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# Service User Perspective Review, Flying Start – **Newport City Council**

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# Summary report

## Summary

- 1 In 2017-18, the Wales Audit Office completed work to understand the 'service user perspective' about an agreed service at every Council within Wales. We followed a broadly similar approach at each council. In Newport City Council (the Council) we agreed to undertake a review of parents' experiences of the Language and Play (LAP) and Nurture programmes of the Flying Start programme in Newport.
- 2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the 'Act') places a duty on local authorities and other public bodies to have regard for the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working that define it. 'Involvement' is one of the five ways of working identified in the Act.
- 3 The Flying Start programme is a Welsh Government grant-funded early years programme for children under the age of four. The Welsh Government provides grant funding to councils to deliver the programme to families living in areas defined by postcodes. In Newport, all families living in the following areas are eligible to take part in the Flying Start programme:
  - Allt-yr-yn, Alway, Bettws, Duffryn, Gaer, Lliswerry, Maesglas, Maindee, Malpas, Pillgwenlly, Ringland and Somerton
- 4 The programme consists of four elements:
  - Quality part-time childcare for all two-to-three-year-olds living in the designated Flying Start areas five days a week for 39 weeks
  - Enhanced Health Visiting Service in the designated areas
  - Parenting programmes and support
  - Early language development programme
- 5 The programme is based on research that shows that providing these entitlements to families in disadvantaged areas will support children's development, increase their educational attainment, reduce the need for later remedial action, and therefore ultimately reduce the proportion of people with very low skills in adulthood.
- 6 The short-term objectives of Flying Start are to identify and respond to children's early needs and achieve tangible outcomes for the child in relation to their development, specifically language, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.
- 7 In Newport, a central Flying Start team co-ordinates the programme that is delivered in a range of '**settings**', including purpose-built Flying Start centres, schools, community centres and private childcare settings. The Council provides 16 of the 18 settings with two private childcare settings.
- 8 The programme includes an ongoing LAP programme to help parents explore new ways of playing with, listening and talking to their children. The LAP programme introduces children and parents to new ideas and activities that can be used to enhance children's language and communication skills. Settings run LAP sessions

every week. The sessions provide parents with opportunities to share ideas with other parents and to learn new skills.

- 9 The Flying Start programme also includes the Tiny Talkers sessions for children aged 7 to 18 months, and Chatty Children sessions for older children. Chatty Children is a ten-week parent and child programme that focusses on attention, listening and early language skills.
- 10 The Family Links Nurture programme is based on psychological and child development research. This programme has four main components that trained staff deliver to parents in a structured ten-week programme, including sessions about;
  - Self-awareness
  - Appropriate expectations
  - Positive discipline
  - Empathy
- 11 This programme has been shown by research<sup>1 2</sup> to lead to a number of improvements in parent/child relationships as well as positive impacts for parents, including improved coping perceptions and self-efficacy and improved family relationships.
- 12 The Council requires that all settings have arrangements to collect the views of parents using short written surveys. In 2017-18 around 90% of participating parents completed these surveys. The surveys offer parents the choice of stating whether they are happy or unhappy with aspects of the service provided.
- 13 The Council has six key organisational design principles that guide how it works and one of these is: 'In Newport, citizens are equal partners and play a role in the creation and support of strong communities and help to design local public services.'
- 14 We ran focus groups with parents who were participating in Nurture and/or LAP sessions at 6 settings between 12 June and 14 June 2018. In total, 39 parents took part in our focus groups. However, due to the scope of the project, we were unable to develop a comprehensive understanding of the views of all eligible parents. We were unable to speak to eligible parents who do not currently take up their entitlement to the Flying Start programme.
- 15 We provided printed information leaflets (flyers) to all parents participating in the sessions a week before the focus group at their setting ([Appendix 1](#)). We also used the Wales Audit Office Facebook and Twitter accounts to make parents aware of

<sup>1</sup> Ghate, D., (2015) **The Family Links Nurturing Programme – Findings and recommendations from a strategic review and development project**

<sup>2</sup> Villadsen, A., (2015) **Parenting Self-Efficacy before and after the Family Links 10-Week Nurturing Programme for Parents**

the focus groups. The Newport Flying Start team also reposted our posts on their Facebook and Twitter pages.

