

## SECTION 1. WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

(Please note that this Section will be published)

**In narrative form, please describe the issue and the action proposed by the Welsh Government. How have you applied / will you apply the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to the proposed action, throughout the policy and delivery cycle?**

### **Issue**

Due to the urgency of the public health situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a pressing need to reprioritise human and financial resources to support the immediate response. Staff from across Welsh Government, local authorities, childcare sector umbrella bodies and wider stakeholders needed to prioritise their response to the pandemic drawing them away from planned and routine actions. Budgets also needed to be repurposed very quickly to enable the Welsh Government and its partners to respond to the emerging situation to support both public health and the economy.

As part of the Welsh Government's immediate response, Childcare, Play and Early Years Division considered what support was needed by children and their families, childcare settings and local authorities. This integrated impact assessment relates to the following decisions taken in March and April of 2020:

- Recommending that where childcare settings remain open they restrict provision to the children of critical workers and vulnerable children;
- Committing to ongoing funding for childcare booked under the Childcare Offer for Wales for a period of 3 months;
- Suspending the Childcare Offer for Wales to new entrants in April, with a review to be undertaken after 3 months;
- Establishing the Coronavirus – Childcare Assistance Scheme;
- Deferring the launch of the playworks holiday hunger scheme;
- Pausing the support grants for the childcare sector delivered by Business Wales;
- Suspending the Childcare Works programme administered by the NDNA;
- Delaying procurement of suppliers for the training to be delivered under Progress for Success;
- Providing additional funding for activities relating to the coronavirus outbreak to the Cwlwm consortium;
- Repurposing and reprioritising the funding and activities of Social Care Wales in relation to the childcare sector; and
- Issuing of a circular letter relaxing certain requirements within the National Minimum Standards for childcare.

The policy decisions outlined above are interconnected and therefore presented in one IIA which allows Welsh Government to consider the impact of these decisions and mitigating actions. It should also be read alongside the Covid-19 IIA for Education.

Each policy decision within the IIA will be regularly reviewed in light of emerging scientific advice by SAGE, Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government's continuing response to the current pandemic, taking account of other Welsh Government policy decisions that could impact on those outlined above. Thinking will be informed by the Welsh Government's Technical Advice Group and in particular by the Education and Children subgroup. The IIA will be an important document for future policy decisions relating to the recovery of the childcare sector.

#### Recommending that where childcare settings remain open, they restrict provision to the children of critical workers and vulnerable children

On 18 March, responding to emerging scientific advice, the Minister for Education issued a statement regarding the operation of schools in Wales and the intention to bring forward the Easter holidays. Following this, a joint statement from the Minister for Education and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services issued on 20 March. This second statement reflected the advice that children should be cared for at home wherever possible, with schools and childcare asked to remain open only for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-eligibility-ongoing-provision-children-who-are-vulnerable-or-whose-parents-are>

The advice regarding children, which came from the UK Government's Scientific Advisory Group (SAGE) and COBR and was verified with the Chief Scientific Officer for Wales, was based on data around transmission rates for Coronavirus within the wider population. It was issued at a point where there was a pressing need to reduce overall levels of social interaction, drawing down the R rate for Coronavirus, and did not suggest children were at a particularly significant risk of infection or complications. Instead it recognised their role in transmission.

This was reflected in the advice, which said childcare settings remained safe, as long as numbers of children remained low and the wider public health advice was followed. In light of those statements, the Welsh Government and their partners have been working to ensure that parents and children who continued to access childcare had the required support and that parents who are front line staff did not face barriers in responding to Coronavirus.

Across Wales approximately a third of all schools remained open for older children. Many childminders operated through the initial three months of the outbreak, but only a small number of day care settings remained open to support the needs of pre-school children whose parents are critical workers or children who are vulnerable.

On 15 May the Minister for Education published the decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare:

<https://gov.wales/decision-framework-next-phase-education-and-childcare>

On 19 June the First Minister confirmed childcare settings could increase their operations from 22 June, enabling them to accept a wider cohort of children. Guidance to support childcare settings in their preparations was published on 10 June:

<https://gov.wales/protective-measures-childcare-settings-keep-childcare-safe>

A separate IIA is being prepared in relation to the restart and recovery of the childcare sector in Wales.

#### Committing to ongoing funding for childcare booked under the Childcare Offer for Wales for a period of 3 months

On 18 March, it was agreed that where children already eligible for and accessing the Offer were unable to attend childcare settings due to coronavirus, the Welsh Government would continue to fund the setting for any term-time hours of childcare booked under the Childcare Offer. This followed concerns about low attendance by children expressed by a number of childcare providers, and the Welsh Government confirmed funding would remain available for a period of up to three months.

<https://gov.wales/childcare-offer-wales-payments-will-continue-even-if-children-do-not-attend-due-coronavirus>

This was intended to provide some stability for the sector, and built on the precedent set in relation to flooding following Storms Ciara and Dennis. It followed announcements about the UK Government Job Retention Scheme, which covers up to 80% of wages for furloughed staff. At that time limited detail on wider financial support was available, and settings continued to incur fixed costs around mortgages / rents (unless mortgage / rent holidays have been agreed), and overheads such as utilities and other consumables.

