas and across the wider Welsh public, funding has been agreed for

- The production of three bilingual DVD productions for
 - Flying Start families
 - Flying Start and family support professionals
 - General promotional usage
- A Flying Start promotional media campaign
- The design and printing of information leaflets on Flying Start

Awareness of the programme and the role of different elements emerged from the evaluation as an area for improvement. A PR campaign will also be launched to help facilitate awareness and understanding of the programme elements amongst practitioners and eligible parents.

Early Language Development

Early Language Development is a vital element of Flying Start, and it is one of the four core entitlements of Flying Start. Findings from the Evaluation Reports highlight that it is the entitlement that is least understood and least accessed in the

programme. To improve delivery of this entitlement and to further inform policy development, two research reviews are currently being undertaken by ARAD Research in partnership with the National Centre for Language & Literacy (Reading University):

- Review of research evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches to promoting early speech and language development
- Review of practice in the implementation of the early language development support element within Flying Start

The final reports for both reviews will be submitted at the end of March 2014. Detailed guidance will be developed based on the findings and recommendations of these reports and further consultation with the Flying Start network.

Welsh-language provision is an integral part of Flying Start. Local Authorities have a duty to ensure there is sufficient Welsh language provision across the programme, and there is a requirement on Local Authorities to respond to the parental choice of families.

An Early Language Development annex for the Flying Start programme will be developed, and circulated, to Local Authorities by Summer 2014.

Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report 2013

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 placed a duty on Welsh Ministers to report on progress made against the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy. This included progress against the three strategic objectives of the 2011 Strategy, which are:

- 1) To reduce the number of families living in workless households.
- 2) To improve the skills of parents/carers and young people living in low-income households so they can secure well-paid employment.
- 3) To reduce inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest.

The Welsh Government fulfilled this duty on 29 November 2013, through the publication of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales Progress Report.

Highlights of the Child Poverty Strategy Progress Report 2013

A wider approach to tackling child poverty: The 2013 Progress Report recognised that since the Child Poverty Strategy was published in February 2011, there has been a significant change to the way in which the Welsh Government, other public sector organisations and the third sector work together to tackle child poverty. There is now a broader approach to tackling child poverty – and that tackling child poverty is as much about improving children's wellbeing as it is about addressing income poverty. The Welsh Government remains committed to the target of eradicating child poverty by 2020 and to doing all within its powers to

improve the life chances of children living in poverty, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission has commended the Welsh Government for its wider approach to tackling child poverty – welcoming its engagement with the public sector and other partners across Wales and its Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

Child Poverty within the Tackling Poverty Action Plan: The Progress Report makes clear how the Welsh Government's 2012 Tackling Poverty Action Plan and the refreshed 2013 Action Plan *Building Resilient Communities: Taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan* complements the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy. The 2013 Action Plan sets out key milestones and targets that support the delivery of better outcomes for those living in poverty. The milestones and targets include a strong focus on child poverty and support the objectives of the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy – with a particular emphasis on preventing poverty in the longer term, helping people out of poverty and mitigating the impact of poverty.

Progress made up to 2013: Some progress has been made to tackle child poverty and improve outcomes since the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy was published: the percentage of children living in workless households has been decreasing since 2009; the percentage of working age adults with no qualifications continues to decrease year on year; and there has been a small decrease in the education attainment gap between those eligible for free school meals and those not eligible between 2009-10 and 2011-12. At the same time, the percentage of live births with birth weight under 2,500g has remained fairly constant between 2008 and 2012, while the rate of Looked After Children increased each year from 2008 to 2013 (reaching 91 children per 10,000 in 2013). We are in the process of addressing gaps in knowledge around the number of children living in low income households reaching health, social and cognitive development milestones when entering formal education.

It is important to recognise, however, that significant challenges remain. The impact of budget cuts has forced the Welsh Government and the whole public sector to re-think ways of working. The recent years of a flat economy, rising living costs and cuts to welfare are likely to push people further into poverty. Nevertheless, we are unwavering in our commitment to address child poverty, as shown in the unique actions we have set out in our Tackling Poverty Action Plan, which is aligned with our Strategic Equalities Plan. Our Tackling Poverty Action Plan and our Strategic Equality Plan both include a focus on reducing the number of people who are not in employment, education and training. In addition, and recognising the critical role that childcare plays in supporting people into employment, both plans also include commitments to support the delivery of accessible and affordable childcare.

