

Expansion of Early Years Provision: Guidance for Phase One

Section One: Strategic Direction

In 2019 the Welsh Government launched its vision for a holistic Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in Wales. We are embarking on a ten year journey to adopt an ECEC approach for children aged 0-5. This will involve ensuring our provision for 0-5 year olds is focused on the holistic development of children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs to support well-being and lifelong learning. One of the fundamental aims of this approach is to ensure as many children as possible can access high quality provision in Wales.

Our updated Programme for Government commits us to continue our support for our flagship Flying Start programme and, in line with the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, we have extended this commitment to deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all two-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium provision.

The cabinet has agreed that Flying Start is the most suitable vehicle to deliver this commitment in a phased way. Already, around 36,000 children under four living in some of the most deprived areas in Wales, benefit from the programme with around 9,000 two year olds receiving funded, high quality, part-time childcare.

The first phase of the expansion of Flying Start, will start in September 2022, and will include all four elements of the current programme: - enhanced Health Visiting, support for speech, language and communication, parenting support as well as high quality childcare. Our intention is to reach a further 2,500 children under four during this phase. This will increase the number of beneficiaries to 38,500 each year.

Clear and consistent guidance is now required to ensure that local authorities have the information and direction needed to inform expansion plans that reflect the following **high level priorities**:

- addressing deprivation
- increasing Welsh language provision
- addressing gaps in availability of provision

Section Two: Criteria for Targeting Expansion in Phase One

The purpose of this guidance is to help local authorities develop expansion plans in readiness for the roll out of services in new Flying Start areas from September 2022.

Further guidance focussing on phase two of the rollout will follow in the autumn of 2022.

Historically, Flying Start has been a geographically targeted programme which used income benefit data, a proxy indicator for poverty, to target areas with the highest proportions of children aged 0-3 living in income benefit households.

These areas have been identified using the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs and are broken down by Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs).

This high level approach to targeting remains fit for purpose, is transparent and is based on a robust evidence base which shows why a particular area is in scope of expansion plans and, conversely, why others are not.

Of the three high level priorities, deprivation and the Welsh language will need to be factored into expansion plans during phase one.

The third criteria, based on gaps in current provision, is, by definition, likely to identify places where more time will be required to make provision available because some capital investment may be required and infrastructure development can take time. We propose, therefore, that gaps in current provision should not be regarded as a primary factor in determining areas where additional funded childcare will be provided in phase one but that phase one should include an element of intelligence/ data gathering to inform plans for future years.

Addressing Deprivation

In allocating additional funding to expand the provision of Flying Start in Wales we are effectively increasing the 'footprint' of the programme nationally. Understanding where geographically targeted Flying Start services will be moving into at local authority level is a priority and this will need to be clearly outlined in local expansion delivery plans.

Additional Funding and Targets

You will receive indicative revenue allocations, which are ring-fenced for expansion purposes only, as part of your Children and Communities Grant (CCG) award letters for 2022-25 and you will be expected to deliver services to an additional number of children based on a revised sum of £2400¹ per head.

For example – if your indicative ring-fenced revenue allocation for expansion is £350,000 you will be expected to work to a target of 146 additional children (350,000/2400 = 146). Please note this represents £1400 per head for September to March 2023.

The revenue allocated to you in phase one is to support the provision of expanded Flying Start services between September 2022 and March 2023 (7 months) however this becomes a greater financial commitment from April 2023 to March 2024 (12 months) and beyond and your revenue allocations will be increased in future years accordingly.

¹ Pro-rated for the 7 months of delivery in phase 1.

For example – if your indicative ring-fenced revenue allocation for expansion is £350,000 for phase one (September 2022 and March 2023) this becomes £600,000 in future years. Your target number of children supported during the expansion of phase one will remain the same.

Individual local authority allocations will follow the existing Flying Start formula which means each local authority will receive the same proportionate split of the expansion money as they received for Flying Start prior to the introduction of the CCG. Local authorities will be required to submit detailed expansion plans and final allocations will be subject to endorsement by the Welsh Government. Each local authority will also receive some additional funding as part of their CCG allocations to build administrative capacity to support the expansion in phases one and two. This money will recur for three years.

Once you have identified your target number of additional children you will need to determine your local Flying Start expansion areas following a similar methodology to that adopted as part of the previous expansion of Flying Start in 2012 (as outlined below).

Expansion Areas - The Methodology

In order to identify your expansion areas you will need to use the WIMD and DWP information provided to you by the Welsh Government. This information is the most up to date available and will give you an indication of which LSOAs in your local authorities, currently without Flying Start services, are now in scope of the expansion during phase one.

Other sources of information, combined with your local knowledge of your local authority areas, remain crucial in ensuring services reach those families most in need of support within the broad geographic areas prescribed. You may have already started working in some of these areas through the Early Years Transformation Programme and can build on this as part of the expansion programme. Other sources of information which may help you may include, but is not restricted to:

- Free School Meals data.
- Social Services data.
- Health board data.

Expanding to whole LSOA areas should remain the 'default' position when it comes to expanding the footprint of Flying Start but, as in previous years, if there are clear, objective and legitimate reasons for you to exclude certain sections of a LSOA then you should feel able to do so.

Please note –We recognise that there may be gaps in the existing coverage of Flying Start in your local authorities which you may feel should be addressed as part of expansion plans. Where this is the case we would expect you to explore all possible avenues of using your existing funding allocations to

address these anomalies. Expanding the footprint of Flying Start to new LSOAs is the focus of the first phase of expansion.