This decision initially covered the three month period from 18 March. On 9 June it was confirmed the funding would not be continued after that period unless the setting was open and the child in attendance. No funding would be paid where a setting had closed or where a child had ceased to attend.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-childcare-offer-and-coronavirus-childcare-assistance-scheme>

Childcare settings are able to increase their operations from 22 June, meaning that it is possible for these children to return to their settings if their parents want them to do so.

At the time of the commitment we estimated the costs to be in the region of £4m per month, based on the most recent data we had at that time. Having now received claims from local authorities for March, we believe the costs will be closer to £4.8m per month. While some of the costs will fall to the previous financial year, prorating costs up to 19 June suggests we could see a total cost in the region of £12-13m.

#### Suspending of the Childcare Offer for Wales to new entrants and establishing the Coronavirus – Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS).

In a written statement dated 6 April 2020, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services stated the Childcare Offer for Wales was being suspended to new entrants with immediate effect, committing to review the decision after three months. The budget for the Offer would be repurposed until the end of June 2020 to focus resources on supporting the childcare needs of critical workers and the needs of vulnerable children. Entry of the new cohort of children due to start accessing the Childcare Offer in the summer term would be delayed until after this suspension, even where applications had been approved.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-childcare-offer-wales-supporting-critical-workers-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

In light of the decision to suspend the Childcare Offer for Wales on 6 April 2020, Welsh Government announced that the funding would be repurposed to establish the Coronavirus – Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS). The three main factors considered when establishing the C-CAS were:

- Government scientific advice calling for children to remain at home wherever possible and not to attend school or childcare settings;
- The recommendation that childcare settings remain open only for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, meaning most children were not in attendance;
- The need to provide safe, funded childcare for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

In addition to this we considered the need to maintain support for children with disabilities and special educational needs or additional learning needs.

At the time of the decision local authorities were suggesting up to 75% of childcare settings had closed in some areas, with the vast majority of children eligible for and accessing the Offer no longer in attendance. The advice for children to remain home and the lack of childcare locally meant very few of those children due to start accessing the Offer from the beginning of the summer term (20 April) would have done so. Having modelled the costs of childcare for this cohort, and taken into account their likely non-attendance, the evidence suggested this did not represent good value for money in the context of the wider response to the Coronavirus.

School based provision for the school aged children of critical workers and vulnerable children has been provided at no cost to parents. Local authorities were alerting us to a number of families of pre-school age children who required support but were unable to afford childcare – many had previously relied on informal childcare from family members who were shielding. Concerns were also expressed about vulnerable children, who were having less contact with support services. Consequently it was felt it would be a more appropriate use of the funding to provide childcare for the pre-school age children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

C-CAS is a temporary scheme, originally put in place for a period of three months but with an option to extend it further. A regular review schedule was developed using monitoring data to estimate number of children accessing the C- CAS and cost on a monthly basis.

On 9 June the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services announced that the C-CAS would be extended to cover the summer period. The Offer remains suspended to new entrants for the same period to release the necessary funding.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-childcare-offer-and-coronavirus-childcare-assistance-scheme>

The independent evaluation of the Childcare Offer has been repurposed to consider the C-CAS as well. It will be primarily formative but will also look at the likely impact on those families who have not previously accessed formal childcare, and we will consider this in more detail using government administrative data linking in the long term (i.e. to explore variations in child education and health outcomes, and potentially parent outcomes too).

Unlike the Childcare Offer which provides eligible families with up to 30 hours of government funded early education (Foundation Phase Nursery) and childcare for 3 and 4 year olds, the C-CAS, which is also administered by local authorities, is available for all pre-school age children (0-5) whose parent / parents are critical workers<sup>1</sup> and to all vulnerable children. This includes workers in refuges and other supported accommodation for victims of domestic abuse. However, critical workers who have school aged children will continue to send their children to school, if they are not able to stay at home.

The funding allocated to local authorities to provide C-CAS funds:

- Childcare cost for children of pre-school age of eligible critical workers and vulnerable pre-school children (as defined by Welsh Government Guidance)
- out-of-hours care for key workers over and above normal childcare costs;
- an agreed hourly rate;
- reasonable food and transport costs;
- additional support for vulnerable pre-school children (subject to PHW advice on social distancing); and
- booked hours for children who cannot attend due to COVID-19 isolation reason but had a place booked for a maximum of two weeks.

Operational guidance has been developed with the support of local authorities to support the process of administering the C-CAS. Local authorities have been allowed discretion to apply the scheme within their areas, accounting for varying levels of demand for childcare and capacity within the sector.

### Deferring the launch of the Playworks Holiday Hunger Scheme

Local authorities were informed by letter on 19 March 2020 that the Playworks Holiday Hunger programme was on hold due to the outbreak. The project was due to be rolled out across Wales during the 2020 school holidays starting with Easter.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of Critical Workers can be found [here](#).

The decision to ask childcare settings, including play settings, to remain open only for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children restricted the ability of these settings to operate. Social distancing rules also restrict the way in which play settings can currently operate. In parallel with this the Minister for Education announced funding to continue the provision of Free School Meals throughout the Easter holidays, easing holiday hunger pressure.

