Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Review
A review to evaluate the levels of nursery provision in the Vale of
Glamorgan.

Final Report
May 2007

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Councillor Anthony Hampton
Chairman Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee
The Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Offices
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU

Foreword

Cllr Anthony Hampton, Chairman
Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient places are secured for every child aged over three to be able to access free part time nursery provision. The review, which has been undertaken by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee regarding the levels of nursery provision in the Vale, is therefore extremely important.

The Committee has spent a considerable amount of time reviewing nursery provision and has met with a number of officers and nursery providers over a series of meetings. As part of the review Members also expressed an interest in the new Flying Start programme and how this programme will help to meet the needs of young families living in deprived areas. This review has considered the start that we give young people in the Vale and recognises that it is vital that nursery provision in the Vale is accessible and meets the needs of our youngest residents and their families.

Although the Committee identified a number of areas where improvements could be made, it was reassuring to note the range of support and initiatives offered by the School Improvement and Access and Inclusion Services and the close working with other agencies from across the Council to support children and families who may need particular assistance.

I would like to thank all the nursery providers, officers and members who participated in the review and in particular Councillors Chris Franks and Stuart Egan who were the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee when the review began.

I hope that Members and the public will welcome this report and that the Committee's recommendations will inform service improvements.

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Executive Summary

The Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee has a wide responsibility to examine the work of the Council and its partners in the provision of services in the areas of Schools, Post 16 Education and Training, Libraries, Community Education and the Youth Service within the Vale of Glamorgan. It is tasked with monitoring the effectiveness of work, creating improvement and offering recommendations in these areas.

The review established the situation in terms of nursery provision within the Vale of Glamorgan. It examined levels of provision in both the nurseries provided by the Vale and those which are privately operated.

The review involved talking to people directly involved with the services, both from within the Council and local providers throughout the Vale. It looked at a number of key issues around nursery provision in the public and private sector. It also looked into issues around how geographical location impacts upon the ability to access nursery provision and how it affects demand for services. Having established the current situation in the Vale, it looked at other local authority provision to offer some comparisons of interest. The review also looked specifically at the new Flying Start programme, which is funded by WAG and is designed to meet the needs of the most deprived children and families in the Vale.

A number of recommendations and observations are therefore made to the Executive in relation to the arrangements of nursery provision within the Vale.

Recommendations

R1. Provide information through a range of communication channels including the website, community centre notice boards and through partners to raise awareness of the free nursery provision to ensure maximum take up of available services.

R2. Review the policy for allocating nursery places to determine whether it can be more flexible to enable a child to attend an alternative provider if there are genuine reasons to support this choice. This is in line with the Welsh Assembly Government directive of increasing parental choice.

R3. Extend the childcare database which details Council operated facilities and privately run playgroups to enable parents to make an informed choice about the appropriate form of childcare.

R4. Undertake a feasibility study for introducing transport provision to enable children who live in the rural Vale to have better access to services based in other parts of the Vale.

R5. Receive a report on the survey into the demand for Welsh Medium Education to be undertaken in 2007/08 to enable the Committee to consider the implications for nursery provision.

R6. Use the Wales Index for Multiple Deprivation and other relevant local data to help identify needs and gaps in service provision outside of the Flying Start areas. Information to be used to inform service provision and future opportunities for funding/bids.

R7. Undertake a survey of Nursery providers in Flying Start areas regarding their view of the impact of Flying Start and the benefits gained in twelve months time.

R8. Maximise opportunities to utilise the knowledge and relationships established through Flying Start to enhance services and support in other areas which are not directly benefiting from the Flying Start Programme.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee has responsibility to examine the work of the Council and its partners in the provision of services in the areas of:
• Schools (Pupil Support, School Improvement and School Support)
• Post 16 Education and Training
• Libraries
• Community Education and Youth Service
Its task is to actively promote improvement by testing the effectiveness of the work that the Council undertakes in these areas and recommending ways in which greater benefit may be obtained for the community as a whole.

1.2 Terms of Reference

Review scope and timescales were agreed in June 2006.

Appendix 1 of the report contains the review scoping document, which outlines the objectives and purpose of carrying out the review including the desired outcomes.

1.3 Methodology

The review was carried out in line with the Council's overview and scrutiny methodology. Guidance is provided with regards to the overview and scrutiny function including:
• Identifying issues for scrutiny review
• Scoping the review
• Collecting and collating evidence
• Final report

The review aimed to identify whether current nursery provision is sufficient and identify any areas of potential improvement.

The review also identified areas of notable practice in order to identify any service gaps and propose recommendations to determine ways in which the Council can ensure appropriate service provision throughout the Vale.

2   Current Situation

2.1   Nursery Provision and WAG Policy

The Early Years Strategy of the Welsh Assembly Government is currently undergoing a number of significant changes with the launch of two new programmes in the last year (Flying Start and the Foundation Phase). The Flying Start programme is designed for children aged up to four years old and will be initially rolled out with funding until 2011. It will be targeted at children and families in the most deprived areas and will provide part time childcare, parenting guidance and health visitor support. Those responsible for delivering the programme will be based either in local integrated centres or local primary schools within the designated areas. Flying Start is designed to assist the development of a child's language, cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The Foundation Phase is aimed at children aged between three and seven years old. It provides a curriculum which is based upon using practical and creative methods of teaching and learning. Children will be encouraged to develop not just intellectually, but also emotionally, socially and personally. This is currently in the pilot stage, with 41 schools in Wales implementing this new curriculum; the proposed timetable suggests it will be in place throughout Wales by 2010/2011. Paragraph 2.2 looks at how these initiatives will impact upon the Vale.