- 16 Following our focus groups with parents we met with the parenting and Flying Start managers at the Council. We discussed the views that the parents had shared with us during the focus groups. We also met with the Head of Community Regeneration and the Cabinet member for Community and Resources. The officers and member we met were all very interested in hearing the views of parents and received the feedback constructively.
- 17 We also considered relevant data that the Council reports to the Welsh Government about the level of parental take up of the Flying Start programme.
- 18 We conclude that **parents are generally very satisfied with the Flying Start Language and Play and Nurture programmes**, but the Council could more systematically use parents' views **when planning and improving services**. We say this because the parents we spoke to told us that:
- the Council designs the services effectively to meet parents' needs, but there are further opportunities for it to better understand and act on their views;
  - parents can access the services easily, although some barriers exist;
  - parents are generally very satisfied with the quality of the services they use; and
  - communication between parents and staff in the Flying Start settings is good, but the Council could do more to systematically use parents' views to improve the programmes.

## Proposals for improvement

### Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	To increase the number of eligible families accessing and benefitting from the Flying Start programme, the Council should; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ensure that the non-attendance policy is reviewed to ensure its alignment with the Council's wider safeguarding policies; and</li><li>• ensure that its analysis of non-attendance is used to secure improved attendance.</li></ul>
P2	To ensure that the Council can demonstrate that parents and children gain the intended benefit from the Flying Start programme, the Council should; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• set out clearly the intended outcomes for parents as well as children; and</li><li>• monitor and report to elected members on the outcomes achieved by parents as well as children.</li></ul>

### Proposals for improvement

- P3 To understand parents' views more effectively, the Council should;
- review its parent surveys to ensure that the same information is collected from all settings. The information collected should be relevant and useful to help ensure that the programme meets parents' needs and aspirations, for example, parental satisfaction, timing and location of sessions.
  - review the survey questions with parents whose first language is not English or Welsh to ensure that all parents are able to provide informed feedback.

# Detailed report

## The Council designs the services effectively to meet parents' needs, but there are further opportunities for it to better understand and act on their views

- 19 We asked parents how the programme takes account of their needs and views. Parents provided us with a number of examples of the programme responding effectively to their views, and these included:
- parents being offered a choice of session times.
  - installing a covered buggy park at the Seabreeze Centre which allows parents to stay at the centre and participate in the programme, rather than walking home.
  - providing training to staff to promote bilingual provision, following feedback from parents in a Welsh language setting that the Welsh offer had not been equally promoted.
  - changing drop off arrangements at Alway Community Centre following parents highlighting concerns.
  - providing written confirmation of nappy changes for children at all settings. Previously parents were updated verbally but some parents were not always consistently informed.
  - ensuring that parents who move out of the Flying Start areas retain their access to the programme through the outreach service which supported 11 families in 2017-18.
  - providing a walking buggy class, although take up was very low.
- 20 Whilst recognising that the programme takes good account of parents' views and needs, parents also identified several areas where the Flying Start programme could take greater account of their needs and views, including:
- improving signposting to suitable provision in school holidays when Flying Start does not run, because parents felt that their children benefit from the routine of attending the sessions;
  - ensuring that all buildings and locations where Flying Start sessions are delivered are safe and secure. At the Alway Community Centre, parents told us that they were concerned that the main access doors can be left open, which does not provide a secure environment for parents and children as they leave the building. At the Seabreeze centre parents told us that the layout of the road outside the centre means that it is not always easy to cross the road due to parked cars, and there are no crossing points near the centre.
  - ensuring that programmes are delivered in settings that are convenient and easy for parents to walk/ travel to. This was highlighted at the Seabreeze centre where parents told us that some other parents no longer attend due



to the distance that they must walk, and that this impacts on collecting their other children from school.

- providing transport to settings that the Council relocates further away from parents.
- reviewing the eligibility of new estates that have been built since the Welsh Government set the eligibility criteria.

21 We discussed parents' views with the Council's service managers and Head of Community Regeneration who told us that the programme would take the following steps to respond to parents' feedback;

- looking at how local settings could better link parents into activities in local areas during holiday period.
- reviewing the layout and door security arrangements at the Alway Community Centre in light of parents' concerns.
- liaising with the Council's Streetscene team to look at improvements around car parking and road crossing points around the Seabreeze centre.
- exploring the provision of transport for parents who currently use the Blossom House setting when it is relocated in Autumn 2018. The Council has included this within its consultation with parents on the proposed relocation.
- the Council does not, however, have the ability to review and amend the eligibility criteria for new estates built after the Welsh Government established the eligible postcodes.

