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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Deputy Minister for Social Services
& Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee

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Cyf/Ref P-06-1303 Ein cyf/Our ref JMSS/01015/22

I would like to thank the Minister for her response to the petition.

However having read through the content of the response I do not feel the case she makes adequately addresses the issues raised in the petition.

The main case the petition wishes to identify is the lack of universal affordable and accessible childcare for all parents in Wales.

The response from the Minister instead reinforces the fact that what we have in Wales is a very piecemeal approach that provides **some** childcare for **some** parents **some** of the time – this is a long way from the request made by the petition and her response seems to make it clear she does not understand or is not aware of the lived reality for parents and carers across Wales, which is disappointing.

The following statements are taken from her response:

choice and flexibility for parents in the type of care parents use for their children,
I cannot see from the types of childcare the Minister refers to that choice and flexibility is in fact in place. The only schemes she references have restrictive conditions to be able to access them, cater for a very specific and narrow age range, run for only part of the day and/or part of the year and those days and times are often arbitrary in terms of how they match with parents employment or training patterns and set by the provider so in fact the idea of 'choice' is not evidenced in the reality of the provisions she identifies.

access to affordable and flexible childcare is often cited by parents, and particularly mothers, as one of the main barriers preventing them from working or progressing further in their careers.



Yes this is absolutely the case the petition is making. Affordable and accessible childcare is a barrier to women in particular enjoying equality in terms of employment and the various approaches detailed by the Minister do little to address this. The case is constantly made that women lag behind men in terms of earnings, retirement income etc and one of the biggest factors in the UK is this lack of affordable and accessible childcare. Until that is in place for all women equality will not be achievable.

expand early years provision to all two-year olds

Early years provision is not the same as full time childcare needed by parents in order to access employment. It is piecemeal, does not cover the full working day, nor the full working year, and only kicks in when children reach a certain age. I object to this even being included as a response that meets parental needs for childcare. Early years provision was never meant to be a responses to childcare needs, instead the funding and motivation behind this provision is to provide the 'flying start' and enrichment children need to thrive. I object to this being conflated with the need for reliable, affordable accessible childcare needed by working (or training) parents. Childcare needs to open at a time that allows parents to get to work, and close at a time that enables parents to work a full day, 52 weeks of the year – early years provision does neither of those.

12.5 hours of free childcare for children aged 2-3

Again I object to this being put forward as any kind of response to the need for full time, reliable, affordable and accessible childcare needed by parents and carers in order to take up employment. This only kicks in for a very short time in a child's life, does not run 52 weeks of the year and mostly parents do not have much control over which 12.5 hours in the week they are offered – eg mornings vs afternoons and some settings switch those two options on a term by term basis – how is a parents/carer meant to find a job or training course that can adapt tot that sort of pattern? This is a wholly inadequate response to the request in the petition.

The Summer of Fun 2022 sat alongside programmes like the Playworks scheme, which support access to play opportunities across Wales, and the School Holiday Enrichment Programme funded by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language. Again it feels like the Minister is throwing in anything and everything related to funding provided towards children, rather than providing a response connected to the substance of the petition, which is for full time, reliable, affordable and accessible childcare. Nothing in this extract from her response describes childcare that meets the needs of working parents.



I would like to make some further points that are personal to my experience and that of other families in Ceredigion and illustrate the case made by the petition.

The Childcare Offer

I manage a setting that registered to provide the Childcare Offer. What we found is that eligibility was so specific that the vast majority of parents who would have benefited from access to the scheme were not eligible. This does not meet the needs of working parents for many reasons – the very restrictive eligibility; the short hours it offers; the very small age range it covers; the number of weeks it provides. It is wholly inadequate as a response to the case made by the petition. It may be that a percentage of parents benefiting from the offer find it useful, but that does not at all reflect the views of the parents who are not eligible to access it, and it is their needs the petition seeks to reflect.

Choice and flexibility

I would really like the Minister to identify the areas in Wales where parents have the luxury of choice and flexibility in finding affordable local childcare that meets all their needs, and particularly showing me where that exists in Ceredigion?

To illustrate the need I would like to share the following:

Impact of lack of childcare example one

My niece is a Band 5 nurse and has a 1 year old and a 6 year old. During maternity leave in 2021 she applied for and got a placement as a Child Health nurse with Flying Start to start the process of training as a Health Visitor. Due to the lack of childcare in the summer holidays when her placement started I had to adjust my full time working hours to step in to care for the baby and the 5 year old because her partner also works full time and his employers were not flexible. She then found a childminder but within 6 months the childcare gave her notice and gave up childminding to train as a social worker. Again I had to adjust my working hours to care for both the children, the 1 year old during the day and the 5 year old after school. After a very stressful and tearful few weeks when she nearly gave up her chance to be a Health Visitor so many times, another childminder was found. And I now have to help by collecting the now 6 year old from school, impacting on my employment meaning I have to make up hours in the evening and at weekends. Like so many grandparents (I brought my niece up so am more like a parent than an aunt) my childcare role enables the younger generation to work.



Impact of lack of childcare example two

I manage a local charity and an employee recently was in tears explaining to me she was going to have to hand in her notice. She had started with us 2 years before, we had provided access to training for her to gain her Level 2 & 3 in Youthwork and she assisted with our 3 days a week youth clubs for 6 – 19 year olds. Her parents were not in the best of health (her father has since passed away) and were becoming exhausted looking after her 1.5 year old and his other grandparents worked full time as does her partner. S lives in a Flying Start area so we asked them for help, but her son was not of the right age, and then when he reached the right age the days and times they could offer did not match her employment. Before S started with us her work was waitressing in a local café, unfortunately due to lack of childcare she had to give up her youth work role with us, reducing the income for her family and taking a qualified and enthusiastic youth worker out of the sector.

Impact of lack of childcare example three

K works in the local supermarket and Post Office and has one son aged 8. She needs childcare after school and during school holidays. There is one playscheme in her local area and it runs for 2 weeks in the summer holidays and the after school club closes at 5.30pm (recently extended from 5pm). The only way she can continue to work is relying on her parents to collect her son from after school club as her shift ends at 5.30 and for them to care for him during school holidays. The fact that she has to rely on her parents so much causes family tensions.

If allowed I would be happy to collect many more stories from Ceredigion parents and grandparents, to illustrate the detrimental impacts caused by this lack of affordable, accessible childcare that meets the needs of working parents.

I am very disappointed by the Ministers response as it seems to illustrate a disconnect between the lived reality for parents in Wales and the belief held by those in power, which therefore does not provide much hope for any positive changes going forward.

I would hope that the Petitions Committee might reflect on the reality parents are facing and give some indication of a positive change in future policy?

Gill Byrne
Petitioner