



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	6 th September 2021
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Service Area	Community Wellbeing
Committee Date	13 th September 2021

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Youth Service

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report sets out the responsibilities of the Youth Service and its component parts in delivering against these responsibilities. It also revisits how the service is structured across the County Borough. The integrated model that was developed and approved is reliant upon partners across the voluntary or third sector and through grant funding for a substantial amount of delivery.
- 1.2 The report focuses on the national performance data of the Youth Service and its partners as both the NEETs agenda and the Participation agenda have been the subject of other reports to Council and or Cabinet. This national data has not been published for the last two years and therefore cannot be benchmarked against other local authorities at this time.
- 1.3 The report identifies the key areas for future development and next steps that will enable the service to achieve its ambitions of remaining in the top quartile across Wales.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The content of this report is discussed and noted.
- 2.2 Scrutiny Committee members identify any further information they would like to receive on the proposed Youth Support Services Plan.
- 2.3 Scrutiny Committee members identify any further information they would like in relation to future grant funding impacting these services, including Legacy funding.
- 2.4 Scrutiny Committee members identify priorities which can be considered by Cabinet in developing budget proposals.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 There is a requirement on the local authority under section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000) to *'provide, secure the provision of or participate in the provision of youth support services'*. This means services that will *'encourage, enable or assist young persons (directly or indirectly):*
- a. To participate effectively in education and training,*
 - b. To take advantage of opportunities for employment, or*
 - c. To participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.*
- 3.2 The Youth Service, in addition to its statutory responsibility also has responsibility for the co-ordination of young people who are NEET or potentially NEET (11-25), as laid out in the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework guidance provided by Welsh Government.
- 3.3 A range of targeted services are also available through grant funding including the School Support Team and the Mental Health and Youth Homelessness Team funded through the Youth Support Grant; Inspire to Achieve and Inspire to Work European, funded lead working projects; and the Families First funded Youth Support Team that supports the Team Around the Family (TAF) model.
- 3.4 The local authority, through a core funded commissioned service with Safer Merthyr Tydfil (SMT), provides young people with the opportunity to have their voice heard through the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF), along with support from the office of Youth Mayor.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 Since 2015 the statutory Youth Service has comprised of three full-time youth provisions and one street-based team, funded from core resources, with only one facility across the County Borough being the property of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (Pen y Dre Youth Centre). This established a geographical model, agreed by Council, and was based on both the LA funded provision and partners provision ensuring that young people are no more than three miles from an open access universal youth provision. The structure implemented was based upon robust self-evaluation, independent research and extensive consultation with young people, stakeholders and staff. This also secured a substantial saving for the Council at the time through the reduction in provision, changes to staff terms and conditions and increased integrated working with the third sector.
- 4.2 The introduction of the Legacy Fund by Welsh Government enabled the best of Communities First to be maintained. This enabled the continuation of the Dowlais Engine House, The Gellideg Foundation and the 3G's Development Trust (now Merthyr Valley Homes) as agreed by Council to continue delivering services to children and young people as part of this geographical approach.
- 4.3 This collaborative approach resulted in an improved strategic focus and co-ordination of services across the County Borough whilst also influencing the quality of these services. This was recognised in 2018 by the Youth Service achieving the Bronze Quality Mark for Youth Work in March 2018.

- 4.4 In 2017 there were three separate strategic plans covering the various aspects of the work with children and young people: NEETS Strategy, Youth Support Services Strategy and the Youth Service Strategy.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 The current structure of provision across the County Borough is provided in Appendix A which shows how reliant upon the third sector the local authority Youth Services are for both delivery and access to facilities.
- 5.2 In relation to the current performance of the service the data for 2019/20 has not yet been verified and published by Welsh Government due to the impact of the pandemic and the figures for 2020/21 have only recently been obtained from all partners and submitted to Welsh Government. These figures, for both years should be treated with extreme caution as there is no comparative data across Wales to benchmark this performance against during the pandemic.