22 The Council's take up rate of childcare was the seventh lowest across Wales in 2017-18 at 85% and the Council could potentially learn from other councils where take up is higher. If parents do not take up their eligibility, then settings refer this to the family's health visitor who will undertake enquiries with families. The Council currently collects information on the reasons that parents do not take up their entitlement. In early 2018, the Council established a multi-agency Task and Finish group, to strategically look at approaches to increase participation. The group has already identified barriers to accessing childcare for some Czech speaking parents and taken action to ensure that language line support is now in place for those parents for childcare as well as health aspects of the programme.

## Parents can access the services easily, although some barriers exist

23 The Council delivers its Flying Start programme to all parents living in eligible postcodes as defined by the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government's data about Flying Start programmes across all 22 councils in Wales show that Newport City Council provided the Flying Start programme to 2,808 children during 2017-

18<sup>3</sup>. The proportion of children in Newport on a Flying Start health visitor's caseload is the second highest in Wales at 32% compared to the Welsh mean of 26%.

- 24 The Council offered the childcare element of Flying Start to 86% of eligible families in 2017-18, which was the lowest rate in Wales and a reduction from 96% in the previous year. Parents' take up of formal parenting courses has declined from 91% in 2015-16 to 54% in 2017-18, and the take up rate of these courses in that period has fallen from the third highest to the fourth lowest of the 22 councils in Wales.
- 25 The Council's approach is to allocate parents to the setting closest to their home. The programme operates two Welsh-medium settings which are located in the East and the West of the City and the Council allocates parents to the Welsh-medium setting that is closest to their home. We found that parents using all bar one of the settings lived within a short walking distance. Parents told us that it is important for them and their children to walk to the centres in a few minutes.
- 26 However, parents at the Seabreeze Centre, whose setting moved location to the purpose-built centre in September 2017, told us that they now have further to travel. This additional distance increases parents' and children's travelling time to and from the sessions. The Council had noted a decline in attendance at sessions during the Autumn term of 2017. However, despite the additional distance and time, those parents we spoke to value the impact of the sessions greatly and so continue to attend. The Council recognises that the new location of the setting is further from the community that it supports; however, at the time of the move, it considered that the centre represented the best provision available for parents and their children as it is a purpose-built facility for Flying Start.
- 27 When looking to change the location of settings the Council's current approach is to use computer mapping software to calculate walking distances for eligible parents. Parents we met at the Seabreeze Centre told us that this means that the slower speed that young children may walk at and the additional time that walking with a buggy or pushchair may take are not therefore considered.
- 28 A number of the parents who attended our focus groups do not speak English or Welsh as their first language. The central team therefore ensured that at the focus groups someone, including Flying Start team members, who could speak the parents' first language(s), attended the sessions so that parents could participate fully should they wish to.
- 29 Parents told us that they receive language support during the nurture programme, and the LAP sessions, and the support helps them to participate fully in those sessions. The Council asks for parents' language needs on its application forms for the programme and uses that information to plan how it can support parents whose first language is neither English nor Welsh.

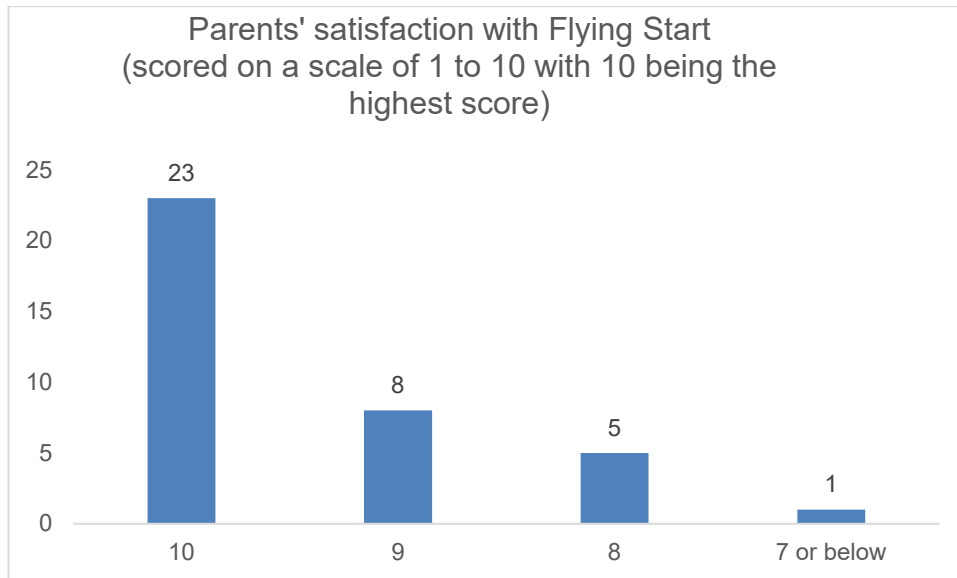
<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government (2018) Research and Statistics Flying Start – <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/flying-start/?lang=en>