Deferring the project was considered appropriate, enabling it to be reconsidered for later in the year, in the context of the evolving crisis, operation of the sector at that time and the position with regards to the provision of Free School Meals. As of June 2020 it now seems likely that the funding for the scheme will be repurposed to enable local authorities to provide childcare for vulnerable school-aged children over the summer holidays. This is partially enabled by the commitment to maintain Free School Meal provision throughout the summer, and the continuation of C-CAS, which supports younger children.

#### Pausing the support grants for the childcare sector delivered by Business Wales

All funding for the Childcare Business Wales Grants had been allocated with deadlines for drawing down the funding set at 31 August 2020 (wage subsidy) and 11 December 2020 (childminder start up). However, due to Coronavirus a significant number of childcare settings have chosen to temporarily close, accessing the UK Government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) to furlough staff and 'hibernating' their businesses. It was agreed to extend the deadline of the childcare grants (wage subsidy and childminder start up) to the end of March 2021. The reasons for this are as follows:

- For the wage subsidy grant - settings cannot put in a claim for a grant payment without the required evidence proving the staff member has worked 10 hours a week for 3 months. Where staff are furloughed or settings closed this is not possible.
- For the childminder start up - the pandemic could mean a delay for some childminders to complete the registration process which is a pre requisite of funding.

Due to the unprecedented circumstances we need to be supporting businesses and staff in the most flexible way to help childcare businesses, ensure jobs are safeguarded and assist with cash flow for those businesses operating during these unprecedented times. Extending the grant will allow businesses to collect the necessary paperwork required to support any claims made under both grants. This supports both settings that close temporarily during the crisis as well as those that remain open to support critical workers.

#### Suspending the Childcare Works programme administered by the NDNA

The Welsh Government funds the National Day Nurseries Association (Cymru) to deliver the Childcare Works project. It is a small supported employment project under our 10-year Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce plan to attract high quality individuals with right skills and behaviours to work with our young children and to support them as they gain the necessary skills to become future qualified practitioners.

Phase 2 of the Childcare Works Project provides support to 84 unemployed individuals who are over-25 years of age in 10 local authority areas in phases: Conwy/Wrexham, Gwynedd/Anglesey, Cardiff/Caerphilly, Torfaen/Newport and Swansea/Neath Port Talbot. In April NDNA confirmed it was unable to deliver and complete the Childcare Works project in the remaining four local authority areas in the agreed timescales, namely Gwynedd, Anglesey, Newport and Torfaen. The 4-week training and 12-week placements could be delivered as many nursery settings were either closed or unable to support the 12-week placements.

It was agreed to pause the Childcare Works project as of April 2020 for an initial period of three months and to extend the project end date to 31 March 2021.

Pausing the project allowed NDNA to furlough their Childcare Works staff via the CJRS without the risk of duplicating funding. This gives NDNA the option to complete the project when possible while retaining the same amount of funding in the current financial year. This in turn will support the Welsh Government's ambition to increase the capacity and capability of the childcare workforce.

#### Delaying procurement of suppliers for the training to be delivered under Progress for Success (PFS)

In order to ensure the quality of the care that is available to parents and their children is not compromised, and to support an expanding workforce to upskill, there needs to be continued investment and opportunities for the existing workforce to increase and broaden their skills levels. PFS has refocussed and broadened to meet the needs of the sector. The intention is to provide opportunities for the existing workforce to understand fully how children learn and develop, and for practitioners to gain the skills and experience they need to progress in their careers and potentially access more employment opportunities.

A tender process had been developed to contract with successful suppliers to deliver the 'Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork (from Early Years)' to practitioners across Wales: split between West Wales and the Valleys (WWV) and East Wales (EW) there are 7 regionalised lots. However, in light of the current pandemic, it is unlikely that providers would be in a position at this time to submit a bid to take on additional/new work.

At the time of the initial decision to delay the tender exercise it was agreed that it would be reviewed after one month. Given the wider position with regards to the virus the tender was further delayed and is now unlikely to take place before September 2020.

#### Funding for Work Based Learning Providers – delivering Progress for Success

As a result of recent Government advice, all Work Based Learning providers, including those delivering the Progress for Success programme, have closed their training centres until further notice. This move prevents the delivery of classroom based learning, although providers will seek to use on-line teaching methods where possible and will be required to regularly keep in touch with learners and employers throughout this time. We expect the number of employers seeking to enrol new apprentices over this period to significantly decline, if not cease.

Provisions have been agreed to support PfS Pilot Apprenticeship providers during the COVID-19 crisis, average monthly payments would be made to providers based on their defrayed payments this contract year, up until July 2020. The first payment will be made in April 2020. The same provisions have been agreed for those Work Based Learning providers delivering the mainstream Apprenticeship programme.