Although the Early Years Strategy is undergoing a process of significant change, other complementary programmes will continue to run and offer specialist support, these include: Cymorth and the Basic Skills Strategy. The commitment to development of Basic Skills was reaffirmed in April 2005 by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning with a £40 million injection for the Words Talk – Numbers Count programme. This programme is designed to ensure that young children are prepared for learning when they start school with basic numeracy and literacy skills. Both the new and existing programmes will, or already do, impact upon nursery provision in Wales, and significant change has already begun to take place.

In November of 2005 the Childcare Bill was published detailing the specific duties that local authorities will be expected to undertake with regard to childcare. By 2008 each local authority will be required to:
• provide sufficient childcare for those who are working or moving into work
• have regard for childcare using the Welsh language
• establish and maintain an information service

The Childcare Bill will be used in conjunction with the Childcare Strategy to try and minimise any potential barriers to work and ensure equality of opportunity. This review has considered the current position of the Vale with regards to these requirements.

Some significant changes have already been made; the Education (Nursery Education and Early Years Development and Childcare Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2003 were amended in 2005:
To place a duty on all local education authorities to secure sufficient nursery education in their area for children who have reached the age of three (Learning Wales).

Prior to this duty being officially placed upon local authorities, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning made a commitment that any child would be entitled to a half time funded place upon request from a parent.

Much of the basis for expanding provision for three year olds was included in the 2001 WAG report "Laying the Foundation: Early Years Provision for three year olds". The central recommendations of this report included: providing a solid foundation for future learning, achieving equal access of educational opportunity for all, providing "wrap around care" involving both the maintained and non maintained settings and ensuring that early education is delivered by appropriately skilled individuals.

As of the 1st of September 2005 a part time nursery place must be made available the term following a child's third birthday, if a parent should request one. Extending the provision should, according to the Welsh Assembly Government, expand parental choice and improve access to Welsh-medium provision.

2.2 Nursery Provision in the Vale of Glamorgan

The Vale of Glamorgan is a predominantly rural area and is generally thought of as being affluent, however there are areas of social deprivation particularly in Barry. The population is spread unevenly throughout the Vale, being more clustered around the towns. The number of children who live in the Vale of Glamorgan was 7,086 aged between 0 and 4 and 16,607 aged between 5 and 15 in 2001, this is projected to decrease over the next ten years (although these predictions have been made prior to knowledge of the development at St Athan).

School Provision in the Vale of Glamorgan

Type of Schools	Number
Junior Schools	3
Infant Schools	3
Primary Schools	41 (including 5 Welsh medium school)
Nursery Units attached to Primary Schools	34
Designated Nursery Schools	3
Secondary Schools	8 (including 1 Welsh medium school)
Special Schools	3
Pupil Referral Unit	1

Special Educational Needs units attached to mainstream schools	16
Registered Playgroups	24
Registered Cylch Meithrin playgroups	6

Within the 34 nursery units attached to primary schools and the 3 designated nurseries there are 2,016 allocated funded places. There are a further 471 places within 17 registered playgroups which also provide funded places. A funded place equates to 5 either morning or afternoon sessions (a session is 2 and a half hours) per week, totalling 12.5 hours, per child. These funded places can be applied for by a parent from the term after their child's third birthday. Within these nursery units a majority offer some form of Welsh language provision.

Figures provided by Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin show the number of children in the Vale of Glamorgan who have attended a Welsh playgroup (Cylch Meithrin) or a Welsh mother and toddler group (Cylch ti a fi). In the Autumn term of 2005, 236 children attended, in the Spring of 2006 it fell slightly to 219 and then rose again in the Summer to 237 children. It should be noted that these numbers are not restricted to only children aged over three as they cover all Welsh medium education for children aged from two up to starting school.

There are six Cylch Meithrin playgroups in the Vale and there is some level of Welsh education provided in most nursery settings. The Strategic Planning and Performance Department will be undertaking a survey in 2007/08 to establish the demand for Welsh medium education at all levels in the Vale.

Many of the nursery units which are operated by the Council, and a number of the privately run playgroups, are members of the Early Years Partnership. In order for a Nursery School in the Vale to be affiliated with the Early Years Partnership it must be inspected by Estyn. Estyn is responsible for inspecting education and training providers in Wales. The reports detailing the findings of all inspections are publicly available.

The Early Years Partnership is a sub group of the Children's partnership. The Children's Partnership coordinates inter-agency planning and development of services for children from 0 to 10 years old. It places children at the centre of service planning and recognises that families are of prime importance to this age group. Supporting families, in many cases, will be necessary to improve outcomes for children.

Nursery schools and classes in the Vale comply with the Code of Practice for identifying pupils for "Early Years Action" and "Early Years Action Plus" statements of educational need. Many nurseries are able to manage particular special needs within their organisation, often having developed their own specialised provision. If a particular nursery is unable to provide the necessary support pupil placement can be provided, depending on the

needs of the individual child. Extra support can be sought from organisations such as Cymorth, and this often takes the form of increased levels of support staff. The School Improvement Service, located in the Council, offers training and support to teachers and Learning Support Assistants in topics related to special educational needs. Visits are also made to all early years settings on a cluster basis in order to audit current SEN provision and address staff training needs.

Besides the funded nursery provision, the Vale of Glamorgan is also home to a range of private childcare providers. There are fifteen private day nurseries in the Vale, the majority of which are located in the more urban areas including Rhoose, Barry and Penarth. Within these fifteen nurseries there are 595 childcare places available. As well as private nurseries there are a number of playgroups located within the Vale which offer childcare facilities. Another alternative form of childcare are Registered Childminders, and the Council holds a list of all of these, organised according to their ward base. All information concerning private forms of childcare can be accessed through the Children and Young People's Information Service; which provides details and locations of local providers to prospective service users as well as practical advice to those delivering the service.

