

Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee
Date

Report Title:	Update on Early Years Education Provision
Lead Officer:	Eurig Towns

Key Issues in the report highlighted by Lead Officer

Key Feeders (tick all that apply)

Strategic Risk		Cabinet Work Plan	
Director / Head of Service Key Issue		External / Internal Inspection	
Existing Commitment / Annual Report	X	Performance / Finance Issue	
Suggestion from Public		Referral from Council / Committee	
Corporate Improvement Plan		Impacting Public / other services	
Service Integrated Business Plan			
Suggestion from Members			
Partnerships			

Scrutiny Impact (tick all that apply)

Policy Review		Performance	
Informing Policy Development		Evidence Gathering	
Risk		Corporate Improvement Plan	
Service Integrated Business Plan		Partnerships	
Pre-Decision Scrutiny		Finance / Budget	

Other (please specify)

For information on standards and provision in Early Years education

Suggested scrutiny activity - Committee's Role:

To be aware of the current standards and provision for Early Years education across Powys.

On what specific elements of the report would scrutiny comment add value

The Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee requested an update on standards and provision in Early Years education.

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee Date

Report Author: County Councillor Pete Roberts
Portfolio Holder for a Learning Powys

Lead Officer: Eurig Towns

Report Title: Update on Early Years Provision

Report For: Information

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee with an update on the standards and progress of Early Years education in Powys.

2. Background

2.1 The local authority has a statutory requirement to provide a minimum of 10 hours per week of pre-school Early Years education to all children from the start of the term following his/her third birthday until s/he commences school on a full-time basis, normally at the start of the school year following their fourth birthday. However, Early Years education is not statutory and it is a parental decision as to whether they apply for and take up a place for Early Years education for their child or children.

2.2 Since September 2017, Early Years education has been provided through dedicated English and Welsh medium Early Years settings across Powys. As of September 2023, there are currently 72 Early Years settings in Powys, 18 Welsh medium providers and 54 English medium providers.

2.3 The number of children in each setting ranges from 5 children to 82 children. There are three admission periods over the course of an academic year. These coincide with the start of each academic term. As admissions are staggered over the course of the year, due to children accessing Early Years education following their third birthday, settings are at their lowest capacity in the autumn term and are often close to or at capacity by the summer term.

2.4 The number of children accessing Early Years education in Powys remains fairly stable.

Academic year	Number of Children accessing EY education
2018-19 (pre-pandemic)	1398 Full Time Equivalent Places (FTE)
2019-20 (Covid Pandemic)	1367 FTE
2020-21 (Impacted by Covid Pandemic)	1320 FTE
2021-22	1401 FT
2022-23	1386 FTE

2.5 All settings are supported by a designated Foundation Learning Advisory Teacher. This team of 5 teachers is led by Sharon Hughes, Senior Foundation Phase Advisory teacher. Their support ranges from on-site visits to individual and cluster online support meetings. During these support visits they deliver bespoke educational support to address individual needs of

each setting. They also provide face-to face and online training sessions, available to all settings.

3. Outcomes

3.1 Early Years settings have joint inspections from Estyn and Care Inspectorate for Wales (CIW). Each setting will be inspected at least once every six years.

3.2 Inspections restarted following the pandemic in February 2022. Inspections focus on six inspection areas and settings can be placed in follow up categories if they are deemed as not providing a high quality of education or that the care and support for children does not meet CIW regulations.

3.3 Inspection reports from February 2022 to March 2023 did not contain judgements for each individual inspection area. These were removed during the Covid pandemic and recovery period. However, settings could still be placed in a category for follow up. In March 2023, Estyn and CIW reinstated judgements for each individual inspection area.

3.4 In 2021-22, 10 Early Years settings in Powys were jointly inspected, nine had successful inspections and did not need any follow up activity, one setting was placed in review. This setting was inspected in June 2022, following a reinspection in November 2022, the setting was deemed to have made strong progress in addressing their recommendations and was removed from any further follow up activity.

3.5 In 2022-23, 11 Early Years settings received joint inspections from Estyn and CIW. Ten settings had successful inspections and required no further follow up activity. One setting was placed in review in October 2022, however, by April 2023, this setting had made strong progress and was removed from any further follow up activity.

3.6 At the start of the 2023-24 academic year, there are no Powys Early Years setting in any follow up category.

4. Provision & Support

4.1 Early Years settings are implementing the Curriculum for Wales for non-maintained funded settings ready for September 2023. This will ensure appropriate learning experiences for our youngest learners who receive their education provision in childcare settings. This non-maintained curriculum will act as a precursor to the schools' Curriculum for Wales.

