

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 17 th December 2024
Report Subject	Flying Start Childcare Expansion Flintshire Proposal
Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Social Services and Well-being
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welsh Government have a well-established Flying Start Programme which consists of four core elements. The four elements are parenting programmes, speech and language, enhanced health visiting and funded childcare.

In Flintshire approximately 1500 children under the age of 4 are current beneficiaries of the Flying Start full programme which includes over 440 children aged 2 benefitting from funded childcare provision. The Flying Start full programme currently operates in the most deprived LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas) of Flintshire based on the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), (as specified by Welsh Government).

Whilst the full Flying Start programme is targeted at the most disadvantaged children and families across Wales, Welsh Government's ambition is that all families in Wales with children aged 2 will be eligible for 12.5 hours of funded, high-quality childcare for 39 weeks of the year.

This strategic intent is being delivered through a phased expansion of Flying Start funded childcare provision. Flintshire County Council have successfully rolled out the first two phases of the Flying Start childcare expansion programme. Welsh Government will continue to fund the rollout of further expansion and have requested that each local authority submit expansion proposals by December 2024 for consideration.

This report proposes three options for submission to Welsh Government to seek funding for our local childcare expansion programme. In summary the three options that have proposed are:

Option 1 – Rollout of Flying Start funded childcare provision to all remaining areas of Flintshire who are not currently covered by expansion areas in 2025-2026. (Appendix 1)

Option 2 – Rollout Flying Start funded childcare provision to remaining areas of Flintshire who are not currently covered by expansion areas over the next 2 years (2025-2027). (Appendix 2)

Option 3 – Roll out in accordance with Welsh Government approved plan and funding, if different from the Option 1 and 2 above e.g. longer period.

The report also identifies proposals for the use of capital funding from Welsh Government to support providers of childcare to build their capacity and infrastructure to offer additional childcare placements across Flintshire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Cabinet endorse and support the Flying Start Phase 3 expansion, building upon the developments from Phase 1 and Phase 2, and the large and small capital schemes.
2	That Cabinet approve the inclusion of the three Options within a Business Case to Welsh Government for future programme roll out. Welsh Government will base the future grant award on their availability of funding and the bids received from across Wales.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING FLYING START CHILDCARE EXPANSION FLINTSHIRE PROPOSAL
	<p>The Welsh Government Programme of Work includes the expansion of 2-year-old funded childcare for all children. They have incorporated this into the Flying Start programme and are taking a phased approach. The Flying Start Expansion Programme will significantly extend childcare provision to support long-term, positive impacts on the lives of the most disadvantaged children and families across Wales, until it reaches a universal offer.</p> <p>Welsh Government expansion guidance has encouraged local authorities to target the expansion of Flying Start towards communities, in more deprived areas, that aren't already part of the Flying Start programme. There is focus on ensuring all children have access to quality Welsh Medium childcare provision with the expectation that an equal offer is made to all eligible children.</p>
1.01	Flintshire's Expansion Programme
	The programme in Flintshire has been informed through a comprehensive needs analysis and assessment, with analysis conducted with NESTA Cymru. The 2019 WIMD data has been used to ensure children in Flintshire's more deprived areas are offered funded childcare during Phase

2 expansion, and the WIMD will be used for all future expansions, subject to Welsh Government funding allocation.

A weighting system has been incorporated that captures data from Children’s Services and Free School Meal eligibility to rank areas of need. This approach has provided an objective and evidence-based approach on the areas and sequencing of the expansion programme.

1.02 Flying Start Expansion Phase 1

The initial phase (Phase 1) of expansion commenced in September 2022 when two LSOAs in Buckley were successfully brought into the full Flying Start service. This enabled the programme to expand services in the Buckley area for childcare, health, speech and language and parenting. This has made a significant impact in the Buckley area tracked through regular Flying Start performance management and reporting to Welsh Government.

However, further phases have not included all four Flying Start elements (health visiting; parenting; speech, language, and communication) and are only funding childcare.

