

Vale Family Information Service Annual Report 2024

Providing families in the Vale of Glamorgan with accurate information and guidance on what matters to them.

Becky Wickett

Social Care Information Team Manager



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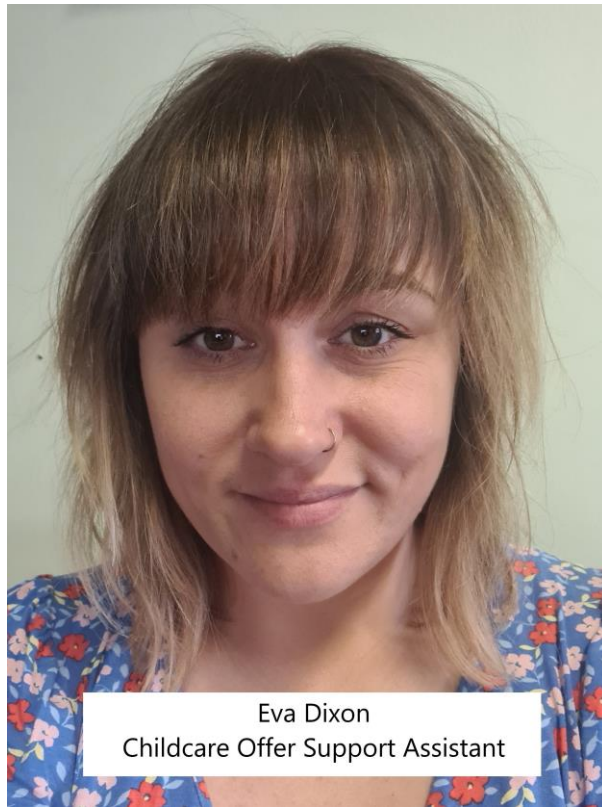
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1. Meet the team



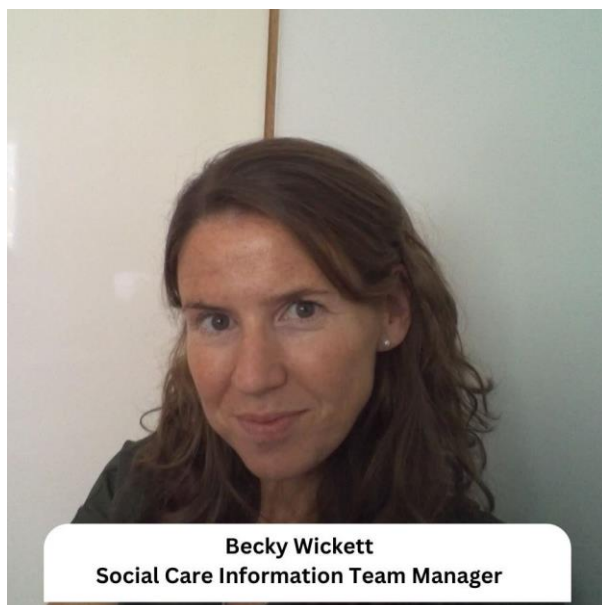




Eva Dixon
Childcare Offer Support Assistant



Cath Broad
Family Information Service Support Assistant



Becky Wickett
Social Care Information Team Manager

2. The Role of the Family Information Service

2.1 The Vale Family Information Service (FIS) is a one-stop information service for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-20 years in the Vale of Glamorgan, as well as for professionals working with families and childcare providers.

2.2 Providing an integral part of the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service for the Council, as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014).

2.3 Enabling the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006, Section 27, regarding the provision of prescribed information to parents and prospective parents, on childcare and other services or facilities. And the revised [Childcare Statutory Guidance 2016](#)



1 - FIS staff at Penarth Library

2.4 The FIS provides free information and guidance on childcare, help with childcare costs, groups for new parents, activities for children and young people, family support services and generally, all things that matter to families.

2.5 We also provide information to prospective childcare providers and existing childcare providers, to support the sector.

2.6 Maintaining an online database of childcare and services for children, young people and families in the Vale via the [Dewis Cymru website](#) which feeds through to the [Childcare Information Wales website](#).

