



**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

C.Hanagan
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale CF40 2XX

Meeting Contact: Claire Hendy - Senior Democratic Services Officer (01443 424081)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a meeting of **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** to be held at the on **WEDNESDAY, 21ST APRIL, 2021** at **5.00 PM.**

Non Committee Members and Members of the public may request the facility to address the Committee at their meetings on the business listed although facilitation of this request is at the discretion of the Chair. It is kindly asked that such notification is made to Democratic Services by Monday, 19 April 2021 on the contact details listed above, including stipulating whether the address will be in Welsh or English.

AGENDA

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1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

To Welcome Members and Officer to the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee & to receive any apologies

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and

2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

3. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 3rd February 2021 and 24th February 2021

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REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS

4. CONSULTATION LINKS

Information is provided in respect of relevant [consultations](#) for consideration by the Committee.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES.

5. UPDATE OF EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

To consider the report of the Director of Education in respect of the most recent changes in Education during the spring term in response to the ever-changing COVID-19 position.

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REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

6. CHILDREN'S SERVICES COVID 19 RECOVERY AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

To receive a report from the Director of Children's Service in relation to the COVID -19 Pandemic

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7. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION SERVICE: AN OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT AND PROVISION DURING COVID -19

To receive an overview from Youth Engagement and Participation Service in respect of the Support and Provision during Covid -19"

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8. CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

To reflect on the meeting and actions to be taken forward.

9. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (County Borough Councillor S. Rees-Owen and County Borough Councillor J Edwards respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor S Evans, Councillor J Brencher, Councillor H Fychan, Councillor A Calvert, Councillor S Powell, Councillor M Powell, Councillor M Griffiths, Councillor D Owen-Jones, Councillor S Morgans, Councillor G Stacey, Councillor L De Vet and Councillor L Walker

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr M Cleverley
Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Ms A Jones, Representing UNITE
Mr C Jones, Representing GMB
Mrs C Jones, Representing the National Union of Teachers and Teachers' Panel
Mr D Price, Representing UNISON
Mr A Rickett, Voting Diocesan Authorities' Representative
Mrs R Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, 3 February 2021 at 5.00 pm.

County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor A Calvert	Councillor S Powell
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor G Stacey	Councillor L Walker

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms T Prosser, Head of Service
Mr L Lewis, Acting Head of the Youth Offending Service
Ms M Ropstad – Service Manager – Carers, RCT

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor W Lewis

54 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors L. De-Vet, S Evans, H Fychan, M Griffiths, M Powell and Co-opted Member R Nicholls.

55 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, the following declaration of personal interest was received:-

In relation to Agenda Item 5 , Youth Offending Service Report , County Borough Councillor G Stacey - " My daughter works for the Youth Offending Service"

56 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 2nd December 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

57 Consultation Links

The Chair referenced the consultation links which were available through the RCT Scrutiny website. The Chair continued and reminded that if there are any relevant item Members would like to consider they should notify the Scrutiny Officers who will deal with the items.

A Member commented that there was an item with the link on School Improvement Guidance and felt that it would be an item the Committee may wish to consider.

After consideration Members **RESOLVED** to contact Scrutiny with any comments and the Chair and Director of Education would form a response on behalf of the Committee.

58 Young Carers Report

The Service Manager – Carers, presented Members with an updating report on the Young Carers Service.

Members were informed that the Young Carer Service sits within the Local Authority's responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) (2014). It was explained that a new national plan for carers was expected for 2020/2021 however Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown and disruption has led to a delay in progressing the public engagement which is now planned for October 2020 – January 2021.

Officers continued and explained that once confirmed the Regional Action plan will be required to implement the National priorities and recommendations established in the new national plan. It was also highlighted that Welsh Government provided transitional funding of £1million per annum for Wales in 2019/20 (£161,00 for Cwm Taf Morgannwg) to protect and build on progress to date and to support the expansion of Carers rights under the implementation of the SSWB Act . Young Carers are included in this regional work.

Officers updated Members on the following key point of the report:

- The year has been extremely challenging for young carers as their circumstances have changed significantly. The support provided has continued within the Coronavirus restrictions and the RCT Young Carer Service has supported young carers and families to deal with challenges;
- A new national ID card for young carers will be launched before the end of March in RCT. This scheme has been piloted with a group of young carers currently accessing support and additional shopping discount has been added with support from RCT Council's Staff Benefit Scheme.; and
- Once restrictions allow, all age carers service in the borough will be co-located in a new refurbished office in Pontypridd, Grant funding has provided equipment and furnishing to allow space for carers events, workshops, training and meetings this will act as a carer's hub for RCT.