Table 1 Engagement

Year	%11-25 year old engagement	Wales average	%11-19 year old engagement	Wales average
2020/21	21.32%	N/A	32%	N/A
2019/20	29.4%	N/A	48%	N/A
2018/19	36%	15%	59%	25%
2017/18	21%	16%	36%	27%
2016/17	22%	16%	37%	27%

- 5.3 In 2019/20 the number of engagements by young people was 31,735 which was a decrease on the previous year (33,677). This engagement though was really hit hard during the heights of the pandemic in 2020/21 when centres were closed and access to young people in schools was restricted to essential learning only. This resulted in most engagements being done online through group or one to one sessions with those most at risk of disengagement and amounted to 6,710 in 2020/21.

Table 2 Accreditation

Youth Service Trend Data – Accredited Outcomes		
Year	% 11-25 year olds gaining a qualification	Wales average
2020/21	14%	N/A
2019/20	23%	N/A
2018/19	14%	10%
2017/18	26%	9%
2016/17	15%	10%

- 5.4 The percentage of 11-25 year old young people engaged with the Youth Service who achieve a recognised qualification has been consistently above the Wales average for the last seven years. Table 2 provides the trend in performance since 2016/17. This reflects the desire by young people to be able to access qualifications through Youth Services. During the pandemic a concerted effort was made by all partners to support as far as possible young people to continue with their accredited learning through one to one work, online group delivery. The delivery of BTEC's were also completed just as lockdown commenced in March 2020 but were claimed in the summer of 2020. Therefore, the full impact of the pandemic on accredited outcomes will not be fully realised until 2021/22.

5.5 The Youth Service accesses a range of funding and reports on this alongside the data above on an annual basis to Welsh government. The financial analysis is as set out below:

Table 3 Funding

Core and Grant Funded Youth Work Budgets (£)					
Funding Type	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Core	461,914	486,964	497,089	486,464	447,874
Grant	280,152	276,842	488,241	504,498	515,865
Total	742,066	763,806	985,330	990,962	963,739

5.6 In addition to the above, which is reported to Welsh Government annually, there are also two other funding streams the Youth Service is in receipt of; European funding for the Inspire programmes (£573,304) and Families First funding for its role in Team around the Family and NEETs coordination (£141,430).

5.7 During the pandemic, and as previously reported to Scrutiny as part of the Education portfolio report, the Youth Service continued to deliver services where possible by adopting different approaches and through staff assisting with other activities to support children, young people and families. A summary of the approaches is provided below and were delivered dependent upon the various stages of lockdown:

- Implemented keeping in touch and telephone or online interventions with young people
- New referrals continued to be accepted for phone or online interventions
- Families were supported to engage in the MTHA Fit & Fed programme by purchasing cooking equipment, food vouchers and small fitness equipment
- 'Operation Play Packs' programme was supported during February half term
- Group work interventions were redeveloped and ready for delivery once schools re-opened
- Approval was granted to pilot the delivery of the BTEC Personal Growth and Wellbeing, which replaces the BTEC Personal Social Development
- A successful BTEC Centre inspection took place In January 2021 with good practice highlighted in the inspection report
- Young people in Years 10 and 11 were supported to complete Agored Cymru Level One PSD qualifications as part of the Inspire to Achieve project
- In Inspire to Work, the roll on roll off Employability Programme was delivered to small groups of young people with a focus on completing a CV and undertaking certain on line qualifications such as 'Safety in Catering'
- Monthly Youth Service Partnership Forum meetings were resumed
- The Universal Youth Service and commissioned partners adopted new ways of working, including outreach work and teams partnered with organisations such as Barod, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Mind and Cardiff City Foundation
- Online workshops were delivered in partnership with the Street Based Youth Service team, Treharris Boys and Girls Club and the Calon Las (MVH) Youth Project