Challenges ahead to make further progress: While many of the levers around tackling child poverty lie with the UK Government (for example, around changes to the tax and benefits system), the Welsh Government nonetheless has a critical role to play. One of our main challenges will be to close the education attainment gap and address the link between deprivation and attainment. Raising levels of attainment will increase the potential for young people and adults to move into well-

paid jobs. This will help to reduce levels of in-work poverty, which have been increasing in recent years.

In addition to closing the education attainment gap, the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty has asked Local Authority Anti-Poverty Champions to focus on reducing the number of children and young people who are not in education, employment or training, and reducing the number of babies born with a low birth weight. The emphasis on reducing the number of young people who are not earning and learning is consistent with those outcomes being delivered through the Youth Progression and Engagement Framework. The emphasis on low birth weight babies addresses an issue identified in the majority of Local Authority Single Integrated Plans. This is also a priority in the Public Health Wales Child Poverty Strategy. There has been a positive response to this request and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty will meet regularly with the Local Health Boards and Local Authorities to monitor progress and encourage the sharing of best practice.

Collaborative approach: The Welsh Government continues to recognise that we cannot tackle poverty alone. The role of the public sector, private sector and the wider third sector is critical. The Welsh Government remains committed to working with all of our partners to deliver on the objectives of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales and our Tackling Poverty Action Plan. Local Authority Anti-Poverty Champions (established in 2013) have an important role to play in maintaining momentum at a local level. The End Child Poverty Network meet with the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty throughout the year to ensure the third sector have the opportunity to highlight key issues and concerns relating to child poverty.

Evaluation of the Child Poverty Strategy: We have a clear focus on tackling poverty as a whole government, building on the evidence, evaluation and good practices over the past three years. An evaluation report on the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales will be published by Spring 2014. The Welsh Government will reflect on the evaluation and continue to strive to do all within its power to offer better life chances for children and young people across Wales.

Monitoring further progress: The Welsh Government is required to report every three years against the objectives set out in its 2011 Child Poverty Strategy. In addition, Welsh Ministers have committed to reporting annually on the progress of the targets and milestones within the Tackling Poverty Action Plan. We will be using this reporting mechanism to hold ourselves to account for the actions we have pledged to deliver.

Update on the systems/structures in place to co-ordinate cross-governmental matters relating to child poverty.

Helping disadvantaged families is a cross Government priority – one of the three key themes in the Budget

The co-ordination of child poverty action across government is achieved through the delivery of our Tackling Poverty Action Plan. A **Tackling Poverty Implementation Board** has been established where departments provide an update on their progress against the targets and milestones set out in the Action Plan. The Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty chairs the Implementation Board (which meets three times a

year), which is attended by relevant senior officials from across all Welsh Government Departments. Alongside the Implementation Board, the Deputy Minister continues to meet regularly with other Welsh Government Ministers to discuss the tackling poverty agenda and progress made on commitments in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

A network of internal **Welsh Government Tackling Poverty Champions** has also been established with the aim of identifying additional opportunities for collaborative working, and a focus on improving the outcomes of low income families.

Welsh Government Early Years and Childcare Plan

Wales's first Early Years and Childcare Plan, *Building a Brighter Future*, was launched in July 2013. The Plan has been received positively. It sets out a number of outcomes that we want to achieve throughout the 10 year lifetime of the Plan and the actions that will be taken to help achieve these outcomes.

Progress is already being made on many actions, including:

- The Review of Early Years Regulation and Inspection
The aim of this Review is to develop a system that supports our ambition to continuously improve standards and, where possible, reduce burdens on local authorities and providers. The Review was commenced in October 2013 and is being led by Professor Karen Graham. The final report is due in March 2014.
- Development of a 10 Year Workforce Plan
The plan will set out our long-term aims for the early years, childcare and play workforce in Wales and will include qualifications, leadership, continuous professional development and career pathways. The Care Council for Wales is taking forward a workforce survey to help inform this work.
- Stocktake of the Foundation Phase
The Stocktake was commenced in September 2013 and is being led by Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford. The purpose of the stocktake is to look at how the Foundation Phase is being delivered and how it can be strengthened. The final report is due in March 2014.
- Developing the All Wales Child Health and Mental Well-being Programme
The final recommendations of the expert working group are due to be presented to the Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Medical Officer later this month (January). Local Health Boards will be consulted on the changes needed to implement the recommendations, with a plan agreed by the end of March 2014. Implementation will then follow in the 2014 - 2015 financial year.