Funding

If a parent applies for a part time funded place for their child for the term following their third birthday, the registered nursery which the child attends will be given a maximum of £6.79 per session by the Council. This level of funding is aligned with age weighted pupil unit allocation figures and remains the same for all nursery education centres, whether they are located within schools or are privately run. There is wide variation in charges amongst private providers.

Non-maintained nursery providers can apply to Cymorth for additional funding; Cymorth is a Welsh Assembly Government initiative providing funding "to provide a network of targeted support for children and young people within a framework of universal provision, in order to improve the life chances of children and young people from disadvantaged families." The funding is allocated according to age group specific aims and often works in conjunction with other initiatives such as Sure Start. Both the Children's, Young People's Partnerships and the Children and Young Peoples' Framework Team are involved with the process of engaging with and determining the priorities of Cymorth funding within the Vale, ensuring that funds are appropriately distributed.

Additional Services and Support

Besides the free part time places in nurseries there are additional support services available. The Vale Flying Start programme is designed to meet the needs of the most deprived children and families in the Vale. Funding is a specific grant initially until the financial year 2010-2011and will be targeted in three school catchment areas: OakField, Cadoxton and Jenner Park. These areas demonstrate the highest levels of deprivation identified in the

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. The three areas targeted for Flying Start also have the highest levels of free school meals in the Vale. Other information demonstrates that the areas collectively have the highest number of lone parents (1138), the highest proportion of children living in families claiming benefits (17.6%), 24 looked after children aged 0-3 years, the highest number of under 25 year olds demonstrating anti social behaviour (230) and a high proportion of teenage pregnancy (over 50% of the Vale figure). The total number of children to be targeted by Flying Start in the Vale of Glamorgan is 568.

There are five elements within the Flying Start programme;
• Childcare – good quality, free, part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds.
• Health – additional visits from health visitors as needed to deliver extended parental support.
• Parenting – the provision of effective parenting programmes both in the home and in groups.
• Basic Skills – every family to have access to a Language and Play programme and programmes to develop adult skills.
• Information sharing – professionals involved to share information and to make referrals to ensure that higher resources are available to the children most in need.

Prior to the introduction of Flying Start, 56% of Sure Start provision was in the Flying Start area. The Sure Start services, which offer specific support or assistance for children of pre-school age and their parents, are being reconfigured in line with the launch of Flying Start. Sure Start provides support for parenting skills, post-natal depression and literacy and numeracy. The services have been operating in the Barry area, with some outreach work taking place in the western Vale in the form of play support. Under the Flying Start arrangements much of the original Sure Start areas will continue to be covered with some additional satellite provision in other areas of deprivation.

Language and Play (LAP) and Number and Play (NAP) are programmes for parents and carers of children from birth to three and are funded through the Basic Skills Agency, currently until March 2008. The programmes aim to provide support to encourage parents and carers to explore ways of playing, listening, talking and sharing songs and stories with young children through everyday experiences. Twenty-five schools and nurseries have trained staff who deliver the programmes throughout the school year. In addition, other groups and organisations such as Sure Start, health visitors, NCH, foster carers, parent and toddler groups and playgroups and childminders also support the delivery of the programmes. Support for parents and carers is currently targeted within Communities First areas and areas of significant disadvantage. In the Vale the target areas are Barry, St Athan, pockets of Penarth and Llantwit Major.

3   Findings

3.1   Current and Potential Issues

Current policy and proposed policy developments have implications for those involved with nursery provision. Currently all nursery providers who are affiliated with the Early Year's Partnership must have an Estyn Inspection on a regular basis. All of the findings from Estyn inspections are publicly available. This can be an immense undertaking for a nursery school or class as they are measured against the same teaching standards as schools. Although the level of qualifications and training required to work in a nursery setting are not as high as that in a traditional school setting, the same criteria upon which to base judgements is used.

The focus of programmes and initiatives are often in the Barry area due to its indices of deprivation. For example the Sure Start programmes and groups have nearly all been based in Barry, with some outreach work-taking place in the western Vale. They are targeted in the areas where they are seen to be needed the most and can in turn have the most positive impact on the service users and local communities. However this does mean that potential service users may be missing out, as they may not have transportation to be able to access these services. This pattern looks set to be repeated with the Flying Start initiative, which will be focused in the three Barry wards of Gibbonsdown, Court and Cadoc.

The central focus of the Flying Start scheme is the provision of "free part time good quality childcare for two year olds" (Learning Wales – Flying Start). It is intended that this extra provision will be available through integrated centres or community focused schools, meaning increased levels of nursery provision in the three catchment areas, but not in others. Therefore some families who would benefit from the Flying Start programme will be unable to access the services as they live outside the designated catchment area which has been defined in accordance with WAG criteria.

3.2   WAG Policy

Welsh Assembly Government policy has placed a duty upon local authorities to ensure there is sufficient nursery provision to enable every child, from the term after their third birthday, to be able to have the opportunity to take up a part time place. In the Vale of Glamorgan half time provision equates to five sessions a week per child. A session is two and a half hours, and can be taken in either the mornings or the afternoons, this is usually more dependent upon the arrangements of the individual nurseries.

