

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **9th March 2021**
Report Subject: **Inspire 2 Achieve and Work Performance Report January – December 2020**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Jo Collins, Executive Member for Education**
Report Submitted by: **Joanne Sims, Youth Service 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)
22/02/21	25/02/21	22.02.21			09/03/21	14.04.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the local Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). These projects are part of the Youth Service team's approach to reducing the numbers of young people becoming Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In 2013, Blaenau Gwent Youth Service led on the development of two ESF operations across West Wales and the Valleys (10 Local Authorities and 4 FE Colleges) called Inspire 2 Achieve (11-24 at risk of NEET young people) and Inspire 2 Work (16-24 NEET young people). In July 2015, the lead was transitioned to Environment and Regeneration, whilst the local delivery projects still remained with the Youth Service within the Education Directorate.
- 2.2 The ESF Inspire 2 Achieve project was approved by WEFO in February 2016, with Inspire 2 Work being approved in November 2016, both approved until 2022. The Youth Service had established both teams by 2017, with additional posts (two for year 6 to 7 transition, 1.5 for emotional and mental health and 1 x health and fitness) recruited later. These projects have ensured continued support for young people both at risk of becoming and currently NEET for the past 5 years.
- 2.3 The Inspire projects are underpinned by the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF), which outlines 6 key areas which Councils are required to have in place, to support young people who are at risk or who are currently NEET. The Inspire projects are how the Council provides the brokerage/lead worker role for young people.

2.4 The two Inspire projects have ensured that as a Council we deliver the requirements of the YEPF and that the numbers of young people becoming NEET continue to reduce. The additional posts address the emerging themes identified since the onset of the project, which are contributory risk factors, which include transition from year 6 to 7 and additional support for young people pre and post 16 around emotional and mental health needs.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 It is recommended that Members scrutinise the current performance of the two projects and considers the following options:

Option 1 – Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the report, contribute by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee and accept the report.

Option 2 – Members do not accept the report and offer comments.

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

4.1 The Inspire programmes contribute to all areas of the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan through supporting young people to overcome barriers in their life enabling them to become positive members of the community. The programmes also contribute to key objectives within the Corporate Plan, provide support to some of the most vulnerable young people in Blaenau Gwent, supporting them to overcome significant barriers to their learning, training and/or employment. This work also ensures that the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) 6 key areas are fully met.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 Impact on Budget:

The two programmes are externally funded by ESF and so have no impact on core budget. Although, there is an amount of match funding required, this is minimal and is provided by some officer in-kind time from the Youth Service Manager, one Youth Service Team Manager and then other externally funded posts. The financial profiles for the two Inspire programmes for 2016 - 2022 are below:

I2W

Total Project Costs - £2,440,445
ESF Grant receivable - £2,148,723
Match Funding identified - £310,874

I2A

Total Project Costs - £3,787,353
ESF Grant Receivable - £3,325,260
Match Funding Identified - £470,026

NB. Redundancy costs are built into the lifetime of the programme.

5.2 Risk Including Mitigating Actions:

Securing ESF monies until 2022 has provided some stability for targeted services for the past 5 years. However, plans need to be put in place prior to this end date to secure support for young people beyond this date. If the entire project support ends in 2022, this will have a detrimental impact on managing the NEET agenda. This 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). Regional discussions are underway to involve the Youth Service in considerations relating to future plans for 'Shared Prosperity' funding.

5.3 Legal:

There are no legal implications for this report.

5.4 Human Resources:

There are no immediate implications for Human Resources. However, as the end date of 2022 approaches, all staff within the two projects will need to be put on notice.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Performance Information and Data:

Although support is provided to young people up to the age of 25, Local Authorities are measured and compared nationally against the recorded numbers of young people leaving school each year at the end of Year 11 and then becoming NEET. Since 2010, Blaenau Gwent has seen a steady reduction in the numbers of young people leaving in Year 11 becoming NEET from 8.7% (74 young people) in 2009/10 to 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019/20. This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the lowest figure ever achieved. The national comparative report is published later this year.

6.1.1 Considering the context of the past year, it is extremely positive that so many young people transitioned successfully and maintained their post 16 placement. This reduction is attributed to improved partnership working but also due to the focussed efforts of the Youth Service using ESF funded programmes, initially Prevent 14-19 and now Inspire.

6.1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on I2A and I2W

Since March 2020, Inspire youth workers have been part of the Youth Service's response to COVID-19. Although school based youth workers 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.

6.1.3 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. A full summer programme was provided including a mixture of online and face to face activities. The Inspire teams have supported with detached 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.

6.1.4 Inspire 2 Achieve (11-16)

The Youth Service Team Manager: Education, Employment and Training oversees both the Inspire programmes.

6.1.5 There are 12 members of staff in the Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) team. This includes 1 x team leader, 5 x school based youth workers, 4 x transition youth workers (2 x Yr 6/7, 2 x Yr 11 including year 11 Electively Home Educated young people) and 1 x Emotional and Mental Health youth worker. Usual support includes one to one support and group programmes depending on the needs of the individual in an out of school.

6.1.6 The projected outcomes (targets) for the lifetime of the project and progress for Inspire 2 Achieve (11-16) are set out below:

- Total number of young people supported: 1196 (699 males, 497 females)
- 7% to gain qualifications (84 young people),
- 20% to enter into further learning when leaving school (239 young people)
- 50% to be at reduced risk of becoming NEET (598 young people)

6.1.7 Since 2016 (when team was established):

- 752 young people (out of 1196) have been supported, (372 male, 379 female), with one young person identifying as Non-Binary.