In respect of future plans Members pleased to see that once schools reopen fully

the service is hoping to promote the Young Carer Schools Award programme as it shows the hard work and commitment of our young carers.

Members thanked the Officers for the report and presented their questions. A Member asked a question regarding supporting young carers especially the intensive support and wanted to know if Members have a direct line to the service so they can help those in need. Officers explained Members can get in touch within the IAA Team and Staff there are able to address any issues and will direct the referral to the services that are able to help.

Another Member asked a question regarding the Covid 19 situation and asked if the service is aware of any new carers which may have been put in the situation due to the pandemic and is there any early indication of demand if so how are these young carers managing looking after parents.

The Team Manager Community and Children's Services explained that Covid has been a worry for all and assured Members that staff were still visiting families and monitoring their needs. Members were informed that contact through the front door had increased by 1000 compared to last year. Social Workers, Miskin Project, Resilient Families Service, YEP Service. working together to identify the child's needs and will refer to the service. If there is a need we will try and deliver a service to deal with needs of young carers. In the future we may see an increase and we will priorities and monitor this through many ways.

A Member asked what are we doing to raise the awareness of the Service across the County Borough, what information is out there to let people know the service is available to everyone who needs the service. .

The Officer explained we do need to raise the profile of young carers and with the National Scheme for ID card, the Carer Friendly Employer Scheme and the use of social media should put the service in the right direction to raise the profile of Young Carers. The service is producing a film showing the work of young carers and how they cope during Covid.

Another Member wanted clarity in relation to young carer who are supporting siblings, the Member asked how of these child have internet access and digital devices and also asked if these children are attending school.

In response the Officer explained the sibling carer service sound more alarming than it is. The Sibling Carer Service provides support for the siblings of the child with additional learning needs. The Service give the sibling time away from the family unit to develop friendships with other sibling carers. It also allows quality time for parents and the sibling carer.

In respect of the digital devices the officer explained that she did not have any numbers for the children at present. However there has been support where needed and there has been a joined up approach with Education and when identified the child has been provided with devices and internet access. The Officers explained they have worked with finance and have accesses a number of grants.

The Chair asked Officers to bring back figure in respect of how many carers have had access to the devices and how many may are still waiting as this is a main concern for the Committee and we need to make sure each child is

supported.

Finally Members highlighted concerns in respect of young carers during the pandemic and wanted to know if the access to the service had increase and if there had been any indication of new problems which have occurred due to the pandemic. Also Members wanted to know there had been more resource made available and if not was it needed.

In response the Officers explained that the assessor sits within the IIA service and some face to face work would be done. Young people we are aware of has had a service that meets their needs and we will have capacity within the service.

After further discussion Members RESOLVED:

- Receive an updating report challenges identified by young carers during the pandemic and beyond.
- Receive information in respect of the number of digital devices and internet access provided to young carers throughout the pandemic.

59 Youth Offending Service Report

The Head of Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service provided Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny with an update on the work of the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) 2020/21. Also included within the report is a summary of the Service's response to the Covid 19 pandemic along with the future challenge for the services.

Members were informed that the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service is a statutory partnership legislated by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and provides a service across two local authority areas, namely Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. It was brought to Members attention that in August 2014 the local authority YOS areas merged to form Cwm Taf YOS.

The Head of Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service enlighten Members that the aim of the service is to prevent the offending and re-offending of the children and young people within our communities. The statutory partners involved are South Wales Police, Cwm Taf University Health Board, HM Prison and Probation Service along with Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authority areas.

It was highlighted that the overall governance is facilitated by the Regional Cwm Taf Offender Management Board (OMB) which meets quarterly to hold the service to account. In addition to this the performance of the YOS is also reported to the Youth Justice System and to the Welsh Government.

The Head of Service explained that due to the result of Covid 19 the YOS were not required to provide an annual Youth Justice Plan for the financial year 2020/21. The Head of Service continued and explained that the YJB instead

requested that YOS completed a self-assessment and action plan in relation to a new set of National Standards for Youth Justice.

The Head of Service provided Members with an overview of the work carried out by the service since March 2020, it was explained that most of the YOS staff have undertaken the majority of their work remotely which has meant a reduction in face to face contact with young people and families.

It was also explained that during this unprecedented time staff have continued to support young people who appear in the law courts or required an appropriate adult at a police station.

Members were also informed that face to face contact with young people assessed as high risk has continued during this time.

