

12th May 2020 – Childcare Briefing

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Welsh Government (WG) has required that childcare is made available to the children of all essential workers (key workers) and for vulnerable children. This requirement, as interpreted in Powys, is for childcare to be available from 8am to 6pm for seven days every week, inclusive of bank holidays. This is to meet demand as required by essential workers and childcare places for vulnerable children.

Childcare Assistance Scheme

WG are redirecting the funding available through the Childcare Offer for Wales to ensure it supports those families most in need at this time. WG will fund the childcare costs for pre-school children of critical workers during the COVID-19 outbreak. The WG will also continue to fund childcare provision for vulnerable pre-school children.

Under the new scheme, critical workers will have full access to funded childcare provision for their pre-school aged children. This scheme needs to be up and running as quickly as possible, so WG have given Local Authorities flexibility to manage the provision and demand locally.

Childcare Offer payments to childcare settings will continue for three months for children already in the system as of 18 March, even where those children are no longer accessing that childcare provision as a result of staying home. The payments would be the equivalent to the term-time hours the parent had previously booked. This arrangement ceases on the 18th June 20. This will have a financial impact on all settings which are not currently providing childcare provision including those local authority settings based within schools which have closed. The childcare offer funding will cease for these settings between the 18th June 2020 and until the childcare offer scheme is reinstated.

There is no upper, or lower, threshold on the number of hours of childcare that critical workers can access. They should be able to access the number of hours of childcare that they require to cover their working hours.

Each of these providers will be in receipt of existing childcare offer funding up to the 18th June 20 which needs to be considered and deducted from any additional payments from the new scheme.

In addition those settings in receipt of Flying Start or Early Years Education funding will have elements of this funding for staffing deducted from any payments from the new scheme to avoid double funding and to achieve value for money for public finances.

The funding model agreed with WG and level of funding available has communicated to all open settings. Communication to all settings which have closed has been issued in order to establish their status so decisions on future local authority funding to be paid can be reached and implemented.

Demand for childcare has increased following the announcement of the WG childcare scheme.

Current Situation

The Early Years Childcare workforce is small in Powys. Many of the settings are privately owned and run and the local authority is unable to force them to remain open. Private settings are eligible to furloughing their staff and close so that staff still receive 80% of their wages.

The situation as of the date of this report is that:

- Many Early Years Childcare Settings have closed and not able/willing to provide the service required.
- Families register their childcare requirements online by 3pm every Wednesday with Powys and the Childcare Team allocate places accordingly. Confirmation of places are emailed to families the following day.
- All children requiring childcare have been allocated a place in one of the open settings.
- There are 29 settings (including childminders) currently providing Early Years Childcare and would be eligible for funding through the new scheme. The make-up of the settings vary and these consist of the following;
 - Maintained settings based within schools and share premises with the Childcare Hubs.
 - Private settings based within schools and share premises with the Childcare Hubs.
 - Non maintained privately run settings
 - Childminders
 - Third sector providers
- The settings that remain open have different levels of existing funding from various funding streams.
- Once block bookings are made and the funding applied most settings will receive additional funding from the Childcare Assistance Scheme. A small number of settings will receive no additional funding due to the numbers of children attending and existing levels of funding already being provided.

There are 29 settings in Powys currently providing early years childcare to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Early Years childcare is provided between the hours of 8am to 6pm and is available 7 days a week including bank holidays. Opening hours will vary in order to meet demand in the locality. The demand for childcare has increased following the announcement of the WG scheme.

Due to the rurality of Powys it is important that we retain provision for families to access local childcare and it is for that reason Powys have opted to adopt the block booking model. This will allow for local provision whilst ensuring the sustainability of the childcare providers.

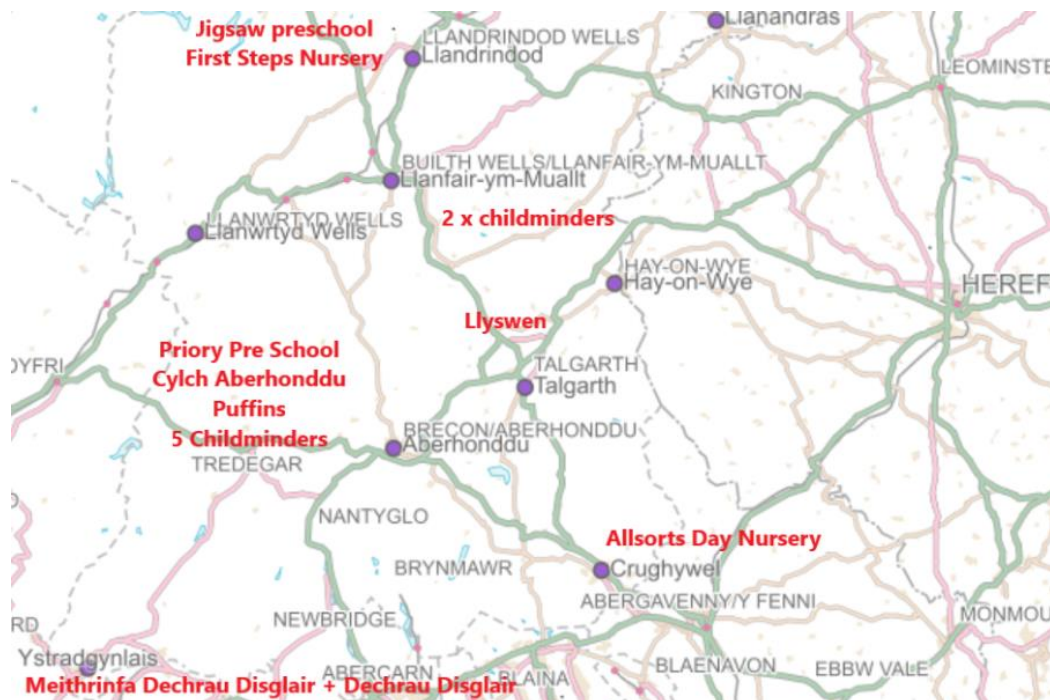
292 keyworkers have been supported with childcare provision by early years settings across Powys.

