



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INFORMATION REPORT

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Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
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To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS OF YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES SINCE THE ESTYN MONITORING VISIT 2015

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the progress of the wider youth support services across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough. The scale of Youth Support services encompasses any service for young people between 11-25 that supports individuals to participate in education or training, to take advantage of opportunities for employment or to participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.
- 1.2 This report focuses on the critical areas highlighted within the Estyn Monitoring visit in 2015 and outlines what has been achieved since then to improve the identification of needs and the strategic planning of services through Multi Agency Partnership approaches working across a number of different areas.
- 1.3 The impacts of this have also been identified and are set out, along with the priority areas for development over the next 12 to 18 months.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The local authority has a statutory duty to 'provide, secure the provision of or participate in the provision of youth support services' (section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000) and, as such contributes to the Estyn inspection process of local authority education services to children and young people.
- 2.2 In the Estyn Monitoring Visit in November 2015, the local authority Youth Support Services was judged to have 'made strong progress' in addressing Recommendation

7 to 'evaluate the impact of Youth Support Services in order to adjust provision and rebalance resource allocation where necessary.'

- 2.3 The report noted that partnership arrangements and changes to the corporate structure had improved strategic planning; a comprehensive needs analysis had identified gaps in services; a review of externally funded local authority services had led to improved working across the service; young people's views were taken into account when planning programmes and improved use of data and co-ordination of services had led to an evaluation of impact and improved engagement in learning and employment prospects of young people.

3.0 SINCE THE ESTYN MONITORING VISIT 2015

- 4.1 Restructures which took place prior to the previous inspection and which created better collaboration across service areas focused on young people have continued to be developed further by the Local Authority. A restructure at head of service level has now brought together a department which focuses on Community Wellbeing and poverty, which now not only looks at the needs of children and young people but also these needs within the wider family and community context. This has strengthened further the approach to ensuring children and young people's needs are met through a range of support services working in a more collaborative way.

- 4.2 The local authority, in accordance with its duties under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, has undertaken a range of needs assessments that have further identified the needs of young people to inform the future development of services both locally and on a regional basis. This has been further supplemented with local needs assessments and community consultations when examining the future services provided through programmes such as Substance Misuse, Families First, Communities First Legacy arrangements etc. and the priorities identified for specific strategies focused on young people.

4.0 PROGRESSING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 4.1 The approach of the Youth Support Services plan 2017- 20, which was developed in partnership with third sector partners, mirrors the approach the organisation has taken within the poverty agenda. This approach focuses resources on early intervention and prevention, through both universal and targeted services, in order to reduce the reliance on specialist support services. A key priority within this approach is to ensure young people are supported to influence and shape services that are provided for them.

- 4.2 The priorities within the plan were identified from a number of sources. During the start of the process, a transition was taking place between the local authority Corporate and Single Integrated Plans and the development of the initial Wellbeing Plan. These plans identified a range of priorities for future service delivery to meet young people's needs. The priorities within the wellbeing plan were also reflected in the views expressed in the Youth Service consultation with young people that took place in the autumn of 2016 and reinforced the views that young people had provided in consultations in previous years. The priority areas are Raising Attainment; NEET's and Youth Unemployment; Healthy Living; Active Citizenship and Safeguarding and Quality, all of which are embedded within the strategies focused on supporting young people.

- 4.3 Since the Estyn monitoring visit in 2015 and through the work of the Corporate Safeguarding Reference group, safe recruitment practices have been enhanced and a template safeguarding policy has been developed for commissioned services and third sector partner to use. Also, as part of the Corporate Safeguarding Action Plan, WRAP training has been delivered.
- 4.4 Last autumn, the Youth Support Services Steering group undertook a review of more recent consultations involving young people in order to ensure that, in this changing strategic landscape, the YSS Plan remained relevant. As a result of this review the group concluded that the themes identified in the various consultations supported the YSS Plan in its current form, but a decision was made to update the mapping of provision during the early part of 2018. The group, conscious of the changing landscape and financial pressures on services were keen to further improve their understanding of any potential gaps in services that may have arisen and of how services are continuing to meet needs, so that this informs future planning of provision leading into 2019.

5.0 SHAPING SERVICES TO MEET NEEDS

Youth Services

- 5.1 The Local authority restructured its Youth provision a number of years ago in response to young people's needs and consultations. These provisions have now embedded and continue to be the mainstay of universal youth provision across the county borough. Access to provision is further improved by the range of open access youth provision provided through the voluntary sector, either individually or in partnership with the local authority. Good examples of this partnership approach can be seen at Georgetown, Treharris, or in the existing contract for Participation with Safer Merthyr Tydfil.
- 5.2 Through targeted work, the Youth Service continues to support the preventative agenda and significant developments have taken place in this area in relation to the provision of formal qualifications in educational settings which contribute to young people achieving their threshold point score. For example, the successful delivery of BTEC Personal Social Development at Penydre High School has been expanded to Afon Taf High School. In 2017 100% of young people successfully achieved their BTEC Level One qualification. In recognition of its importance, and due to grant reductions from Welsh Government in 2018, elements of the resource which enable the delivery of this programme are now funded from core resources.
- 5.3 The Youth Service is also now a main deliverer of qualifications to learners attending the EOTAS programme, with some considerable success. In 2017 all Year 11 learners attending this provision achieved a range of recognised qualifications. During 2017-18 the service has also been piloting the delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate to this client group in response to the changes in performance measures at Key Stage 4.
- 5.4 In recognition of the responsibilities assigned to the statutory youth service through the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework and the challenges of the NEETs agenda, the local authority has secured additional external resources. These European resources enable the allocation of lead worker support to young people pre 16 to prevent them becoming NEET and young people aged 16-24 to reengage