In addition, with endorsement from Cabinet, the Early Years Partnership Board has been established to work on specific high level actions in a way that supports co-production / co-construction of solutions / ideas. This is co-chaired by the Minister for Education and Skills and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty and includes representatives from local government, the voluntary sector, local health boards, childcare and play organisations, and academia. The first action that the Board is overseeing and advising on is the development of an Early Years Outcomes Framework.

Childcare

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of childcare for both child development and supporting working parents. Improving access to affordable quality childcare is a key priority. The provision of high quality childcare plays a key role in delivering on Programme for Government Commitments. It enables parents to work or access training, and supports our drive to increase economic growth, tackle poverty and reduce inequalities

The Revenue Support Grant (RSG) is the main revenue funding stream to local government in Wales whilst specific grants such as the Out of School Childcare Grant help Local Authorities address gaps in childcare provision within their areas. £2.3m per year has been made available to local authorities since 2012 through the Grant, which supports the 22 local authorities in Wales in providing wrap around childcare and play during out of school hours and holiday periods.

The grant can help deliver on a range of Welsh Government priorities, outlined in both the Early Years and Childcare Plan and the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, as it facilitates parents and carers to work, train or study for future employment.

In line with Welsh Government priorities, Local Authorities are currently using the grant to focus on offering out of school childcare, including holiday play schemes, for children from low income families, or children who have a specific need.

Start-up and sustainability grants are also being provided to promote, encourage and sustain childcare provision, particularly in rural areas. Financial support through this grant scheme is also being provided to childcare provision through the medium of Welsh.

Key actions from the Early Years and Childcare Plan which are being taken forward to advance the Welsh Government's childcare priorities include:

- researching the needs of parents who work atypical hours as well as those who need additional support
- working with JobCentre Plus and Families Information Service to improve awareness and parental uptake of financial support for childcare
- taking action to stimulate the child care market to increase the number of child care businesses by providing advice, support and funding
- reviewing the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) duty on local authorities.

Families First

Families First is the Welsh Government's vehicle for driving forward its ambitions for family support. Through the programme we have asked local authorities to develop and implement family-focused plans promoting early interventions based around a multi-agency system of support for families, particularly those in, or at risk of moving into, poverty. Through Families First we are driving the development of structured ways of addressing and, where appropriate, pre-empting families' problems at the earliest possible opportunities, using the most appropriate interventions.

Families First has been fully operational in every local authority since 2012 and is funded through a grant set at £47.15m this financial year (2013–14). This programme has spearheaded the establishment of a Team Around the Family (TAF) in every local authority and the development of a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF). These system changes are supported by strategically commissioned family support services and projects, and a commitment to shared learning which will deepen our knowledge locally, regionally and nationally. Furthermore, we have ring fenced funding to ensure that each local action plan includes a disability focus within their programme which will continue for the duration of the Assembly term.

The fund is closely monitored through a strong performance management framework which includes three strands:

- a results based accountability approach with four outcomes, underpinned with 16 population indicators (PIs), all agreed with local authorities
- a Process Change Performance Measures Framework which demonstrates the extent to which processes and systems in the delivery of services for children, young people, and their families have changed and are continuing to change since the introduction of Families First
- a Family Outcomes Tool, which will assess the impact of Families First on families which have been through the programme, using data from distance travelled tools and/or their JAFF

The information gathered through the monitoring framework is supplemented by the results of our independent evaluation. The first annual report was published last December and provides vital feedback about the implementation and delivery of the programme. The evaluation confirmed that national and local stakeholders support the design of the five key elements of the programme which address gaps or inefficiencies in previous ways of working. The evaluation also reported on the core elements of the programme as follows:

- By summer 2013, some form of **Team Around the Family** (TAF) approach, was running in all but one local authority. TAF was believed to facilitate knowledge sharing across disciplines and TAF panels were seen to be more responsive to families' needs than previous arrangements.
- A **Joint Assessment Family Framework** (JAFF) approach had been *fully* implemented in 18 of the 22 local authorities in Wales, and was under development in the other four. JAFF was reported to help families engage more effectively because they are actively involved in the assessment process, which gauges strengths as well as needs. JAFF also provides common language for teams and a structured approach to recording and sharing information.
- Local authorities reported that **strategic commissioning** promoted better multi-agency working and an outcomes based culture. Families First was also praised for advocating the commissioning of early intervention projects.