Prior to the new directive from the Assembly, it was the position that all four year olds should have a half time funded place allocated to them. This has been in operation since 1997, and has been delivered either in a state setting or by the giving of grants to private providers. In 2001 the Welsh Assembly Government made clear its intention to expand provision to cover

all three year olds, setting the target for local authorities of achieving this by September 2004. The specific extension made in September 2005 for authorities to secure sufficient places for all children following their third birthday, illustrates the importance which is being ascribed by WAG to nursery provision.

3.3   Nursery Provision Policy in the Vale of Glamorgan

Until very recently admissions to nursery schools were administered by the individual nurseries in accordance with council policy, however since September 2006 the majority of admissions are handled centrally by the School Admissions section of the Council. The new procedure means that all English medium nursery schools and nursery units who are approached by parents to obtain a place for their child will be passed onto the Education Service to send out an application pack to the parent at the appropriate time. Although the administration of places has changed, the policy behind it remains the same. When allocating places no account is taken of the infant or primary school a child is likely to attend nor is length of time on a waiting list a factor.

The policy of the Council states that children are entitled to a part time nursery place from the term following their third birthday, and this can be in a nursery school, a nursery unit of a school or a registered provider in the voluntary or private sector. However the policy states that a registered provider will only be used when there is a shortfall in Council provision within a 2-mile radius of a parents home address. Therefore, priority is given to filling up spaces in council provision.

The Council accepts pupils in a particular setting up to the approved capacity limit. If the number of children requiring a place exceeds the limit the admissions, criteria are applied as follows. (The following criteria relates to the academic year 2006/2007, eligibility dates automatically change for forthcoming years).

1. Children who will be three on or before 31 August 2006, resident within the defined catchment area of the school. (Where preferences exceed places available, priority will be given to children living nearest the nursery school/class, as measured by the shortest available walking route).

2. Three year old children in respect of whom the Council judges that there are compelling medical or social grounds for their admission to a specified nursery school/class i.e. those children recommended for placement with regard to medical, psychological or special education reasons, including looked-after children. (Written recommendations from the Area Health Authority, Director of Community Services, appropriate agencies or professional advisers will normally be required in such cases)

3. Other children who will be three on or before 31 December 2006, resident within the defined catchment area of the school. (Where

preferences exceed places available, priority will be given to children living nearest the nursery school/class, as measured by the shortest available walking route).

4. Other children who will be three on or before 31 March 2007, resident within the defined catchment area of the school. (Where preferences exceed places available, priority will be given to children living nearest the nursery school/class, as measured by the shortest available walking route).

5. In determining applications for admission for other children the Council will have particular regard to the degree of proximity of the child's home to the nursery school/class, as measured by the shortest available walking route, with priority given to children living nearest the nursery school/class.

Nursery education is not part of statutory provision and therefore parents have no right of appeal if they are unsuccessful in gaining a place for their child. Although in practice, it is extremely unlikely that a place will not be allocated to a child, if it is requested, as there are currently sufficient places available in the Vale of Glamorgan.

A survey is planned by the Head of Strategic Planning and Performance to assess the demand for Welsh medium places in 2007/08.

3.4 Officers' Views

As part of the review interviews were conducted with the Early Years Advisors for the Council, the School Strategy and Support Officer, the Information Officer and members of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. Through the course of the investigation there were two main issues or topics that were referred to frequently;
- Preference for use of Council facilities rather than alternative providers is causing problems for some providers.
- The difference in situation between the urban and rural Vale.

The policy of the Council is to first fill the places available in Council maintained settings wherever possible. This can mean that a parent/ guardian may have to travel further to enable their child to take advantage of the free part time provision. This also has a knock-on effect on the private or voluntary nursery providers as they are only used for the funded places when there are no viable Council alternatives. This policy in conjunction with changes in birth rates does appear to be having a negative impact upon alternative providers. At present nearly all nursery facilities are experiencing falling roll numbers.

Currently projections for the number of nursery school places required are made for a number of years in advance. The calculations are based upon pupil projections, which come from birth data which is then generally aligned to specific wards. Currently the source of the data is the Office for National Statistics, however internal records from the Registrars Office are beginning

to be used, in the hope that it will enable more accurate predictions to be generated. By being able to use more specific data, the projected number of places required could be aligned with school catchment areas, ensuring the correct number of places can be provided.   One of the key challenges that has been addressed is planning in light of new housing developments and this will increase with the development at St Athan.

Another factor which impacts upon nursery provision levels is the Council's School Admissions Policy. It is a legal requirement that a child is admitted to school at the start of the term following their fifth birthday. Within the Vale it is the policy that a child may enter a reception class in the autumn term if they turn five between September 1st and August 31st of that year. This means that a child may only be in nursery provision for a relatively short period; however it is a parental choice as to when they decide their child should start school.

The geographical nature of the area also affects the situation. In the rural western Vale the number of providers is not as abundant, either council or privately operated. In line with the admissions policy a child tends to be offered a place in their closest council run provider, however this may not always be the closest nursery provider. This can mean that often privately run facilities will lose out on local children as they have to travel to take advantage of the free places. This situation can lead to the playgroups and private facilities acting as overflow facilities when all Council alternatives have been exhausted. This situation is also being replicated amongst the childminders who operate in the Vale, in the rural areas they are struggling to fill their places, and this issue is inter-connected.

With regard to providing full-time nursery places, the revenue costs would be in the region of between £1.5 and £2 million and the capital costs in the region of £10 million. Furthermore, the Council can not charge for places in order to enable a child to attend Council run nursery provision for a full day as this would be inconsistent with the Education Act 1944 and the Local Government Services Act 1972.   In addition there would be equal opportunity implications as not all schools would be capable of offering full-time places due to physical constraints.