6.1.8 Due to COVID, the team has not closed any young people to the service this year. This will be reviewed at Easter. Therefore, the outcomes

recorded are those captured up to March 2020. 431 closed and the following outcomes are recorded:

- 24% have gained qualifications;
- 76% have entered further learning;
- 52% have reduced their risk of becoming NEET; and,
- 93% have improved their soft skills.

6.1.9 For the period of January to December 2020, 140 new young people were supported (81 males, 59 female). All school based youth workers supported school leavers this year, rather than just the two transition workers. This was due to the concerns that COVID could have on transition, and has contributed to the numbers of young people transitioning successfully.

6.1.10 Emotional and physical wellbeing became the dominant theme for 2020. 90 wellbeing packs were delivered, qualifications were delivered and support was provided to ensure young people had appropriate equipment and Wi-Fi access. Staff liaised with schools, arranged community walks and virtual activities. All to keep young people engaged in various ways and offer support. This support was highlighted as an area of good practice in a recent Estyn thematic review. In June 2020, The Youth Service won a national Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award and the Inspire programmes were key to that award.

6.1.11 Inspire 2 Work (16-24)

The team has reduced from 6.5 to 4.5 this year as two members of staff have temporarily supported the youth homelessness work in the Youth Service. The team, managed by the Youth Service Team Manager, includes 3 x core I2W youth workers (Education, Employment and Training), 1 x Health and Fitness youth worker and 0.5 emotional and mental health youth worker was appointed at the latter end of this year.

6.1.12 This project also funds one day a week counselling for 16-24 year olds and part funds a psychologist for the service.

6.1.13 Inspire support for young people aged 16-24 is provided on a one to one and group basis, delivering projects such as gym, fitness, training, enterprise and wellbeing and plays a pivotal role in supporting young people on Tiers 1,2 and 3 of the Careers Wales 5 Tier Model. Support is also offered to young people linked to the DWP, Housing associations, Social Services and other agencies. I2W can only support any young person who is NEET, and not living in a Communities First area, as Communities 4 Work is based in those areas. The reality is that the majority of young people coming through to the team often need long term intensive support, addressing issues such mental health, low self-esteem and housing. Therefore, the team work closely with other Youth Service colleagues and other partners, and small steps are seen as a big success.

6.1.14 The Communities 4 Work (C4W) Triage partnership work is pivotal. Each I2W Youth Worker acts as a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for each C4W cluster area. All referrals for young people who live in Communities First post code areas must go to the Triage post in Communities 4 Work before agreed to refer to Inspire. This ultimately means that Inspire has limited control over how many young people can access the project.

6.1.15 The projected outcomes (targets) for the lifetime of the project and progress for Inspire 2 Work (16-24) are set out below:

- Total number of young people supported: 780 (438 males, 342 females)
- 50% to gain qualifications (390 young people),
- 20% to enter into further learning when leaving school (156 young people)
- 20% to gain employment NEET (156 young people)

6.1.16 Since 2017 (when team was established):

250 young people (out of 780) have been supported (146 male, 104 female). Of the 211 closed, the following outcomes are recorded:

53 achieved a qualification (25%)

64 supported into further learning (23%)

54 supported into employment (26%)

82 still NEET but improved soft skills (39%)

Of the 211 closed, 202 (96%) improved their wellbeing support scores, meaning that their overall awareness and understanding of themselves and the wider world has significantly improved.

6.1.17 For the period of January to December 2020, 102 new young people were referred, with only 29 eligible through the Triage process and enrolled (15 male, 14 female). Out of the 29, 10 young people have now moved onto further learning and employment, with 19 continuing with support into 2020. However, an additional 150 young people were supported during this year linked to COVID. Food supplies, wellbeing packs, laptops, mobile phones, wellbeing walks, virtual fitness and cooking sessions and access to counselling were all facilitated through the small team.

6.1.18 It's clear to see that the sharing of participants between the Inspire 2 Work programme and C4W programme (C4W is an all Wales programme, run by Welsh Government, funded by ESF) has made meeting and/or exceeding targets difficult. This has been the same experience across the region where Local Authorities have a higher percentage of Communities First old areas. WEFO and the lead team are aware of this situation as all ESF programmes for this age group are facing a similar situation. Despite this, the numbers of young people being supported are good, with positive achievements being made by all young people. Nevertheless, future funding developments needs to take this into consideration, as many more

young people could be supported if the tight restrictions on where they live could be removed.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public:

Through the delivery of these programmes, young people will be supported at the times when they most need it and are more likely to achieve better outcomes in school, training and employment. The by-product of this enhanced support should lead to more economically active young people, more young people reaching their potential in secondary education and further learning/training and less mental health barriers hindering the development of young people.

6.3 Involvement (Consultation, engagement, participation):

From the outset, young people, schools and partner organisations influenced the design of the programmes.

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:

Both Inspire programmes are preventative in their approach. Inspire 2 Achieve exist to help 'prevent' young people from becoming NEET. Inspire 2 Work exists to 'prevent' young people from developing ingrained negative behaviours and lifestyles into their future.

6.6 Collaboration/Partnership Working:

The programmes are collaborative in their nature as they are a regionally planned programme, locally delivered. The local Raising Aspirations Group holds the Youth Service to account for achieving the outcomes in both Inspire programmes.

6.7 Integration:

These programmes impact upon key objectives for both Education and Environment and Regeneration Directorates, including educational attainment, attendance and behaviour and addressing skills and employment for 11-24 year olds.

6.8 EqlA:

N/A as this programme will not have any negative impact on protected characteristics, only positive.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Raising Aspirations Group monitors the progress of the local delivery of the two Inspire programmes. A performance monitoring report is presented annually to Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the local delivery. Annual reports and evaluation reports are also provided to Education Directorate Management Team (DMT).

Background Documents / Electronic Links
N/A