The **disability focus** helps to prioritise and protect services that might otherwise be cut in a time of reducing budgets. New assessment and referral processes and better data sharing across agencies is helping to identify more families earlier. Agencies were also seen to have better access to the information they need to provide an effective service to families. In developing this strand of Families First we worked with the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign. The Group disbanded as they considered they had achieved their immediate aims. We will continue to work with organisations representing the interests of disabled children as appropriate.

- **Learning Sets** were considered to provide valuable time and space for practitioners to share knowledge and reflect on their practice. It was also appreciated that multi-authority learning sets allowed tackling of cross-authority issues. The learning sets will continue at a local, regional and national level. The evaluation team is working closely to support this process and disseminate the shared learning through a bespoke website. The aim is for this element of the programme to be responsive and well documented.

The Families First Evaluation Team has established that by March 2013, 1,867 JAFFs had been initiated across Wales, and 1,557 TAF action plans were in place.

In addition, data collected through the Process Change Performance Measures Framework for quarters 1 and 2 of financial year 2013–14, shows that in the first six months of the financial year a total of 1,492 JAFFs have been initiated, and 727 TAF action plans have been put in place.

Over the next year we will be working closely with our partners to take stock of the progress in all areas of the programme, and identify how this should be reflected in our Families First guidance.

Families First Funding.

Families First	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Revenue BEL	£47.2	£46.9	£44.6

We have committed to maintain the Families First programme during this Assembly term and we will be investing £46.9m in 2014-15. This is a reduction of £0.75m required in 2014-15 but this will be met without any reduction to the Families First grant. In particular, this means that the ring fenced support for families with disabled children will continue at planned levels. The reductions in 2014-15 can be met from planned expenditure on policy areas that have not yet been fully developed, or can be deferred until budget becomes available.

We will carry forward the reduction in the Families First budget of £0.75m from 2014-15 and will see a further reduction of £2.3m in 2015-16. This will be found by reducing the grant allocations to local authorities for the Families First grant. This is likely to result in a number of reductions in services to children and families and it is likely that there will be an impact on individuals and families from the groups with protected characteristics. This reflects the reality of the budgetary challenges facing

the Welsh Government. The Welsh budget has faced unprecedented cuts - by 2015-16 our budget will be nearly £1.7bn lower than it was in 2010-11.

Play

The Welsh Government places great value on the importance of play in children's lives and recognises the benefits it gives to their health, happiness and well-being. It is also important in laying the foundation for each child in reaching their full potential during their adult life. It is one of our manifesto commitments to continue to improve opportunities for all children and young people to play in safety and, in particular, we will support improved access to play for children with disabilities.

Play Sufficiency Assessments

During March 2013, the Welsh Government received Play Sufficiency Assessments from all the local authorities in Wales. These have now created a baseline of a wide range of factors that affect children's opportunities to play, showing the strengths and shortfalls in each area.

They also assess the extent to which the opportunities are available to all children including those living in low income families. The action plans show the actions to maintain strengths and improve on shortcomings.

Wales is the first country in the world to legislate for play and this sits well with the recent UNCRC General Comment on Article 31. This emphasises the right of every child to rest, play, recreational and cultural activities.

We will continue to work closely with local authorities and all partners on ways to implement the plans for improving play opportunities for all children and young people in Wales.

Funding for Play

To support Local Authorities in implementing their play action plans the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty has agreed to the allocation of £1.25m in this financial year to enhance play opportunities for children in their areas.

The Deputy Minister is at present considering the way forward in commencing the second part of section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which will place a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities in their areas for children, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to their play assessments. The Deputy Minister will be in a position to provide more information about this within the following 2 weeks.

Communities First

The Communities First Programme has historically had a significant focus on working with Children and Young People and this has been strengthened in the refocus of the Programme.

Following consultation in 2011, Communities First (CF) was refocused as a Community Focused Tackling Poverty Programme with three strategic outcomes: Healthy Communities, Learning Communities and Prosperous Communities.

