



## EARLY YEARS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024 - 2025

**Directorate:** Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning

**Service Area:** Early Years

**Accountable Manager:** Sarah Griffiths

### Purpose

The Neath Port Talbot Early Years and Flying Start team comprises of an Early Years & Flying Start manager, an Early Years Integration and Transformation lead, a Childcare lead, a Flying Start Parenting lead and 26 local authority staff across three teams who support children, families and childcare providers. Early Years and Childcare within Neath Port Talbot is delivered by the following teams:

- o Early Years and Flying Start Childcare (Core/Welsh Government (WG) CCG Grant funded)
- o Early Years and Flying Start Family Support (funded within the CCG Flying Start programme). This workstream has evolved to take forward the Early Years Integration Transformation programme work and Flying Start Parenting support.
- o Flying Start core programme teams – Swansea Bay University Health Board (SBUHB) Health Visiting, Midwifery, Speech, Language and Communication teams and the local authority Early Years Education Psychology Team (WG CCG Grant Funded)

The teams work together cohesively to provide the best start in life for children in Neath Port Talbot. A shared purpose, collaboration across the teams and the ongoing development of effective partnership working with key internal and external partners provides a key



strategic and operational driver as we aim to ensure a high quality, equitable and consistent Early Years offer across the local authority.

- The purpose of the **Early Years and Flying Start Childcare Team** is to support the authority in meeting its legislative duties in relation to:
  - Sections 22 and 26 of the Childcare Act 2006 – secure sufficient provision of childcare and to undertake childcare sufficiency assessments (CSA).
  - Section 27 of the Childcare Act 2006 - to provide information for children, young people, families and professionals on a wide range of family related topics; by taking ownership of childcare sufficiency audit.
  
- **Flying Start** is the Welsh Government's (WG) targeted early years programme for families with children under 4 years of age who live in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. Flying Start aims to make a decisive difference to the life chances of children by mitigating the impact of poverty, which is linked to poor life outcomes in early childhood, including health outcomes. The Programme comprises of four entitlements, which in Neath Port Talbot (NPT) provide:
  - **Funded quality, part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds**; includes approximately 45 high quality childcare settings, with high quality staff, monitored via Service Level Agreements
  - **An intensive health visiting service** - consisting of 21 health visitors (HV), 11 community nursery nurses (CNN), two staff management, one Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), providing Healthy Child Wales (HCW) programme plus enhanced visits, support and tailored groups
  - **Access to enhanced parenting support** – a team of 11 parenting staff supporting parents with structured parenting course, drop ins, 1:1 support, early years groups, joint working with Swansea Bay University Health Board (SBUHB) staff for a holistic support package
  - **Support for speech, language and communication development** - 4 speech and language therapists (SALT) plus two SALT Assistants providing Wellcomm Screening, targeted support, adult-child interaction therapy/Hanen, multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings to support transition, childcare support.
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Across Neath Port Talbot there is a strong **Flying Start Outreach programme** that supports children and families to access the support they need.

The objectives of the Outreach programme are to:

- Extend the reach of Flying Start to families with identified need living in non-Flying Start areas.
- Provide an element of flexibility in the delivery of the programme by local authorities.
- Provide continuity of support to children and families moving out of Flying Start areas, or for whom there needs to be continuity of provision before being in receipt of other services or provision.

In addition, in Neath Port Talbot we offer:

- o NPT wide specialist midwifery support for expectant mother under the age of 22 – two midwives, one CNN providing a strong range of support including parenting, infant feeding and intensive antenatal visits.
- o Early Year Education Psychology Service (EY EPS) support, enabling the service to run across the local authority (**please see the Inclusion Service Plan for further information**).

The Welsh Government's phased expansion of Early Years provision (**Flying Start Expansion**) to include all two year olds commenced in September 2022. Phase 1 involved the expansion of the full Flying Start programme across identified areas within the local authority and was completed in March 2023. Phase 2 commenced in April 2023 and included the high-quality childcare element of Flying Start only. Phase 2 of expansion was completed in March 2024.

- **The Early Years Integration Transformation programme** was a Welsh Government funded co-construction programme involving nine pathfinder Public Service Boards. At a local level the programme was regional partnership project with Swansea Council and Swansea Bay University Health Board funded by Welsh Government. The purpose of the programme was to develop joined up and responsive Early Years' services to ensure every child has the best start in life. Children should be at the centre of excellent, integrated services that put their needs first, regardless of traditional organisational and professional structures. The aims of the programme were:



- To create an Early Years system to deliver services in a co-ordinated, integrated and timely way and offer a universal service to all families.
- To support local partners to re-configure Early Years services focusing on planning, commissioning and identifying and addressing needs.
- Through this process to identify barriers to integration and ways to remove, reduce or rationalise them.

Following the end of funding in March 2024, the steering group made up of representatives across the region will continue to meet quarterly to strategically align partnership work streams and to report to the Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Public Service Boards (PSBs) respectively. As a local authority we remain committed to developing an integrated early years system. In Neath Port Talbot (NPT), the integrated family support element of the work will be progressed through the Early Years and Flying Start Parenting/Family Support team workstream.

Across the Early Years' service, we are committed to embedding the following cross-cutting elements within our work:

- The development of the Welsh language and access to Welsh language provision in line with the **NPT Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)** targets, with a focus upon WESP Objective 1.
- **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform**
- **Welsh Government Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC)** guidance.
- **Curriculum for Wales (3-16)** – to ensure our children transition into school successfully to be able develop the knowledge, skills and experiences to become:
  - ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
  - enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work
  - ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
  - healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society



## Vision

The vision of the Early Years service is to enable all children and young people in Neath Port Talbot to have the best start in life. Across the local authority, we aim to deliver an equitable early years' offer by ensuring an inclusive, high quality, child-centred early years service is in place. Children, families and young people will have access to relevant information and support from integrated early years services at the point of need. We aim to achieve this through multi-agency partnership working and support from appropriate professionals including the Inclusion Service, Social Services, Health and regional partners.