2.7 Working closely with partners including the Childcare and Early Years Team, Flying Start, Families First Advice Line, Children & Young People Services, Learning and Skills, and more, to ensure a seamless, valuable service is offered to families and providers in the Vale.

2.8 Our animation explains our service in a more accessible format:



2 - Animation about the FIS Service



2.9 we administer [The Index for families of children and young people with disabilities or additional needs](#), to ensure families in the Vale are connected to services and support. **There are now 1004 children registered on The Index.**



2.10 We promote the [Welsh Government 30 Hour Childcare Offer](#) funding for 3 to 4 year olds in the Vale. Supporting parents to apply for the Offer and childcare providers to register for The Offer.

We now have **153 childcare providers** registered to accept the childcare funding, which is 97% of all registered childcare in the Vale, offering the full range of childcare options for parents. In the last year **782 children have accessed the Childcare Offer funding.**

3. Key Achievements

Here are some examples of our key achievements over the last year:

3.1 We responded to 1,429 enquiries. Section 5 breaks down these enquiries in more detail.



3.2 We have achieved the Families First Quality Award.

The national Award recognises Family Information Services that demonstrate excellence in providing information, advice, and assistance to local families.

We are the third FIS in Wales to achieve the accreditation.



3 - The FIS Team at the Families First Quality Award Celebration Event

The assessment required us to evidence 16 standards, including how our service supported families of children with disabilities. This was highlighted as a strength in the assessor's report following interviews with parents and carers. We were also applauded for our partnership working to deliver an outreach service to parents in the community.

Here is some feedback from parents who were interviewed:

"The help I have had from the FIS has been life-changing. My child's school emailed me with contact details for the FIS. I followed them on Facebook, and I rang the FIS to ask about after school childcare, holiday childcare and funding, and also how to apply for this. The team has an exceptional amount of knowledge, and they helped me straightaway. They are very respectful, they listen, and they are approachable. They want to help. I have recommended them to my friends."

"I have two children with disabilities. I can access the FIS using different media, which is good for me, as I have autism and disabilities as well. The Index Newsletter is really helpful. They always follow-up after my calls to check if I still need help, which is great when you are neurodiverse. They advocate on my behalf as well. I feel listened to and empowered. The help they have given to me means that I am now back at work, and my mental health has improved, which has also had a positive impact on my children."

We held an event with partners to celebrate our achievement and thank them for their support over the years. Here is a video from the event:



4 - Video from the Families First Quality Award celebration event.

3.3 We organised two **Christmas Parties** in Barry Memo Arts Centre for families in the local community.

The two events saw over 700 individuals attend to enjoy activities provided by both our service and multiple partner organisations from Early Years, Health, Adult Learning and Employability services. This gave families the opportunity to not only receive support from our service, but from the 19 other services who attended on the day. We were also able to showcase local groups with performances from Mudiad Meithrin, Bliss Dancers and Razzle Dazzle Theatre School.



3.4 This year, we have continued **outreach work within the community**.

We have worked closely with employability partners and local groups to promote the financial help and support services available to families. We have presented to partners in

Communities for Work Plus, Job Centre Plus and Adult Community Learning, to ensure the teams are aware of the service we provide and can signpost parents to our service. We have seen an increase in enquiries from those requiring financial support this year with 142 enquiries compared to 43 enquiries in 2022/23.







3.5 We've responded to 601 enquiries regarding the 30 Hour Childcare Offer for 3 to 4yr olds. Supporting parents and childcare providers.

The Childcare Offer team has developed good links with colleagues in the Flying Start 2-yr-old offer team. The two schemes can be confusing for parents and carers and our joined up approach will help with providing clear information when parents need it.