Increasing Welsh Language Provision

Expanding Welsh language early years childcare provision has been set as an overarching aim of the expansion. Phase one expansion plans will need to demonstrate how local authorities plan to support this overarching aim and will need to provide specific attention to the following priorities:

- increasing the number of Welsh medium places; and
- increasing Welsh medium settings in the local authority area.

Ensuring plans for increasing Welsh medium provision are realistic and sustainable will need a localised approach to target resources effectively. The Welsh Government will consider the approach outlined in individual expansion plans on a case by case basis.

We know Welsh language early years services and language acquisition work best where there is a clear pathway into primary education and beyond; however, we also know that by establishing Welsh language services in areas where they have not historically been prevalent, we can raise awareness and create new opportunities to access Welsh language provision.

Phase one plans should take account of these factors in conjunction with your local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), the provision of existing Cylch Meithrin, and other existing Welsh medium early years services, to ensure resources are aligned to support our overarching aim.

Promoting the Benefits of Multilingualism

Promoting the benefits of speaking more than one language from an early age is important in helping parents make an informed choice about childcare provision. In your plan you need to explain how you will:-

- Promote the benefits of speaking more than one language from an early age².

Outreach

You are expected to deliver 75% of your expansion via the geographical targeting methodology outlined above. As part of your plans for phase one up to 25% of your expansion can be achieved via Flying Start Outreach in order to give you the flexibility to reach families living outside of existing or new Flying Start areas and in order to reach disadvantaged families living in more rural areas.

² Please be aware of the [Race Equality Action Plan for Wales – An Anti-Racist Wales](#)

This has the benefit of enabling the programme to reach disadvantaged families living in more rural areas and support expansion of Welsh medium provision.

The Flying Start Outreach policy remains unchanged.

Barriers to Expansion

We recognise there may be occasions when the methodology outlined in this guidance document leads you to identify parts of your local authority where Flying Start services should operate as part of the expanded footprint of the programme but where delivering crucial elements of the programme is not currently possible.

For example, it would be unviable to expand into any new area that does not have childcare provision situated either within it or within a sensible walking distance of it (approximately 15 minutes on foot). Establishing new provision is unlikely to be a realistic ambition to enable the delivery of Flying Start childcare services by September 2022 which creates an insurmountable barrier to delivering services within the given area, during phase one of the expansion.

In such instances, we would expect local authorities to adopt a pragmatic approach and to move to the next area on their list that has the necessary infrastructure upon which to build an expansion of Flying Start. Those areas initially identified would need to be developed as part of phase two of the expansion with plans for establishing childcare provision in those areas prioritised as part of the planning for phase two.

We appreciate that some local authorities may find it challenging to meet their new targets via the methodology outlined in this guidance (geographic targeting based on areas of relative deprivation). Where this is the case a greater proportion of delivery via Flying Start Outreach can be agreed as part of your plans for phase one.

Section 3: Flying Start Services in Expansion Areas

In phase one, all four elements of Flying Start are being expanded to new families and communities in Wales. Current programme guidance should be followed and the provision of services in your expansion areas should mirror the services being offered within more established Flying Start areas in your local authority, as far as this is practicable.

However, we recognise that not all elements of the programme may be deliverable by the start of phase one (September 2022) due to workforce capacity and other logistical challenges. To address this, we will need to agree sensible and pragmatic transitional arrangements with local authorities. These arrangements will be agreed on a case by case basis to recognise unique local challenges and will need to be clearly outlined in local authority expansion plans.

Service relaxations may include:

- A fixed term relaxation of the enhanced quality elements of Flying Start childcare including the qualifications.
- A fixed term relaxation to the requirement that Flying Start children have a designated Flying Start Health Visitor with caseloads of 1:110.
- A fixed term relaxation to the enhanced elements of the Flying Start Health programme.

Please note that delivering a full enhanced service to children and families is the priority and you will need to consider how these transitional arrangements can be phased out as soon as possible. This will need to form part of your plans for phases one and two of the expansion.

Please ensure that any services developed as part of your expansion plans are coordinated with other key services in your area, such as Families First.

Flying Start Childcare

Flying Start childcare is often the most tangible and recognisable element of the programme which incorporates private, maintained and third sector provision across the sector. Historically, local authorities have been given the flexibility to determine the exact make up of their Flying Start childcare provision and this has resulted in a number of different models emerging across Wales.

Working with local providers, wherever this is possible, in the first instance is a pragmatic solution to ensure provision is ready for the target date for roll out and enables us to ensure growth is sustainable for the sector. Furthermore, we know that when a wide range of providers are engaged in the provision of Flying Start we can start to raise the standard of childcare for all, which aligns with our wider vision for ECEC in Wales.

Section Four: Reporting Requirements

In the first instance you will be expected to report against the new targets, set as part of the expansion of Flying Start, separately from the core delivery that contributes to the national target of 36,000 children per year. This approach is required to enable us to monitor the delivery of the expansion effectively and in recognition of the logistical barriers that we may face in monitoring beneficiaries following the existing approach (via unique HV contacts) due to workforce challenges.

Discussions with the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Service (KAS) are underway about the best way of collecting expansion data. We will be in touch with you in due course to discuss the approach.

Section Five: What you need to do next

We have included a planning template with this guidance. Further information about your individual financial allocations and targets for expansion, as well as additional guidance on how to complete the template, is included within the document.

The template takes you through a step by step approach for planning your expansion. **Please note that your plans need to be returned to Welsh Government no later than 13 June 2022.**

A copy of the 2018 WIMD and DWP data is also provided to help you to identify your expansion areas.

Please contact your [Account Managers](#) if you have any queries in relation to this guidance or the information requested in the planning template.