LSOA Name	WIMD Rank 2019	WIMD Rank Movement since 2016/17	Final Rank ▲	SSC Rank	Hub Rank	FSM Uptake Rank	% of all Hub Referrals in LSOA	SCC Total %
Buckley Bistre West 3	6	1	4	6	5	4	2.9%	2.9%
Buckley Bistre West 2	25	-4	17	15	8	10	2.7%	2.0%

1.03 Flying Start Childcare Expansion Phase 2 Areas

Phase 2 commenced in September 2023. As explained Phase 2 incorporates the expansion of quality childcare for 2 year olds as opposed to the full Flying Start programme. Phase 2 has three phases: 2a; 2b and 2c.

Phase 2a and 2b targets: 214 children, from September 2023 – March 2024.

Phase 2c: 23 children, from 1 April 2024.

From September 2023 to this date Phase 2 has provided childcare sessions to 280 children in total.

The following table sets out the areas which were rolled out for Phase 2a, 2b and 2c:

LSOA Name	WIMD Rank 2019	WIMD Rank Movement since 2016/17	Final Rank ▲	SSC Rank	Hub Rank	FSM Uptake Rank	% of all Hub Referrals in LSOA	SCC Total %
Mostyn (Flintshire)	5	8	6	10	15	12	2.0%	2.6%
Mold West 1	12	4	7	15	9	1	2.6%	2.0%
Bagillt West	11	2	8	10	13	21	2.2%	2.6%
Saltney Mold Junction	18	-5	13	14	19	3	1.7%	2.2%
Holywell East	26	5	14	4	3	20	3.7%	3.5%
Buckley Bistre East 1	10	-3	19	24	38	22	1.0%	1.3%
Leeswood	20	10	21	19	22	25	1.5%	1.8%
Elsanog	17	7	22	24	28	28	1.2%	1.2%

1.04	<p>Options Proposal: Flying Start Childcare Expansion Phase 3</p>
	<p>Welsh Government propose, after evaluation of Phase 2a, 2b and 2c expansion, to embark on Phase 3, which will be a ‘universal’ offer of funded childcare to all 2-year-olds. Timescale for this is subject to budget allocation from Welsh Government. The local authorities have been advised to plan the Phase 3 rollout for 2025 and thereafter. The expansion will use the original methodology as outlined above using 2019 WIMD data, moving into LSOA in rank order.</p> <p>Option 1 – Rollout to all remaining areas of Flintshire who are not currently covered by expansion areas in 2025-2026.</p> <p>Estimated 829 children aged 2 - please see Appendix 1 for further details.</p> <p>Option 2 – Rollout to remaining areas of Flintshire who are not currently covered by expansion areas over the next 2 years (2025-2027).</p> <p>Estimated 417 children aged 2 (2025 – 26) - please see Appendix 2 for further details.</p> <p>Estimated 412 children aged 2 (2026 – 27) - please see Appendix 2 for further details.</p> <p>Option 3 – Roll out in accordance with WG approved plan and funding, if different from the Option 1 and 2 above e.g. longer period.</p>
1.05	<p>Developing the Infrastructure to Support Phase 3 Expansion of Flying Start Funded Childcare</p>
	<p>To support the development of phase 3 expansion the programme includes the development of the infrastructure to develop the capacity needed to deliver the planned roll out.</p> <p>Staffing & Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing Early Years Childcare, Capital and Partnership Team will prepare for the expansions and submit plans to Welsh Government. • A refreshed Early Years and Family Service structure has brought all childcare elements together, and the Early Years Childcare, Capital and Partnership Team (Early Years Childcare Advisory Team, Childcare Programmes Team, Childcare Development Team and Early Years Childcare Capital Team) will implement the expansion with the support of partners and other local authority departments.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grant funding covers staffing and administration and two Childcare Placement Officer posts have been recruited to support the development of the childcare sector and placing children to appropriate childcare, taking into consideration child and parent needs e.g. vulnerability, development need, additional support need, Welsh language. • The Childcare Advisors will support the childcare settings to improve their quality and go above the Minimum Standards, as required by the Welsh Government Flying Start Childcare Guidance. They will have a role in ensuring children benefit from the childcare, to improve their development needs and readiness for school. • Additional allocation of funding supports the increase of staffing capacity in Family Information Services to incorporate Welsh medium outreach development work with families as discussed with colleagues in Education and Cwlwm partners, and to support the WESP (Welsh in Education Strategic Plan) and Welsh Language Strategy. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A dedicated function to improve access to quality information regarding Welsh medium childcare and early education pathways aligning with Flintshire’s 10-year plan as outlined in the WESP. ○ Liaising with the Welsh in Education Team to develop outreach work to raise awareness of the benefits of Welsh medium childcare & education before parents choose a setting. ○ Designated link with Mudiad Meithrin to coordinate informal Welsh Medium groups such as Ti a Fi and dissemination of promotional material. ○ Designated link for settings wishing to improve the Welsh language skills of staff – liaison with Early Entitlement & Childcare Development team to signpost to quality training.
1.06	<p>Capital Investment</p> <p>With the support of partner services, the Flintshire Early Years Team have successfully implemented Phase 1 Capital programmes and are currently working on Phase 2 Capital programme. This is done in collaboration with colleagues in Education, Cwlwm and other key stakeholders.</p> <p>Welsh Government have indicated the availability of further Early Years Childcare Capital for 2025-2028. Flintshire Early Years Childcare Capital Team with support of Education colleagues will develop an early year’s childcare capital plan to maximise the programme, support areas of need and consider the longer-term impact and sustainability, and a pathway between childcare and education.</p>