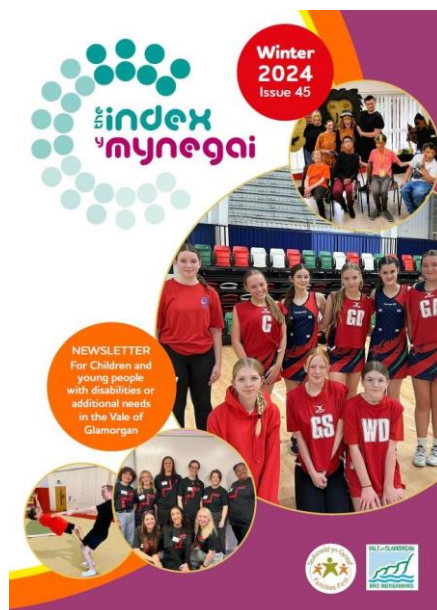
Get up to 30 hours

funded childcare

Check out if you're eligible

A purple graphic with a white box containing the text 'funded childcare'. Above the box is the text 'Get up to 30 hours' and below it is 'Check out if you're eligible'. The graphic also features a photograph of four young children sitting on the floor and clapping. The children are diverse in age and ethnicity. The background of the graphic is a solid purple color.

3.6 We have also developed and refined the referral process for children with additional needs. Working in partnership with Early Years colleagues, we have been able to provide additional funding to children with additional needs to ensure they fully benefit from their childcare provision. We also inform the child's transition to school.



3.7 We have **registered 153 children on The Index for Children with Disabilities or Additional Needs.**

The Index Officer has increased the amount of outreach in the community, which has helped promote the service to parents, carers and partners. One effective partnership was with Cardiff & Vale UHB Neurodevelopmental Service. They ran a series of Community Connector sessions with parents and carers whose children were on the Neurodevelopmental waiting list. We were able to engage with approx. 30 new parents. These sessions will run into 2024.

The Index Officer has also worked closely with the Additional Learning Needs Team and has presented at the Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCo) training days. We have information on their Council web pages, and we can act as a buffer between the team, schools and parents and carers, through the Index helpline.

3.8 The team's knowledge around accessibility has improved through engaging with partners, the Communications Team and sharing knowledge and good practice. The team go through an accessibility checklist when producing newsletters and ebulletins.



The team has attended Easy Read training through Learning Disability Wales, in readiness to convert resources into this format. We have also attended Canva training to create accessible content including flyers, videos and other communication assets.



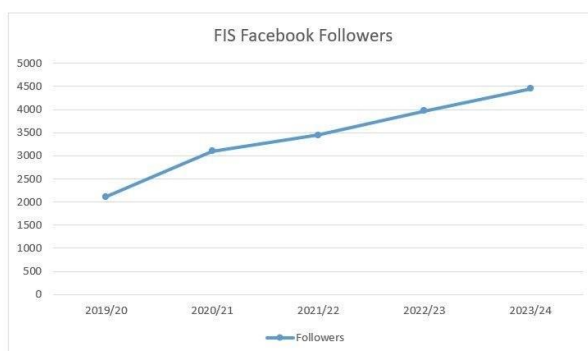
3.9 The team have maintained and enhanced information about **576 services on the Dewis Cymru website.**

This included 275 childcare records and 301 family support services, activities for children and young people and preschool and parent & toddler groups. We have contacted groups to check whether they are able to cater for children with disabilities and ensure this information is available on their Dewis Cymru record. We plan to expand this in the next year for childcare services, and those offering Welsh medium childcare and flexible childcare. The aim is to help parents and carers access the information they need.

3.10 Social media has continued to be an effective marketing and communication tool and we have **4,450 followers on Facebook**, which is an increase of 493 followers since last year.

The most successful post was the Easter Holiday Programme, which reached 21,700 people and was shared 98 times.

Over the last 4 years the number of followers we have has more than doubled, from 2,114 in 2020 to 4,450 in 2024. This means that our information has a far wider reach.



3.11 This year, five new registered childminders have joined the childcare workforce in the Vale of Glamorgan. We have continued to promote childcare workforce opportunities via social media sharing introduction to childcare courses, child development and play work qualification opportunities offered by Adult Community Learning, and further ALN training for current childcare providers. We have worked closely with the Childcare and Early Years Team and PACEY, to ensure all opportunities are shared.

