

Gender Equality Forum

Thursday 6 July 2023, 10.45 – 12.15

Teams meeting

Attendees

Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (Chair)
Deputy Minister for Social Services
Cardiff University
Chwarae Teg
Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Wales
Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales
Homestart Cymru
National Federation of Women's Institutes Wales
Oxfam Cymru
Plan International UK
Welsh Women's Aid
Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales

Welsh Government officials

Early Years, Childcare & Play Division
Unpaid Carers and Older People's Rights
Equality & Human Rights Division

Welcome and Introductions

The Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (DMSP) welcomed attendees.

She explained that, in early May, the Minister for Social Justice was asked by the First Minister to take on some additional responsibilities, including the role of Chief Whip. Consequently, the DMSP will be taking forward additional responsibilities including chairing this Forum and implementing the Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan.

Update on actions from previous meetings

The revised Terms of Reference had been circulated and most members responded to the amendments. The DMSP asked for final agreement of the Terms of Reference. There were no objections to this.

A dedicated Gender Equality Forum webpage is being set up on the Welsh Government website which will initially include the Terms of Reference, membership, and publication of the meeting minutes. Names of the organisation will be published to allow for alternative representatives to attend without additional need for consent.

Officials have compiled a list of academics in the priority areas, such as childcare and unpaid care, and will be inviting relevant academics to future meetings.

Concerns were raised at the last meeting about the lack of Welsh Government officials working on the Women's Health plan. A new team is now in place and will be invited to the next Forum meeting.

The request for the Deputy Minister for Social Services (DMSS) to attend the Forum to provide an update on childcare and unpaid care has been actioned – see next agenda item.

Unpaid care and childcare - Deputy Minister for Social Services

The DMSS provided an update on childcare and unpaid care as both sectors impact disproportionately on women.

Childcare

Welsh Government currently invests more than £100m in childcare in Wales each year. In September 2022, the Childcare Offer was expanded to support parents in education and training. From September 2022 to date, the expansion has already supported 438 parents in education and training.

The Flying Start programme has been extended to deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all two-year-olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh-medium provision. The Phase 1 expansion is almost complete, with all Flying Start services being offered to over 2,500 additional children under four years of age. Phase 2 of the expansion began in April 2023 with the focus on delivering the childcare element.

During 2023-25, £46m will be invested in expanding Flying Start childcare to support long-term, positive impacts on the lives of those children and families across Wales facing the greatest challenges. It is expected that Phase 2 will support over 4,500 additional two-year-olds to access Flying Start childcare in 2023-24 and around 5,200 additional two-year-olds in 2024-25.

Measures aimed at sustaining and supporting the sector to address the economic challenges have been taken. These include the extension of 100% business rates relief for registered childcare premises until 31 March 2025. The hourly Childcare Offer rate paid to childcare providers has increased to £5 an hour and will be reviewed at least every 3 years.

The DMSS recognised the need to expand and support the high quality and skilled workforce. Welsh Government is working with Social Care Wales, who run the WeCare Wales recruitment campaigns and jobs portal, to attract people with the right skills and behaviours into the sector.

Alongside Social Care Wales, Business Wales and Careers Wales, Welsh Government has been working to encourage greater diversity and showcase the opportunities available.

This year, the 10 Year Childcare Play and Early years Workforce Development Plan will be refreshed. Through the review, Welsh Government intends to explore options for establishing a social partnership forum to focus on key issues facing the sector.

Welsh Government will carefully analyse the detail of the childcare announcements made in the Spring Budget by the UK Government.

Unpaid care

The legal definition, with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, of a carer is someone who provides unpaid care to an adult or disabled child. The Strategy for Unpaid Carers applies this definition.

The DMSS explained that it is important that we have a clear definition of this type of unpaid care which serves to distinguish it from childcare, whilst recognising in our policy work the commonalities between the two.

Welsh Government has acted consistently to improve the lives of unpaid carers. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 replaced the National Assembly for Wales Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010 and strengthened the statutory rights of unpaid carers. For the first time, unpaid carers had an equal right to an assessment and support as those that they care for

This year, as part of the efforts to protect public services, Welsh Government has provided an uplift of £227m to the local government settlement. This funding offers considerable flexibility for authorities to prioritise their services in line with the needs of their communities, including unpaid carers.

The DMSS outlined the mechanisms through which the voice of unpaid carers inform policy development and delivery. Welsh Government facilitates engagement with unpaid carers and professionals via the [Ministerial Advisory Group for Unpaid Carers](#) and its supporting engagement group which is facilitated by Carers Trust Wales. It also funds Children in Wales to host the Young Carers' Network.