- 30 In response to parents' language needs the Council has developed its staff team by recruiting staff who can speak the main community languages spoken in the Flying Start areas. Those staff attend a number of settings across the programme to provide language support to parents.
- 31 We note, however, that these staff do not hold professional translation or interpretation qualifications, but they live in the communities and so are 'trusted' by parents. In addition to meeting the language needs of those who do not speak English or Welsh, we were told that the programme paid for a sign language interpreter for a deaf parent which enabled that parent to participate fully in the programme.
- 32 The central team has also organised the translation of the Nurture programme booklet into the main community languages spoken in Newport, which supports parents who may wish to reinforce their learning from the sessions at home.
- 33 Parents had mixed views about the timing of sessions, with many finding the sessions fit in with their other children's school routines and parents' other responsibilities and work commitments. However, a small number of parents, including those at Milton, highlighted that the timing of Flying Start sessions could be better aligned to school timings to minimise the time that parents may spend waiting between the end of flying start sessions and school pick up times. We discussed this with the Flying Start programme manager who agreed to look into the reported mis-match between the Flying Start session times and the primary school session times at Milton and also to check with other centres.

## Parents are generally very satisfied with the quality of the services they use

- 34 We asked the parents we met at the focus groups to score how happy they are with the Flying Start programme on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest score.

Exhibit 2: the parents we met reported very high levels of satisfaction with the programme



35 We asked the parents why they gave their scores, and their comments focussed mainly on the care and attention that staff provide to the children, the progress that parents see their children make, and the positive impact that the programme sessions have on the parents and their ability to engage with their children.

36 Parents made overwhelmingly positive comments about their own and their children's experience of the Flying Start nurture and LAP programmes. Parents identified a range of outcomes for their children that the programmes have helped develop, including:

- helping with the transition from home to nursery;
- improvements in speech;
- improved interaction with other children and adults;
- encouraging positive behaviour, such as sharing;
- increasing independence and confidence;
- increasing resilience which leads to reduced separation anxiety; and
- learning new life skills, including hygiene and toilet training that parents can then reinforce at home.

37 Parents also told us that they benefit personally from the sessions including;

- opportunities to meet new people and develop friendships;
- developing parenting skills and skills to interact with children;
- providing some respite for parents and enabling them to complete tasks;
- providing opportunity to learn from other parents who have similar problems;
- helping parents develop confidence; and

- developing English language skills in parents whose first language is not English, as their children are developing those skills.
- 38 One parent told us;
- ‘The service is amazing, I’ve not had that opportunity in the past. Compared to the other sibling who did not have this opportunity, my child who has had flying start help has come along leaps and bounds. I’m grateful for this.’
- 39 All but 1 of the 391 parents who responded to the Council’s own surveys between January and December 2017 stated that they were happy that their child had had a positive experience, settled well and enjoyed their time in the Flying Start playgroup, and all 391 parents were happy with the play and learning activities provided at settings. The programme receives a very low number of complaints.

## Communication between parents and staff in the Flying Start settings is good, but the Council could do more to systematically use parents’ views to improve the programmes

- 40 Each setting is responsible for the day to day communication with parents. The Council’s central Flying Start team is responsible for programme wide communication and promotion, including via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The programme has the largest social media following of all Flying Start programmes across Wales. The Council’s own analysis shows that the programme reaches around 700 people a day through its Facebook account.
- 41 The central team uses a wide range of methods to communicate with service users with a high level of emphasis on using Facebook and Twitter to communicate information. The programme also has an information page on the Council’s website which provides parents with an overview of the programme and contact details.
- 42 Individual settings do not have to follow a standard communication policy, but parents told us that generally they receive the information they need in a timely way. Parents told us that, given their busy lives, the text message reminders that they receive on the day of their sessions are a very useful and timely reminder.
- 43 Parents feel comfortable in communicating with staff at the settings because staff are approachable. Parents also told us that in their experience, when they raise any issues, they are generally resolved straight away. Parents told us that staff in the settings maintain regular contact with them, and in some cases, staff have made home visits when parents miss a nurture programme session.