4. Key Challenges

4.1 The Childcare Offer for 3- to 4-year-olds requires childcare providers to register with the scheme in order to care for children who receive the funding. **Welsh Government pay an**

hourly rate to childcare providers and for most of them, this doesn't cover the provider's usual fees.

As childcare providers can't deliver the scheme at a loss, these costs are passed to parents. While childcare providers are able to charge parents for additional elements, for example food and transport, parents often feel that these charges are unfair or unreasonable. This can lead to a breakdown in the relationship between the parent and the childcare provider, with our team trying to support both the parents and childcare provider. This can be very challenging and time-consuming, and detrimental to our relationships with the childcare providers.

Welsh Government plan to undertake a review of the hourly rate in the coming year.

4.2 The implementation of the Welsh Government's Flying Start 2-year-old Offer has presented us with some challenges.



As this is a separate scheme to the 30-hour Childcare Offer, parents are very confused and unsure what they are eligible for and what to apply for. There's been a lack of information from Welsh Government as to when the 2-yr-old Offer will be rolled out throughout the Vale.

We have received 100 enquiries over the last year regarding Flying Start provision, which is a significant increase from the previous year. We are already working closely with our colleagues in Flying Start to ensure we are all providing the same accurate information and this will be a key action for us next year.



4.3 While the Christmas Party was a huge success, it took up a huge amount of staff resources to pull it together.

We have a small staff team and two members of staff worked tirelessly on the preparations for this event with support from the remainder of the team on the day. We received some feedback to say that the activities were not always suitable for the ages advertised and it was challenging to coordinate partners, organising a wide range of activities for families to participate in.

4.4 The design of the Index Newsletter has thrown up several challenges.

This is due to the costing of design and print companies, the high level of attention to detail required and our growing knowledge around accessibility, as well as our tight timescale from design to distribution. There have been several lessons learnt throughout each production and we have a much clearer vision of what we want from the designer and what the designer needs from us to remain on the same page from start to finish.

4.5 An ongoing challenge for our team is to encourage childcare settings and organisations to keep their information up to date on the Dewis Cymru website.

Dewis feeds through to the Childcare Information Wales website. Records need to be reviewed every 6 months, or they are no longer visible on the website, ensuring that only up to date information is available.

It takes a huge amount of staff resources to contact organisations, check information and update it for them. We have tried many ways to improve this process, including creating a 'how to' video, showing childcare settings how to review their information; Data Cymru are also working on a suite of 'how to videos'. We have also produced digital flyers promoting the Childcare Information Wales website as The place to go for local information for families.

5. FIS Enquiries for 2023-24

5.1 FIS receives enquiries from parents, carers, professionals working with families, childcare providers and partners. We contribute to the Local Authority's duty to provide Information, Advice and Assistance to parents, carers and families in the Vale. We also work closely with the Families First Advice Line and the Children & Young People Services Intake Team, to ensure a seamless service for families. This section will look at our enquiries in more detail.

Here are some examples of the enquiries we received last year:

A parent contacted us regarding the Childcare Offer. They will be starting an Apprenticeship role soon and could therefore now be eligible to receive the Childcare Offer funding for 3 to 4 year olds. The parent queried how she would be able to evidence her earnings without having started/been paid yet.

While at outreach at a parent group in the library, a parent of a child age 20 months approached me. They had no idea they had to apply for nursery school in a few months.

They asked about childcare to provide a drop off and pick up service from the school nursery and also if there was any help with childcare costs.

A parent phoned The Index helpline, after speaking to their child's school ALNCo. They wanted to know about activities for their child who was on the waiting list for a Neurodevelopmental assessment. As well as some support groups for them as parents.

Case Study

Enquiry

A parent contacted FIS for support with her Childcare Offer application as she was finding it difficult to complete the online application.

She also needed help to find childcare for her child with additional needs.