The Head of the Cwm Taf YOS highlighted where the service is at now and what the future priority areas are for the service. It was explained that the service is currently in the process of restructuring the service in order to meet the demands of early intervention and prevention which now accounts for the majority of the workload. Members were updated on the use of the Viewpoint data feedback system, along with the YOS education training and employment team.

In respect of CAMHS the officer explained that YOS has recently negotiated CAMHS provision with Senior Health Managers to provide increased support for staff dealing with young people who present with more complex wellbeing issues and continue to work to strengthen links with the Health Service.

In concluding his report the Head of Cwm Taf YOS explained that currently the service is dealing with staffing issues which were not so apparent within the first lockdown, which includes sickness rates, caring for family member etc. The Officer finally explained that the potential impact of future Covid restriction, service change and the risks associated with potential changes to grant funding will need to be monitored closely to ensure that Cwm Taf YOS can alongside key partner can properly meet the needs of young people within the region.

The Chair thanked the officer for a comprehensive report and open up the meeting for Members questions and comments.

A Member commended the officer for the report and thanked staff and the service for the work that had been done throughout this year. The Members asked a question with regards to the hotspot areas within the County Borough the Member asked for an illustration of where these areas are and queried whether work is being done with the YEPS with these areas.

We meet on a monthly basis with community partners and police and we identify hotspots areas where the troubles are coming in. As a service our prevention teams are going out to these areas to try and better inform these young people and steer them in the right direction rather than use enforcement. However more recently due to the situation the police have asked for a more enforced approach however this can compromise some our staff.

In relation to the YEP services they have been working with the young people and this is a different type of work to the YOS team and we are having referral from YEPS.

The Member also questioned officers in respect of Care homes and county lines.

In his reply the officer explained that County lines has not been a major issue for the service, but we know there is an issue with child exploration and work is being done around this. With regards to care homes the officer explained that there has been a lot of restorative justice work and mediation work carried with care homes.

Members also raised questions regarding CAMHS and the Head of Cwm Taf YOS explained that there seems to be an increase in the number of young people presenting with mental health issues and was pleased that the services is working with health colleagues to address the situation.

Further questions were put forward and after further discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the impact of Covid and the response of YOS during the past 10 months whilst setting out the future challenges for the service;
- Receive further report at a future meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

60 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Officers and Members for their input in this evening's meeting and wished the well in the future.

This meeting closed at 6.15 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, 24 February 2021 at 5.00 pm at the .

County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor J Brencher
Councillor H Fychan	Councillor A Calvert
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor G Stacey
Councillor L De Vet	Councillor L Walker

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mrs R. Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms A Richards, Temporary Service Director - 21st Century Schools and Transformation
Ms D Humphries – Senior 21st Century Schools Project Manager (Childcare & Special Projects)
Ms C Seery – Managing Director Central South Consortium (CSC)
Ms L Blatchford – Deputy Managing Director Central South Consortium
Mr S Davies – Central South Consortium
Mr A Hurley - Central South Consortium
Ms N Gould - Central South Consortium
Mr A Williams - Central South Consortium
Ms L Barry – Estyn Inspectorate Wales
Ms N Thomas – Estyn Inspectorate Wales

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor J Rosser – Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion Services
Councillor W Lewis – Vice Chair Overview & Scrutiny

61 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair Welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. The Chair also Welcomed Officer from

Estyn who observing the meeting this evening.

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillor S Evans, M Powell, S Powell.

62 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's code of conduct the following declaration of personal interest was received from Voting Co- Opted Member Mr J Fish

In relation to Agenda Item 4 – "I have recently taken up a position regional leader of governance for the consortium."

63 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 13th January 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

64 Report of the work of the Central South Consortium in the region and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority (April 2019- September 2020)

The Chair welcomed Officers from the Central South Consortium and asked the Managing Director to introduce Officer to the Committee before presenting the report.

After introductions the Managing Director Central South Consortium informed Members that the purpose of the report is to update Members with the contribution of the Central South Consortium (CSC) and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority to raising standards in schools across the RCT from April 2019 – September 2020.

The Managing Director CSC explained that this report details the work of the consortium for the academic year September 2019-2020 and the financial year April 2019 – April 2020. It was highlighted that the global pandemic caused schools to be repurposed in March 2020, requiring CSC to amend its approach to supporting schools.

The Officer continued and informed Members of its Business Plan and the following six priorities:

- Develop a high- quality education profession
- Develop inspirational leaders to facilitate working collaboratively to raise standards;
- Develop strong and inclusive schools committed to wellbeing , equity and excellence;
- Develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements, supporting self-improving systems;
- Provide professional learning (PL) opportunities to support the Curriculum for Wales;
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of CSC.