The service contributes to the delivery of the four corporate wellbeing objectives by developing, delivering and supporting services for children and families in their early years. This is achieved through:

### **Wellbeing Objective 1 - Best Start in Life**

The service supports children, young people and families throughout their early years journey. We aim to ensure inclusive, equitable, integrated early years services are available to all children and families. A key element of achieving this is facilitating high quality funded childcare provision through the Flying Start Programme and Flying Start expansion programme, which is currently being rolled out across the local authority. Working with Welsh Government and partners in the sector to increase access to childcare is a key priority. We facilitate access to free parenting groups and enhanced early intervention and support services including Health, Inclusion Service and Social Services where appropriate. We support low-income families to access help towards childcare costs. We enable and support high quality childcare across the sector, this includes supporting the sustainability of providers. We provide funding support for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) or emerging needs to access childcare and work closely with the Early Years Multi-Agency Panel (EYMAP) to meet the needs of families. Working in partnership with families, early years partners and the childcare sector to develop a more equitable Early Years offer is key to ensuring our youngest learners transition into education successfully. It should be highlighted that these actions also support the delivery of the **Neath Port Talbot Public Service Board Wellbeing Objective 1**.



### **Wellbeing Objective 2 - Communities are thriving and sustainable**

The service enables children, young people and families to actively participate and engage in their communities by providing relevant, local information and access to high quality early years services. This includes supporting parents with childcare costs, including funded places and parenting support. We work with community partners and local businesses, including the third sector and childcare businesses. The local authority supports the creation of high-quality childcare provision through the effective use of Welsh Government capital investment. In addition, the service provides sustainability advice, support and funding to the childcare sector. The service is working in partnership with early years partners to develop equitable and universal ways of supporting children, young people and families through the next phase of the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme.

### **Wellbeing Objective 3 - Our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations**

The Early Years service actively promotes the use of Welsh within our communities by providing relevant information and support for families and our childcare sector. The service provides information to families regarding Welsh language childcare provision. Support for the childcare sectors includes:

- o Establishing a Welsh Award available to all childcare settings increasing the use of Welsh.
- o Developing new or increase capacity of Welsh childcare settings using capital investment.
- o Developing new childcare locations with outdoor play spaces, improving the local environment for children's play.
- o Providing Welsh courses and training specifically targeted at childcare settings, to improve their use of Welsh with young children.

The service is working with early years partners in the Inclusion Service, Education, Health and Social Services to develop Parenting Hubs/Cafés to give families ownership of their communities. Early years support provided to children and young people facilitates access to curriculum provision in schools. This provides children and families with opportunities to experience and develop a sound understanding of their locality, culture and heritage.



#### **Wellbeing Objective 4 – Local people are skilled and access high quality green jobs**

The service provides a wide range of information and signposting to services that support the wellbeing of families and supports their ability to access financial support, skills and training. The service support families to access funded childcare which enable them to access work, further education and training. The service supports the childcare sector by providing financial advice, support and workforce training and development. This includes offering volunteering opportunities and some accredited training to parents and childcare workers for career development.

How well are we doing?

#### **Delivering Priorities and Outcomes:**

In Early Years and Childcare, priorities and outcomes are articulated through the following delivery plans:

- The Childcare and Play Plan funded through the WG Children and Communities Grant (CCG)
- Flying Start Programme funded through the WG CCG
- Flying Start Expansion Programme funded through the WG CCG
- Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Action Plan
- Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme funded by WG

The plans provide the operational vehicle to deliver key priorities within Wellbeing objective 1. All programmes follow clear guidance and grant criteria as set out by WG. Decisions and information are reported to members via cabinet scrutiny committees as required, with detailed quarterly reports submitted to WG as part of the wider Children and Communities Grant funding reporting mechanisms. Local and national reporting is informed by termly comprehensive monitoring. In addition, all teams contribute to the NPT ELLS self-evaluation report and Directorate Plan and respond to Estyn recommendations as appropriate.



Overall, teams are delivering planned priorities effectively and achieving outcomes successfully, as demonstrated through quantitative and qualitative delivery plan monitoring evidence.

### **Early Years and Flying Start Team: Childcare**

#### **Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA)**

Facilitating and expanding access to high quality, equitable childcare across Neath Port Talbot is a key priority. The NPT Childcare Sufficiency Assessment evidences that engagement with childcare within the borough is high, particularly for children aged 2-4. Enabling families to access high quality childcare is a priority across the service. However, the CSA highlights that there is a gap in childcare provision regarding:

- After school club provision
- Holiday provision
- Times childcare is available
- Accessible Welsh Medium provision for all families who require it
- Families' ability to choose the childcare they want for children with a disability/additional learning needs

The priorities in the CSA are being addressed and monitored through the CSA Action Plan. The CSA priorities are actioned through three CSA sub-groups who meet to review progress on a termly basis.

Partnership work is on-going with the childcare sector and relevant partners including Education, third sector and umbrella organisations to support the increase in demand for out of school provision.