 If the Council judges that there are compelling medical or social grounds for a child to be provided with a full-time place due to medical, psychological or special education reasons, including looked-after children a full time place is offered on the basis of a relevant professional recommendation. However this is very rare.

Officers also advised that for those children with particular needs access to support and activities for them and their parents such as those provided through Flying Start may be more beneficial than a full day within a nursery setting.

3.5 Service Providers/ Operators views

An important part of this review was to gain an insight into the situation from the perspective of service providers and to understand the issues they face. Those involved with delivering the services were directly contacted.

A telephone survey was undertaken with a selection of nurseries to obtain a clearer picture of the situation from a variety of different providers. The nurseries contacted were:

1. Wick and District Playgroup- a privately owned playgroup on the outskirts of the rural Vale (non maintained playgroup).
2. Celtic Playgroup- a privately owned playgroup located in the Rhoose (non maintained playgroup).
3. Cadoxton Nursery School- located in the Barry ward of Cadoxton. This nursery school is operated and maintained by the Council.
4. Eagleswell Primary School – a nursery which is attached to a primary school in the rural area of Llantwit Major.
5. Y Bont Faen Primary School- has a nursery unit attached to the school in the rural area of Cowbridge.
6. Wenvoe Playgroup- a privately owned playgroup located in Wenvoe on the outskirts of Barry.
7. Cogan Nursery School- located in Penarth, is operated and maintained by the Council.
8. Romilly Infants School- Also has a nursery unit and is located in Barry, this unit is maintained by the Council.
9. Albert Primary School- Has a nursery unit attached and is located in Penarth, this unit is maintained by the Council.
10. Swallow Playgroup- a privately run playgroup located near the forces base in St Athan, this is not maintained by the Council.

Each of the maintained and non maintained nurseries were asked questions concerning the number of children at the playgroups or nurseries, whether they were full to capacity and any issues or problems they are experiencing. The key findings were:

- Only the private nurseries offer, or have any children with full time places. The exception being if there is a particular need for a child to have a full time place, often done through a social services referral.
- Part time provision tends to be a mix of mornings or afternoons.
- All of the children attending nurseries operated by the Council are entitled to the part time funded places on the term following their third birthday. They are not able to pay to make up the shortfall if they prefer a longer attendance.
- The cost of nursery provision through the private playgroups is between £5 and £6 a session (a session varying between 2.5 and 3 hours)
- In terms of capacity there was a relatively even split between those who are full and those who are not. There was no pattern in terms of rural and urban areas.

- When questioned about having any children on a waiting list most nurseries suggested that, if they did, it was for places starting in the new academic year.
- Looking at whether there will be enough children to fill places in September, a majority indicated that they would, with a few suggesting if not in September then probably by the next term.
- The key problems or issues were around funding and having to meet high expectations with very limited funds. Some nurseries also mentioned ensuring people knew about the free provision and the need to advertise the service more aggressively. Some providers mentioned having spare capacity and thus being able to offer full time provision if they were allowed.
- In terms of localities most of the children came from the local areas. For the Council run nurseries they came from their catchment areas, while private nurseries took children from larger areas. One nursery did take children from the next authority as they are on the border. This particular nursery also commented that other Councils do pay more for each child.
- The Welsh medium provision offered took the form of having some classes or lessons in Welsh, but not nursery education through the medium of Welsh. (Please note no Welsh medium nursery was contacted)

The survey offered an insight into some of the general issues in the area of nursery provision. A more in-depth insight of the situation in the rural Vale was offered by the co-ordinator of the new Western Vale Integrated Children's Centre. Currently the centre is home to a private day care nursery which is full to capacity, as is the adjacent Council nursery. However some of the privately operated playgroups in the area are struggling to fill their places as the demand has reduced. This illustrates the situation with many of the playgroups in the rural Vale.

In addition to the survey undertaken to gather the views of providers, four headteachers were invited to attend meetings of the Committee to offer their views. Headteachers expressed concern about the geographical boundaries of Flying Start but were very positive about the support and services from the Council's Learning and Development services.

3.6 Workshop

A special meeting of the Committee was arranged to enable members to engage with officers and nursery providers and discuss issues around nursery provision in the Vale. Members received a presentation on the Flying Start programme and were informed that there were a range of services provided by the Council, partners and other providers for children aged three and younger. Following discussion with officers and headteachers present at the meeting a number of key issues were identified including;

- The good working relationship between council services, schools and other agencies including health services was recognised.

- The Flying Start Programme is a positive initiative but children in areas not covered by the programme will miss out.
- Realistic funding regimes are essential to ensure sustainability for the Flying Start Programme.
- Resources should be targeted at those most in need and this can not always be achieved through an area based approach.
- The mixed approach of outreach work and centre based services adapted by SureStart was recognised as a good way forward.
- Innovative ways to advertise services and make information available to parents about nursery provision and Flying Start should be considered.
- There is a need for joined up services at all ages and the best use has to be made of the resources available.

3.7   Other Councils

As part of the review other councils were contacted to examine the wider context.

Carmarthenshire County Council
The situation in Carmarthenshire County Council is very similar to that of the Vale, where nursery places are available in one county operated nursery school, in nursery classes attached to schools and provision from the non-maintained sector is also utilised. The free part time provision has been interpreted as ten hours per week per child, this is slightly less than is allocated in the Vale. Carmarthenshire also has issues with providing appropriate levels of provision in the more rural areas due to the way in which the population is spread through the area.

