

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **26th January 2022**
Report Subject: **Youth Service Performance Report 2020 – 2021**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanne Collins, Executive Member for Education**
Report Submitted by: **Joanne Sims, Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
09.12.21	23.12.21	13.01.22			26.01.22	02.03.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the Youth Service, demonstrating how the Council meets its statutory requirements of providing a Youth Service for young people aged 11-25, a Counselling Service for 11-25 year olds and delivers against the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. The report will also include an update on how the service has refocussed and responded during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The report will update Members on the continued progress of all areas of the Youth Service and how the service has supported the Education Directorate's response to COVID-19. The report will outline the last available comparable data linked to the Reach, accreditation outcomes and reduction of number of young people becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).
- 2.2 Blaenau Gwent Youth Service provides information, support and learning opportunities for young people aged 11-25 and also supports young people through earlier transitions from 9 years old, based on a voluntary relationship between the young person and youth worker. In addition, the Youth Service co-ordinates the 11-18 Counselling Service (statutory), the extended 18-25 Counselling Service and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPPF), which aims to reduce the numbers of young people who become NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) up to the age of 25 through a partnership approach. The partnership now includes a focus on Youth Homelessness and Wellbeing.
- 2.3 The Youth Service is a community based provision, housed in the Ebbw Vale Cultural Centre and Abertillery Youth Centre, with support offered to young people across all secondary schools, year 6 primary schools and the River Centre 3-16. Youth Clubs are provided in Abertillery, Cwm, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. Youth Club developments are underway in Brynmawr and a dedicated Detached Youth Team is working across the Abertillery communities, requested for and funded by the Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council.

- 2.4 Open Access Youth Services include D of E (Duke of Edinburgh), Detached and Outreach, Youth Information Service, Young Reps Volunteering programme, Youth Ambassadors (YAMs), Health and Wellbeing workshops and training, Youth Clubs, Open for Youth Nights, school holiday programmes and the 11-25 Counselling Service.
- 2.5 Targeted Youth Services include Inspire to Achieve 11-16, Inspire to Work 16-24, Youth and Community Team (Youth Homelessness and Mental Health) and the Positive Futures anti-social behaviour programme.
- 2.6 The Youth Service leads on implementing the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, prevention and support for young people at risk of becoming or currently NEET. This includes maintaining and developing the strategic multi-agency Raising Aspirations Group, implementing the Early Identification Tool to ensure that young people at risk of becoming NEET are known and supported, overseeing the lead worker role, and monitoring progress to ensure that the numbers of young people becoming NEET are reduced up to the age of 25.
- 2.7 The Youth Service facilitated the development of the 10 LA ESF programmes and line manages the two local ESF youth programmes, Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work. This funding has secured sustainability for the Youth Service's work linked to the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF). The funding is in place until July 2022, with an expected extension until December 2022 and has been highlighted as a corporate risk. The service has also appointed additional youth workers in the service, funded by the Welsh Government's Youth Support grant, to support young people's issues of youth homelessness and mental health.
- 2.8 Since March 2021, the newly appointed Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships has led on the development of a Post 16 Partnership and acted as the link officer for the Leisure Trust, Awen Cultural Trust and Head 4 Arts. Partnerships across these areas are positive and are integral to future delivery.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 **Option 1:** Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers and accepts the report.
Option 2: Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made prior to reporting to the Executive Committee.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic support the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

- 4.1 The Youth Service contributes to all 5 areas of the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan through supporting young people to overcome barriers in their life enabling them to become positive members of their community. The service also contributes to key objectives within the Corporate Plan, in particular those within Education and Regeneration. The programmes provide support to some of the most vulnerable young people in Blaenau Gwent, supporting them to overcome significant barriers

in their lives, including issues such as youth homelessness, unemployment and mental health. This work also ensures that the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework 6 key areas are fully met.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget:

In 2020/21 the Youth Service was funded partly through a core budget of £380,873, and external grants of £1,459,034 (from ESF - European Social Fund, Newport Live, CCG, Welsh Government Youth Support Grant and other community grants and funding). Therefore, the total income for the Youth Service in 2020/21 was £1,839,907. All national grants have been secured for the next financial year, with the ESF funding secured up until July 2022 and additional funding sourced from Welsh Government to continue the youth work offer to young people around youth homelessness and mental health.