The Early Years and Flying Start Advisory Teacher co-ordinates the Welsh Medium and Welsh Language development within childcare and early years, linking up CSA and WESP objectives. Currently, areas for development include the first Welsh Festival in NPT, "Cael tro, have a go" videos promoting Welsh Medium provision on Early Years and Flying Start social media, a myth busting booklet ensuring clear





information around accessing Welsh childcare and Welsh education and the promotion of Camau, the early years Welsh language scheme.

### **Training and Support**

The Early Years, Flying Start Childcare team provide high quality training and support to childcare providers. All training is in line with mandatory requirements, Welsh Government's vision for Early Childhood Play Learning and Care and Curriculum for Wales guidance to ensure children are ready to learn and transition into setting/education successfully. The team are responsive to the needs of providers and provide pre/post Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection support. Training for childcare providers is now offered flexibly through online and face to face training. In 2023/24, 471 childcare practitioners attended training courses funded by the LA. In addition, 458 practitioners attended four Flying Start Development Days including child led play, attachment training, Curriculum for Wales and Trauma Informed Practice. The Welsh in Childcare Award continues to be implemented by the Welsh Development Officer, as well as Cynefin and Welsh language training on a setting by setting basis as requested.

The service works effectively with early years partners to develop a consistent and collaborative approach to training across the early years. This work is being led by the NPT Early Years Professional Learning Group. This group consists of professionals from the Early Years and Flying Start Childcare team, the Foundation Learning Education Support Officer (ESO), the Inclusion Service, Headteacher representation and health. The group have mapped the current training offer across the early years in NPT to identify areas of strength and gaps in training and support. As a result, it has been identified that training to support a greater understanding of child development and the pedagogy to implement the WG Enabling Learning approach is needed. The group have also recognised that working collaboratively to co-construct and co-deliver training to practitioners from childcare settings and schools will secure a consistent approach to the delivery of training, whilst also facilitating the sharing of best practice across the sector. Work is currently on-going to co-construct and deliver training to meet identified training needs for childcare providers and early years staff in schools, which is being delivered by individual teams and collaboratively where appropriate. To launch this approach the first NPT Early Years Conference took place in March 2024. The in-person conference was attended by 130 childcare staff, nursery teachers and internal and external professionals. The conference focused upon the importance of play in the Early Years, underpinned by the Enabling Learning pedagogical



approach and sharing of Early Years service information. As a service we will continue to work with early years colleagues to develop and deliver training to early years staff in settings and schools to communicate pedagogical approaches consistently. The impact of this approach will be monitored by the Early Years Professional Learning Group and evaluation information used to inform further training and support needs.

NPT Skills & Training Unit continue with their Childcare Apprenticeship programme as well offering a commercial training programme. NPT College continues to deliver Childcare courses. NPT College delivery of funded Level 3 Transition to Playworks. Safeguarding and Paediatric First Aid training is currently being delivered to ensure providers meet the revised requirements under the National Minimum Standards for Childcare by November 2024.

The team work effectively with the Early Years ALN and Early Years Education Psychology Teams to support settings to implement ALN reform. Development officers continue to use the skills developed as part of Person-Centred Practices (PCP) training to support childcare practitioners as part of their visits, with completion of person-centred tools where required. They continue to promote the EYMAP panel guidelines to settings, share ALN updates including information regarding the Education Psychology helpline for parents and the Education Psychologists 'Work it Together Wednesday' sessions. It should be noted that all support visits take place in person.

### **Transition**

The team is working closely with partners to continue to develop transition processes from home to provider and from provider to school. Childcare providers continue to build relationships with schools around transition of children from setting to school. This builds positive relationships and communication as well as raising the profile of childcare providers in a professional capacity. Where required information is shared by the Flying Start Training and Transition Officer at cluster meetings and at individual transition meetings arranged in line with Neath Port Talbot protocol. Training in relation to transition has been increased due to demand, with sessions looking at transition into setting and within setting as well as from setting to school. Staff are finding training sessions particularly useful for upskilling and awareness of strategies to support transition. In addition to formal transition training the Flying Start Training and Transition Officer has spent time with individual settings supporting the transition of individual children into setting and to manage transitions within their day. The Training and Transition Officer has worked with ALN Transition and Partnership Officer to develop an



Early Years Passport. This contains all relevant information in relation the child and is a working document, started on transition into setting, updated accordingly during the child’s time at a setting and then moves with the child to school as part of their transition journey. New Child Development Tracking documents created in line with Flying Start guidance, ECPLC guidance and Curriculum for Wales, have also been included in Early Years Passport, with training and support delivered around this. The Early Years Flying Start Childcare Lead in collaboration with ALN Transition and Partnership Officer, has co-ordinated “Cuppa With Your Cluster” sessions, that are aimed at school based senior leaders and nursery staff, childcare settings and all early years professionals within the cluster community. They are held in central locations within communities and are informal sessions aimed at developing relationships between settings and schools to support the transition process. Initial meetings have been very successful with positive feedback from most participants. Moving forward sessions will take place on a six monthly basis with sessions being arranged by the Early Years Flying Start Training and Transition Officer (TTO) and ALN Transition and Partnership Officer. Overall, transition to school is working well, however, the team continue to develop effective partnership working with the Early Years ALN team and schools to ensure this process is effective. Working with the childcare sector and partners to develop a more equitable Early Years offer to ensure our youngest learners transition into education successfully is a key priority for the service.

### **Support for children with emerging or additional learning needs to access childcare**

The team work closely with the Inclusion Service and multi-agency professionals to ensure all children are able to access inclusive childcare that meets their needs. Children with emerging or identified additional needs are supported to access and fully participate in childcare through childcare funding schemes such as O Gam I Gam and the Childcare Offer Additional Support Grant. However, multi-agency professionals across all early years services have identified that the number of pre-school/nursery children who require additional support to access childcare is increasing. As a result, a review of the needs of children who require additional support to access childcare and how this is funded will take place in 2024/25 to ensure we continue to meet children’s needs when accessing childcare effectively.