Action

FIS Officer:

- Provided one to one support with the parent's Childcare Offer application, which was submitted and approved.
- Liaised with local childcare providers and the parent to find suitable childcare and Additional Support staff to meet the child's needs.
- Liaised with the Vale's Early Years Additional Learning Needs (ALN) staff to ensure that the child was known to their service. They could then also offer support and guidance to the childcare provider and school to meet the child's needs.
- Provided the parent with information about the Families First Advice Line (FFAL) for support with other family issues.

Outcome:

The child started attending the childcare setting and the additional support staff member was funded through the Childcare Offer's Additional Support Grant.

When the Childcare Offer funding was due to end, the child was unable to start full-time education due to his additional needs. The FIS Officer submitted a business case to Welsh Government to request that the Childcare Offer and additional support could be continued past the usual age eligibility, until his school was able to accommodate him for longer sessions. This was granted and continued until the parent's loss of income meant that she was no longer eligible for the Offer.

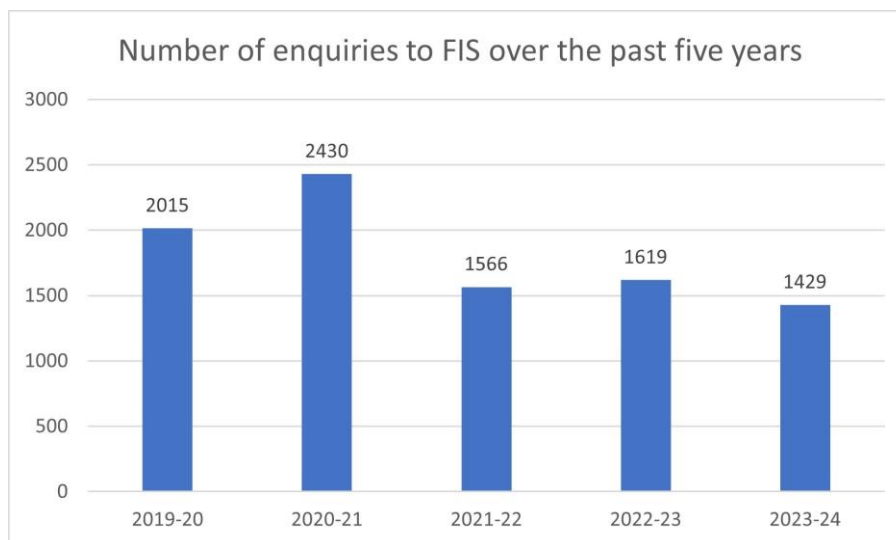
Feedback:

Verbal feedback from the parent and the childcare provider reported that the child had benefited from attending childcare provision with additional support and his social skills and engagement with the provision had improved.

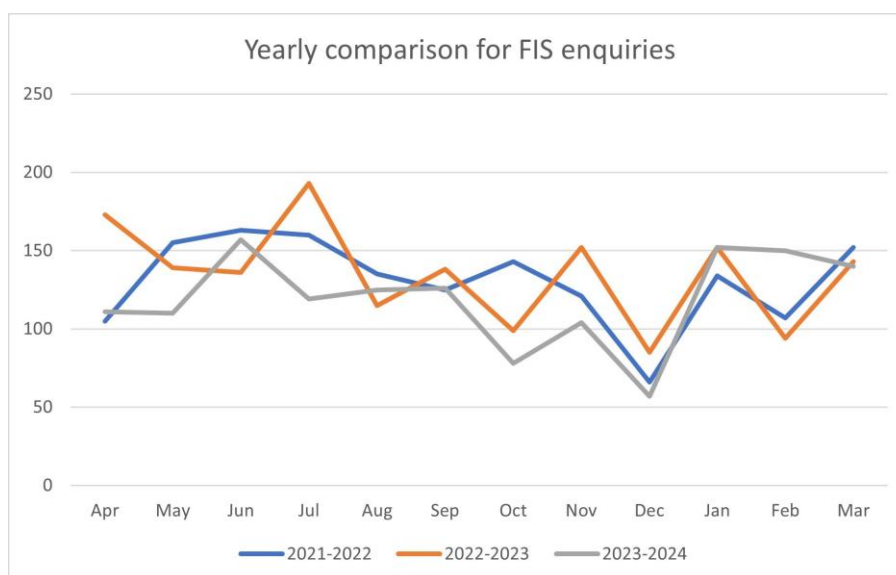
5.2 Total number of enquiries

We received 1,429 enquiries direct to the service, which is a decrease from the previous year (11%). The high volume of enquiries in 2020-21 was mainly due to parents applying for the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (CCAS) for key workers from April - August 2020.