Members were presented with an overview of the progress made against each of the above objectives in respect of schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf and this was detailed within the report.

With regards to comparative data the Managing Director CSC reminded Members of the Ministers statement of the 3 July 2020 which was that the cancellation of the 2020 summer examinations due to the pandemic and that performance measures would not be published. That decision related to all school and post-16 performance measures.

The Managing Director Central South Consortium continued and informed Members of the Central South Consortium's position, it was highlighted that it is important to note and understand that following Welsh Government's suspension of statutory data collection and publication of outcomes for 2019-20 and 2020-21, there will be a reduction in analysis available within CSC. However schools will have their own internal systems for tracking and analysing pupil performance /outcomes and whilst there is no expectation that schools will need to provide this information to CSC IPs for accountability reasons, a range of questions may still be used by colleagues in discussion with school leaders to inform CSC support for school improvement and partnership working in 2020-21.

Members were also provided with an overview of the challenge and support that had been provided by the consortium before and during lockdown on behalf of RCT some of which are:

- In 2019-20, RCT LA £1,014,176 towards the core functions of the consortium. In addition to the core costs of the consortium, this has provided funding for 15 IPs (6.96 FTE) plus support from Accelerated Progress Leads (0.23 FTE) effective from September 2018 and Principal Improvement Partners (PIPs) (2 FTE).
- Estyn suspended their inspection activity in March 2020. Eight schools were inspected during 2019-20 (Ty Gwyn Education Centre, Caradog Primary, Porth Community, Ynysboeth Community, Hawthorn High, St John Baptist High, Cilfynydd Primary and Penygawsi Primary). Of these, one school (St John Baptist High School) was asked to write an excellent practice case study, one school was placed in a follow up category of Estyn Review, one school was judged as having important weaknesses that outweighed the strengths and was therefore placed in the statutory category of Significant Improvement, and one school has been placed in Special Measures. Two further schools were identified for inspection (Trallwng Infants and Our Lady's RC Primary) but these were cancelled due to COVID-19.
- Due to COVID-19, Estyn ceased any follow up activity for schools in statutory categories in March 2020. Of the schools inspected in previous years, two schools were removed from an Estyn category and six schools remain in an Estyn follow up category. Three schools (Aberdare Community, Craig-Yr-Hesg and Cefn Primary) are in Significant Improvement. Three schools (Mountain Ash, Williamstown Primary and Abernant Primary) are in Estyn Review.

Members were also provided with an overview of other support provided by the consortium to schools in RCT which was pleasing to see. Members found it pleasing that a number of schools with RCT had been identified as Welsh Government Pioneer Schools during 2019-20 along with a great number of our schools providing support as part of the Hub programme in 2019-2020.

Members were informed of the number of schools with RCT that had taken up the opportunity to benefit from the leadership programme of these:

- 11 Head Teachers have undertaken the New and Acting Head Teacher programme
- One Senior leader has completed the Aspiring Head Teacher pilot programme etc.

Officers continued and presented Members with an overview of the work carried out during the national lock down from March to July 2020 highlighting the role of the improvement partners and the principal improvement partners along with the finer details in relation to supporting distance learning, developing a blended approach encompassing distance learning and face to face learning, supporting professional learning and supporting the repurposing of schools.

The Managing Director CSC continued and presented Members with information regarding RCT's report on distance learning for the summer term 2020 and along with the work carried out with improvement partners to support the reopening of schools.

The Managing Director continued with the report highlighting many areas and after concluding proceeded to hand the floor back to the Chair of the Committee to take any Members' questions.

The Chair opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

A Member wanted to understand what support was given from Improvement partners for Head teachers and other members of staff during this time, it was asked if there had there been any wellbeing support as our teaching staff have had to cope with extreme pressure and changes due to the pandemic.

The Officer explained that the Improvement partners had regular contact with Headteachers and their main concern is to ensure the staff's wellbeing is at the forefront. Improvement Partners have also managed to help Headteacher filter down some of the details that have been provided to schools from Welsh Government etc. which has helped elevate some of the pressures. Counselling Services has also been offered to Headteachers and it was explained that Headteacher are able to self-refer if required. Feedback from staff is very positive and also Unions have praised the work of the service.

Another Member thanked the Officer for a very comprehensive report and explained that she wanted to focus her question on outcome 4 :(To continue to develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system). The Member felt that this was the best way to improve education for children however this means more time more commitment of staff. In 2019-20 we haven't had the benefit of many school inspections and the Member wanted to know whether the consortium have been able to assess how the self-improvement system is working in schools RCT.