them in education training or employment, thereby decreasing long periods of unemployment through providing an effective safety net support system.

- 5.5 More recently, within the wider service areas of Community Wellbeing there have been several examples of how the local authority has reviewed and reshaped service provision and allocation of resources in order to ensure that the needs of young people are being met:

Young People's Participation

- 6.6 A decision was made in the summer of 2016 to commission out the Participation service and this has proved beneficial as the service has gone from strength to strength. This approach has enhanced partnership working with young people and the wider youth support services sector, including third sector providers, in order to increase learner voice. In response to the views of young people, MTBWYF has developed an award winning Mental Health DVD, which now forms part of a local authority mental health toolkit aimed at supporting teachers and other front line staff to help young people to deal with these issues.
- 6.7 The approach has also provided more of a challenge to the local authority with the young people feeling that they are in a stronger position to speak independently and not therefore constrained by the internal workings of a Local Authority. This has enabled MTBWYF as a group to prepare and submit proposals to council to shape their own service and other services for the future benefit of young people.

Families First Funding

- 6.8 In response to the recent review of Families First funding, a model has been approved which sets out to widen access to services through ensuring providers can offer single interventions in response to needs, alongside meeting the needs of families with multiple needs. This reshaping of Families First funding will widen access, within the preventative approach, to critical areas of support before families develop the need for multiple service support.
- 6.9 A targeted youth support pathway has been developed, with the intention that this will improve efficiency across contracted projects that support young people and their families, through a graduated, co-ordinated response. The aim is that these projects should add value to existing services and focus on the reduction of risk, prevent escalation and support young people to make better choices.

Communities First Legacy Funding

- 6.10 In addressing the closure of Communities First the local authority implemented a review with the Community First cluster organisations and a consultation with the wider community to establish future priorities for legacy funding. These priorities, alongside the wellbeing plan information and the Families First review, identified a range of potential investment areas.
- 6.11 It was recognised during this process that, with the ceasing of Communities First funding, significant gaps in services for children and young people were going to be created and therefore, these service areas were prioritised for funding. In order to develop greater collaboration with the voluntary sector and to maximise impact of current youth strategies, the services commissioned and the objectives within have

been developed by the youth service, who will also be responsible for contract management of these provisions. Through this approach the opportunity to standardise priorities across the borough has been adopted in what were previously independent services.

Regional Developments

- 6.12 **Community Zones:** Cwm Taf were successful in being approved as one of the pilots across Wales for the development of the Children's First initiative. However within the region it was recognised that to change a child's life means having to influence the wider family and the community. Therefore, within the region, the term 'Community Zone' has been adopted. Within Merthyr Tydfil the area that has been agreed as a Community Zone is the Gurnos. A number of services are already available within this community. However, the challenge now is for integrated working to be developed across the community in order to support the resilience of that community. Therefore, through legacy funding, a small budget has been made available to support this initiative.
- 6.13 It is recognised across the region that this approach is not a quick fix and that working in partnership with the community is essential to finding long term solutions to issues identified. An immediate positive of engaging the community has been noted through the focus on addressing issues of the use of 'spice', which is now being led on by the Cwm Taf Integrated Substance Misuse Service.
- 6.14 **Integrated Substance Misuse Service:** Cwm Taf has recently undertaken a review of its substance misuse services and is in the process of agreeing its new model which will enable a greater focus on a more holistic approach to supporting those with substance misuse issues. This approach will also enable a greater focus on legal highs as well as illegal substances, ensuring a far more responsive service to the needs of young people.

7.0 IMPACT OF YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES

7.1 Youth Service

- 7.1.1 The Youth Service continues to perform above the Welsh average for the achievement of national accreditations. In 2016-17, 15% of young people engaged with the youth service achieved an accredited outcome, against a Welsh average of 10%, with the engagement of young people between the ages of 11-25 at 22%, also above the Welsh average of 16%.
- 7.1.2 Whilst the accreditation data for 2016-17 is reduced from that available at the time of the inspection, it is noted that in that year (2015) a spike in the achievement of national accreditations occurred due to significant investment in employment related programmes. This, however, did not result in a significantly higher engagement of the youth population due to the very targeted nature of this work.
- 7.1.3 Targeted provision has provided the opportunity for vulnerable learners to gain accreditation. For example, 100% of Year 11 EOTAS learners completing their courses with Youth Service gained nationally recognised BTEC and ASDAN qualifications. As a pilot, BTEC Personal Social Development (PSD) is currently being delivered to a group of vulnerable Year 11 learners in Afon Taf and they are due to complete their course in summer 2018, with promising progress being made.