5.2 Risk Including Mitigating Actions:

The reliance on external funding is identified as a risk. Securing ESF monies until 2022 has provided some stability for targeted services for the past 6 years. However, the majority of grants are funded on an annual basis which does not allow long term financial planning. This along with ESF ending in 2022, has been flagged up as a risk and is being considered in the Education Directorate risk planning arrangements this year as well as the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). A report has been submitted to CLT to highlight the timescales and risk of a gap in funding between the end of ESF and the start of any future funds from UK Government.

5.3 Legal:

There are no legal implications for this report.

5.4 Human Resources:

There are no direct staffing implications associated with this report.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 **Performance Information and Data:**

Due to the pandemic, the national comparable data for the Youth Service was released in June 2021 and covers the period April 2019 to March 2020. No other national data has yet been released and therefore comparative performance will be reported for 2019/20 and localised performance for 2020/21. However, the data released in June 2021 continues to demonstrate the service is good, taking account of its statutory duties and meeting them effectively, providing a wide range of universal and targeted opportunities for young people aged 11-25.

6.1.1 **Youth Service Impact:**

In 2019/2020, 18% (2054 individuals) of the youth population voluntarily registered with the Youth Service, a 1% increase since the previous year, (and increase of 44 young people) placing 10th across Wales and above the Welsh national average (15%), with an additional 15089 anonymous contacts made with young people (not registered) through the 11-18 Counselling Service, Detached youth work and out of

school activities and events. 18% places Blaenau Gwent 2nd across the region (Caerphilly 17%, Monmouthshire 22%, Newport 4% and Torfaen 13%) and 4th across the family mean (Caerphilly 17%, Merthyr 29%, Neath Port Talbot 28% and RCT 26%).

- 6.1.2 Accredited outcomes for registered young people increased to 41% an increase of 26%, placing Blaenau Gwent 1st across the region and 1st (best performing) across the family mean of local authorities. This was an unusual and unexpected 'spike' in performance given that accreditations are not the focus of the work.
- 6.1.3 The ESF Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work programmes are highly effective in supporting young people to overcome barriers to either remain in or enter education, training or employment or to enter. The projects directly impact on young people improving their attendance, attainment or behaviour, as well as overcoming personal barriers. Through Inspire, transitional support is provided to identified young people moving from year 6 to year 7, in-between school terms and post 16. Data from Careers suggests that this additional, bespoke support has enhanced the transition of young people this year, with the second lowest numbers recorded not entering education, employment or training (1.5% unverified).
- 6.1.4 The Independent 11-25 Counselling Service is very effective. The high impact of the service is evidenced in the 11- 25 Counselling Annual report and demonstrates that the Counselling Service is having a positive impact on young people's wellbeing. In 2020/21, 302 young people aged 11-25 accessed a counsellor with a total of 1510 sessions being delivered. 59 young people chose to put sessions on hold for periods ranging from 1 to 5 months during lockdown. 1059 sessions were delivered face to face with 451 carried out using digital means.
- 6.1.5 Safeguarding is an important aspect of the service. In the financial year 2020/21, 33 DTRs (multi-agency referral forms) were submitted to Social Services. More detail relating to these are included in the Joint Safeguarding report to Joint Scrutiny.
- 6.1.6 In addition, in 2020/2021 the Youth Service recorded supporting young people anonymously (not registered) through the 11-25 Counselling Service, some detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events although these were limited due to the pandemic but some online activities were offered. The Youth Service had 6257 anonymous contacts with young people (one contact is between 1-3 hours).
- 6.1.7 **Effective use of core funding and grants:**
The Youth Service's core budget is effectively used to employ a small core team to access and administer external grants to meet identified need. These grants include European Social Funding, Welsh Government Youth Support Grant, Positive Futures and Children in Need. Smaller community grants are accessed in partnership with local community groups. Over the last year, both core and external funding has been secured to continue all projects for another year.

6.1.8 **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework:**

The Youth Service leads on the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, prevention and support for young people at risk of becoming or currently NEET. This includes maintaining and developing the strategic multi-agency Raising Aspirations Group, implementing the Early Identification Tool to ensure that young people at risk of becoming NEET are known and supported, overseeing the lead worker role, and monitoring progress to ensure that the numbers of young people becoming NEET are reduced up to the age of 25. 534 children and young people were identified over the last year as at risk of becoming NEET and offered additional support.

