

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **9th February 2021**

Report Subject: **Youth Service Performance Report 2019 – 2020**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. J Collins, Executive Member for Education**

Report Submitted by: **Joanne Sims, Youth Services Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	19.01.21	26.01.21			09.02.21	24.02.21		

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 and a Counselling Service for 11-18 year olds. The report will also include an update on how the service has refocussed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ‘Youth Work in Wales Statistical Release 2019-20’ is not published at time of writing the report, but should be released later in the year to use as a comparison.

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 most recent data linked to the reach, accreditation outcomes and reduction of number of young people becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Key legislation and guidance underpinning Youth Work in Wales includes the new National Youth Work Strategy for Wales, Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes, the Welsh Government’s Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) Act 2015.
- 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 (YEPF), 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, and Ebbw Vale. Youth Club developments are underway in Tredegar and Brynmawr through support from community groups and a dedicated Detached Youth Team is working across the Abertillery and Llanhilleth 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 and Youth Info Champs, 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 2022, which has ensured continued support for young people both at risk of becoming and currently NEET for the past 5 years. 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 2020, through agreed interim arrangements, the Youth Service Manager has led on the development of a Post 16 Partnership and acted as the link officer for the Leisure Trust, facilitating the renewed five-year contract. 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 Well-being 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 also 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 2019/20 the Youth Service was funded partly through a core budget of £356,827, and external grants of £1,306,146 (from ESF - European Social Fund, Positive Futures, Welsh Government Youth Support Grant and other community grants and funding). Therefore, the total income for the Youth Service in 2019/20 was £1,662,973. All national grants have been secured for the next financial year, with the ESF funding secured up until 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 5 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 needs to be considered in the Education Directorate risk planning arrangements this year as well as the Corporate Risk Register (CRR).

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:**

The comparative data for the Youth Service across Wales is not available yet but year on year comparison demonstrates 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 2019/20, 2054 individual 11-25 year olds were registered (Reach of 18%) and supported by the Youth Service, with an additional 15,089 contacts made with anonymous (not registered with the service) young people (8,000 more than the previous year). The 'reach' has slightly increased since last year with an additional 44 young people supported. We do not yet have the all Wales comparison, which will be available later this year.

6.1.2 Out of the 2054 individuals, 41% (847 young people) gained 851 nationally recognised accreditations. The number of young people gaining a qualification significantly increased this year (16% increase), which was not expected as this is not the focus of the work, but is welcome. The outcomes for each programme are now measured on improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either attendance and behaviour, rather than accreditations. It is worth noting that achievements are made voluntarily and during the young people's spare time.

6.1.3 In addition, in 2019/20 the Youth Service recorded supporting young people *anonymously* (not registered) through the 11-25 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events. The Youth Service had 15,089 anonymous contacts with young people (one contact is between 1-3 hours).

6.1.4 Safeguarding is an important aspect of the service. In the financial year 2019 – 2020, 62 MARFS (multi-agency referral forms) were submitted to Social Services. More detail relating to these are included in the Joint Safeguarding report to scrutiny.

6.1.5 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 a variety of projects to meet identified needs which include Inspire 2 Achieve, Inspire 2 Work, Youth Homelessness, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Duke of Edinburgh, Detached and Outreach Youth Workers, Positive Futures (ASB programmes), Open for Youth Nights, Youth Clubs, Youth Information Service, Young Ambassadors (YAMs), the 11-25 Counselling Service, the Young Reps Volunteering Programme and the school holiday programme.

6.1.6 Youth Engagement and Progression Framework:

The Youth Service co-ordinates the Welsh Government's 'Youth Engagement and Progression Framework' through a strategic multi-agency partnership the Raising Aspirations Group (RAG). The partnership is mature and effective and continues to address all 6 key areas of the Framework. This includes using the Early Identification Tool (7th year), updating the online directory of support (7th year), facilitating the 'lead worker' role and further refining the tracking and support of young people through a partnership approach. All areas of the Blaenau Gwent action plan are developing well and either met or are on track.

- 6.1.7 The Youth Service also facilitates two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships and sub groups of the RAG. These forums co-ordinate the Early Identification process, allocation of lead worker role, and robust tracking and monitoring of transition from year 6 to post 16 provision.
- 6.1.8 As a result of this co-ordinated approach with partners, there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET when they leave school, reaching 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019. This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the *lowest figure* ever achieved. We are unable to compare this information nationally until the Careers Wales national report is published later this year. Considering the context of the past year, it is extremely positive that so many young people transitioned successfully and maintained their post 16 placement.
- 6.1.9 **Youth Service Response to COVID-19**
Since March 2020, the Youth Service has supported the response to COVID-19. Although school based youth workers and counsellors returned to buildings in September, initially, the service refocussed to identify and support the most vulnerable young people known to the Youth Service, Education and schools. Since March 2020, the service supported 600 11-16 year olds and 250 16-25 year olds and from March to July made weekly contact. Initially the focus was supporting young people around the challenges they faced linked to the pandemic, including delivering essentials such as food, toiletries, wellbeing packs, supporting issues around lack of money, losing employment and facing eviction. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation and the local authority placed some young people who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support.
- 6.1.10 Over time, the emergency response changed to support young people around their wellbeing. Online activities were developed such as music, cooking and art club, and face to face activities included wellbeing walks, supporting attendance at college and job interviews. The Counselling Service has continued throughout, providing online sessions, meeting young people outside, in school and the youth centre. A full summer programme was provided including a mixture of online and face to face activities. Throughout, youth club staff have been redeployed to provide outreach and the detached team have continued to work in the evenings, responding at times to requests from the Police and community members. This has been an opportunity to keep young people informed about the restrictions, any changes and what that means for them. Between April 2020 and December 2020, 24 referrals (MARFS) were made to Social Services.
- 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
Through the Youth Service and Counselling Service, 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 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

National reports are due to be published later this year, which can be used as a comparative against BG's performance.

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