

# CABINET CYNGOR GWYNEDD



## Report to a meeting of the Cabinet

<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	13/5/2025
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Menna Trenholme
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sioned Owen
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<b>Title of Item:</b>	Flying Start expansion

### 1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1. Accept the grant offer to expand the Flying Start Programme in the county by
  - extending the full scheme to the rest of the Penygroes area due to the reduction of eligible children in the current programme
  - extending the childcare element only to additional areas – Phase 3
- 1.2. Support the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department, in consultation with the Head of Finance, to submit business cases and accept grant offers for the childcare and early years capital programme.

### 2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1. Cabinet approval for the direction to the expansion of the Flying Start Programme, and approval to submit business cases to secure capital funding to deliver the expansion of Flying Start and wider childcare provision in the county.

### 3. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

- 3.1. The Welsh Government announced, as part of the collaboration agreement, their aim to gradually expand the early years provision to include all 2-year-old children, placing particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium childcare provision.

- 3.2. The Government will achieve this aim in the first place by extending the Flying Start programme.

**Flying Start the full programme - Phase 1 and birth reduction**

- 3.3. The Flying Start Programme is already available in 7 communities in Gwynedd. It supports families with children aged 0-4 by offering an intensive health visitor service; family support; language and speech support; and 12.5 hours of free childcare for children aged 2 years.
- 3.4. The communities that are currently part of the Flying Start programme are: -
- Deiniolen
  - Marchog 1 and 2 – Maesgeirchen, Bangor
  - Peblig and Cadnant – Caernarfon
  - Gerlan, Ogwen 1 and Ogwen 2 and parts of Tregarth – Bethesda
  - Talysarn, Llanllyfni, Clynnog Fawr and parts of Penygroes
  - Diffwys and Maenofferen, and Bowydd and Rhiw - Blaenau Ffestiniog
  - Dolgellau South
- 3.5. The expansion of Flying Start is to take place gradually. The Early Years' Service has implemented the 1st phase of the expansion since September 2022 to include additional areas of Tregarth and Bethesda, and Blaenau Ffestiniog. An additional 73 children have benefited from the 1st phase. These families have received all the support available through the Flying Start Programme. A few houses and streets which were new developments were also added in the area of Marchog 2 and Ogwen 1 to tidy up the postcoded areas
- 3.6. Although we have successfully implemented the above and included a further area in 2023 being Deiniolen, the project is facing a reduction in eligible children on the scheme due to a reduction in births across the above areas. It stipulates that the programme can't be under 10% of the overall target number of children. The present numbers are currently unacceptable to the Government as they are investing over £4400 per child.
- 3.7. Before deciding on phase 3 extension areas (which will only receive childcare) it was necessary to look at increasing the number of children on the Flying Start scheme and targeting the most deprived area in Gwynedd so that the most vulnerable families could receive full access to Flying Start services across the four elements.

- 3.8. An analysis of the most deprived areas (LSOA) was carried out and the Flying Start Management Board decided that it would be best to recommend extending the service to the rest of Penygroes LSOA. This means that around 40 additional children in the area would be able to qualify for the scheme, all from age 0 until age 4.
- 3.9. We have identified that there is capacity to achieve this in Penygroes within the existing Flying Start grant, which is a cost of £60,000 over a full year. There will also be more childcare places available from May onwards with the large capital development on the site of Ysgol Bro Lleu.
- 3.10. If the recommendation is accepted, it will be possible to start the families on the programme from September 2025.
- 3.11. We will also continue to run a campaign to get more outreach families in the vicinities of the current areas in order to provide a service to vulnerable families on the outskirts of the Flying Start areas. This will allow us to offer services to as many families as possible within the grant investment

### **Extending Flying Start – the childcare element only to new areas – Phase 2 and 3**

- 3.12. The expansion of Phase 2 which is the childcare-only element of the Flying Start programme has been operational since 2023-24 and serves 2-year-olds with childcare for 12.5 per week in the LSOA areas below:
- Hendre a Dewi (Bangor)
  - Abermaw
  - Hirael a Garth 2 (Bangor)
  - Porthmadog - Tremadog
  - Bala
  - Teigl (Blaenau Ffestiniog)
  - Seiont 2 (Caernarfon)
  - Trawsfynydd
- 3.13. Over the last period of extending this childcare we have seen the challenges below
- o **Sector is very fragile** - recruitment problems and running the business has become more costly e.g. energy, food costs, staffing costs trying to still make it affordable for families.
  - o **Increased Staffing costs** - NI / minimum wage changes etc.

- o **Need to ensure** that childcare places are Welsh or bilingual.
- o **Not enough places** at the start as the sub-structure is not available and the rural dimension of the county is a challenge for delivery.
- o **Expectations to achieve higher standards** of service in a given period e.g. staff commitment to achieving level 3, 4 and 5 qualifications.
- o **Accountability and management structures** of the childcare sector - our reliance here in Gwynedd on Cylchoedd Meithrin and Voluntary Committees.
- o **Sustainability of the Childcare Sector** – consideration needs to be given to the funding formula (there has been discussion to raise the level of investment to £18.50 per session) and business support for settings so that they can successfully tender

3.14. There will be obvious challenges for the Early Years Service in the coming period and will have to work with our partners Cwlwm and the sector to overcome some of the challenges, particularly when we have to consider commissioning more childcare places to greet the further extension of the childcare element with Phase 3.