6.1.9 The Youth Service also facilitates two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships, subgroups of the RAG, which co-ordinates the Early Identification process, allocation of lead worker role, and robust tracking and monitoring of transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.

6.1.10 As a result of this co-ordinated approach with partners, there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET, the unverified figure for 2021 is 1.5% (9 young people). This is in-line with the lowest record to date. 1.5% is lower than the Welsh average of 1.7%, ranking Blaenau Gwent as joint 10th with Swansea, 3rd across our family mean and 2nd across the region.

Focus areas this year include developing the work on co-ordinating Youth Homelessness, expanding the Early Identification Tool to include risk factors around youth homelessness and the ALN Post 16 Enhanced Transition pilot.

6.1.11 **Post COVID/Responding to Poverty Agenda**

Since March 2020, the Youth Service has supported the response to COVID-19. Youth workers and counsellors are back in schools and youth centres and support has moved from dealing with essentials to supporting wellbeing. This support is provided through one to one and group work, with a growing increase in requests for detached youth work. A full summer and winter programme was provided as part of the Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing. All opportunities provided by the Youth Service are free, food and transport provided. Recent examples are a residential to Jamie's Farm, a reward trip to Cardiff City Stadium and a Christmas trip to Winter Wonderland. The service works with partners to address identified need, examples include providing clothing for work/sports/proms, free gym passes to encourage healthy living and wellbeing. As part of the period poverty agenda, sanitary products are available for free in all youth service settings with this widened to include other personal hygiene items such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap and deodorants. The service has partnered again this year to provide Christmas Hampers to those in need. The Youth Homelessness Team work closely with colleagues in Housing to ensure that appropriate referrals are made and that young people are completing necessary paperwork to secure shelter. If accommodation is offered the Youth Service supports young people to ensure they are in receipt of the correct benefits, support with budgeting plans and access funds for furniture and appliances where needed. All projects assist young people with managing their finances, responsibilities and budget when the need is

identified. Where issues of poverty arise, staff are able to identify this and suggest referrals to Safeguarding or Families First for wider family support.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

Young people are able to access support if and when they need it and are able to access new opportunities. These opportunities help broaden young people's horizons, raise their aspirations and the support ensures that all young people, no matter their experience, are able to participate. This can result in young people becoming active citizens in their communities, making informed choices about their future and reaching their potential.

6.3 Involvement (Consultation, engagement, participation)

Involving young people is a core principle of youth work. A bi-annual consultation takes place with young people across the borough, the Youth Service's Advisory Group (YAMS) help decide on how priorities are set and each project works with young people, both in groups or as individuals to ensure they influence the delivery and design of their particular project.

6.4 Thinking for the Long Term

The support provided is expected to better prepare young people for their future and beyond the lifetime of the programmes.

6.5 Preventative Focus

All the work of the Youth Service is preventative in nature. At a very basic level, the support and opportunities can help young people to meet with each other and with trusted adults, feel part of their community which can prevent low levels of mental health, prevent incidents of anti-social behaviour and help young people become active citizens. Targeted programmes are working to prevent youth unemployment and youth homelessness.

6.6 Collaboration/Partnership Working

The Youth Service facilitates a number of partnership forums including the Raising Aspirations Group (multi-agency partnership), the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners sub group. Working in partnership is fundamental to providing a co-ordinated, effective service. The service is continually looking at how it can better develop this area as partners evolve and change.

6.7 Integration

This service impacts upon key objectives for both Education and Environment and Regeneration Directorates and for 11-25 year olds.

6.8 EqIA

N/A

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The Youth Service reports to a number of external funders and provides an annual audit return to Welsh Government. The Raising Aspirations Group monitors the progress of the local delivery of the two Inspire programmes and the new Youth and Community Team (Youth Homelessness and Mental Health). A performance

monitoring report is presented annually to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee to update Members on the performance of the Youth Service. Annual reports and evaluation reports are also provided to Education DMT. Feedback is provided to young people on a regular basis.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

N/A

List of Acronyms

RAG: Raising Aspirations Group (strategic multi-agency partnership)

NEET: Young people not in education, employment or training

YEPF: Youth Engagement and Progression Framework; a national framework which outlines the processes and support that needs to be in place to support young people aged 11-25 to prevent them from becoming NEET.

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

D of E: Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme

ASB: Anti-Social Behaviour

EIT: Early Identification Tool which is run twice a year to identify which young people are at risk of becoming NEET