We also received 82 calls for Children & Young People Services which were put straight through to the Intake Team. Those calls aren't included in the following analysis.



5.3 It's important to look at the volume of enquiries throughout the year and whether they follow a similar pattern year on year. We received a peak in enquiries in June and January, which was mainly due to Childcare Offer applications opening. Each year generally follows a similar pattern, except for April and July in 2022. During those months, we created the Summer of Fun Holiday Programme and Easter programme.



5.4 Parents can also visit the The [Childcare Information Wales](#) website to search for childcare, activities and support themselves.

The website surfaces information from the Dewis Cymru resource directory and has been designed as a more user friendly platform for parents. FISs in Wales manage the information, ensure it's kept up to date and raise awareness about the website.

We link to this throughout our web pages and this could be the reason why enquiries have decreased, as parents could be using the website to search for childcare and services. Unfortunately the website analytics aren't available this year, but they should be next year.

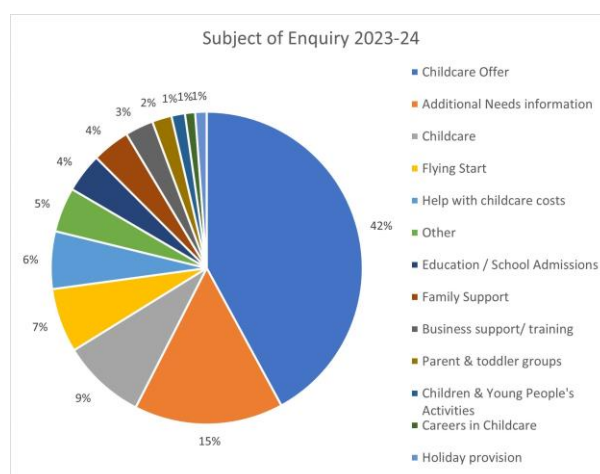


5.5 Subject of Enquiry

The nature of our enquiries over the last year have remained consistent with the previous year, with a few exceptions.

The most common reason for people contacting FIS remains to be the Childcare Offer for 3 to 4 yr olds , accounting for 42% of all enquiries. However, people contacting us for information on childcare has almost halved since last year. We have also seen a reduction in enquiries regarding parent & toddler groups, activities for children & young people and holiday provision. This could largely be due to us producing a Summer of Fun Holiday Activity Programme last year, which generated lots of enquiries.

We have seen a huge increase in enquiries regarding the Flying Start 2-year-old Offer, which we anticipated, as the scheme is being rolled out across the Vale. This accounted for 7% of our enquiries.

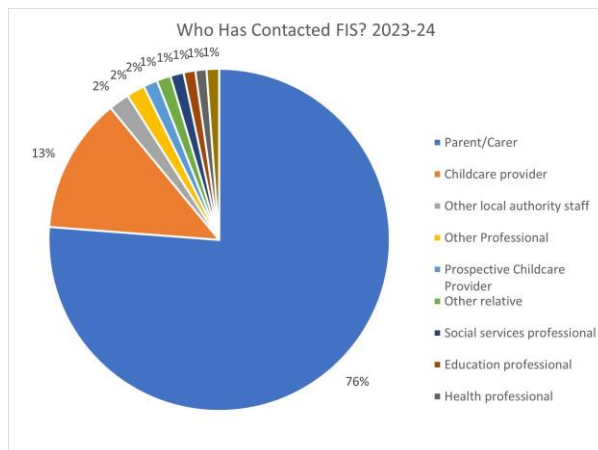


5.6 Who has contacted FIS?

Three quarters of all enquiries were from parents or carers, which has remained the same over the past two years.