3.15. The Government announced the 3rd phase of expanding Flying Start again limiting it to funding only the childcare element with a need to target 147 additional 2 year old children during 2025 - 26 in more areas of Gwynedd. As in Phase 2, the 2-year-olds will receive 12.5 hours of free Welsh or bilingual childcare for 39 weeks of the year.

3.16. In line with Welsh Government guidance for the extension of the Flying Start scheme the highest areas of child poverty will initially need to be targeted.

3.17. In light of the Government's vision to extend 2-year-old childcare to all children in Wales we were asked to prepare a plan to cover expansion plans for the rest of the Gwynedd areas using the Government's targeted methodology of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (Child Poverty) and data from Her Majesty's Dept. for Work and Pensions and Customs. This data is organised based on Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) to identify areas of need. An expansion plan was presented to the Government before Christmas setting out a realistic plan for the next three years.

3.18. In drawing up the plan, the methodology was modified due to the Government data (2016) being dated. A layer of more recent data was added from the Index of Multiple Deprivation for Wales. We have merged the two documents to target the top Lower Super Output Areas in the two data layers. Adapting the methodology and using

more up-to-date data will give us a better chance of reaching those families who need support most now.

3.19. Looking at the two layers of data, an analysis of childcare sufficiency was added side by side. Several areas were found to lack adequate childcare to meet the demand. This meant that some LSOAs which are high in deprivation have had to move to the later years of the expansion because there is currently no childcare available e.g. LSOA Llangelynnin. There are obvious gaps in provision, especially in rural areas of Gwynedd. In these places work has to be done to develop new provision to meet the demand in the near future.

3.20. The recommendation is therefore to target the highest 'LSOA' in terms of deprivation who currently have adequate childcare so that the provision needed to meet the demands of the families can be procured straight away.

3.21. We have identified the areas (LSOA) below where expansion is recommended during 2025 - 26 which are

<b>LSOA</b>	<b>Births 2023</b>	<b>No of Childcare providers</b>
Tywyn 1 + 2	15	2
Harlech	15	1
Llandderfel & Llanuwchllyn 1	3	2
Penrhyndeudraeth 1+ 2	27	1
Efailnewydd / Buan	13	2
Aberdaron/Botwnnog/ Tudweiliog	24	2
Criccieth	13	1
Waunfawr	17	
Seiont 1- rest of LSOA	9	Caernarfon providers
<b>Next stand by areas</b>		
Llanberis	18	1
Arlechwedd	7	1
Porthmadog Gorrlewinol	8	Porthmadog providers

3.22. The Service does not have access to the exact information in terms of the number of children. Therefore, we will target as in the table adding to reserve areas if the number of children allows. We can then extend to the next areas when more childcare is available in the coming years i.e. 2026 - 28 (if more funding comes from the Government.)

3.23. On receipt of the grant offer i.e. the Children and Communities Grant for Flying Start £4,138,482 there will be available annually for the next three years with an additional £827,917 for Phase 3. This means a about

200 additional pre-school children will be supported by the programme between 2025-28.

- 3.24. This gradual expansion will eventually result in the creation of a universal childcare offer for all 2-year-olds across the County in line with the Government's vision.

### **Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme**

- 3.25. In addition to expanding the Flying Start Programme, the Welsh Government has also announced a £75million Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme across Wales (2025-28). It was noted that projects to be included should cover the following criteria:

- Welsh-medium provision
- Co-location – for example on school sites, in Community or Health Hubs
- Expand the Childcare, Flying Start or Foundation Learning offer in a childcare setting
- Expanding childcare places

- 3.26. Since 2022 the Early Years Service in conjunction with Housing and Property and Education officers has been working on several major capital projects in Tywyn, Penygroes, Deiniolen, Bangor and Criccieth (total capital expenditure of around £3.5million) which is a fantastic investment for the children in those areas.

- 3.27. We have submitted a list of areas of interest to the Welsh Government and it includes the following communities: -

- Chwillog
- Bontnewydd
- Pwllheli

- 3.28. Looking at our Flying Start expansion plans, the conclusions of the childcare sufficiency assessment, and the availability of the Childcare Offer for 3–4-year-olds and nursery education. Further data analysis will need to be completed to identify further gaps in provision so that we identify those areas where further investment is needed to add to the list in 3.27.

- 3.29. During 2025-26 we will be able to apply for a capital grant for investment in the areas. There is no certainty of the grant, nor of the success of any individual business case at this point, as we currently only have an illustrated list. Each individual business case will have to test the need, meet the capital program guidelines and demonstrate the ability to deliver and complete within the program schedule.

- 3.30. While the capital programme will help us create more childcare space in the county, challenges as outlined in 3:13 and the sufficiency and sustainability of some of the childcare providers are a challenge as we seek to expand childcare provision.
- 3.31. Taking advantage of these two early years programmes will contribute towards the Priority areas of "Gwynedd Tomorrow" and "Gwynedd Gymraeg" in the Council's Plan by giving children the best possible start in life; and increases the number of Welsh-medium early education and childcare settings.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE**

- 4.1. Formally accept the grant offer to continue with the expansion of the Flying Start programme to Penygroes
- 4.2. Move to commission 2-year-old childcare provision in the targeted areas during 2025-26.
- 4.3. Prepare and present business cases for the Capital Programme during 2025-26.

#### **5. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION**

- 5.1. Monitoring Officer:  
"No comments to add in terms of propriety"
- 5.2. Chief Finance Officer:  
"I can confirm the accuracy of the financial information contained in the report. I have no objections to the decision sought."