

## **Gender Equality Forum – 05 December 2024**

### **Written Updates**

#### **Outstanding actions from previous meeting**

##### **Childcare officials to confirm whether research has been undertaken to understand the low take-up of the Childcare Offer**

Parents and providers are surveyed annually on their experiences of accessing and delivering the Childcare Offer for Wales. The surveys for the seventh year of the Offer ran from August to October 2024. The surveys included questions related to the take up of the Offer. Parents were asked how many hours of childcare they used in a particular week. Providers were asked whether Childcare Offer parents tend to take up all the funded hours they are eligible for, whether they are aware of eligible parents who do not take up any hours and the reasons for this.

The monitoring data collected for the Offer provides more granular data on take up. Analysis of responses and monitoring data for years six and seven of the Offer is currently ongoing, with the view to publish a findings report before the end of the financial year.

Further evidence on factors influencing take-up of the Offer was generated through a [2021 study](#) commissioned by the Welsh Government. Interviews and focus groups with parents indicated the following influences on decision making:

- Challenges completing the application process;
- Availability of suitable local provision of either childcare or early education, including in preferred language;
- Attitudes around the value of employment both for financial and mental health purposes; and
- Parents' views about what experiences were most important to children, their views about who should be responsible for raising young children, and their cultural values.

##### **Equality officials (Gender) to include an agenda item on the budget at the next meeting**

This will be completed for the next Gender Equality Forum meeting either as an agenda item or written update dependant on timing constraints.

On 10 December 2024, Welsh Government published a draft budget setting out revenue and capital spending plans for 2025 to 2025.

[Draft Budget 2025 to 2026 | GOV.WALES](#)

Following scrutiny of these plans by the Senedd, the Final Budget 2025-26 will be published on 25 February 2025.

## **Updates on Priority Areas**

### **Intersectionality /Mainstreaming**

Welsh Government published its National Equality Objectives in March 2024, the objectives were informed by a consultation process. Broad in scope, they provide a framework to affect change across all agendas, delivery will be evidenced through various equality and human rights related plans. Related to this work, Welsh Government is currently revising its Equality Impact Assessment process, this amongst other levers will be instrumental as we progress work to mainstream equality and human rights. In addition, wider next steps linked to how we can take forward reforms in support of tackling inequality are being actively considered.

[Written Statement: Achieving an equitable Wales: The National Equality Objectives 2024-28 \(18 March 2024\) | GOV.WALES](#)

### **Unpaid care**

#### **Information, Advice and Assistance / Carers Assessments**

Timely information, advice and assistance for unpaid carers is crucial, and the current work of the Task and Finish Group (under the Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers) will be key to driving national improvement. We are working closely with local authorities and health boards to identify and share good practice regarding unpaid carers receiving information and advice, and accessing assessments of their support needs, where required.

#### **Short Breaks Scheme**

A recent review of Short Breaks reports demonstrated strong collaborative work with a broad range of local carer groups and other third sector organisations. This scheme has reached half of carers not previously known to services, and so has the added value of increasing the identification of unpaid carers in local communities and connecting carers with support services.

#### **Carers Support Fund**

The Carers Support Fund has a commitment of £4.5million for three years. Half of the applicants were not previously known to services and can now access financial advice and more general support. The fund provides support for unpaid carers, all of ages, facing financial pressures.

### **Flying Start Childcare - Expansion**

Phase 2 of the expansion programme is making significant progress on our 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".

Phase 2 focuses on delivering the childcare element of Flying Start to even more two year olds.

During 2023-24 and 2024-25 we are investing £46m in expanding Flying Start childcare to support long-term, positive impacts on the lives of those children and families across Wales facing the greatest challenges.

We expect to support more than 9,500 additional two-year-olds across Wales to access quality Flying Start childcare during Phase 2 (2023-24 and 2024-25) and we are well on track to deliver that.

The latest National Statistical Release for Flying Start showed that 6,885 additional childcare places for 2 year olds were offered in 2023-24 as part of Phase 2 ([Flying Start: April 2023 to March 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)).

We are committed to continuing the expansion of Flying Start childcare for two year olds and are working closely with local authorities on their plans.