13% of our enquiries were from childcare providers, which also remains consistent with the past two years.

Therefore, only 11% of our enquiries are from professionals, other relatives or prospective childcare providers.

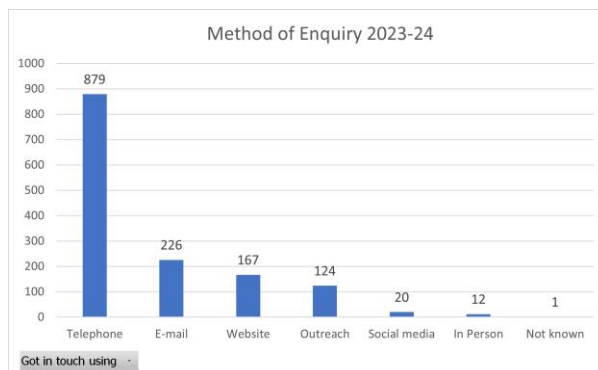


5.7 Method of Enquiry

Over half of all enquiries (61%) were made via phone, which is consistent with previous years.

As well as the FIS public phone line, we also staff the national Childcare Offer helpline for the Vale. We received 401 calls direct to the Vale and 118 calls that we picked up for the Newport Childcare Offer Team.

There has been an increase in enquiries from the website, due to our online enquiry form. However, there has been a decrease in enquiries from outreach, email and social media.

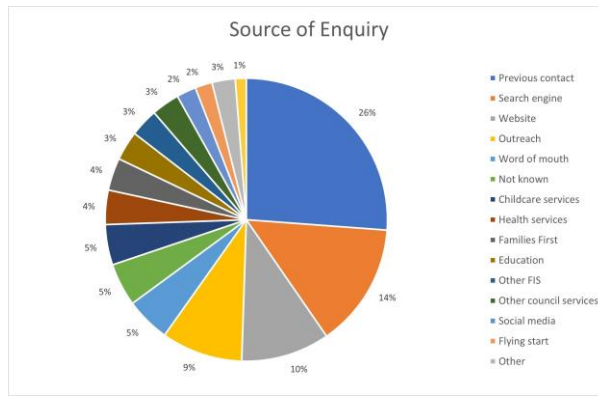


5.8 Source of Enquiry

One quarter of all enquiries were from people who have previously contacted the service (26%). Therefore, 74% were new contacts.

14% of people found out about the service via a search engine and 10% via the Vale website.

When comparing data with last year, how people found out about the service remains consistent. However, there has been a reduction in people being referred by the Families First Advice Line, other council services and social media. There has also been an increase in referrals from other Family Information Services.



5.9 Website Performance

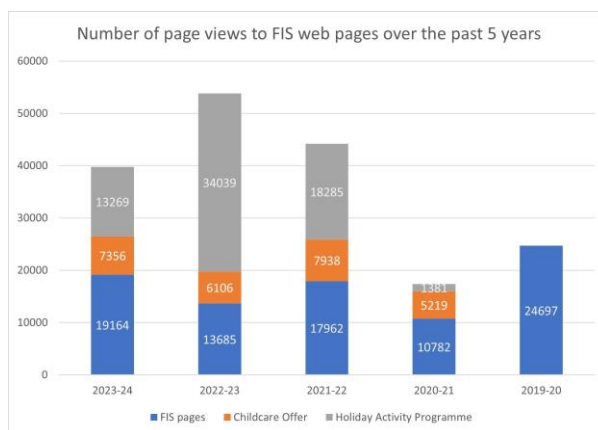
FIS ensure information for families is available and up to date on the [FIS web pages](#). This includes information on choosing childcare, health and wellbeing in the family, parenting programmes, starting nursery, raising a child bilingually and much more. We also have a comprehensive section for childcare providers, including starting a career in childcare, training and grants for providers.

The graph below shows the number of page views over the past five years and we have split them into the most visited pages which were the 'Holiday Activity Programme', the 'Childcare Offer' and the rest of the FIS web pages.

