

CABINET CYNGOR GWYNEDD



Date of meeting :	15/09/2026
Cabinet Member :	Menna Trenholme
Relevant Officer:	Sioned Owen Early Years Senior Manager
Item Title :	Expanding the Flying Start programme

1. DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1 To agree to expand the Flying Start Programme within the Children and Communities Grant by extending the full scheme to a new area being Pwllheli, following a reduction in the number of children eligible for the current programme.

2. REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 2.1 Cabinet approval is required for the proposed direction of extending the Flying Start Programme across the county and to enable the submission of a business case to the Welsh Government as soon as possible.

3. RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISION

- 3.1 The Flying Start Programme is already available in seven communities across Gwynedd. It supports families with children aged 0 to 4 years through the provision of an enhanced health visiting service, family support, speech and language support, and 12.5 hours of free childcare for children from the age of two.

- 3.2 The communities currently included in the programme are:

- Marchog 1 and 2, Maesgeirchen, Bangor
- Deiniolen
- Peblig and Cadnant, Caernarfon
- Gerlan, Ogwen 1 and Ogwen 2, and parts of Tregarth
- Talysarn, Llanllyfni, Carmel, Clynog Fawr and Penygroes
- Diffwys and Maenofferen, Bowydd and Rhiw, Blaenau Ffestiniog
- South Dolgellau

- 3.3 As a result of decreased birth rates affecting child population over recent years, the Flying Start Programme has already been gradually expanded to include the remainder of Ogwen 2 and Tregarth, Deiniolen, and the remainder of Penygroes LSOA.

- 3.4 Although the above expansion has been implemented successfully and new areas have been added, the project continues to experience a reduction in the number of children enrolled on the scheme due to declining birth rates across the areas listed above. The programme cannot fall below 10% of its target number of children. The current numbers are considered unacceptable by the Welsh Government, which invests over £4,400 per child and is consequently facing an annual underspend within the programme.
- 3.5 The Welsh Government has also recently announced its intention to expand childcare provision to include all two-year-old children in Gwynedd, with particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium childcare provision.
- 3.6 Before extending childcare provision (Phase 3) to every area of the county, it was necessary to consider increasing the number of children within the Flying Start Programme and to target the most deprived area in Gwynedd so that the most vulnerable families could benefit from full access to all four elements of the Flying Start Programme.
- 3.7 Following Welsh Government guidance, analytical work was undertaken using health data, Gwynedd poverty data, and Welsh Government data to identify the areas with the greatest level of need and therefore the most suitable areas for consideration.
- 3.8 An analysis was undertaken of the most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). When comparing the options, most of the areas assessed showed a low caseload and comparatively low levels of complex need. In contrast, South and North Pwllheli demonstrated a combination of a higher number of children, a higher proportion of vulnerable children, the presence of social housing, and existing service infrastructure. This offers the best opportunity to target resources where they can achieve the greatest impact. This would enable approximately 91 additional children in the area to qualify for the full programme from birth until the age of four.

(See Appendix 1)

- 3.9 An Integrated Impact Assessment was undertaken to assess the impact of the proposed change to the scheme on the county's population, considering the requirements of a range of relevant legislation. The proposal will contribute towards achieving several of the well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, supporting families to live in a more equal Wales, a healthier Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, and a Wales with a vibrant culture where the Welsh language thrives. The Flying Start programme will continue to operate in the same way as in other areas, promoting the five ways of working. This will include integrated working with health services through the co-location of services locally, as well as providing early intervention to prevent problems from arising or escalating in the future.

(See Appendix 2.)

- 3.10 As the programme is currently operating within its existing funding cap, we have identified sufficient financial capacity to expand the scheme to Pwllheli within the current Flying Start grant allocation, at a maximum cost of £131,805 over a full year. In addition, more childcare places will become available from April 2027 onwards through a major capital development involving the installation of a new modular building on the grounds of Ysgol Cymerau, Pwllheli. This will ensure sufficient childcare capacity to meet demand.
- 3.11 The evidence clearly suggests that South and North Pwllheli is the option that provides the greatest strategic benefits. The level of need, the number of vulnerable children, the concentration of social housing, and the planned capital investment together provide a strong case for prioritising these areas as the next stage of the Flying Start expansion programme.
- 3.12 The findings were presented to the Flying Start Management Board and the Children's Department Management Team, who concluded that the recommendation should be to extend the service to the South and North Pwllheli LSOAs.
- 3.13 If the recommendation is accepted and the Welsh Government approves the business case, it will be possible to begin providing services to families from January 2027, subject to a phased implementation approach.
- 3.14 We will also continue to run an outreach campaign to engage more families living close to the boundaries of the existing scheme and provide services to vulnerable families on its periphery. This will allow the programme to support the greatest possible number of families within the available grant funding.

4. NEXT STEPS AND TIMESCALE

- 4.1 Submit a Business Case to the Welsh Government seeking approval to extend the full Flying Start Programme to South and North Pwllheli.
- 4.2 Start registering families on the programme from January 2027, subject to the successful recruitment of staff.

5. VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

5.1 Monitoring Officer

'The report reflects the work which has gone into arriving at the recommendation. I am satisfied with the propriety of the decision sought.'

5.2 Chief Finance Officer

"For the reasons outlined in the report, the Council does not currently maximise the benefits it obtains on behalf of Gwynedd families through Dechrau'n Deg, since there is underspend. I

have no comments from the perspective of financial propriety on the methodology used to consider the options for extending the scheme."