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 Given the negative impact of the pandemic on children and young people and the impact this had on the delivery of services we clearly want to be fully operational 'safely' in all settings. This process has begun and risk assessments have been revised in light of the guidance provided by WG for alert level zero with the expectation that all provisions are fully operational in the new academic year. We will need to consider the impact of the pandemic on young people and reengage them in informal and social learning opportunities so increasing both engagements and accredited learning opportunities back towards pre-pandemic levels or higher.
- 6.2 The service is currently developing a new strategic plan for the service that will incorporate the responsibilities of all three areas Youth Service, NEETs and Youth Support Services into an overarching single plan. This plan will be shared shortly with a request that this goes out to consultation so that all partners internal and external have an opportunity to influence and shape the plan. Partners across both the NEETs strategic group and the Youth Support Services steering groups have been supportive and involved in this approach to date.
- 6.3 The body responsible for administering the Youth Services Quality Mark has changed and is now administered through the Education Workforce Council. Due to this change and due to the pandemic, the opportunity to renew the award or attempt for the Silver Award was not available. However, now that this is back open the service has already begun the process of renewing the Bronze Award.
- 6.4 There is a substantial amount of delivery which is reliant upon external grant funding and which is currently being reviewed either nationally or locally. The service will need to do everything it can to maintain the levels of investment in key areas:
- NEETs coordination contributes significantly to the education agenda through its identification and support for those disengaging from education or at risk of disengagement
 - Service Managers are already liaising with Careers Wales about future applications to the Shared Prosperity Fund
 - Legacy Fund could mean the loss of several big youth providers, however there is also growing concern about the lack of resources for other third sector provisions compared to these providers. There will be significant vested interests and unrest across communities with any reshaping of provision and funding in this area of responsibilities
 - The pandemic has significantly impacted on young people's wellbeing so maintaining the TAF approach for young people and the wider group work programme in schools through this resource will be essential.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 Review what has worked during the pandemic and establish how we can maintain some of these systems (e.g. use of social media) whilst encouraging and supporting young people to reengage in face to face services across communities.

- 7.2 Finalise the Youth Support Services Strategic Plan, consult on the plan and after approval by Council implement accordingly.
- 7.3 Explore funding opportunities through potential partnership with Careers Wales to develop an application to the Shared Prosperity fund to at least maintain, if not extend work with those at risk of disengaging with education and preventing NEETs, guidance permitting.
- 7.4 Once guidance on the future of the Legacy Fund is available provide an analysis report and a transition plan to implement the new guidance to Scrutiny and the Tackling Poverty Group.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO rAISING ASPIRATIONS RAISING STANDARDS STRATEGY

8.1 The contents of this report relate to the following RARS Themes and Goals

- Partnership and Collaboration
- Pandemic Recovery

- Supporting Learners Health and Wellbeing
- Improving Achievement and Progression

9.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

9.1 The contents of this report relate to the following Wellbeing Objectives:

- Best Start to Life

SUE WALKER
CHIEF OFFICER, LEARNING

COUNCILLOR LISA MYTTON
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND
PORTFOLIO LEAD FOR LEARNING

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

Open Access Universal provision 11-25yrs

North Cluster

Dowlais Engine House	-	LEGACY FUND*
Merthyr Valleys Homes	-	LEGACY FUND*

Mid Cluster

Georgetown Boys & Girls Club (LA Youth)	-	Core Funding
The Gellideg Foundation	-	LEGACY FUND*
Twynrodyn Action Group (TAG)	-	Core Funding**
Menter Iaith	-	WG Youth Support Grant Annual

South Cluster

The Willows Centre (LA Youth)	-	Core Funding
Treharris Boys & Girls Club	-	Core Funding

<u>Street Based Service</u>	-	Core Funding
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Targeted Provision 11-25yrs

School Support Team	-	Youth Support Grant
Inspire to Achieve	-	European (end of 2022)***
Inspire to Work	-	European (end of 2022)***
Youth Support (Team Around Family)	-	Families First ****
NEETS Coordination	-	Families First ****
Wellbeing/ Homelessness prevention	-	WG Youth Support Grant Annual

Any other youth provisions across the County Borough do not currently receive financial support annually through the Youth Service, or youth/ community orientated grants managed through this service area e.g. H factor Aberfan, Stephens and George, bridging the Gap

* LEGACY FUND was only meant to be for 3 years but extended and now being reviewed by WG meaning these provisions could be at risk

**TAG previously received one off support from Core, however has been supported via grant through underspend enabling this to have been ongoing for 3 years

***European Grants will all end and hope to secure resources through the x fund set to be made available but no guidance has yet been provided by WG

****Families First funding currently being reviewed and these services could be at risk