Welsh Government's Strategy for Unpaid Carers and supporting Delivery Plan recognises the important role that employers play in enabling unpaid carers to work alongside their caring role.

The Carers Support Grant started in 2020. This fund has helped over 10,000 carers on low incomes to buy basic essential items. The Fund has also helped to identify a substantial number of carers who were previously unknown to services.

Forum members raised the following points:

- The TUC has a survey on caring and employment. Flexible working is not always available or accessible to employees. Some people face disciplinary proceedings due to their need to juggle work with caring responsibilities. Maternity pay is also problematical – the option to spread maternity pay equally across 12 months should be available to all.

- Parents of disabled children face even more barriers when trying to access childcare and may have to leave work to care for their children.
- Childcare provision is not always compatible with working patterns – needs flexibility.
- Following the UK budget announcement on childcare, how much money will come to Wales and how will it be spent? Is there a way to ensure it supports the poorest parents?
- Many of the early years' professionals are part-time. Need to work with the sector to tackle the capacity issues.
- Does Welsh Government have an aspiration to pay the real living wage in childcare settings? Why are the childcare workforce not part of the real living wage plan?
- Providers often don't look like the children they're looking after – little diversity in the workforce.
- Unpaid carers – anecdotal evidence suggests that carers assessments don't always translate into actual support.
- Expansion of Childcare Offer to those in education is only for those in Further/Higher education. Could it be broadened?
- Flying Start – is there scope to enable parents to add extra hours of childcare with the same provider to enable them to get nearer to full-time work?
- What needs to happen to get to universal provision of childcare?
- How are Welsh Government supporting parents who want to look after their own children? This choice should be supported.
- Childcare can be devalued because it is seen as 'free'.
- The support offered to two-year-olds is very different to that for three- and four-year-olds but the messages are confused and lead to lack of understanding of what is available.

The Deputy Minister for Social Services responded to the issues raised:

- Important to ensure that any increased provision is accompanied by the necessary increase in capacity across the sector to make it workable.
- There are significant pressures on budgets so decisions need to be made as to where any additional money will be spent.
- Welsh Government is working to support the poorest parents which is why the extended provision is being made via the Flying Start programme.
- Welsh Government has delivered its commitment to pay the real living wage to those working in social care. It doesn't include nursery settings, but this is something which is being considered.
- Diversity in childcare workforce – important work is being taken forward via the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan in this area.
- Data and information relating to carers assessments translating into action would be held by local authorities.
- Childcare Offer expanded to include those in FE/HE settings, but the intention is to expand it more broadly.

- Universal childcare is a longer-term aim but needs to be developed sustainably. It will be dependent upon funding available and capacity within the sector.
- More needs to be done for disabled children. Training is offered and separate funding is available. However, the challenge for parents is often finding a setting which is appropriate for the needs of the child.
- Different systems for two-year-olds and three/four-year-olds – through the expansion of Flying Start, we must do what we can to bring the two together.
- It is recognised that more flexible, wraparound provision is required and is being explored.

ACTION: DMSP and DMSS to meet to discuss low pay in care/childcare sectors and the work being undertaken by Cynnal Cymru.

ACTION: Welsh Government officials (childcare and unpaid care) to meet with Wales TUC to discuss their work on caring and childcare.

ACTION: Welsh Government officials (unpaid care) to investigate what data is held by local authorities regarding carers assessments translating into action and provide any information to members.

Links to documents shared by attendees

- Anti-racist training for the childcare and play sector: - [Childcare, Play and Early Years - DARPL](#)
- We Care Campaign - [Home | How to work in social care and child care | WeCare Wales](#)
- Welsh Government statement by the Deputy Minister for Social Services and Minister for Education and Welsh language (30 June 2023): [Written Statement: Publication of A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales and supporting materials \(30 June 2023\) | GOV.WALES](#)
- Oxfam toolkit: How to Talk about Care in the UK: A framing toolkit: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/how-to-talk-about-care-in-the-uk-a-framing-toolkit-621498/>
- WEN Wales briefing paper- 'Make Care Fair' (June 2023): <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Make-Care-Fair.WenWales.2.pdf>

Update on the Implementation Plan and next steps - Deputy Minister for Social Partnership and Head of Disability and Gender Policy, Welsh Government

The DMSP briefly explained where we are in working towards our vision of gender equality and how this work will be driven forward.

The Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan was launched in March 2020. It was the first phase implementation plan based on some of the recommendations from the

Gender Equality Review and covered the period up until 2023. The DMSP confirmed that most actions are either completed or ongoing and that there had been significant work to progress the longer-term actions for more radical change. A review and refresh of the plan must recognise the combined impacts of Brexit, the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis

The Head of Disability and Gender Policy provided a summary of key achievements from the first phase implementation plan, including:

- **Equality Mainstreaming pilot.** Led by Cardiff University, tested on a live policy area (Net Zero Skills) and reported in September 2022.
- **Gender Budgeting pilots.** Three pilots underway in the areas of skills, employment and active travel and learning is informing longer term plans.
- **Budget Improvement Impact Advisory Group (BIAG).** Formed to provide advice, feedback and evidence from an equalities and inclusion perspective to Welsh Government to ensure that budget and tax processes improve over the longer term to better align funding to outcomes.
- **Intersectionality** now being addressed in other WG plans and strategies.
- **Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units.** Established in January 2022 with the aim of improving the availability, quality, granularity and accessibility of evidence about individuals with protected and associated characteristics.
- **Socio-Economic Duty.** Came into force in Wales on 31 March 2021.
- **Childcare Offer.** Extended to parents in education and training, an online system introduced to apply for funded childcare.
- **Flying Start.** Phased expansion of early years provision to include all two-year-olds began in September 2022.
- **Real living wage for social care workers.** Introduced in 2022.

Ongoing work includes taking the next steps to embed equality across Welsh Government, development of the next Strategic Equality Plan and continuing to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. Budget pressures across Welsh Government and wider public sector have created challenges so it is important that policy is evidence based and intersectional to get the desired impact and to find innovative ways of partnership working.

The DMSP reflected that, despite challenging circumstances, meaningful change was happening on many fronts. She highlighted the importance of equality being mainstreamed into everything we do and ensuring the progress we have made is not lost or rolled back. The next phase of the implementation plan would provide an opportunity to refocus and drive forward the next set of ambitious and achievable actions which will further embed the change.

The DMSP explained that the published documents from the Gender Equality Review - Deeds Not Words and the Roadmap - would continue to drive our work to advance gender equality in Wales and form the foundations of the next phase implementation plan alongside the three priority areas identified by the Forum: women's health; unpaid care; and intersectionality and alignment between the equality plans.

The DMSP explained she wanted to progress this work as quickly as possible and was mindful of the criticism often levelled at the Welsh Government about the number of plans produced. She informed Forum members that the next version of the plan would take the form of an internal implementation plan focused on taking meaningful action. It will be agreed by Cabinet colleagues and confirm commitment across the whole of Welsh Government.

The DMSP reaffirmed that Forum members will have a key role in overseeing and scrutinising implementation of the plan and receive regular progress updates.

Forum members raised the following points:

- Work is being undertaken over the summer to look at aligning the various Welsh Government plans. Will there be an opportunity to ensure integration of the work being undertaken by the Disability Rights Taskforce as the action plan is not yet complete?
- Positive that work is driving internal change & culture change. A number of pilot projects have been undertaken. How can the findings of the pilots be taken forward and implemented more widely?
- How do the statutory duties work together?
- Welsh Government is leading the way but how do we get mainstreaming implemented across the wider public sector?
- In the Net Zero Skills pilot, a key recommendation was around the care sector but there is no mention of it in the Skills plan.
- There is sometimes criticism regarding equality mainstreaming – need to ensure focus is on making it work rather than why it hasn't worked.
- Industries dominated by women are often overlooked. In the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, work is underway to develop guidance for the construction sector but why are others which are female dominated– such as care and cleaning - not being considered?

Response from DMSP/Welsh Government officials:

- The work over the summer to assess all plans will draw out common themes. The Disability Rights Taskforce has a number of recommendations ready for consultation and these can be included in this exercise.
- Statutory Duties working together – officials are working on this and will be invited to the next meeting to provide an update.
- Welsh Government will need to demonstrate the benefits of mainstreaming equality to encourage wider implementation across public sector. The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) duty will come into force in 2024 which may provide an opportunity to include appropriate guidance relating to equality mainstreaming.
- Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act – there is a separate contract for the construction sector due to the high rate of challenging issues in the supply chain. However, this doesn't preclude other issues and can be applied more broadly.
- There is need for strong interventions in employment in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion plans.

- Need to build competence in public and private employers.
- In the development of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, there was definitely an appetite for equality issues to be taken forward. It may be a topic for the Social Partnership Council to consider.

ACTION: Welsh Government officials to be invited to next meeting of the Forum to provide an update on work relating to the statutory duties.

ACTION: EHRC to share their refreshed procurement guidance for public bodies with Welsh Government for circulation.

Any other Business - Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

It was highlighted that free school meal provision is being halted for the summer holidays which will cause difficulties for families, particularly with the cost-of-living crisis.

Diary markers have been sent out for upcoming meetings. The next Forum meeting will be led by officials in October and the DMSP will meet the group again in January.