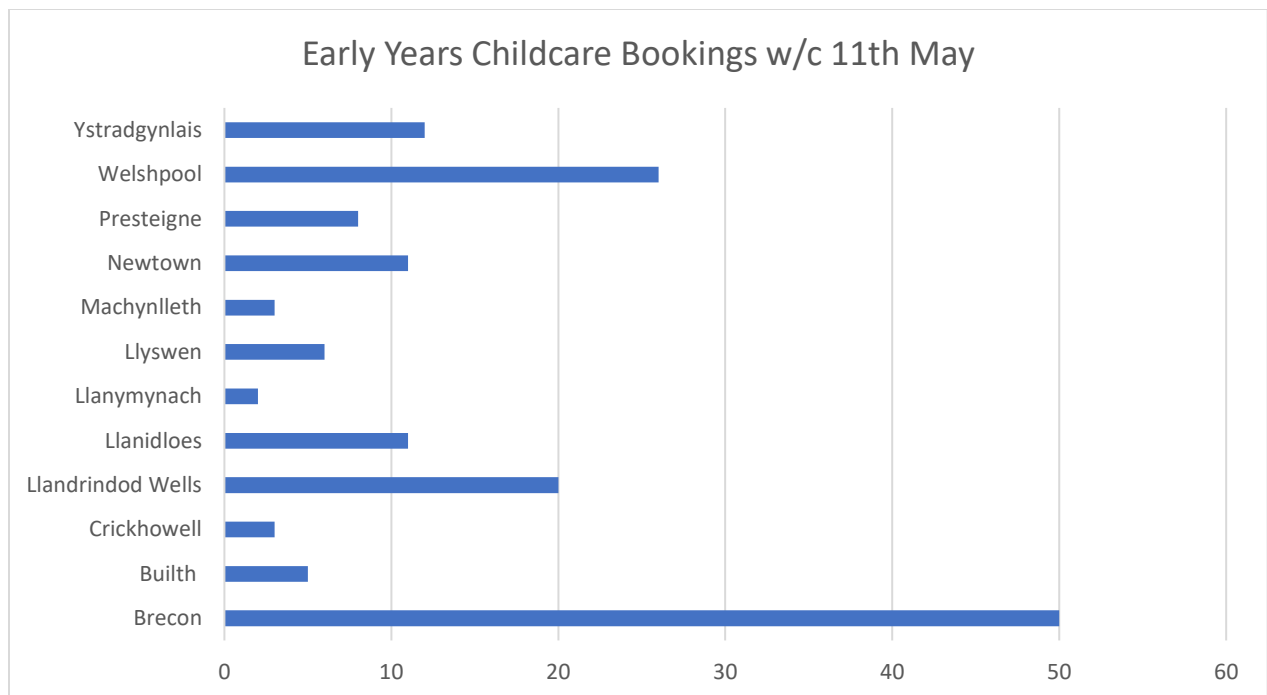
All available places will be allocated appropriately following the receipt of the online bookings from families.

North Powys



South Powys





*157 children booked into early years childcare settings w/c 11th May

*12 of the children booked into the early years childcare settings w/c 11th May are from vulnerable families.

Some early years staff have been deployed from local authority maintained settings which have closed to support the delivery of childcare in one of the remaining settings. These staffing costs have been met by the closed local authority maintained settings. Additional travel costs are being incurred for these local authority staff to travel to the settings which are currently providing childcare.

Challenges

The demand for early years childcare in Welshpool and Brecon has exceeded the capacity available. The Childcare Team have worked to provide additional early years childcare in these areas to meet this demand which has resulted in opening up further settings.

The current funding model has been agreed with WG, however there will be a review of funding levels for open settings post 18th June when the scheme changes. The Childcare Team will work closely with WG to consider and implement any changes.

Consideration needs to be given on the impact on LA maintained settings who have closed and will not receive the Childcare offer funding post 18th June.

The most significant challenge is the deployment of Local Authority Early Years Childcare workers. The Corporate Recruitment Team are working with the Childcare Team to deploy these staff to the settings which are currently providing childcare. Some staff are reluctant to travel to the open provision and are

already providing childcare at the emergency childcare hubs for school aged children. The sustainability of the early years childcare is dependent on enough resource being available to support the rotas in the early childcare settings.

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