- 44 The programme has a structured non-attendance policy that is followed by all settings when a child has missed three consecutive days without any explanation. The policy is structured as a series of steps which are recorded by staff at settings:
- staff at individual settings make the initial attempt to contact a family in the case of non-attendance;
  - if staff at a setting are unable to contact the family then health visitors are requested to make a home visit;
  - staff at a setting then send out a 'Missing you' postcard if a family does not attend as a result of previous attempts to contact them; and
  - if a family does not re-engage, then staff at settings inform the central team who then write to the family, potentially allocating their place to another child.
- 45 Despite this structured approach to non-attendance, the Council was unable to provide us with assurance that the non-attendance policy has been aligned to the Council's wider safeguarding policies. The Head of Community Regeneration agreed to check that the policy has the appropriate feedback loops built into it to ensure children are safeguarded. Positively, parents who do not attend do not lose their entitlement to the programme if they wish to re-engage at a later point in time.
- 46 The central team's admissions officer contacts parents to establish the reasons why parents have been unable to attend. The central team reviews information about the number and percentage of authorised and unauthorised absences and the reasons why parents do not attend. Despite having this structured approach to recording the reasons for non-attendance, we did not find clear evidence that the central team uses this analysis to secure improved attendance, as a large percentage of the reasons recorded for non-attendance were either parents declining or not providing a reason.
- 47 The central team has a service level agreement with each setting and as part of this agreement settings must issue and collect parent surveys on a termly basis. The Council's central team collects and reviews the surveys from each setting. The Council does not provide feedback to parents after the surveys are reviewed by the Council. We noted that the Council uses different questions for its parent surveys in its own settings, as compared to those in privately operated settings. The questions focus almost entirely on parents' perception of the impact on the children from attending the playgroups.
- 48 The central team collects pre and post-intervention surveys from parents about the impact of the nurture programmes. These surveys collect information from parents about their parenting before and after they take part in the nurture programme. The central team also uses Foundation Phase profiles to track the impact on children's development. The profile uses observations and formative assessments to help settings to provide a developmentally appropriate learning and development experience for children and can be used to support children's transition into school. These tools provide a strong evidence base about the impact of the programme on children. The service does collect information to track the impact of the programme on parents using a standardised approach (Tool to Measure Parenting Self

Efficacy). The service uses this tool to measure the impact of parenting programmes by measuring the pre and post-intervention scores for each parent.

- 49 The Flying Start programme manager told us that as part of the Council's approach to understanding parents' views each setting has a suggestion box which it reviews. Parents also provide feedback through surveys and post inspection surveys. Settings respond to parents' ideas submitted through the suggestion boxes. The central team respond to parent views at a whole programme level. We found that the central team does not have a process to review parents' views from the suggestion boxes across all settings, and so the programme may potentially be missing an opportunity to learn from parents' suggestions and implement improvements across the whole programme.
- 50 In July 2018, the Council introduced a new Community Engagement Management Process (CEMP) which will provide regular reports to elected members on the Welsh Government's data set on Flying Start. However, the Welsh Government's data set does not include parental satisfaction or insight into the impact of the programme on children and parents, data which the Council collects. The Council's programme does not therefore currently have arrangements to report the full impact of the programme on children's as well as parents' outcomes and parents' satisfaction levels to elected members.

# Appendix 1

## Flyer provided to parents and social media screenshot

### Flyer

Exhibit 3: flyer provided to parents





## Social media screenshot

Exhibit 4: screenshot of the Wales Audit Office social media post for Flying Start events in Newport

**Wales Audit Office / Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru** Published by Orlo [?] · 6 June · 🌐

Is [Flying Start](#) flying high for you? Are your views taken into account? Tell us what you think between 12-14 June at one of our [Newport Flying Start / Dechrau'n Deg Casnewydd](#) sessions in Newport

**IS FLYING START FLYING HIGH FOR YOU?**

918 People reached      86 Engagements      [Boost Post](#)

Newport Flying Start / Dechrau'n Deg Casnewydd      7 shares

[Like](#)      [Comment](#)      [Share](#)

Write a comment...

# Appendix 2

## Infographic summarising the key findings for parents

Exhibit 5: infographic summarising the key findings for parents

### IS FLYING START FLYING HIGH FOR YOU?



We talked to some parents at Flying Start centres.  
This is what we found out...



Most parents we spoke to are very satisfied with Flying Start



Newport City Council designs Flying Start services to make it easy for parents to use them



Most parents find the times and locations good



Lots of parents who use Flying Start know what is going on and can talk to staff easily



Newport City Council could do more to use parents' views to make improvements to Flying Start

Find out more: <http://www.audit.wales/>



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