	<p>Priority will be given to new areas of Flying Start expansion, where the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has identified gaps in childcare provision and Welsh medium provision.</p> <p>The Small Capital grant supports the development and improvement of the indoor and outdoor childcare facilities/provisions to accommodate the 2–4 year olds. This will continue to build upon small capital investment since 2019 for childcare and will continue to be processed through a panel consisting of early years childcare and education colleagues.</p>
1.07	<p>Programme Benefits</p> <p>The identified benefits of the roll out of Phase 3 funded childcare are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child development: To improve outcomes for children and improve their skills and potential by receiving funded quality childcare provision. There is growing evidence that the Covid 19 pandemic has negatively impacted young children’s development. • Childcare sector sustainability: who will receive guaranteed long-term income for childcare providers, who have been struggling financially due to increased costs. • Childcare sector quality: improving setting quality and practitioner skills via the Implementation of Flying Start quality guidance and early years training and support e.g. safeguarding. • Meeting need: this has ensured the most deprived areas in Flintshire benefit first from the funding and has allowed time to grow the Sector, including in-house provision and models of operation. • Family outgoings: families already or considering paying for childcare will benefit from the funded childcare. Families unable to afford childcare will have access. • Educational outcomes: Quality childcare for 2-year-olds can improve children’s readiness for school and learning, and influence their longer-term outcomes. The longer-term aim is to ensure that all children have the best start in life and become adults who reach their full potential and contribute to society. • Employment: funded childcare demand will create new roles within settings and provide long term employment opportunities in Flintshire. • Early Intervention: Through the support of quality childcare and skilled staff there will be an opportunity to identify needs early and provide appropriate intervention. This could include for example, assessing and developing a child’s speech, language and communication or meeting an additional support initially within the childcare setting prior to seeking specialist input.
1.08	<p>Challenges</p>

Programme challenges that will need to be managed include:

- Flying Start Childcare Sustainability: currently provided by existing open market childcare settings, with the exception of Garden City, an inhouse provision – in some area’s settings may not be sustainable in the long term due to rising staffing and utility costs, and the expectations required when childcare providers are registered for certain programmes which require more than the National Minimum Standards for Childcare.
- Capacity and availability of childcare places: Limited capital funding and allocations from Welsh Government don’t cover all areas identified for creating and increasing childcare provision, therefore, some children are likely to miss out on funded childcare places. The Nesta Cymru Report and the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan identifies that childcare availability is less in areas of deprivation.
- Quality: Many settings do not fully meet all the quality standards stipulated within the Flying Start Guidance. This does not mean that the quality is not good. Indeed, there is permission to temporarily relax some expectations of new providers however it will require a concerted effort to ensure settings meet targets within timescales, and to develop a model of self-assessment, planning and action that ensure the quality is consistent and sustainable and that child needs are met. There will be impact on the Early Years Childcare, Capital and Partnership Team due to the requirements for verifying the quality and qualifications of expansion settings on an ongoing basis. The model will need to be reviewed and research shows that it is childcare quality that provides the biggest impact on children, not childcare itself. There is no evidence that children benefit from attending settings that are not of high quality ([EPPSE, 2015](#)).
- Workforce capacity: Pressure on exiting employees to deliver this scheme on top of business-as-usual commitments will impact other services.
- Digital Strategy: There is a need to develop work pathways through digital provision to staff due to the increased demands. This will include the expansion of the Flying Start database to incorporate childcare and support staff with digital solutions.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The Flying Start 2 year old childcare is fully funded by Welsh Government grant funding; allocated through the Children and Communities Grant. Welsh Government provide Guidance in relation to the expenditure which must be complied with. This relates to the age, geographical area, number of children and staffing and resourcing.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p><u>Risk 1: Childcare Sufficiency</u></p> <p>Some areas have no or limited childcare available for 2-year-olds. Specifically, there is limited provision in rural areas which is supported in the analysis and report from Nesta Cymru.</p> <p>Work is being undertaken by the Childcare team to promote and develop provision in these areas, but this will require investment, a willingness for providers to establish childcare settings, including potential capital development, and time before being able to ensure childcare sufficiency in these areas and this may lead to complaints from parents/carers wishing immediate access to provision within their community.</p> <p>As an interim mitigation, eligible families from these areas will be able to access childcare in other areas whilst the local infrastructure is developed. However, this will need to be closely monitored by the staff to ensure capacity and local impacts in areas of limited places.</p> <p>Actions to mitigate risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable parents in rural communities to access childcare by promoting all Early Years childcare programmes/grants/schemes including Flying Start expansion, through FCC and Family Information Service Flintshire (FISF) media platforms and outreach work including Dewis childcare. <li>• Signpost parents/carers to their nearest childcare providers, made available through FISF information packs and promotion of the expansion through volunteer Parents Champions and Family Workers. <li>• Provide information, advice, and support to childcare providers to apply for the Small Capital Grant (Welsh Government funding) to enable opportunities for childcare providers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ obtain a vehicle to transport children from rural areas to the nearest childcare providers to increase access and take up the offer. <li>○ Develop and improve the indoor and outdoor childcare facilities/provisions to make it developmentally appropriate for 2-year-olds. <li>• Continue to support the development of the childminder sector in collaboration with PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years). Currently, training funding is available to applicants who want to become a childminder (pre-registration cost including accredited training, quality start pack, PACEY membership fee). There may be opportunity to build up childminder networks. This will also support the anti-poverty agenda. PACEY is commissioned to provide pre-registration email and telephone support to potential applicants

	<p>who want to become a childminder in Flintshire. Once registered, childminders are supported by FCC Childcare Development Officers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop seamless early years childcare and education pathways. Early Entitlement and Early Years and Family services will continue to work closely together to support transition for children. The Phase 2 proposed areas offer Early Entitlement provision within non-maintained settings (playgroups and private day nurseries) and schools. Regular meetings will be scheduled to consider each proposed area and future areas as Flying Start childcare expands further. The meetings will consider pathways between Flying Start, Early Entitlement and Schools and how these can be made as easy and accessible as possible.
3.02	<p><u>Risk 2: Welsh Medium Targets</u></p> <p>In Flintshire, all eligible children have an offer of a Welsh medium setting. Even with a comprehensive active offer fewer than 5% of parents choose Welsh medium childcare. In terms of reporting and potentially published statistics that these targets are unlikely to be met without additional funding, communication, and clear Welsh medium education pathways for all children in Flintshire. This requires the active support of members of the Welsh Language Strategy (WESP) group.</p> <p>Actions to mitigate risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mudiad Meithrin had advised that all Welsh Medium providers who are supported by them would be expected to become Flying Start registered providers, to meet the phased expansion of 2-year-old childcare. The 6 Welsh Medium Mudiad Meithrin playgroups within Flintshire already provide Early Entitlement education which makes transition of Flying Start and Childcare Offer children to Early Entitlement in these settings straight forward. All Welsh Medium settings are based within Flintshire Welsh Medium schools or on their grounds which helps their smooth transition through the different phases of their Welsh Medium childcare and education. One Welsh Medium school is due to be considered within the next phase of WG Early Years Large Capital Grant offer (subject to agreement of all parties and approval of the business case). If successful, this grant will be used to develop childcare provision at the school sites which will support the smooth transition of children from childcare to education in line with wider WESP objectives. It is recommended that all school expansions and improvements and childcare capital are aligned to ensure needs are met across the childcare/education. Continue to work with Mudiad Meithrin to support WESP objectives by commissioning the organisation to support Welsh Medium settings in Flintshire. Early Years are a member of the WESP Partnership.
3.03	<p>Risk: Increased Demand on Early Entitlement Provision</p>