### **Childcare Provider Sustainability**

With the aim of supporting childcare sufficiency, access to Welsh Language provision, and children with additional learning needs, the team administers grant funding via an Early Years Grant panel, awarding childcare provision with sustainability grants. The Early Years Grant Panel make these awards in a joint panel with Childcare and Early Years Capital Grants to remove any duplication. However, across



the childcare sector, staff recruitment, retention and sustainability are becoming an increasing issue. The local authority is providing sustainability support to the sector as set out in the CSA Action Plan and programme delivery plans.

As of March 2024, there are 2393 registered childcare places available in Neath Port Talbot, a decrease of 33 places. This decrease reflects the fragile nature of the sector in challenging economic climate. Supporting the quality within and sustainability of the childcare sector is a key priority.

### **NPT Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP)**

The NPT WESP clearly demonstrates the local authority's commitment to expanding high quality Welsh-medium places across childcare settings and schools. The team have benefitted from the appointment of a Development Officer (DO) who leads on supporting providers to develop the Welsh language. The team are passionate about the Welsh Language, and work with the English Medium settings to improve the Welsh they offer through an award based Welsh Language quality assurance scheme "Welsh in Childcare", which includes support, access to training and drop-in Welsh language acquisition sessions. The change in categories may mean over time a move from category 1 English language settings to category 2 English / Welsh language settings. The Welsh DO continues to work with other DOs to support and promote the use of Welsh in all childcare settings. This includes providing fortnightly Welsh sessions to the team to raise their knowledge and confidence in the Welsh language.

The **WG Childcare and Early Years Capital Programme** provides funding for Flying Start expansion and the continuing development of the sector to support The Childcare Offer for Wales. Areas of need identified in the CSA and WESP are used to identify and plan childcare capital builds in partnership with the LA SSIP team and WG. Through recent capital grant funding four additional Welsh medium/bilingual childcare settings are due to open during 2024/2025: Neath Central, YGG Trebannws, Cwmavon Community and YGG Blaendulais. In total this will provide approximately 70 additional Welsh/bilingual childcare places across Neath Port Talbot. Further need identified by the WESP and CSA will continue be addressed by the local authority. This will continue to be a priority for the service.



### **The Flying Start Programme:**

A total of 2046 eligible children aged 0-4 have benefited from Flying Start during 2023/24, this includes 1129 children who have benefitted from Flying Start funded childcare. An additional 92 children accessed Flying Start childcare via an outreach childcare placement as agreed by our Early Years Multi-Agency Panel (EYMAP). 28 families have accessed parenting support via our EYMAP panel. For a detailed evaluation of the programme, please see the Welsh Government Flying Start Progress Reports 2023/24.

**Early Years and Flying Start Parenting/Family Support:** The Flying Start Parenting team provide an effective range of targeted support to families. Setting staff and Flying Start professionals provide valuable advice and guidance to parents to help them to support their children's social and emotional development as well as their learning needs. Parents can access a good range of structured group programmes and bespoke parenting support. It should be noted that the parenting team have worked effectively and proactively within their allocated cluster area/communities whilst also covering areas which have been without a designated worker due to staff shortages during the last financial year. However, the parenting team have engaged effectively with parents, with contacts ranging from wellbeing checks to formal courses in all areas of Flying Start including expansion areas and outreach cases. The team have re-established their Stay & Plays in all areas across NPT Flying Start areas and these have continued to be well attended and utilised in order to respond to the individual needs of each area across the county. These groups offer a place for play opportunities for children and promoting positive parent/child interaction. As well as it being a base for their hubs to work alongside the wider Flying Start agencies e.g. Health, SALT and Education. In addition, they have continued to secure attendance from outside agencies on an 'ad hock' basis to offer advice and information that is of relevance to further the families support and journey with Flying Start Parenting Support.

The team continue to implement the 'Henry' programme, which provides a wide range of support for families from pregnancy to age 12 including workshops, programmes, resources and online help. All support for families is underpinned by the HENRY approach to supporting behaviour change which helps parents gain the confidence, knowledge and skills they need to help the whole family adopt a healthier, happier lifestyle and to give their children a great start in life. Officers report that this programme has had a valuable impact upon families who have engaged in the programme. Currently the team have also been planning and implementing packages of support for families in NPT that will or could be affected by TATA steel closures/job losses. Drop in support and groups are in place for families to



receive information and support as and when needed. Outside agencies can be invited along to these such as career opportunities/financial aid support/advice. The team will continue to provide support in a responsive and flexible manner. The Male Carers Support Group continues to run weekly with dad's and carers coming along to meet with our dad's worker in a safe place where they can speak openly and learn how to play comfortably with their children.

In total, during 2023/24, the team have offered over 90 formal and informal courses. 1424 parents signed up to take part in courses with the majority attending the sessions. Team evaluations demonstrate a clear positive distance travelled as a result of attending courses for the majority of families. Flying Start professionals highlight the parental engagement in group sessions continues to be inconsistent since the pandemic. Increasing parental engagement in family support programmes is a priority. The team are currently continuing to plan family support service delivery with the Families First Children and Families team to ensure consistency and avoid duplication to address the increasing need of the communities they work with. Working across both parenting teams to develop a consistent universal and targeted offer is a priority for the service.