7.1.4 The closer collaboration across youth support services has resulted in an improved strategic focus and co-ordination of services, which has enabled the service to achieve High Sheriffs Awards and, more recently, the Bronze Quality Mark for Youth Work.

7.2 NEETs

7.2.1 The annual Destination Survey shows that the NEET figure in Merthyr Tydfil for 2017 was 1.3%, with no unknown destinations for the fourth year in a row, placing the authority joint fifth and above the Welsh average of 1.6%. This has been sustained through a continued focus on the co-ordination of services and tracking of learners, which has resulted in a steady improvement in the NEET figure since 2012 when it was 6.2% and 2015 when it was 1.6%.

7.2.2 At year ending 31st March 2018, youth unemployment for 16-24 year olds was 13.5%, equalling the Welsh average. The improvement since 2012 of 23.4% was at an accelerated pace in comparison to the rest of Wales, which improved at a rate of 10.4% over the same period.

7.3 Participation

7.3.1 The local authority can demonstrate effective and sustained commitment to listening to young people across many service areas and this good progress was acknowledged in a letter to the local authority following submission of the Participation progress report to Welsh Government and subsequent visit that took place in the summer of 2017.

7.3.2 There have been several notable impacts in relation to young people's participation. These are identified as:

- The revised election process saw the number of young people voting in youth mayor elections rising from 37 votes in 2016 to over 2500 in 2017.
- Membership of MTBWYF has also increased from 28 members to 137, with representation from 16 different organisations.
- Production of a mental health toolkit and DVD by young people, which is now used in the training of adults, including teachers, and has been awarded the High Sheriff's Cup award.
- Full Council agreeing to move the inauguration of the Youth mayor to fall in line with the local authority Mayor; passing of a motion to support voting rights for 16 year olds and young people holding positions on Scrutiny Committees

7.4 Families First

7.4.1 Whilst the reshaping of Families First is still in its initial stage, notable impacts have been identified including:

- Joint commissioning of therapeutic and school based counselling which, it is anticipated, will reduce previous waiting lists and provide better value for money.
- A 'Resilience Programme' delivered by the Youth Support team in local secondary schools.

- Creation of an emotional health and wellbeing focus and pathway to address an identified priority and reduce escalation into more specialist mental health services.
- Improved support for parents, including additional availability of support to fathers.
- Organisations and individuals supporting families across the county borough being trained in how to recognise and promote play within the family in order to promote child development.

7.5 Communities First Legacy Funding

7.5.1 Whilst the introduction of the Legacy Fund is still in its initial stage, notable impacts have been identified including:

- Improved strategic and partnership approach between statutory and voluntary sector provision.
- Joint commissioning of services for early language development and domestic violence awareness.

7.6 Play

7.6.1 Investment has been secured from Welsh Government to increase the use of play spaces across the county borough in response to the Play Sufficiency Assessment. Sustainable play provision has been instigated in partnerships with schools and parents in identified communities through the 'Ziggies' programme, further involving parents in school life.

8.0 AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

8.1 A mapping exercise is being led by the Youth Support Services Steering group to refresh information currently held on services for young people. The requirements for YSS go beyond the information which is held on DEWIS or on the Family Information Service databases. The exercise may identify gaps, but could also support a proposed youth service sufficiency assessment that may be required by Welsh Government in the near future and add to the directories already held.

8.2 Development of the Capita One database is currently being looked at from a number of services. However critical areas identified include: developing vulnerability profile down to key stage 2; implementing a new Youth Service module which will enhance data analysis across service area; piloting of key/lead working approaches using the system to be able to identify impacts on outcomes for children and young people.

8.3 Refresh the Welsh Audit Office data regarding the support available to NEET's and the impact of a reduction in unemployment figures for providers. Further develop quality frameworks for lead working and the development of a joint workforce development plan across service areas. This will improve use of training resources, but also allow the local authority to begin to plan for the ending of European funding of lead worker projects and upskill staff to undertake the lead worker role.

8.4 A Wellbeing Tool will be piloted within Youth Service and several third sector organisations in order to assess learner wellbeing and distance travelled. If worthwhile, this would supplement other sources of evidence to demonstrate the

impact of services and contribute to an overall picture of wellbeing of young people in Merthyr Tydfil.

- 8.5 The School Sport Survey 2018 is being rolled out between April and July and a report for each participating school and the local authority will be published in October 2018. This report will inform progress since the last survey was undertaken in 2015, when 48% of young people in Merthyr Tydfil reported the they were 'hooked on sport', which was in line with the Welsh average.
- 8.6 Several multi agency partnership strategies will be instigated or renewed over the next year including the Parenting Strategy, Play Strategy, and a refreshed Early Years Strategy which will include the new 30 hour childcare offer from Welsh Government.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.