Bridgend County Borough Council
In Bridgend the situation is slightly different and parents are free to choose any nursery they wish their child to attend if there is room available, be it council or privately run. That is why some children from the area may attend a nursery within another authority. Currently each child receives a grant of £452 per term for the part time provision they are entitled to. In Bridgend part time provision equates to 10 hours per week per child.

In the case of over-subscription for a particular nursery five criteria will be applied in allocating places:

1. Pupils living within the community school's catchment area will be considered first.
2. Children recommended for placement with regard to medical, psychological or special educational reasons, including looked-after children. These must be confirmed by the Councils' professional advisers.
3. Chronological date of birth, i.e the older child would have a higher priority.

4. Children with siblings attending the school. A sibling is classified as a half or full brother/sister; an adopted brother/sister; a child living in the same household.
5. Pupils living outside the catchment area according to proximity to school measured by the nearest available safe walking route.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council

Rhondda Cynon Taf is similar to the situation in the Vale and Carmarthenshire. They use 27 registered education providers to provide the part time places for the children in the area. Interestingly a majority of these are located in the more affluent areas due to the greater demand from working parents. The levels of funding allocated are based upon the calculations used for pupils in schools. Cymorth and Sure Start funding is also used to assist children who are from particularly deprived or disadvantaged backgrounds.

3.8 Equalities Assessment

The Council has a duty to consider the needs and requirements of the community who are affected by our policies and procedures. Therefore as part of this review an impact assessment on equalities was completed which is attached as Appendix 2.

All policies have to be able to be applied to all members of society to enable them to utilise the service correctly. In the case of nursery provision every child is entitled to their free part time place from the term following their third birthday, children which require extra support are also offered this.

3.9 Sustainability Assessment

The Council utilises the four dimensional definition of sustainability: ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, achieving a sustainable economy, living within environmental limits and promoting governance. The Council is placing great emphasis on ensuring that the principles of sustainability are embedded across all services and policies.

The updated Wales Programme for Improvement Guidance identifies sustainability as a 'key ingredient in effective and efficient performance…on all levels … from service delivery to strategic planning and community leadership.' Therefore a failure of the Council to meet community needs in a sustainable way is a failure in be fully effective and efficient.

With regards to this review adhering to the two principles of sustainability of ensuring a strong and healthy society and achieving a sustainable economy are key. Not only does nursery provision begin the educational process for all children who take it up, it also aids parents who wish to work or go back to work through the provision of quality childcare.   In addition children are encouraged to attend the nearest nursery provision where possible.

4   Notable Practice

Good and notable practice that is taking place in other Councils is an opportunity to learn from the experience of others.

4.1   Beacon Authorities

The IDeA website makes reference to four Beacon Authorities; the London Borough of Camden, Leeds City Council, the London Borough of Newham and Somerset County Council. All of these Councils are adopting slightly different approaches to early years policy the emphasis is on integrating services, and bringing together early years education and childcare provision. Somerset County Council is the most similar to the Vale of Glamorgan, with a mixture of urban and rural locations. In order to ensure all areas within the county receive the services they have begun a programme of outreach work into the remote rural communities, enabling children to access a range of appropriate services.

4.2   Good and Notable Practice in other Authorities

Web-sites
Newport City Council has a very useful, informative and user-friendly childcare database on its web-site. This details all types of childcare available within the area, including creche facilities, playgroups, childminders and nursery schools. It is a very helpful and user friendly system including details of the facility, the location, the costs of the facility and the opening times. The website of Rhondda Cynon Taf is also very user friendly and contains some very helpful information.

Kent County Council also has a very useful and user friendly search engine. It enables members of the public to search for a nursery school, or a childminder by post code or area. It also contains up to date information about current vacancies enabling parents to find out the majority of information required prior to contacting any of the providers.

Flexibility
Good practice in other councils centres around increased flexibility and options for parents with regards to child care. For example in the London Borough of Islington the delivery of the part time provision is much less rigid. Each three and four year old is entitled to a free part time place, as in the Vale, however it is up to the parent how this is allocated, for example they may choose to use two of their weekly five sessions on one day to make arrangements much easier for themselves. There is also the provision of facilities such as after schools clubs, however it is up to the parents to pay for any additional provision they take up. Some councils also allow parents to take up the part time funded places in a setting which is also able to offer full time provision if the parent is willing to pay for the shortfall. For example in Kent County Council a parent can claim for a part time funded place for their child, once they reach three years old, through any registered provider.

They can then decide to pay the extra cost of any additional provision required with a private provider.

5 Conclusions

The purpose of the review was to establish the current situation with nursery provision is in the Vale of Glamorgan, looking at the types of provision that exists, including the split between full and part time places and to identifying any general issues with the provision. It also identified any potential issues that may exist in different localities throughout the Vale. The final part of the review aimed to place the provision level and approach in context by undertaking a comparison with other authorities.

The review found that the Vale was successfully meeting its statutory duty of providing free part time places to children, upon request, from the term following their third birthday. A part time place equates to five two and a half hour sessions per child per week, 12.5 hours in total. The policy of the Vale is to first utilise all places within Council maintained settings, and if there is a need for extra places private and voluntary providers may be approached to offer this provision.

A majority of the nursery providers used are members of the Early Years Partnership. As such they must go through regular Estyn inspections, ensuring that the standard of provision being offered is acceptable, the results of all inspections are publicly available. Nurseries are also required to offer some form of Welsh medium teaching or provision as part of the curriculum, this usually takes the form of certain elements of the nursery session being devoted to basic Welsh instruction.

The funding policy used by the Vale of Glamorgan is in line with the age weighted pupil unit allocation calculations. Currently £6.79 is paid per child per session for a nursery place in the Vale. This is roughly in line with what private nursery providers charge per session.