	<p>The expansion of the 2 year old childcare programme could enhance integration between the 2 year old provision, the 3–4 year old Childcare Offer, and Early Entitlement, benefiting families and the sector by improving transitions and continuity. However, this creates two key risks:</p> <p>1. Hourly Rates</p> <p>Increased demand may require more settings to register as Early Entitlement providers. Hourly rates paid to childcare providers registered to provide Flying Start, 3-4 year old Childcare Offer and Early Entitlement require joined-up management and oversight to ensure sustainability and incentivise participation. Rate reviews, such as the annual review of Childcare Offer rates from 2025/26, could result in one programme negatively impacting another.</p> <p>2. Qualified Teacher Input and Childcare Development</p> <p>Welsh Government’s requirement for 10% qualified teacher input in Early Entitlement settings could lead to financial and workforce pressures. Increased demand may strain advisory teachers’ capacity to maintain standards, potentially causing: failure to meet requisite standards; settings being placed into Estyn follow-up categories; higher workloads for advisory teachers, leading to reputational risks for the Council.</p> <p>It will also impact on capacity to meet the Authorities statutory duty to ensure sufficient childcare across Flintshire, to meet the needs of parents. Whilst funding is available to support the Flying Start element no further funding has been made available for increasing capacity within the above teams.</p> <p>Actions to mitigate risks:</p> <p>These risks require careful management of rate reviews, targeted workforce development, and support for registered 2-year old expansion and Early Entitlement settings to reach and maintain quality and compliance.</p>
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>Consultation has been carried out with key partners including Early Years staff, and Cwllwm partners.</p> <p>Welsh Government have stipulated the criteria and will approve the areas, and speed of expansion. Partners have been aware of the programme since its original inception, and it is widely published on social media.</p>

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: Option 1

	Appendix 2: Option 2
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6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Welsh Government 2 Year Old Expansion Guidance</p> <p>The criteria will determine the areas of focus and will reflect the following three priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - addressing deprivation - supporting and increasing Welsh language provision - addressing gaps in availability of provision <p>A data-driven research project to explore available early-years data in Flintshire, identifying key questions early-years staff hoped to address through data analysis, improve data utilisation, and uncovering gaps in existing datasets.</p> <p>https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/using-early-years-data-to-support-families-a-partnership-with-flintshire-county-council/</p>

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer:</p> <p>Byra Foulkes – Early Years Childcare, Capital and Partnership Team Manager</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 703934 / 07795122267 E-mail: byra.foulkes@flintshire.gov.uk</p> <p>Gail Bennett – Service Manager, Early Years and Family Service Email: gail.bennett@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) - The CSA is a questionnaire that was sent out to families living in the Flintshire area that enquired about what improvements they would like to see made to the childcare provisions that are offered in the Flintshire area.</p> <p>Capital Funding - Capital funding is usually linked to acquiring or improving a long-term asset such as equipment or buildings.</p> <p>LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas) – The data used to support the identification of geographical areas for statistical purposes. It includes population, health, education, housing and deprivation.</p>

Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) – This index is used to identify areas with higher levels of deprivation based on various social, economic and environmental factors.

NESTA Cymru: Nesta is an innovation foundation. For them, innovation means turning bold ideas into reality and changing lives for the better. They use their expertise, skills and funding in areas where there are big challenges facing society.

WESP and Welsh Language Strategy: Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Working together to achieve Cymraeg 2050 and a million Welsh Speakers, implementing the WESP action plan into educational strategic plans.

CWLWM: Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually. The alliance of five childcare and play partners delivering a bilingual integrated service that will ensure the best outcomes for children and families across Wales.

Mudiad Meithrin: A voluntary organisation celebrating and encouraging the use of Welsh Language in childcare and education.

Early Entitlement: Provides educational provision for 3 year olds, supporting the childcare workforce to deliver educational sessions.