**Health Visiting** and health staff including CNN's and midwives continue to provide vital support for children and families. Community based contacts and group sessions have been undertaken successfully. Full compliance with the Heathy Child Wales Programme has been maintained. However, it should be highlighted that safeguarding issues are increasing in Neath Port Talbot and mental health issues are more prevalent. Work is progressing with PRAMS to work closely in clusters to develop services for young mums in the peri-natal period. In addition, the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme Perinatal Mental Health and Emotional Support project supported families across the local authority in 2023/24. As a LA, we continue to work with SBUHB to continue to progress this work following the cessation of funding. The team continue to work closely with colleagues in Health and Social Services to support families.

**The Midwifery team** continues to work effectively with families across Neath Port Talbot. The team has been affected by capacity issues, however, these are being managed appropriately. Current caseload (40 cases at March 2024) includes 62.5% living in Flying Start areas and the remainder of clients accessing support through Outreach. 5% of clients were 15 years or under, 12.5% were 16 years old, 20%



were 17, 15% were 18 & 47.5% were 19+ years old. 27 postnatal and 13 antenatal. The team provide valuable support to clients, this includes support with breast feeding and baby wearing.

**The Speech and Language team** provide effective support to children and families. The team offer universal and targeted support to children and families. Universal messages have been delivered via the social media accounts of Neath Port Talbot Flying Start and Swansea Bay Speech and Language Therapy (SLT). This included strategies from BBC's Tiny Happy People and the Talk With Me campaign. The team delivered 21 Elklan's Let's Talk with Your Baby (LTWYB) courses. This course is offered universally and reached 141 parent/carers and their children. Feedback from parents evidences that the majority of parents felt more confident following the course.

During 2023/24, 163 requests for SLT assessments were received, which is a slight increase compared to 2022/23. Requests were received from the Flying Start Health Visiting team, the generic Health Visiting team, Childcare WellComm screening, Paediatrician's and children in receipt of an outreach placement identified as needing SLT support. The SLT team provided assessment, support and intervention.

At a targeted level, 80 children and their families completed a Hanen Intervention package. The aim of this intervention is to equip the parents with strategies they need to support their child's language development through everyday interactions. An additional 59 children were supported via a bespoke contact with the Speech and Language Therapist. Examples of a bespoke contact would be either a visit into their childcare setting to further support the staff working with the child; a review of the child in their home or supporting the transition into or out of a Flying Start childcare setting via a child centred transition meeting. As a result of this intervention parents and staff equipped with the strategies to continue to support their children's communication development.

198 Flying Start Flying Start children were supported through multi-disciplinary team meetings with the Flying Start Educational Psychology service, Health Visitor, Child Care setting and/or school. These meeting are conducted to support those children identified to be at high risk/vulnerable to developing persistent SLC difficulties or with an emerging ALN. 16 children were supported via a bespoke transition meeting or via a Child Centred Review resulting in 14 of these children acquiring an Individual Development Plan as a result. However, school-based monitoring data evidences that across the local authority many children's speech, language and communication



skills are below the expected developmental level on entry to school. As part of the local authority's approach to address this issue, investment from Flying Start funding has been used to recruit two additional speech and language assistants. As a result, a coordinated universal offer of speech and language support is being implemented in partnership with Health services. This development will build on the success of the Early Years Integration Programme and existing Flying Start speech and language intervention and governance and will build on the evidence-based practice already in place. The impact of this initiative will be monitored as part of Flying Start programme monitoring. The service is committed to supporting the continued work of the Speech and Language team to support the development of children's speech, language and communication skills. This is a priority for the service.

### **Flying Start Expansion**

The Flying Start expansion programme is currently being rolled out across the local authority. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, Neath Port Talbot has made significant progress in ensuring a more equitable Early Years offer, by exceeding its Phase 1 Flying Start expansion goal of engaging an additional 127 children aged 0-4 into the Flying Start programme. Phase 2 commenced in April 2023 and included the high-quality childcare element of Flying Start only. As of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2024, 322 eligible children have been offered funded Flying Start childcare, with 184 places accepted to date. As a result of expansion, an increased number of children in a growing geographical range of areas have accessed high quality early years funded childcare provision that supports their early developmental skills, including speech, language and communication and personal, social and wellbeing skills. However, the expansion of Flying Start childcare has put additional pressure on childcare providers to offer additional spaces whilst meeting the criteria to become a Flying Start provider. Expansion has put additional pressure on the capacity of the Early Years and Flying Start Childcare teams to provide support and guidance to new Flying Start settings, including the increased impact upon capital maintenance and developments. In addition, the expansion of Flying Start childcare has begun to put pressure upon parenting teams, the Early Years ALN team, Health and Social Services as more children access childcare provision and work with childcare professionals. However, due to skilful work of the team, 45 childcare settings and 4 childminders offer funded Flying Start Childcare. Before this initiative was introduced, funded Flying Start childcare was available in 28 settings. By implementing expansion through offering all providers the opportunity to offer Flying Start funded places, the service is enabling and securing capacity within the sector as expansion continues to progress. We are currently awaiting further information from WG regarding the next phase of expansion.





### **Early Years Integration Transformation Programme**

During 2022 – 2024, WG funding for the Early Years Integration Transformation programme supported the development of an integrated approach across early years' service. However, funding for the programme ended in March 2024. Continuous self-evaluation identified the needs of the community and informed the work of the programme. The programme investigated different models of working in an integrated way through the six pilot projects. For example, in the Dulais Valley, health visitor services worked in partnership with schools and local community projects to provide effective advice and support for parents, including speech and language support through 'Baby Massage' and breast-feeding support. Professionals involved in the project note that there has been a change in culture with regards to integrated working and early monitoring evidence demonstrates that there have been improvements in outcomes for children and families in the area, helping to reduce isolation, encouraging new relationships, increased health outcomes for families, improved wellbeing and development. The development of models to support integrated working will continue to be implemented across the Swansea Bay University Health Board region through the Early Years Integration Steering Group. A final evaluation of the programme is currently taking place, with the results being used to inform the local, regional and Welsh Government's national approach to early years integration. Following the cessation of Early Years Integration funding, the integrated family support element of the work will be progressed through the Early Years and Flying Start Parenting/Family Support workstream.