The Programme supports the most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas of Wales with the aim of contributing to alleviating persistent poverty and focuses on those actions that can be undertaken, with the support of the community, that have the greatest impact on education/skills, economic and health outcomes, ultimately leading to the long term sustainability and wellbeing of communities.

The programme aims to narrow the education/skills, economic and health gaps between the most deprived and more affluent areas by:

- supporting individuals, families and groups of people who have the poorest education/skills, economic and health outcomes
- supporting those in places where deprivation is most concentrated
- increasing the life skills, self esteem and self reliance of individuals, including their financial capability
- supporting and strengthening the local activity which does most to tackle poverty and deprivation.

There are now 52 CF areas in Wales, known as Clusters, each typically covering a population of 10-15,000 people. A number of Clusters, for example, in Cardiff, are significantly larger covering populations in excess of 25,000.

Each Cluster is focused on the most deprived communities in Wales, and the programme concentrates on supporting the most deprived individuals, families and groups in these areas (according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2011). These 52 Clusters overall relate to around 24% of the population in Wales.

Whilst in many areas there is already a strong working relationship between the Communities First Programme, Families First and Flying Start, it is recognised that more needs to be done. There is a clear expectation that these programmes will be more coherent by intent and not leave this to chance. This programme is designed to influence and improve the delivery of major services and opportunities and not exist in a self contained space. Funding has been secured from ESF to support better alignment and planning across the programmes and this is now being taken forward by 4 regional posts with support from the Welsh Government. Whilst this learning and improvement is focused in the Convergence Areas it will be disseminated across Wales.

The Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty will also be hosting four regional events for Local Health Boards, Anti-Poverty Champions, Communities, First, Flying Start and Families First to help align activities to achieve better outcomes.

The *Building Resilient Communities – Tackling Poverty Action Plan*, published in July 2013, made a commitment to establish a new programme to Tackle Workless Households. The “Lift” programme will focus on households where no one has worked for over 6 months and will inevitably support families where worklessness is the significant factor in relation to poverty, the cycle of deprivation and aspirations of young people. The programme is now being established and will provide intensive support and mentoring to help households access and sustain employment. The Lift Programme areas are:

Mon CF Cluster – Anglesey
Carmarthenshire CF Cluster – Carmarthenshire
Swansea North West CF Cluster – Swansea
Afan Valley CF Cluster – Neath Port Talbot
Taf CF Cluster – Rhondda Cynon Taf
Cardiff East CF Cluster – Cardiff
Caerphilly Basin CF Cluster – Caerphilly
Tredegar & Ebbw Fawr CF Clusters – Blaenau Gwent

In November 2013, the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty announced the extension of the programme for the life of the current Government subject to an evaluation and future budgetary constraints. The evaluation of Communities First has been commissioned and a final report will be available in later summer 2014. The CF Programme includes a range of projects under the outcomes of ‘healthy communities’ (e.g. grow your own, healthy cooking classes, exercise groups), ‘prosperous communities’ (making people fit for the work place and more able to access jobs, money management), and ‘learning communities’ (improving basic skills, supporting young people in their learning and supporting parents to be become more involved in their child’s education). CF encourages all projects to be holistic in their approach. For example, health projects, training schemes and those around making young people ‘job ready’ are urged to work with existing local networks, schools and third sector organisations.

Learning Communities

This outcome is strongly supported in the Delivery Plans set out by each Cluster. Projects supporting this outcome include:

- homework clubs
- toddler groups focusing on making children ‘school ready’
- literacy and numeracy classes more generally but also for children and parents to study together
- basic skills improvement schemes, including schemes for vulnerable young people, children from minority or hard to reach groups
- schemes aimed at improved attainment levels at key stages 2, 3 and 4
- adult learning and improving adult basic skills including IT

Clusters are expected to have strong working links with key providers and training organisations, particularly in the area of adult learning.

The CF Programme supports over 100 posts that are focused on learning and education including family learning initiatives. The value of the posts is in excess of £6 million for the period until March 2015.

In addition the Welsh Government is developing Programme Improvement initiatives that provide additional resources, including funding and staff, to deliver key priorities in CF areas in partnership with other Government Departments, Government Sponsored Bodies and partner agencies. Some examples are contained below.

