

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to the Cabinet

Meeting Date:	14 February 2017
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mair Rowlands
Contact Officer:	Sioned Owen
Contact Number:	01286 662632
Item Title:	Extend child care for 3-4 year olds in Wales to 30 hours and implement the statutory requirements of the Child Care Act 2006.

1 DECISION SOUGHT

1. Designate the following Well- being areas Bangor, Dolgellau, Ffestiniog and Porthmadog as pilot areas for the new childcare offer in 2017 -18.
2. Commit to receive grant resources from the Welsh Government for the pilot (the amount available for Gwynedd and Anglesey is £1,869,719)
3. Agree to establish Gwynedd and Anglesey children Care Unit for 2017-18

2 INTRODUCTION

The Government acknowledges that childcare is one of the greatest challenges facing working families in Wales. This is why the development of a better childcare offer has been a priority for the Government.

Welsh Government has now committed to providing 30 hours per week of early years education and free childcare for working parents of three to four year olds, for 48 weeks a year, within the current Government term.

The free early years education currently provided by the Foundation Phase forms part of this offer. The childcare offer is expected to be as clear and easy to obtain as possible so that parents can continue to choose the provider that most suits their needs.

The Government's main objectives in extending the right are:

- provide support in bringing up the next generation
- provide more employment choices for parents
- tackle poverty
- promote equality
- support child development

Helping families with affordable and flexible, high quality childcare supports economic regeneration, reduces the pressure on family income and helps parents go to work, and reduces the risk of families living in poverty. It also helps the well-being of children by providing them with positive and valuable childhood experiences.

The Council must implement the duties of the Childcare Act 2006 by holding a childcare feasibility assessment every five years and develop the field to ensure sufficient childcare for Gwynedd families.

Early Adopter for the 30 hour Childcare Scheme

The Government has nominated Gwynedd and Anglesey to be early joint adopters. Early adopters will receive funding early on, the intention being to collaborate with the Government from 17-18 onward, assisting in testing the following before the plan is rolled out nationally in 2020.

1. Test
 - how accessible and easy it is for parents to use the offer,
 - how accessible and easy it is to provide the offer;
 - how the offer sits side by side with the Early Years Foundation Stage;
2. Tell parents, local authorities, and locations about matters that could arise as a result of providing or attempting to provide the offer;
 - Consider how those matters could be dealt with using inexpensive / free solutions;
 - Understand how the offer can best work to allow more career options for parents;
 - Develop a better understanding of the impact the offer has on parents, local authorities, childcare providers and the childcare sector in general.

Establish a Gwynedd and Anglesey Childcare Unit

In light of this development and its related challenges, discussions were held jointly with Anglesey to discuss the option of setting up a dedicated childcare unit for Gwynedd and Anglesey. It would include the existing work in the field of child care i.e. duties regarding the Childcare Act 2006 in both counties, and the additional funds related to the new plan to create a team of officers to take the field forward to overcome the challenge.

Once created, Gwynedd would house the unit at a Bangor office with management duties falling on the Early Years Unit, Children and Supporting Families Department.

See Appendix 1 – staffing model

3 REASON AND JUSTIFICATION BEHIND THE DECISION

Selecting pilot areas

Following further discussions with the Government, it was noted that Gwynedd and Môn needed to target **800** children during 17-18 with Gwynedd targeting 62% of this figure, namely **496**, in accordance with the difference in population.

100% of the costs tied to this plan will be fully committed through a specific grant from

the Welsh Government. The Government indicative allocation for 2017-18 - Gwynedd and Anglesey Partnership will be **£1.87 million**.

This calculation is based on the amount if the pilot reaches about 800 children (**496 for Anglesey and 304 for Anglesey**) receiving 24 weeks of 20 hours of childcare per week. The indicative hourly rate calculated by the Government is £ 4.75 an hour for the childcare.- see table below

It is therefore clear that the project would partly have to start by looking at specific areas of Gwynedd, gradually introducing the project and making it fully operational by 2020.

In our original application to the Government, it was stated that we, as Gwynedd and Anglesey, would test the offer in rural areas and also test movements in work patterns across the Menai, with families in Anglesey using childcare in Bangor city and its vicinity. This would facilitate claims made by parents who travel to other counties to work so that there are no barriers for families.

Recently, also, the Childcare Act 2006 guidance for drafting the childcare assessment was amended and, now, the information has to be set out according to fields of information for areas in the Well-being Act - see appendix 3. Since the information in the childcare assessment is on a well-being areas level, it is wise to use the same model when extending the entitlement for childcare.

When considering the number of births per ward in the well-being areas, it was noted that it would be possible to extend to four areas in 17-18 if funds allowed (have not yet received official confirmation from the Government).

It will also be dependent on the number taking up the offer, if they work for more than 16 hours. Detailed figures per ward are not available detailing the possible numbers of parents who intend taking up the right fully, so an initial estimate of 40% and 60% of the population of three and four year olds will be necessary.

Obviously, if families do not take up the offer, it will be possible to extend to the next area sooner than expected.

Proposed Budget 2017-18		
	Estimate No of Children	Total for Areas
Well-being area		
Bangor	272	£620,160
Porthmadog	87	£198,360
Ffestiniog	56	£69,160
Dolgellau	81	£184,680
Sub total per Consortia Area	496	£1,072,360
Anglesey pilot	304	£657,590
Residual Budget		£139,770
Proposed Grant Total 2017-18		£1,869,720

**See Appendix 2 and 3
Pilot Areas 1- 4
Map of Well-being areas**

3.2 Gwynedd and Anglesey Childcare Unit

The advantages of establishing a Gwynedd and Anglesey Childcare Unit would be the creation of a dedicated and effective team with the skills to develop the field across counties, collaborating closely with the sector, the Government and childcare organisations by sharing resources and expertise. They would also have the skills to administrate the offer in a straightforward manner on behalf of parents by verifying claims and administering payments to providers.

4 NEXT STEPS & TIMETABLE

Need to submit a project plan to the Government in February 2017.

Attend national meetings - every six weeks.

Need to await further confirmation by the Government that it is willing to release funds from the 16-17 financial year so that an officer can be appointed to carry out the work of managing and running the project. Government has sent a draft job description for our consideration.

Need to agree, restructure and appoint a cross county team to drive the work in the field of childcare forward.

Set up a Project Board for the project.

Assess and interpret the information gathered through the childcare feasibility assessment.

Pilot phase to commence September 2017

Project operational across Wales by 2020

5 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO MAKING THE DECISION

Chief Executive:

The proposal presented allows us to be at the forefront in introducing a prioritised plan by the Government and it is a great opportunity. I note that the report confirms 100% grant aid towards the costs and that also is welcomed.

However, we have to be careful when operating in the early days to ensure that the development and assesment requirements of the plan as it moves forward does not take any time and resources away from local priorities.

I also welcome the intention to co-operate in providing this service. The measurment tool of any collaborations plan is the benefits it offers the residents of Gwynedd. It appears at the moment that the specialisation and team unity that a collaboration plan offers will support this.

Chief Finance Officer:

I note that the author has included fair estimates of the projected costs involved in a table in part 3 of the report, but I also understand that further discussions will be held with the Welsh Government regarding the pilot and its expansion.

It appears that the specific grant for 2017/18 will fund 100% of the expenditure planned by 2017/18, including funding the Childcare Unit as overheads within the totals of the cost of the areas.

Monitoring Officer:

The report deals with arrangements in collaboration with Anglesey County Council. It's important when moving forward with the plan that the collaboration arrangements are formalized in order to ensure clarity regarding the realization of the pilot.