4.2 During the summer term of 2021, 4 Powys Early Years settings (Little Steps Childcare, Jigsaw pre-school, Carreghofa Owlets and Cylch yn yr Ysgol) and 2 Powys child minders expressed an interest and were chosen by Welsh Government to pilot the new non-maintained curriculum for funded settings. As part of the pilot, they, along with the Foundation Learning Advisory Teachers, were responsible for delivering and scrutinising the draft document, then providing valuable feedback about the content, vocabulary and usability to Welsh Government. As a result, the settings increased their knowledge & understanding of the curriculum before the draft was published in January 2022, ready for implementation from September 2023. In addition, the settings provided useful feedback to the advisory team, helping to shape training for other settings as part of the dedicated support programme for all settings. As a result, settings across Powys are prepared for the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales for non-maintained funded settings.

4.3 In 2020, the Foundation Learning Team were invited by Dr Sue Evans to complete the Incredible Beginnings programme specifically for pre-school settings. This is based on the

Incredible Years programme, used by many schools. Following this, three members of the team proceeded to become trainers of the programme with the founder, Dr Carolyn Webster-Stratton. To date the advisory team has successfully trained 4 cohorts of practitioners. The positive feedback from practitioners includes *'This is the best training I have ever done and everyone should attend'* and *'I felt it was all extremely useful. I have been able to use the 'tools' provided to build better relationships with the children'*. The feedback of cohorts trained by Powys Teaching Health Board and the Foundation Learning team has also been shared world-wide ([Incredible Beginnings® program](#)). The support provided through this programme has been particularly relevant to settings following the pandemic period. Participants reported a statistically significant reduction in their perception of child difficulties (emotional problems, hyperactivity, conduct problems, and peer problems), reporting an increase in their use of positive teacher practices, and highly rated their satisfaction with the program.

4.4 Each year the Foundation Learning team ask for feedback from settings as to the quality and impact of the support provided. For the previous academic year 2022-23, settings rated all training provided to them as at least good. All settings stated that they thought the guidance on curriculum had been very effective or effective. Also, 95% of settings thought that the overall support provided by the Foundation Learning Advisory teachers was good to excellent.

4.5 Four of the Foundation Phase Advisory Teachers are trained Early Years Estyn inspectors. This has been beneficial in supporting our settings, ensuring they have high quality support, focused on improving education and leadership within each setting. The team of advisory teachers have a very good understanding of the quality of education in each setting and are able to provide bespoke support based on the individual needs of the setting. The impact of their work not only evidenced through the positive feedback from settings but also through the quality of inspection outcomes within Powys's Early Years settings.

5. Funding

5.1 The 2022/23 budget to deliver Early Years education in Powys was £1,691,370.

5.2 The Powys Funding Formula established for Early Years settings in 2017 is based on the number of adults needed to staff a setting. The ratio of adults to children is 1:8. The minimum number of adults funded for any setting is two adults which complies with CIW regulations. For the first sixteen children, Powys fund one setting leader and one assistant. Then for every eight additional children Powys fund an additional assistant. This formula was implemented due to some settings across Powys being very small and to ensure access for children for both Welsh and English medium settings.

5.3 In January 2022, Welsh Government amended the funding formula for Early Years education and stipulated that by April 2024, all children across Wales must be funded at £5 per hour for their 10 hours of education provision.

5.4 As Powys's current funding formula is based on the number of adults needed to support a setting, on a ratio of 1 adult to 8 children, with a minimum of two adults, Powys finance and Early Years officers have been modelling the impact of the change as a result of the new national funding formula. As funding will be determined by the number of children on role, based on figures from the last two years, most settings would be financially viable. However, there are a very few settings, those with less than 8 children accessing Early Years education at that setting, that will not generate enough income to be financially viable.

6. Contracts to Deliver Early Years Education

6.1 Contracts to deliver Early Years education were awarded to settings in 2017. The initial duration of contracts was five years, with an option of a two-year extension. Due to the pandemic and the impact this had on gathering quality information on standards, provision and financial viability for settings, the contract extension was activated in 2021. With the introduction of the new funding formula from Welsh Government in April 2024, an application for an additional year's exemption was made, thus allowing settings to gather information to support their application for a new contract based on the new funding formula.

6.2 The tendering process for Early Years education will begin in September 2024. Contracts will be awarded for the five-year period, starting in September 2025.

6.3 As part of the work in preparation for the retendering process, an Early Years workstream has been established within the transformation programme. The workstream are reviewing the early years support across education and Children's Services, to look at and reduce any duplication of work whilst ensuring standards of provision are at least maintained across both English and Welsh medium provision.

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