Providing additional funding for activities relating to the coronavirus outbreak to the Cwlwm consortium;

In March, towards the end of the 2019/20 financial year, it was agreed to provide additional funding to the Cwlwm consortium to support activities they had undertaken in response to both the flooding across Wales and in anticipation of the arrival of the coronavirus. In total £175,000 was provided to support action relating to the virus covering a range of actions including:

- Significant liaison with Welsh Government and local authorities on options to retain childcare provision for key workers and vulnerable children;
- Daily liaison with Care Inspectorate Wales on notifications around childcare settings exposed to Covid19
- High-level strategic daily meetings and conference calls resulting in the production of twice-daily e-briefings to the childcare sector
- The production of policy templates and best practice examples
- Increased telephone calls, e-mail and social media posts including the creation of bespoke webpages
- Met with insurance representatives and key strategic partners on behalf of the sector
- Provided IT equipment to enable staff to work from home
- Provided IT advice relating to best practice shared files, information security etc

The impacts on the sector have been significant over this period, with over half of all registered settings informing CIW of their temporary closure. Cwlwm partners have working with CIW, Social Care Wales and local authorities to support settings in remaining open and applying for support.

Repurposing and reprioritising the funding and activities of Social Care Wales (SCW) in relation to the childcare sector;

SCW is regarded as the Sector Skills Council for the early years and childcare (EYCC) sector in Wales, responsible for promoting high quality standards and best practice and for maintaining and overseeing the sector's training qualifications and development requirements.

The remit letter and funding for SCW is usually agreed for the full year, but given the Covid-19 crisis, Social Care Wales' work plan for the EYCC sector was refocused for a six month period a funding allocation of £142,357 for this six month period. Prior to Covid-19, the indicative funding allocation for 2020-2021 was £315,700



Their six month work plan now focused on supporting the resilience of the sector during the crisis and ensuring its sustainability as we emerged from the immediate response. This means that they can take forward distinct areas of work to support the early years and childcare workforce during this time. This includes:

- A dedicated WeCare Wales campaign to support morale and say thank you with the longer term aim of supporting the retention of the existing workforce to allow smooth transition to normal operation post lock down and thus ensure there is adequate availability of childcare.
- Support for those who are continuing to work in the sector during Covid-19 through ongoing provision of curated sector specific resources and guidance to support the sustainability of the sector
- Ensuring that the necessary qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks are in place to support the delivery of qualifications to the sector both during and post Covid-19

A review will be undertaken in September 2020 to determine their work plan and funding for October 2020 to March 2021. This will be subject to further advice to Ministers.

#### Issuing of a circular letter relaxing certain requirements within the National Minimum Standards for childcare

On 8 April 2020, a circular letter was issued by Welsh Government to key childcare, play and early years stakeholders outlining the decision, in light of the current pandemic, to temporarily relax some of the requirements in the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Regulated Childcare. It was hoped that these measures would help address some of the immediate difficulties and facilitate the continued provision of key childcare provision. In identifying which standards within the NMS could be relaxed, officials considered any potential risks to the safety and well-being of children and sought to balance any risks against the current unprecedented situation and the need to continue to provide childcare for children of critical workers.

Deliberations were informed by discussions with colleagues in Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), to understand which standards could potentially be relaxed and the safeguards and arrangements which could be put in place to ensure the continued safety and well-being of children being cared for in childcare settings. It was agreed it would be helpful to consider relaxing the standards in respect of staffing ratios and qualification requirements as these were the areas where providers were facing the most immediate difficulties in responding to Covid-19.

The following temporary relaxations to the National Minimum Standards were introduced on 8 April 2020 until further notice:

- **Staffing ratios:** Adult: child ratios for children could be relaxed on a temporary basis as follows:
  1. Standard 15.12 – Day care:

- the NMS ratio of one adult to eight children for children aged 3-7 years to be relaxed to one adult to ten children.
- the NMS ratio of one adult to ten children aged 8-12 years to be relaxed to allow one adult to care for up to 12 children.

## 2. Standard 15.7 - Child minders:

- The NMS ratio for child minders to care for no more than six children under 8 years of age to be relaxed to enable child minders to care for more than six children aged 5-7 years subject to the overall limit of 10 children under the age of 12 years. Please note ratios for children under the age of 5 are unchanged

Local authority approval is required prior to any relaxation in staffing ratio being implemented, in order to ensure that the changes are reasonable and proportionate, and ensure that ongoing care can be provided taking account of local circumstances and without compromising the safety and welfare of the children being cared for.

## 3. Standard 15.13 Supernumerary staffing in day care settings:

- Arrangements to be agreed with local authorities on a case by case basis, depending on the specific circumstances. The requirement, that the manager should not be included in any calculation of adult: child ratios in a full day care setting registered for 20 or more children, can be relaxed subject to the prior approval of the Local Authority.

## 4. Standard 15.3 Two staff on duty in day care settings:

- Subject to all other staffing ratio requirements being met the requirement that, there are always at least two staff on duty can be relaxed on a case by case basis subject to the local authority taking into account the specific circumstances of the setting.

### • **Staff qualifications:**

- A flexible and proportionate approach to qualification requirements to be adopted in relation to staff working or volunteering in a childcare setting. For example, this could mean relaxation of the standards in respect of the proportion of childcare staff who must have a recognised childcare qualification or acceptance of on-line training in respect of first aid qualifications. In all instances, child minders and the person in charge of a setting or their appointed deputy would require qualifications in line with the NMS. The registered childcare provider and person in charge would also need to be confident about the quality and safety of the care provided at their setting, and would need to consider whether any staff employed were of suitable integrity and good character if any of the staff qualification requirements were relaxed.

