

Spring Conference 2024

POLICY MOTION

Closing the Gap - Childcare in Wales

AGREED BY THE WELSH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS CONFERENCE

Conference notes:

- A. For many parents and carers, childcare is unaffordable. Parents and carers can spend up to 60% of their net income on childcare. In 2022-23, Wales saw the biggest increase in childcare costs in the UK.
- B. The number of available childcare places is declining, with the number of providers falling year on year since 2018. In 2021-22, 60% of childcare providers said they were turning families away because they didn't have enough spaces.
- C. There are significant challenges with the childcare workforce, with providers citing challenges with recruitment and retention, stemming from relatively low pay, qualification requirements, and the number of hours available.
- D. Parents and carers cite frustration with the lack of choice available, with a focus on regulated and formal childcare settings. Evidence suggests that European countries with similar levels of public expenditure provide far greater flexibility for parents and carers to choose from formal or home-based care.
- E. The Welsh Government proposals to extend Flying Start to all 2 year olds in Wales.

Conference believes:

- I. By investing in childcare, we're building a more generous society, where each of us, wherever we live and whoever we are, have the tools to shape a brighter future and lead happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives. Childcare is important for children's development.
- II. Childcare is an integral part of the fabric of our society, our economy, and our local communities, whether through the services they provide to local people, the services and employment they provide, and the freedom and

- choice they provide to parents returning to work, education, or training.
- III. Access to high quality, affordable, and flexible childcare options is critical to supporting families, and ensuring that parents and carers can play a full part in the economy, education, and training.
 - IV. That choice and flexibility for parents and carers in choosing between formal settings and informal care at home should be a key factor of any childcare policy.

Conference calls for:

1. The Welsh Liberal Democrats to advocate for universal funded care for all children from 9 months to school age, including greater support for funded holiday care and activities.
2. Welsh Government to increase investment in measures to promote parental and carer choice in the care they provide for their child or children, including piloting a Child Care Allowance, providing a cash payment to parents of children 0-3 years to make personal and informed choices about the care of their children, and giving parents the choice of informal care at home or with family.
3. Review and potentially amend the arbitrary maximum of 3 children under school age that a childminder can care for in their setting.
4. Implement a system of training bursaries to support childcare workers in completing mandatory training. This would alleviate the financial burden on providers caused by covering staff absences during training days.
5. Allow childcare providers greater flexibility in accessing training courses, including out-of-area options. This would enable workers to choose more convenient and potentially higher-quality training opportunities, regardless of location.

Conference endorses the Welsh Liberal Democrat policy paper [Closing the Gap – Childcare in Wales](#), which sets out costed plans to:

- a. Introduce 30 hours per week of funded, part-time childcare for every child from 9 months to school age, and invest in school holiday provision.
- b. Invest in the type of provision available in local communities, to ensure no child goes without the high-quality childcare they need.
- c. Pilot direct cash payments to parents through a Welsh Child Care Allowance for children from 0-3 years to improve parental choice.

- d. Invest in the childcare and early years workforce, to attract and nurture the best workforce possible.