The situation and policy is very similar to that of Carmarthenshire and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Both of these Authorities utilise a mixture of public and privately operated establishments to meet the provision needs. The one Welsh Council which does operate slightly differently is Bridgend, where allocation of places is based much more upon parental choice. Parents may choose which facility they wish their child to attend and then apply for the part time funding. Parental choice is more limited in the Vale as admissions are more tightly controlled.

One of the main issues which has arisen from the review is the difference in situation between the urban and rural Vale. There are, unsurprisingly, more facilities available in the urban areas and many of the supporting programmes are solely based in the Barry area. This is partially due to external guidelines, however it does mean that potentially some residents are missing out on beneficial services.

The review also highlighted the fact that a number of facilities are currently operating below capacity, and when asked about this a number of them expressed this as an issue. Some nursery providers specifically stated that if given the opportunity they would like to offer increased levels of provision, thus ensuring their places are filled. Offering parents the opportunity to pay for the shortfall in provision would assist the providers with filling their places and would mean parents may not have to use two forms of childcare. This initiative would also be in line with the Welsh Assembly Government agenda of enabling parents to work while their child is well cared for.

The review identified that the Vale is meeting the policy objectives set out by the Welsh Assembly Government, however there are issues concerned with the delivery of the provision on a practical level to enable members of the public to make the most of the facilities on offer.

With regard to the Flying Start programme the review identified that the programme would benefit a number of deprived families in the Vale and would build on the success of Sure Start. However due to the levels of funding and WAG criteria linked to funding some families in need of these services in the Vale will not be able to access the necessary support.

6   Recommendations

The following recommendations have taken into account issues identified during research, discussions with specialist officers, both internal and external and officers working in best practice authorities. Cabinet is requested to consider and approve each of the following recommendations made by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee in relation to nursery provision:

Recommendations
R1. Provide information through a range of communication channels including the website, community centre notice boards and through partners to raise awareness of the free nursery provision to ensure maximum take up of available services.
R2. Review the policy for allocating nursery places to determine whether it can be more flexible to enable a child to attend an alternative provider if there are genuine reasons to support this choice. This is in line with the Welsh Assembly Government directive of increasing parental choice.
R3. Extend the childcare database which details Council operated facilities and privately run playgroups to enable parents to make an informed choice about the appropriate form of childcare.
R4. Undertake a feasibility study for introducing transport provision to enable children who live in the rural Vale to have access to services based in other parts of the Vale.

R5. Receive a report on the survey into the demand for Welsh Medium Education to be undertaken in 2007/08 to enable the Committee to consider the implications for nursery provision.

R6. Use the Wales Index for Multiple Deprivation and other relevant local data to help identify gaps in service provision outside of the Flying Start areas. Information to be used to inform service provision and future opportunities for funding/bids.

R7. Undertake a survey of Nursery providers in Flying Start areas regarding their view of the impact of Flying Start and the benefits gained after twelve months.

R8. Maximise opportunities to utilise the knowledge and relationships established through Flying Start to enhance services and support in other areas which are not directly benefiting from the Flying Start Programme.

Appendix One

Scrutiny Committee	Lifelong Learning
Scrutiny Chairman	Cllr Hampton/ Cllr Franks
Scrutiny Review	Nursery Provision

1	**Review Focus** The review will consider access to nursery provision, particularly in disadvantaged areas.
2	**Objectives and Purpose of the Review** • To identify the extent of nursery provision within the Vale of Glamorgan. • To identify the level of and demand for full time and part time provision. • To identify availability of Welsh medium nursery education. • To establish the cost of provision and the ability of local people, especially in disadvantaged wards to access services. • To identify any gaps in the current levels of provision and make recommendations. • To compare provision with that in other authorities.
3	**Desired Outcomes of the Review** • A clear picture is established of the needs and provision of nursery services within the Vale of Glamorgan. • Need for full time compared to part time nursery services • Establish if current levels of service provision are sufficient, and whether there is sufficient availability of provision through the medium of welsh.
4	**Information Required** • Details of all nurseries within the Vale, including those provided by the Authority and those run by private companies, together with number of attendees. • Details of waiting lists to gauge levels of demand and supply. • Details of any partners working within the Vale in relation to Nursery provision. • Details of other Local Authority provision, this will enable a transfer of knowledge.
5	**Format of Evidence (to be decided)** • Report to be submitted by Scrutiny Chair • Responses to members' questions • External witnesses as required.

Scrutiny Committee	Lifelong Learning
Scrutiny Chairman	Cllr Franks
Scrutiny Review	Nursery Provision

6	**Methods to be Employed (to be decided)** • Desk research and literature review • Research analysis of numbers using Council provision • Mapping of all nursery provision available – private and Council • Interview internal officers • Interview appropriate external people • Obtain views of users
7	*External Witnesses and Council officers* • Officers from within School improvement, Finance, Children's Information Service. • Childcare Partnership • Vale Early Years Development • Service Operators and Users • Other external witnesses as identified
8	**Co-options to Review Body (if any)** • None
9	**Timescales (including start and finish dates)** Review start date – June 2006 Review finish date – September 2006 Reporting – October 2006.
10	Responsible Officers (insert names) • Rhian Thomas (Graduate Trainee, Chief Executive's Dept.) • Amanda Jenkins/Helen Moses (Improvement & Development Team) • Chris Hope (Democratic Services Officer).
11	**Resources and Budget (to be decided)** • From within existing resources (staff time).
12	**Final Report** • Full report of the Chairman to the Scrutiny Committee.