- **DBS:**
  - In order to provide flexibility in the current emergency situation and ensure there is sufficient childcare available for critical workers and vulnerable families, the Welsh Government has concluded that it would be appropriate for childcare and playwork staff and nannies approved under the Welsh Government Childcare at Home Voluntary Approval Scheme to be able to move between settings if they have had a valid DBS check i.e. an enhanced criminal records check, including a check against the children's barred list, within the last 3 years. This would need to be proved by staff seeking to work in childcare settings by showing their DBS certificate.

All providers are required to inform their Local Authority (through their Family Information Services or usual contact in the childcare team) of their intention to implement any of the measures described above, before any relaxation is made.

In light of the decision childcare settings could increase their operations from 22 June consideration is being given to extending the relaxation of the NMS for a further period.

## SECTION 7. CONCLUSION

### 7.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

Scientific advice from the UK Government's SAGE and COBR meetings on action required to respond to the outbreak of Corona Virus (COVID-19) has evolved significantly. On Friday 20 March we were advised that from Monday 23 March only small numbers of children should be in either education or care settings, to ensure both that the risks of transmission were reduced, and that social distancing requirements were maintained. This followed discussions at COBR on 19 March.

In light of this a joint statement was issued by the Minister for Education and the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services on 20 March. This said:

- Wherever possible children should now be cared for at home;
- While some limited provision would remain available for school age children on school sites, this should be limited to the children of critical workers and vulnerable children; and
- Childcare providers are not required to close, but should prioritise provision for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children.

Since then the position has evolved further, with greater restrictions on public movement. This has impacted on the childcare sector, children and their families and those key stakeholders that support the sector such as local authorities, umbrella organisations and inspectorates. While some of those restrictions are now being eased, this IIA is concerned with decisions taken as they were introduced.

Part of Childcare, Play and Early Years Division's response was to look at the childcare sector and determine what support was needed by children and their families, childcare settings and local authorities as part of the wide-ranging national effort to tackle the outbreak. Advice and guidance was also sought by and from the umbrella organisations and the inspectorates.

With regards to the C-CAS, the draft guidance was shared with LA's, Cwlwm and Play Wales before meeting them to discuss their issues and concerns. We developed 'Frequently Asked Questions' for parents and providers on Welsh Government's websites. We consulted with counterparts in other nations in the UK and sought better guidance on the various finance schemes from HMRC and HMT through colleagues in Strategic Budgeting and Treasury. We subsequently produced new guidance and FAQs on the interaction between some of the financial support schemes and the C-CAS and the Childcare Offer, often at haste which did not always provide for the clear and concise guidance required by local authorities, parents and providers.

Draft changes to the National Minimum Standards were also shared with LAs, Cwlwm and CIW for their input and this engagement helped inform the circular letter. With regards to

Progress for Success, we consulted with WEFO and procurement before decisions were made.

In a joint project with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Children in Wales and with the support of the Youth Parliament, the Welsh Government launched an online nation-wide survey to give an opportunity to children and young people to tell us their opinions about Coronavirus. Based on the Articles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the survey was designed in partnership with children and young people and will aim to reach more than 2500 children and young people as they live through these unprecedented times. The survey results will be used to ensure children's rights and opinions are reflected upon during and after the Coronavirus crisis.

## 7.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

With the vast majority of children at home, and large numbers of childcare settings still closed to all bar those specified cohorts of children over this period, the decision to suspend the Childcare Offer, establish the C-CAS, relax elements of the NMS and delay/pause grants/tenders, will not have adversely impacted children previously accessing funded childcare, including those in protected groups, any more than wider decisions regarding reductions in social interactions and social distancing requirements. Children would not have been able to attend childcare as intended in any case. As a consequence, we consider the impacts of suspending various programmes to be broadly the same for all children – the suspension is not the primary reason why the children are not in attendance at childcare settings.

There are, however, some anticipated additional impacts on children from disadvantaged backgrounds as a consequence of **absence from childcare and school settings**. The evidence suggests these children benefit more from high quality early childhood education and care than other cohorts, and that it can help redress both developmental disadvantages and the attainment gap. Research on the impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak, and specifically the impacts of absence from childcare and education settings, is being scoped and will be considered further.

There was no additional financial impact on families of the initial decisions, including families from protected groups, as there was a separate commitment to maintain payments to childcare providers. Consequently, childcare settings should not be looking to parents to make up any shortfall in income derived from the Offer. However, we are aware that some settings will be continuing to charge parents for hours of childcare booked with them above and beyond those booked under the Offer. This is a matter for parents and providers, based on their regular contracts.

There will be some additional financial implications for some families following the decision to extend the suspension of the Offer to the end of August. As childcare settings increase their operations, there will be some families accessing their services who might have been planning on the basis of accessing the Offer in the summer term and for a portion of the summer holidays.

Childcare providers have continued to receive the Offer funding for three months, for those registered for the spring term. Most settings have also been in receipt of a combination of

the financial support packages provided by UK and Welsh Government. However, it is known a significant number of settings have been affected financially, some with potential longer term impacts. Data collection and future evaluations will provide a picture of the effects on the sector.

