

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 13th December 2018

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member for Education, Children and Young People/Head of Education and Children's Services

Report Author: Strategy and Development Officer

Title: Early Education & Flying Start Childcare Commissioning

1. What is the report about?

Denbighshire County Council will shortly be seeking providers to deliver the childcare elements of both the Flying Start Programme and the Early Education Foundation Phase. Following a review of our arrangements for providing these services, we have decided that recommissioning them will be the best way to ensure quality services, parental choice, fair access to funding and value for money. We propose to conduct this commissioning process in early 2019.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- The childcare elements of the two programmes together represent a significant budgetary commitment.
- The services support the Corporate Priority for Young People.
- The report provides an opportunity for the committee to review the decisions around the recommissioning process and to examine a topic that affects residents and local businesses.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee comments on the contents of this report and supports the decision to recommission the childcare elements of Early Education and the Flying Start Programme through parallel formal processes.

4. Report details

- Early Education childcare (or Foundation Phase Nursery) is part of the statutory Foundation Phase curriculum for 3-7 year olds in Wales. This Welsh Government programme funds 10 hours of education per week for children in Denbighshire following their 3rd birthday, delivered in a childcare setting such as a playgroup, cylich or private day nursery. Settings follow the Foundation Phase pedagogy, framework and ethos. They are supported by a qualified teacher and are inspected by Estyn to regulate standards.
- Flying Start is a Welsh Government (WG) programme for families with children under 4 living in disadvantaged areas of Wales, including parts of Rhyl, Prestatyn and Denbigh. In Denbighshire, Flying Start is part of Early Help services alongside

the Families First programme. As well as childcare, Flying Start provides parenting programmes, support with speech & language and an intensive health visiting service. Flying Start funds childcare for children from the term after their 2nd birthday until the term after their third birthday, for 2.5 hours per day, 5 days a week, 39 weeks a year. Childcare settings receive support from the Flying Start Advisory Teacher and Teaching Assistants.

- We've reviewed funding mechanisms for Flying Start and Early Education childcare services, considering current arrangements, Welsh Government guidance and the Council's Corporate Priorities. Going forward, we've decided to recommission these services to ensure:
 - Quality care services for children
 - Choice for parents and families
 - Open and fair access to funding
 - Value for money
- Foundation Phase guidance requires local authorities to look at the way we commission Early Education childcare in order to maximise value for children and ensure a choice of settings to suit parents' circumstances and needs.
- Flying Start Financial Management Guidance advises local authorities to follow our local procedures when funding services, taking reasonable steps to ensure the best value for money attainable from Flying Start funding.
- Flying Start childcare services were previously tendered in 2013 and Early Education childcare provision has not previously been formally commissioned. We consider that recommissioning these services is the best way to demonstrate appropriate governance and ensure value for money.
- A joint approach has been agreed between Flying Start & Early Education. All childcare services will be recommissioned through two separate but parallel processes, sharing and aligning documentation and approaches as far as possible.
- Current contracts for both programmes will end in August 2019. Flying Start contracts end in March 2019 and will be extended. Early Education providers have rolling contracts which will be formally terminated.
- Flying Start and Early Education Childcare services will be recommissioned in 2019.
- New agreements will be in place to start in September 2019. This will align with the school year to minimise potential disruption for children in case of a change of provider.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The Flying Start and Early Education programmes contribute to ensuring that Denbighshire is a place where young people flourish. The childcare services funded, structured and monitored through these programmes support excellent education provision, laying the foundations for developing life skills, supporting a positive transition into primary school and promoting physical and emotional well-being from an early age to prevent problems occurring later in life. At the same time, funded childcare supports parents to access employment opportunities, including in the most disadvantaged parts of the county.

5.2 By ensuring high quality childcare services, increased parental choice, improved access to funding and best value for money, the recommissioning of these services will support the delivery of our commitments to deliver support for parents to give their children the best start in life, to grow into independent and fulfilled adults. The recommissioning process supports our pledge to work with our partners, schools and businesses to make this happen.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- The value of funding aggregated over 4 years is £1,987,128 for Flying Start & £1,411,500 for Early Education.
- Staff and resources to develop and run the recommissioning process have been allocated from within the Early Years & Primary and Flying Start Education teams. This has had some impact on routine day-to-day operation. Service staff are supported by the Procurement Business Partner (Social Care) and the ECS Strategy & Development Officer.
- No additional resources are required to support the operation of the childcare services following the conclusion of new arrangements.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

We will conclude a full Wellbeing Impact Assessment of this commissioning process once we have received and begun evaluating submissions from providers. This will give a clear, practical indication of the scale and nature of any changes to the availability of Flying Start and Early Education childcare in Denbighshire.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

We have held a series of Commissioning Events to inform and advise providers and other stakeholders, as well as making use of existing forums such as the Childcare Forum, Flying Start's Childcare Providers' Meeting and Early Education's Setting Expectations Meeting.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The Chief Finance Officer has confirmed that this report does not require a statement.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The recommissioning process presents a medium operational and financial risk in that it may impact on the availability of funded childcare places if insufficient numbers of providers are successful in securing funding. There is a potentially high reputational risk to the Council should the above eventually transpire. These risks will be mitigated by extensive stakeholder engagement to consult & communicate effectively, and by running an effective recommissioning process to select and appoint appropriate childcare providers and to ensure capacity to meet requirements. This will ensure no Flying Start grant underspend is recoverable by WG.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 7.2.1 of the Council's Constitution states that the Council's Scrutiny Committee "will review or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions whether by the Cabinet or another part of the Council."

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