

William Powell AM  
Chair  
Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA  
(By email)

Dear Mr. Powell,

Thank you for your letter dated 6 July, but received on 6 August, regarding Flying Start provision in Croeserw and Glynorrwg (petitions P-04-643 and P-04-645). I would respond to your points as follows.

First, as things stand today, there is no guarantee that replacement child care provision will be provided at Croeserw and Glynorrwg in September. I return to the reasons for this situation below - and what the Council is doing about it.

Second, the petitioners' concerns that there may be a gap in provision locally are legitimate at one level; but the title of the petitions imply that the whole of the Flying Start provision needs saving, this is not the case. All Flying Start provision other than childcare will continue at Croeserw and Glynorrwg as the Council has repeatedly made clear. These include health visiting; parenting advice and speech and language provision. In addition the Council will continue to provide other services including midwifery and educational psychology (not available everywhere else in Wales). To put this in perspective, the current number of children aged 0-4 years living in Croeserw and Glynorrwg and benefitting from the Flying Start Programme is approximately 185 and there are 36 children aged 2 years who should have been attending the Flying Start Playgroups from September and the Council is actively making arrangements for alternative provision (again, see below).

Third, the petition asks why alternative provision was not put in place earlier given the amount of notice given by Action for Children (AfC). This is perhaps the key point and I must be quite blunt here. As I made clear to a number of Assembly Members during a recent meeting on this subject (and separately in correspondence with Welsh Government officials), it is my expectation that when a third party tenders for a service, they will deliver it – not subsequently revert to the Council for additional funding, effectively at the expense of others given the finite budgets within which we must operate. If any third party does not feel able to deliver the service for the quantum of funding available, they should not be bidding for it in the first place in my opinion.

Unfortunately, AfC appears to have something of a track record of accepting contracts and then at least threatening to pull out. This first happened as long ago as 2009 in the Upper Afan Valley when they gave us notice to quit requiring us to go through an expensive and unsuccessful tendering process. On that occasion, AfC then said they would continue to deliver the service. This happened again in 2014 when AfC indicated that they would be giving notice; but then pulled back again. In March of this year, we received a further letter regarding Croeserw and Glyncoedw indicating that they did not think they would be able to continue with the service; but the formal notice did not arrive until 29 April 2015. Initially at least the Council made the quite reasonable assumption that having pulled back twice before, AfC might do it again. So, the bottom line here is that this position is not of the Council's making and it is unfortunate to say the least that AfC persists with this administrative hokey-cokey rather than concentrating on providing the services which they contracted to deliver.

There are also other factors at work here. Any discontinuation of the service would lead to TUPE liabilities falling on an alternative provider or the Council. In terms of value for public money, the Council is obliged to take account of such considerations. More widely, there is no certainty from the Welsh Government that Flying Start funding will continue beyond the end of the current financial year (2015/16), so even if we had issued a new tender in May of this year, there would have been no guarantee that anyone would bid for such a short contract.

Taken together, the tendering requirement and the essential registration process with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) could quite possibly have resulted in no provision being available this side of Christmas in any event. We also have concerns that the quality of tenders would have been affected in these circumstances. These are all very relevant considerations in terms of your first point about a replacement service from September. Against this background, I entirely reject the implication in the petition (and in recent media comment) that the Council has been slow off the mark here. Again, I stress that this is not a problem of our making.

In the circumstances that we find ourselves, the Council has been closely consulting with all parents affected (AfC has packed up and left). At the time of writing, 13 children have been placed in alternative provision and we are awaiting a response from the parents of the other 23. These are the essential facts in response to your second point.

In short this Council is doing its best to retrieve a situation which has been precipitated by the less than timely actions of a third party. I am also aware that other local authorities across South Wales are dependent upon AfC to deliver these services to a greater or lesser extent. I am therefore minded to share our experiences with my colleagues elsewhere.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid horizontal line that spans the width of the signature.

**Steven Phillips**  
**Chief Executive**