### **7.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:**

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**
- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

Currently, across Welsh Government, a plan is being developed which focuses on ensuring children are safeguarded and that vulnerable children and young people have the support they need, possibly via remote means/online/telephone contact etc. We will also begin to consider the longer term impacts in relation to adversity. Part of this plan is to ensure that we support the childcare sector through this pandemic to ensure access to high quality childcare in the longer term.

All actions taken are being kept under regular review to assess whether they continue to be necessary and fit for purpose in the context of broader developments relating to the pandemic.

### **7.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?**

The data we are collecting set out in Section 2.6 will enable us to monitor the impact of the pandemic on the childcare sector, and the impact of our response. This monitoring information will feed into the evaluation of our activities. Further detail on this is set out in our Analytical Plan for the Childcare, Play and Early Years Division<sup>2</sup>. This has been substantively revised in response to the pandemic.

Most notably:

- We are monitoring changes in the sector (i.e. number of settings and associated capacity) daily using Care Inspectorate Wales registration and notification data
- We are receiving weekly data from local authorities on those accessing the C-CAS, and more detailed information on a monthly basis
- Arad Research is undertaking an independent evaluation which will consider how the new scheme has been introduced and implemented
- We are working closely with our stakeholders (e.g. Care Inspectorate Wales, Business Wales, Cwlwm partners, the WLGA and local authorities, UK Government counterparts etc.), as well as listening to members of the public. Any feedback received is fully considered and explored further if necessary. At this time when things are changing at pace on the ground feedback can be most valuable.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://documents.hf.wales.gov.uk/id:A28986822/document/versions/published>

The Childcare Offer has been guaranteed for the next three months, until June, if it was decided to not continue the Offer from September for the rest of the financial year that would release £30m from budget.

It has been proposed that the evaluation of the Childcare Offer for 2019/20 be repurposed to cover both the pre and post COVID-19 Childcare programmes (Childcare Offer and the C-CAS) and to take into account any impact that the lack of Childcare Offer spend will have. Additionally, management information on the numbers of children and childcare providers continuing to be supported or delivering under the replacement Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme will be collected on a weekly and monthly basis. From September 2020 onwards, a new contract for the evaluation will need to be procured but planning for this is underway. The collection of the management information from local authorities will continue.

Reviews will be taken on the decisions above in light of new and emerging scientific advice. These reviews will build on the previous decision to allow us to track our progress over the course of the pandemic. This will mean we can measure the impact of the decisions that were put in place to support children and families. We will also ensure that any comments received by our stakeholders and members of the public are considered as part of this process.

## SECTION 8. DECLARATION

### Declaration

I am satisfied that the impact of the proposed action has been adequately assessed and recorded.

Name of Deputy Director: Nicola Edwards

Department: Childcare, Play and Early Years

Date: 6 August 2020



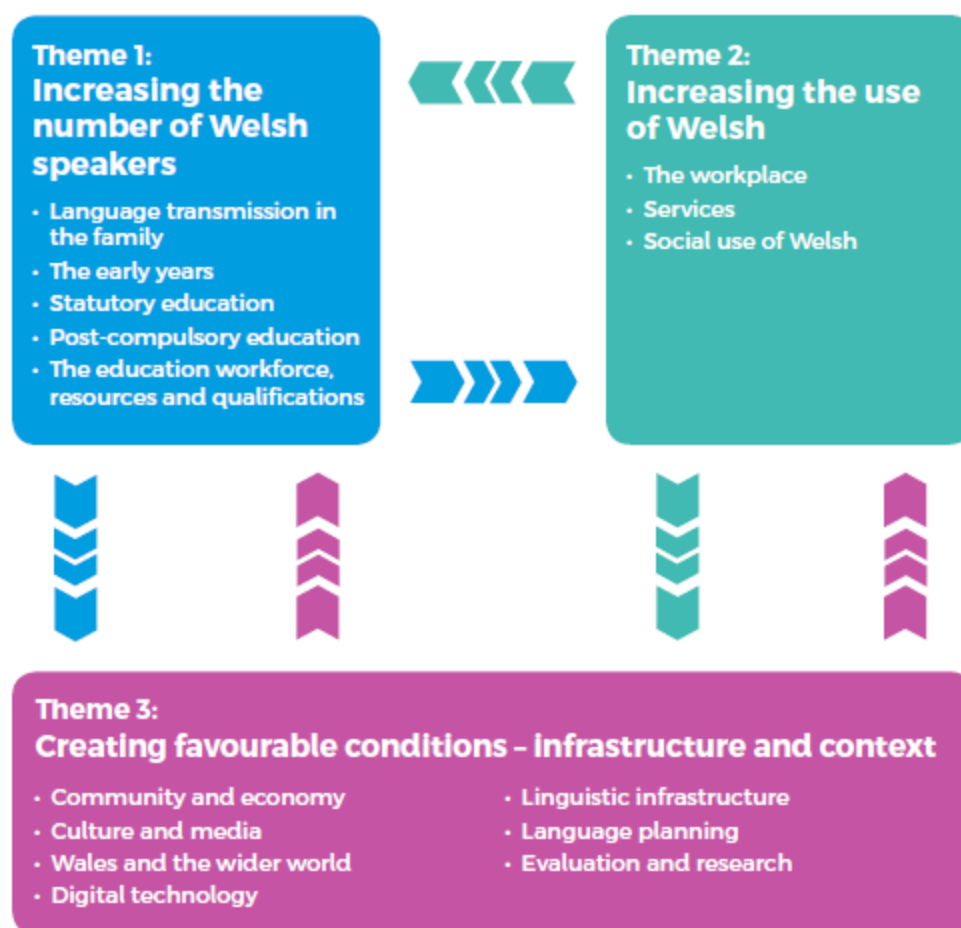
## A. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

*Cymraeg 2050* is our national strategy for increasing the number of Welsh speakers to a million by 2050.