### **Understanding needs, engaging and collaboration:**

Across the Early Years Service:

- The Neath Port Talbot Childcare Sufficiency Audit (CSA) involves consultation with childcare settings, parents, and children about the services they receive, with WG also funding national family consultations. Outcomes of the CSA are published on the NPT website and inform short, medium and long term plans over a five year period.
- All Early Years and Childcare teams are widely represented on many national and local meetings, forums and boards. As a result, the teams are well informed and able to respond to national and local issues that impact service needs and outcomes.
- Families across the authority are informed of the services the teams provide through the NPT website including the Family Information Service and Flying Start pages, NPT social media channels, information from health professionals and information from childcare providers.



- Elected members are kept informed about the performance of the service through reports to Cabinet Scrutiny committee.
- All teams engage with childcare settings, children, families and professionals to collate, monitor and evaluate feedback in relation to the four WG funded Early Years programmes.
- Across the sector, families and professionals are actively encouraged to engage with national consultation in relation to early years services, for example, Flying Start.

#### **Early Years and Flying Start Childcare Team:**

- The team collect evaluation and monitoring information from childcare settings, specifically around training, grants and other schemes such as Health and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme (HSPSS).
- Childcare settings are asked for feedback regarding the services provided at many points during their involvement with the team, so that adaptations can be made where possible to future work and support provided. The team collected detailed monitoring data from childcare settings, some of which is collected via Flying Start monitoring processes. This is submitted to WG quarterly, contributing to national data set and evaluations.
- The team plan to continue to take 'The Right Way' children's right based approach forward. This will include core staff delivery, and training to embed the new 'Right Way in the Early Years' training from the Children's Commissioner for Wales into childcare settings and groups that we run.
- The team have many childcare provider forum events with the sector, both to provide information and listen to the sectors' views collaboratively.

#### **Flying Start Teams:**

- Families are asked for feedback regarding the services provided at many points during their journey through Flying Start services, so that adaptations can be made where possible to future work and support provided. Detailed data is collected via monitoring from all teams and staff members and submitted to WG quarterly. This contributes to national data sets and evaluations, including valued distance travelled data.
- Flying Start Expansion: Data from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), inclusion data around children with emerging needs or ALN, Early Years Multi-Agency Panel (EYMAP) referrals and Early



Intervention Panel (EIP) data has been collected. This will continue to inform any rationale regarding geographical areas for expansion, alongside any modifications to referral process and criteria, to ensure that we understand and respond to the needs of the children and families within NPT, encouraging continued high levels of engagement with the programme.

#### **Early Years Integration Transformation Programme:**

- The final evaluation of the programme will be used to inform the work of Early Years services, particularly in relation to Early Years and Flying Start Parenting/Family support.
- The final evaluation of the programme will be used to inform the work of strategic regional partnership working.

The service collaborates effectively with wider teams across the ELLS directorate and across Health, Social Services, childcare providers and third sector partners. There is a strategic directorate approach to planning to meet the needs of children, young people and their families. As a result, appropriate support is developed and implemented to enable children to grow and develop through engaging experiences and effective environments facilitated by enabling adults in the early years.

Teams within the service work on distinct programme areas, which are funded separately. However, collaboration between teams is strong, driven by an ethos of partnership working. Delivery plans are developed and monitored jointly across the teams, at an operational and strategic level. This mitigates against duplication across the service. Wherever possible within the terms of grant funding streams, resources and funding are used across teams to secure efficiency of service and expand capacity of teams. Across the service, teams work with childcare providers successfully to support the delivery of high-quality childcare. The children, families and communities that teams work within are key stakeholders in informing and shaping the services and outcomes.

#### **How and what can we do better**

During 2023/24 the **NPT Early Years, Children and Young People's plan** was developed. This partnership plan articulates the local authority's approach to delivering and improving Early Years services across Neath Port Talbot. The plan will be directly linked to corporate, directorate and service plans as appropriate.



Self-evaluation evidence including programme monitoring evidence, participation evidence and the CSA inform our priorities. All actions support service, directorate and corporate priorities:

- On-going monitoring and review of the service to ensure sufficient capacity to offer effective, sustainable support as the service evolves.
- Continue to use quantitative and qualitative data effectively, including the CSA, to evaluate the impact of priorities and actions and inform future planning.
- Continue to manage budgets effectively to secure planned outcomes across all teams.
- Continue to plan effectively for the on-going expansion of Flying Start childcare as part of the wider system review to develop equitable early years offer with internal and external partners.
- Continue to progress towards equitable early years offer of family support, taking forward the work of the Early Years Integration programme and Flying Start Parenting support.
- Continue to engage with communities, especially hard to reach families, to understand needs and inform future planning.
- Continue to develop a collaborative approach to training and support across the childcare sector and schools.
- Continue to improve transition systems and processes to support all children to access childcare and education successfully.
- Review data monitoring systems to help understand the impact of services on children and families.
- Invest in and improve database systems that can link with health and education data, for longitudinal progress tracking of children.
- Continue to support childcare providers to be sustainable and recruit and retain staff through workforce development.
- Continue to promote the childcare sector and advocate further at WG level for a higher profile of the sector. This will support NPT to sustain and further develop high quality, equitable, childcare provision that is supported by internal and external services through effective integration in the early years.
- Continue to have clear continuing professional development (CPD) plans for staff to support career progression, succession planning and staff retention.
- Continue to provide appropriate on-going training for staff to ensure they undertake their roles skilfully; this includes support for staff well-being.