Appendix Two

Equality Impact Assessment

Policy Title: Review to evaluate the levels of nursery provision in the Vale of Glamorgan

1.   The Objectives

What are the objectives of the policy being developed or reviewed (brief synopsis)?

To identify the extent of nursery provision in the Vale of Glamorgan, demand, availability of Welsh medium nursery education, costs and gaps in provision.

Who is responsible for developing and implementing the policy/service?	
Name:Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee with support from Rhian Thomas and Helen Moses	Job Title: Helen Moses – Policy Officer (Improvement and Development) Rhian Thomas – Policy officer (Consultation)
Directorate: Officers work within the Chief Executive's Department	Department:
Assessment Date: May 2006 – May 2007	

2.   **Background Data:**

Who is intended to benefit from/be subject to this policy/procedure?
(Take into account any steps taken to ensure that women/men/ parents/carers, disabled people, ethnic minorities and Welsh speakers can benefit from this policy)

	Please ✔
All residents of the Vale of Glamorgan	
Internal departments (please state):	
Customers/Residents in a specific geographical location	
Specific customers Please identify: Parents and pre-school children	✔
Other Please specify:	

Briefly identify any research or baseline information:
Information from WAG as detailed in the report
Council Policy
Survey of Nursery Providers
Best practice in other local authorities

3. Impact Assessment

Will the policy/function impact directly or indirectly on different groups in the community?

(a) Does the policy affect men and women in different ways, e.g. flexible working arrangements might have a positive impact on women with caring responsibilities

Gender	Positive impact	Negative impact	Neutral	Reason
Women	✔ ☐	☐		Availability of appropriate nursery provision can allow carers, primarily women, to return to work
Men	☐	☐	✔	

(b) Do people from different black and minority ethnic communities use Council services differently, e.g. will women from certain minority communities use the Council's swimming pool more often if same sex swimming arrangements are in place?

Race	Positive impact	Negative impact	Neutral	Reason
Asian or Asian Welsh/British/Irish/ Scottish	✔ ☐	☐		Nursery provision helps young children to develop improved language skills prior to full time education.
Black or Black-Welsh/British/Irish/ Scottish	☐	☐	✔	
Chinese or Chinese Welsh/British/Irish/ Scottish and other	☐	☐	✔	
Mixed Race	☐	☐	✔	
White	☐	☐	✔	
Other:	☐	☐	✔	

(c) How will the policy impact on people with disabilities e.g. services will be more accessible for people with a disability if information is available in large print, audio, Braille and other formats?

Disability	Positive impact	Negative impact	Neutral	Reason
Visually impaired	☐	☐	✔	
Hearing impairment	☐	☐	✔	
Physically disabled	☐	☐	✔	
Learning disability	☐	☐		
Mental health problem	☐	☐	✔	
Other:	☐	☐	✔	

(d) What arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the policy provides an effective service both in Welsh and English in accordance with the Council's Welsh Language Scheme?
E.g. translation of documents, Welsh speaking member of staff, bilingual automated telephone system, bilingual forms

The review considered access and demand for Welsh medium provision through the involvement of providers and discussion with council officers. However a detailed report on this issue will be presented to the Committee following a survey into the demand for Welsh medium education which is due to be undertaken by the Head of Strategic Planning and Performance in 2007/08.

Have specific needs of all groups been taken into account?
Please tick the applicable needs that have been taken into account or put a cross next to needs that may be applicable but have not been taken into account- these will need to be included in the action plan (below)

Childcare/crèche		Auxiliary aids (e.g. loop system, Interpreter)	
Physical Access		Format of materials (e.g. large print, audio)	
Cultural/religious		Bilingual Welsh/English materials	
Dietary		Bilingual Welsh / English service	Yes
Other Language		Location/ availability of information	Yes

Other needs identified (please specify):

The needs of people living in disadvantaged wards.

Could any impact identified above be construed as unlawful discrimination?
No

Identify what remedial action can be taken when necessary, to address any unexpected or unwarranted disparities:	
Has the policy taken into account the requirements of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's:	
Equal Opportunities Policy Details:	Yes
Welsh Language Scheme Details:	Yes
Race Equality Scheme / Action Plan Details:	Yes

If the negative impact is potentially discriminatory and please contact the Equality Section for advice.

4. Consultation

What arrangements have been made to consult with: Men/women/parents/carers The black and minority ethnic community People with disabilities / impairments (sensory, physical, learning, medical etc) The Welsh speaking community Other 'hard to reach' or vulnerable groups (e.g. young/older people, low income families) (Please list, including the method of consultation e.g. focus group, survey, public meeting, citizens panel):
Attendance of nursery providers at meetings including Welsh medium providers and a telephone survey.
How have you implemented the results of the consultation?
The results of consultation informed the recommendations in the final report
Is further research/consultation required:
No

6. Monitoring

How will you monitor the impact of this policy/service on equality issues?	
	Please ✔
Consultation	
Requests/complaints/compliments	
Equality monitoring on uptake of the service	
Electronic 'flagging' of specific needs (e.g. language, format etc.)	
Other: Relevant progress reports and a further report to the committee on the demand for Welsh medium provision	

Do you collect monitoring data on the number of people who are using or affected by your policy?		
	Yes	No
Number of people with a disability		✔
Black and Minority Ethnic communities		✔
Women and Men		✔
Welsh speakers		✔

7. Publication of Policy

Identify what arrangements have been made to ensure equality of access to this information (including raising awareness in minority groups, producing information in accessible formats, location of policies)
The report will be a public document and available on the Internet and in hard copy and can be translated in to welsh on request.