The Welsh Government is fully committed to the new strategy, with the target of a million speakers included in the *Taking Wales Forward* Programme for Government and *Prosperity for All: the national strategy*. A thriving Welsh language is also included in one of the 7 well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

We also have a statutory obligation to fully consider the effects of our work on the Welsh Language. This means that any Welsh Government policy should consider how our policies affect the language and those who speak it.

The *Cymraeg 2050* strategy has three themes:



The headings under each theme outline the scope of activities that can affect the language.

As a general rule, if your policy has the potential to impact on people, it will impact in some way on Welsh speakers and therefore on the Welsh language.

1. Welsh Language Impact Assessment reference number (completed by the Welsh Language Standards Team, email: [Safonau.Standards@gov.wales](mailto:Safonau.Standards@gov.wales)):
2. Does the proposal demonstrate a clear link with the Welsh Government's strategy for the Welsh language? – *Cymraeg 2050 A million Welsh speakers* and the related Work Programme for 2017-2021?

Due to the urgency of the public health situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a pressing need to reprioritise human and financial resources to support the immediate response.

Part of Childcare, Play and Early Years Division's response was to look at the childcare sector and determine what support was needed by children and their families, childcare settings and local authorities in light of the crisis. This integrated impact assessment relates to the following decisions:

- Recommending that where childcare settings remain open they restrict provision to the children of critical workers and vulnerable children;
- Committing to ongoing funding for childcare booked under the Childcare Offer for Wales for a period of 3 months;
- Suspending the Childcare Offer for Wales to new entrants in April, with a review to be undertaken after 3 months;
- Establishing the Coronavirus – Childcare Assistance Scheme;
- Deferring the launch of the playworks holiday hunger scheme;
- Pausing the support grants for the childcare sector delivered by Business Wales;
- Suspending the Childcare Works programme administered by the NDNA;
- Delaying procurement of suppliers for the training to be delivered under Progress for Success;
- Providing additional funding for activities relating to the coronavirus outbreak to the Cwlwm consortium;
- Repurposing and reprioritising the funding and activities of Social Care Wales in relation to the childcare sector; and
- Issuing of a circular letter relaxing certain requirements within the National Minimum Standards for childcare.

The programmes outlined above, which had to be paused or repurposed in light of the Covid-19 outbreak, are relevant to the aspirations of *Cymraeg 2050 – A million Welsh Speakers*<sup>3</sup>, our Welsh language strategy. The Welsh Government's vision is to see the

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<sup>3</sup> Welsh Language Strategy

Welsh language thrive, with an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language in their daily lives. Both this strategy and the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act state that the Welsh language is a strategic priority for Welsh Government.

One of the guiding principles of the Childcare Offer is that all eligible working parents should be able to access their entitlement irrespective of the language used in a childcare setting. This is also the case for those critical workers accessing the current C-CAS. Approximately 29% of the children who were taking up the Childcare Offer in January 2020 were accessing the Offer in Welsh-medium or bilingual settings. We want to work with our partners to develop practical solutions to barriers parents may face in accessing the childcare they need to be able to work, including ensuring sufficiency of Welsh-medium and bilingual childcare. This is becoming even more important as Covid-19 presents a further potential barrier in terms of provision and parental access to childcare, including Welsh-medium and bilingual childcare.

The Welsh Government's Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan, published in December 2017, sets out how we would support Cymraeg 2050's commitment to expand the use of Welsh across the sector to offer increased opportunities for children to acquire the language.

The workforce plan includes specific commitments in relation to the development of Welsh-language skills, namely:

- To build a bilingual workforce by offering increased routes for new entrants and existing practitioners to gain qualifications through the medium of Welsh, to improve their Welsh language skills and the specific skills needed to work in Welsh-medium settings.
- To offer training for practitioners in English-medium settings to use more Welsh in their work.

The refocused 'Progress for Success' programme will provide specific opportunities for existing practitioners working in Early Years, Childcare and Playwork to undertake training

through the medium of Welsh as well as deliver training aimed at giving practitioners the confidence to use more Welsh with the children in their settings. This will likely continue once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for organisations/delivery partners to have the capacity to deliver online and blended learning and support, including ensuring a rapid response when required to move from face-to-face to online learning delivery. This will be key in delivering and procuring the refocussed provision as part of the PfS Programme and lessons learned through this period should be built upon to benefit learner, employers and contractors.

We will continue working with Cwlwm and other key delivery partners to build a better understanding of the Welsh language skills of the early years and childcare workforce, especially after the pandemic, to enable support for the sector to be targeted and identify where capability and capacity needs to be built for the future. Developing an early years workforce which can work confidently through the medium of Welsh is vital if we are to realise the aims of Cymraeg 2050.

Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language, and explain how you will address these impacts in order to improve outcomes for the Welsh language. How will the proposal affect Welsh speakers of all ages (both positive and/or adverse effects)? Information from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) on 20 May 2020 showed that 68% of Welsh medium registered childcare and play settings which were operating before lock down had notified the inspectorate they were temporarily closed as a result of Covid-19. This represented a higher percentage than bilingual services and English medium services that had closed in the same period for the same reason.

The priority in the immediate aftermath of the Coronavirus outbreak is to prioritise working with the sector to ensure we are remaining reactive to the needs of critical families and their children during this time and supporting childcare providers to remain viable through a suite of financial packages.

By establishing the C-CAS and maintaining payments to providers for 3 months based on booked hours under the Childcare Offer, we aim to support children, their families,

businesses and staff in the most flexible way, safeguard jobs and assist with cash flow issues. This will support both settings that close temporarily during the crisis as well as those that remain open to support critical workers. However, the impact of the current pandemic on the sustainability of settings, both Welsh and English medium, could be significant.

Our focus currently is on understanding the differential impacts of the crisis on parts of the sector. We have started working with local authorities, the umbrella body CWLWM, the Welsh Language Commissioner and internal colleagues responsible for the Welsh medium education in the early years to understand the impact of Covid-19 on Welsh-medium and bilingual provision and how they can be addressed. Some of the impacts already identified through these discussions are:

- Lack of adequate financial support for Welsh-medium providers because their operating model (they are often voluntary/committee run) means that many do not meet the eligibility criteria for Government financial support schemes;
- Impacts on the language acquisition of children from homes where Welsh is spoken who would have attended a Welsh-medium setting before Covid-19 and who have very little or no exposure to the language as a result of Covid-19;
- Some parents may see Welsh-medium provision as a higher risk option as a result of Covid-19 (for various reasons e.g. a dip in confidence levels, insufficient provision locally);
- Risk of low levels of Welsh-medium provision when things start to recover, especially if childcare starts to open up before the summer holidays when many Cylchoedd Meithrin tend to be closed;
- Impact on transition from Welsh-medium childcare to Welsh-medium primary education.

Work is underway to address some of these issues and work will continue over the next months. The Welsh Government is exploring how the gap in the suite of financial packages can be addressed to better support all setting types. Mudiad Meithrin are surveying their cylchoedd to understand the level of preparedness to re-open/increase

operations when it is safe to do so. Mudiad have also launched their Clwb Cylch which brings the Cylch Meithrin into all homes for 20 minutes per day Monday-Friday, offering friendly and informal session to pre-school aged children through the medium of Welsh.

The Childcare Offer will also be reviewed in the summer and a decision made about when it can be reintroduced. The return of the Offer will help with language acquisition amongst young children, particularly those from homes where no or very little Welsh is spoken. In the meantime, the C-CAS is available to all children aged 0-5 of critical workers or vulnerable children, however there may be limited language choice of provision due to only some settings remaining open. This could impact on the language development of children, particularly those transitioning to Welsh medium primary school. This in turn could impact on whether or not those children will then continue with their provision through the medium of Welsh in the longer term.

Pausing the programmes around workforce development will not directly impact on the Welsh language as the programmes will re-start once it is safe to do so. We will also be working with Business Wales to think how the Welsh Language can be supported in the Childcare sector when looking at recovery. As we look to recover from the current health crises, we will also ensure that Welsh speaking practitioners are actively targeted through the Progress for Success and Workforce Development Programme's marketing and communications strategy to encourage participants to undertake qualifications in Welsh or bilingually. Further, as part of the contracting requirements providers will be required to actively encourage participants to undertake the qualifications and enhance their skills by undertaking training in Welsh or bilingually.

In order to help mitigate these impacts, we have been working closely with our key stakeholders such as Cwlwm who are continuously producing online material, support and guidance on developing children's Welsh Language at home. We have been working

closely with colleagues within the Education Directorate to form the advice<sup>[1]</sup> that has been developed for parents about how they can support their children in using Welsh at home and guidance<sup>[2]</sup>. We have been working with our stakeholders to signpost parents to activities and resources for children to use to support language development, for example:

- families have now been granted access to Hwb to support their child's learning and development;
- Family Information Services and Flying Start teams have been utilising the power of social media to connect with children and families, to support language development and provide useful activities for parents to do with children of all ages;
- Signposting to Welsh language resources such as S4C's Cyw
- The umbrella organisations have been encouraging and producing material to support their practitioners engage with parents including Mudiad Meithrin's Clwb Cylch.

Moving forward, the lessons we will learn from the decisions taken in Section 1 will support our future policy development, ensuring that children and their families from all language backgrounds have access to their chosen language provision. The actions taken will ensure a strategic, managed approach across Wales that will enable equity of access to Welsh language early childhood education and care opportunities and resources to mitigate the risk to the greatest extent possible.

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[1] <https://gov.wales/supporting-your-children-use-welsh-language-home>

[2] <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/stay-safe-stay-learning-supporting-education-system.pdf>