- Continue to work with internal and external partner effectively, including third sector partners. This includes securing clear commitment to the integration of services at an operational and strategic level
- Continue to plan and co-ordinate with other early years services to help avoid wider duplication and to ensure consistency of messages. This includes continued implementation of the legacy of Early Years Integration work and joint work with Education and Children & Young People Services.
- Continue to work to meet the objectives within the NPT WESP.

#### How do we know

Across the service outcomes are evaluated effectively and inform future priorities using the following self-evaluation evidence:

- All areas of the service make good use of quarterly and annual monitoring data to evaluate progress against service, directorate and corporate priorities.
- The CSA articulates the areas of strength and development within NPT. Actions are reviewed regularly by relevant subgroups and an annual progress report is created to evaluate progress against priorities. The next review will be undertaken in June 2024.
- In line with programme plans, all budgets are spent effectively and on time to ensure planned outcomes are achieved (as articulated through monitoring of CCG plans).
- All teams meet on a regular basis to share information and feedback, evaluate progress and plan next steps in service delivery.

#### **Early Years and Flying Start Childcare**

- Childcare monitoring visits support and secure high quality across the sector.
- Services are in line with WG guidance. Team leads are responsible for ensuring all aspects of their service area is compliant with the guidance. WG feedback is always positive and shows confidence in NPT.
- Quarterly reports show good progress and clear improvement to the childcare sector.
- Support for sustainability of childcare providers has had a positive impact upon the sufficiency of provision.
- Feedback from childcare providers and families is positive.
- Capital build spend is fully utilised and spent on time.



### **Flying Start**

- Termly programme monitoring for WG demonstrates successful compliance against monitoring criteria in relation to the Flying Start Programme.
- Comprehensive WG statistics are collated, and compliance is strong. The local authority is a green local authority for monitoring.
- Quarterly reports show good progress across the programme core objectives.
- Feedback from stakeholders' evidences that programme reputation is high with communities and members.
- The programme has often over exceeded the CAP expected number of children and worked with many more within budget.

### **Early Years Integration Transformation Programme (2023/24):**

- Dedicated Coordinator in place to evaluate impact of integration work and create a model to take forward beyond the funding.
- External evaluation evidences progress being made against planned outcomes and the impact the project/pilots are having on families/communities.
- Information is shared back quarterly with the EYI steering group. They make any decisions regarding the success of the project, budget, further outcomes and if any changes are to be made in line with the business plan.
- All the projects complete scorecards monthly which feed into the report for the Steering Group which then feeds into the PSB and contributes to the WG Progress report which is submitted on a six monthly basis.
- There is a monthly Project leads and Coordinators meeting where any information/ issues are dealt with and if necessary, these will be escalated to the Steering Group for action.
- There are also regular meetings with the project leads to discuss any day to day issues with the projects and to report on successes.
- Every project keeps data relevant to their service and this is used in the wider pathfinder context to look at integration across the board.

Risk



The Early Years service is predominantly grant funded. As a result, delivery and continuity of service is reliant upon continued funding from Welsh Government. This also has a potential negative impact upon the recruitment and retention of staff as most posts are grant funded. Overall, recruitment of staff is not a challenge, and the retention of staff is good. However, the expansion of Flying Start creates a possible risk around the capacity of existing staff. As part of expansion, there are strategic plans in place to increase the capacity of the team and create sustainability within the programme in the short, medium and long term. Succession planning is in place and will continue to evolve as capacity within the team develops to deliver priorities and outcomes.

The on-going impact of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and the War in Ukraine continue to put significant pressure on communities within Neath Port Talbot and in turn demands upon service demand and delivery. However, strategic and operational plans direct the work of the service and mitigate known risk as appropriate

<b>Risk Management</b>				
<b>Risk Title</b>	<b>Date From</b>	<b>Date To</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>	
			<b>Original</b>	<b>Latest</b>
<b>Risk 1: THREAT - Limited capacity of existing Early Years and Childcare Team</b>	<b>01.04.2023</b>	<b>31.03.2025</b>	<b>6 Likelihood 2: unlikely,</b>	<b>6 Likelihood 2: unlikely,</b>



			<b>Impact 3: Medium risk</b>	<b>Impact 3: Medium risk</b>
Risk action 1: recruit additional staff from Flying Start expansion funding			N/A	N/A
Risk action 2: contribute to service restructure with clear gap analysis			N/A	N/A
<b>Risk 2: THREAT - Loss of grant funding or changes to grant criteria, especially in relation to Early Years Integration</b>	<b>01.04.2022</b>	<b>31.03.2025</b>	<b>6 Likelihood 2: unlikely, Impact 3: Medium risk</b>	<b>12 Likelihood 4: Very likely, Impact 3: High risk</b>
Risk action 1: Continue to attend Welsh Government meetings to understand potential changes to funding.			N/A	N/A
Risk action 2: Report any potential threats to ELLL senior managers, outlining impacts to services and to children and families.			N/A	N/A
Risk action 3: Identify and apply for additional funding when it becomes available.			N/A	N/A
<b>Risk 3: THREAT: Various processes not 100% digital</b>	<b>01.04.2022</b>	<b>31.03.2025</b>	<b>6 Likelihood 2: unlikely, Impact 3: Medium risk</b>	<b>4 Likelihood 2: unlikely, Impact 2: Low risk</b>