We received 39,789 page views over the last year which is a 35% decrease from the previous year. This is due to the 'Summer of Fun Holiday Activity Programme', published in June 2022, that received 34,000 views.

We are working closely with the Communications Team to improve the accessibility of the holiday activity programmes.

Page views to FIS pages and Childcare Offer pages have both increased since last year which is good news.



5.10 Social Media Performance

Social media has continued to be an effective marketing and communication tool and we have 4450 followers on Facebook, which is an increase of 493 followers since last year. The most successful post was the Easter Holiday Programme, which reached 21,700 people and was shared 98 times.

6. Feedback

6.1 We aim to contact everyone who enquires to the service to gain feedback, to help develop the service and ensure that people received the information they need. We also collate comments received from people after they've used the service.

We obtained feedback from 63 people and a further 24 people provided comments.

88% said they would recommend our service to other people

91% rated their experience as excellent or very good.

96% said we responded to their enquiry in a reasonable time

86% said the support, advice or information we provided to them was very helpful or helpful

6.2 We asked people for suggestions of how we can improve our service and here are the responses:

- *Have an easily accessible calendar of events in the website and provide leaflets/newsletters not just Facebook links*
- *promoting service better*
- *Be honest about who qualifies and that the free childcare hours isn't from 3yrs old for all it's from what term they start school (despite having birthdays in holidays and able to start school just not the right term for the government to allow qualification).*
- *There has been a gap with no childminders / nannies picking up from our school for years. Matching parents requests to gaps in provision and highlighting them with prospective service providers would be useful.*
- *You need a PHD to try and understand the childcare offerings and what we are entitled to! I think having clearer literature around it would be helpful*
- *Perhaps you could make them more aware of the depth and breadth of your work? e.g. 2 year old offer, the Childcare Liaison Officers, are they aware they can/should be signposting to FIS for information on a wide range of topics?*

6.3 Here's a snapshot of comments made by parents and professionals who contacted our service:

Fantastic, x. How helpful and what a great service you provided. Thank you.

You have been fantastic with great customer service!

I would like this message to be forwarded on to x so she knows what a difference she made , I struggle contacting some people because of my mental health problems, I gave it a go and tried to ask questions about any more education or things for my little boy for the

6 weeks holiday, I had no idea the Vale was doing any activities for children, this for me made my day she didn't make me feel like just a number, she actually cared. I struggle to communicate sometimes but x was so lovely and so caring and made sure I was happy before I got off the phone, I had an email as she said as soon as. There needs to be more x! She is amazing , I never even do these review things but x deserves this one as I'm now planning a trip out with the kids which helps me and them too! Thank you x for helping me xx

I would like to say that I have always found yourself and your team very supportive and helpful and I would like to thank you all for that.

Was able to help with all my questions and emailed me the information I needed within 24hrs

I have found the emails really useful and have booked on a few things. It really helps to have all the information like that

7. Key Actions for 2024-25

7.1 Promote the expansion of the Childcare Offer to parents in training and education, by working with Cardiff & Vale College and further education providers.

7.2 Provide information packs to childcare providers to give to new families, containing information on help with childcare costs, childcare options, starting nursery school and 'Being Bilingual'.

7.3 Review the FIS and Index web pages to improve accessibility to information and act as a 'hub' for information for families.

7.4 Work with the Childcare and Early Years Team to support the promotion of childcare as a career.

7.5 Create new resources for families of children with disabilities, including a top tips for choosing a school and a matrix of services.

7.6 Improve the quality of information on Dewis Cymru regarding childcare, services and activities for children with disabilities, Welsh medium childcare and flexible childcare, and provide direct links to these services from the FIS website.

7.7 Review and improve the format of the Holiday Activity Programme, by working with the Communications Team and in line with feedback received.

8. Contact Details

Family Information Service

Vale of Glamorgan Council

Dock Offices

Subway Road

Barry, CF63 4RT

01446 704704

fis@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Facebook: [@VOGFIS](https://www.facebook.com/VOGFIS)

Twitter: [@ValeFIS](https://twitter.com/ValeFIS)



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Have choice and take control