1. Communities First Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund

The CF Pupil Deprivation Grant Match Fund (PDG) offers CF Clusters £3m to match against PDG allocated to their local schools. The CF PDG Match Fund

supports improved working between schools and CF Clusters to improve the outcomes of young people who live in poverty and support better engagement of their parents/careers. The CF PDG Match Fund will support projects which aim to:

- Improve community engagement in schools
- Support children to do well at school.
- School transitions
- Improve family engagement in their children's education.

Projects were invited to submit applications which achieved these aims through work on the following priorities, identified in the CF Outcomes Framework:

- Promoting Family Learning in the Early Years
- Supporting Young People to Do Well at School
- Supporting Families to be Engaged in their Children's Education

The CF PDG Match Fund builds on good practice and fosters stronger links between communities and schools in addressing the shared outcomes of tackling poverty and its impact on young people's educational achievement. The fund will particularly encourage innovative and evidenced-based interventions and collaboration between CF Clusters, working with both local secondary schools and feeder primaries. As part of the application process all areas were provided with guidance which referenced sources of information including the Sutton Trust Toolkit. The PDG Guidance sent to schools also made reference to the opportunities for schools to work with CF Clusters.

PDG match funding aims to increase the number of schools working with Clusters and build on the existing good working relations within CF Clusters where this work already happens. In many CF areas further support was needed to build these relations, there are a number of reasons for this, including the difficulties experienced by some CF areas in developing their Clusters and the relative short notice of the introduction of PDG funding during the process of developing CF Clusters. 15 approvals were made in the first round of applications. Applicants for CF PDG Match were asked to prepare their applications against the following measures.

Promoting Family Learning in the Early Years

- Parents who feel better able to cope
- Parents who better understand the importance of early learning
- Parents reading regularly with child

Supporting Young People to Do Well at School

- Pupils who feel more positive about school
- Pupils with improved behaviour in School
- Pupils with increased school attendance
- Pupils achieving better at school

Supporting Families to be Engaged in their Children's Education

- Parents gaining a Qualification

- Parents feel more confident supporting their children
- Parents who feel their child is coping better at school
- Parents are more engaged with school

The total funding available from CF Match Funding is £1m per annum for the next two years. Expressions of Interest were received on 1 March 2013 for the 2013 - 14 round, applications substantially exceeded the total amount of funding available. A total of 23 applications were awarded funding of around £1.8 million over two financial years.

The next round of funding is for 2014-15 and Expressions of Interest were submitted in October 2013. This round was limited to those who did not receive funding in the first round and outcomes are expected shortly.

2. Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

CF areas continue to be a specific target for HEFCW and officials have discussed changes both to the CF programme and HE funding and the implications for future targets relating to HE recruitment from CF areas.

3. Further Education

Strategic priorities identified for 2014/15 include increasing learner progression and support. We expect colleges to maximise progression routes to level 3 qualifications and higher level education, training and employment. They should also help people overcome the negative impact of social and economic deprivation on education and training, providing the necessary support to enable learners to complete their studies.

Communities First Clusters engage with a variety of FE providers, including colleges, universities, trainers and accreditors, for example OCN. Clusters engage in a range of projects with young people aiming to develop skills and capacity to allow young people to enter Further Education. Other Cluster projects work with young people in school settings to improve exam results to allow access to Further Education and prevent young people from becoming NEET.

4. Jobs Growth Wales

In addition, the Communities First Programme is supporting an additional 750 Jobs Growth Wales employment opportunities, specifically targeting young people from Communities First Clusters. The highly successful Parent Family Advisors project between Communities First and Jobcentre Plus was piloted in 4 areas and following an evaluation this is now being expanded to another 8 Clusters to continue supporting families into work.

Low Birth Weight Babies and Immunisation

In relation to Low Birth Weight Babies, the CF Programmes funds a number of initiatives in Wales which look at parenting skills both pre and post-natally. Projects

include teaching expectant mothers about the importance of healthy eating, exercise, smoking cessation and alcohol intake during pregnancy. The project supports expectant mothers to understand how their lifestyle impacts on that of their baby.

Some projects also work with expectant fathers to ensure that there is wider family support for mother and child.

Projects also work with expectant mothers to make them aware of their options in relation to childbirth, breast feeding and immunisation options. Projects such as this have a strong health focus but also a strong focus on learning, building confidence, dispelling myths and misconceptions (particularly around immunisations) and developing social support networks for mothers, fathers and communities.