Risk action 1: Online pilot grant form under development			N/A	N/A
Risk action 2: Develop further evaluations and data collection digitally			N/A	N/A
<b>Risk 4: THREAT: Childcare Provider sufficiency: workforce recruitment and retention, particularly regarding Welsh speaking staff</b>	<b>01.04.2023</b>	<b>31.03.2025</b>	<b>6 Likelihood 2: unlikely, Impact 3: Medium risk</b>	<b>9 Likelihood 3: likely, Impact 3: Medium risk</b>
<b>Risk action 1:</b> Continue to provide sufficiency support through grant WG grant funding			N/A	N/A
<b>Risk action 2:</b> Continue to provide training and support to childcare providers			N/A	N/A

Key Actions		Responsible Officer	Start Date	End Date	Well-Being Objective / Governance & Resource <i>(contributes to)</i>
1	Expenditure forecast to be contained within budget.	Lisa Clement-Jones Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2024	31/03/2025	Gov. & Resource
2	Early Years, Children and Young People's Plan implemented to direct the work of the service.	Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2024	31/03/2029	WBO1



3	Monitor and review the structure of the service to ensure sufficient capacity to offer effective, sustainable support to children, young people and families.	Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	Gov. & Resource
4	To work with partners to use the outcomes from the Early Years Integration pilot projects to inform next steps in developing an equitable and integrated early years system.	Cathy Bowley Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1
5	Ensure a more equitable Early Years offer is available across the borough to improve the readiness of our youngest learners for education by expanding high quality childcare, including Flying Start funded childcare.	Lisa Clement-Jones Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 3, WBO 4
6	To review with partners how we meet the needs of children with additional needs in receipt of childcare support funding. The outcomes of evaluation work will be used to inform future planning to ensure the needs of children continue to be met through a responsive and sustainable model.	Lisa Clement-Jones Natasha Walsh Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2024	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO4
7	Ensure identified childcare settings benefit from capital funding for improvement.	Lynne Baker Lisa Clement-Jones Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 2, WBO 3, WBO 4
8	Ensure revenue support for childcare providers to secure sustainability and quality improvement.	Lynne Baker Lisa Clement-Jones / Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 2, WBO 3, WBO 4
9	To develop a clearly articulated transition pathway of support to enable children to access childcare and education. This will include working with childcare providers, schools and professionals to implement purposeful systems, processes and resources to support children and families during their transitional journey.	Lynne Baker/Lisa Clement-Jones/ Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1
10	Continue to provide high quality training opportunities for the Early Years and childcare sector in line with Welsh Government's vision for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care and Curriculum for Wales guidance, along with wider mandatory training. This will enable practitioners to support children to make progress and achieve their developmental milestones.	Lynne Baker Lisa Clement-Jones Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 2, WBO 4



11	To work with members of the Early Years Professional Learning Group to develop and implement a collaborative approach to training and support across the childcare sector and schools.	Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2024	31/03/2026	WBO1
12	To continue to implement actions within the WESP Outcome 1 plan	Lisa Clement-Jones Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 3
13	To continue to develop Early Years Integration, with a focus upon supporting families to access and engage with family support, Flying Start parenting and promoting the Flying Start Outreach programme.	Cathy Bowley Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1
14	Continue to develop collaborative working between the Flying Start and Children and Families parenting teams and partners to secure a consistent family support offer.	Cathy Bowley Rebecca Thomas Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 2, WBO 4
15	Working in partnership with SBU HB, to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flying Start Health Visiting services for all Flying Start eligible children under the age of 4, reaching the CAP of 1972 children.</li> <li>Flying Start Midwifery service: this will include antenatal one to one support with young vulnerable mothers.</li> <li>Every child in a Flying Start area should have early access to ongoing appropriate support for speech language and communication development, resulting in meaningful contacts with appropriate staff.</li> <li>An effective Outreach programme, with a focus upon developing 'Born into Care' midwifery support.</li> </ul>	Lisa Clement-Jones /SBUHB/ Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	WBO1, WBO 4
16	To work with SB UHB Speech and Language Therapy team and the Inclusion Service to further develop an equitable universal and targeted support model to support children's speech, language and communication development.	Lisa Clement-Jones /SBUHB/ Sarah Griffiths			
17	To further develop digital monitoring systems to capture relevant information.	Allison Harris / Lisa Clement Jones/ Sarah Griffiths	01/04/2023	31/03/2025	Gov. & Resource



Performance Measures		Actual 2022/23 (full year)	Actual 2023/24 (full year)	Target 2024/25	Well-Being Objective / Governance & Resource (contributes to)
1	Increase number of Welsh Language and Bilingual registered childcare spaces – Flying Start settings/Private settings.	291	328	>350	WBO1, WBO 2, WBO3, WBO4,
2	Increase number of English Medium registered childcare spaces - Flying Start settings/Private settings.	2116	2065	>2065	WBO1, WBO 2, WBO4,
3	Increase the number of unique beneficiaries reached in Flying Start expansion areas.	129 (Phase 1)	322 (Phase 2)	Continue to implement programme (Awaiting further information from WG)	WBO1

Version Control	
Final draft agreed with Head of Service: Hayley Lervy	Date: 31.05.2023
Copy shared with Relevant Cabinet Member: Cllr Nia Jenkins	Date: 31.05.2023
Latest version approved by Head of Service (if changes made):	Date: 31.05.24



Date of last completed self- assessment cycle: April 2024