In response the Managing Director stated that there has been a huge variation with our schools and cluster working has helped and identified new ways of working. Officers gave an example of how schools are working with Improvement Partners to better their understanding. Officers also highlighted that there is a new evaluation framework set out by Welsh Government urged Member to contribute to the consultation that is now being taken.

The Chair explained that the Committee would draft a response and submit its comments to Welsh Government.

Other Members put questions for in respect of accountability and raised concern in relation to how as a scrutiny committee are we going to measure impact accountability and outcome of learners going forward.

Members continued and wanted clarity on many other points within the reports such as HLTA training, Governor training, inspections along with mental health and wellbeing support in schools for both staff and pupils.

With regards to the low numbers in RCT who took part in the HLTA training officers explained that there was a dip 2019/20 however this may change this year.

Also in response to the governor training it was highlighted that there has not been a significant turnover in RCT so there was no need of training. Officer also clarified that Governor Improvement Groups were still in the process of being developed and the focus and progress has been effected through Covid, in future GIG's information will be put in future reports.

In terms of the inspections the Director explained that it was also important to highlight positive outcomes achieved by a number of schools. Progress meetings have continued for schools in statutory category and a number of schools have continued to make progress and will welcome Estyn back into schools to share the improvements made.

A number of Red and Amber schools have made improvements with strategic developments continuing, with support from the LA and CSC.

Another Member asked in terms of the Welsh provision and the work carried out by the consortium before the pandemic with the introduction of the Welsh Charter etc. The Member queried what work is being done regarding people's confidence in terms of continuing with Welsh medium education as this has been a concern for many parents as they feel there is lack of support for parents/carers that do not speak Welsh.

The Managing Director explained that this was a priority area and will continue to be a focus. She continued to explain the work that had been done since March to elevate many of the concerns of parents and staff had around the support being provided. It was explained that there had been a lot of creative work carried out by teachers also there is far more Welsh medium material shared across all schools. WIEO have been made available to schools to work with them to inform them on how to use material to help students.

It was highlighted that it has been a problem in recruiting staff for these post and are continuing to work to fill these posts.

The Chair thanked the Officers for the report and asked for clarity on what work was being carried out encourage Welsh medium teachers to take up roles with our schools. It was also queried how CSC are working to retain Welsh medium to stay with the profession in our Welsh medium schools.

Welsh teacher recruitment is a challenge and we are looking at other way to encourage teachers to take up these posts and will be continually look at this

going forward.

Another point which concerned the Chair was the provision of digital device for pupils to carry out home learning especially children from multiple households, the Chair continued and asked for clarity on the number of device that had been distributed throughout the pandemic and if there were any pupils who were still without some form of device.

With regards to pupil's workloads and catch up the Chair queried what is being done to address this situations. The Managing Director explained that some work has been done with Welsh Government to develop some module to address this. There is also some work being done with Universities and further education providers to establish what is needed to support year 13 pupils going forward.

With regards to the digital devices officers explained that back in March when the digital device had been distributed many families did not identify as being in digital poverty as they had a device .However as time has gone by, it has become more clear to them that the deceives they have may not been fit for purpose. Work has been done to ensure that there is an alternative to live lessons where there are challenges in accessing this.

The Director of Education explained that there had been two audits undertaken within our schools to identify any gaps in provision and address this issue. Welsh Government have confirmed that further Chrome Books will be made available to our schools. The Director of Education presented the Committee with an overview on the Hwb Programme and connectivity with our schools.

A Member congratulated Tonyrefial School in respect an initiative that they set up of "pinning a book to the fence" which was so well received by parents of the school the Member suggested this could be replicated in other schools. Officers agreed that it was lovely initiative and this could potentially be highlighted through our media team.

Members thanked Officer for the report RESOLVED:

- Acknowledge the content of the report
- Receive a further report in the future.

65 Childcare Sector Position update in RCT

The Temporary Service Director 21st Century Schools and Transformation provided Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update on the current position of the childcare sector in RCT and the support that has been offered by the Education and Inclusion Services.

The Officer explained that Section 22 of the Childcare Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) places a duty on the Council to secure 'as far as is reasonably practicable' sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in its area who require Childcare to enable them to take up, or remain in work, or to undertake education or training which could reasonably be expected to assist them to obtain work.

It was explained that the Council has a dedicated childcare development team to support all childcare settings within RCT. The team provides guidance and training along with administrating a grant scheme.

The Officer explained that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the childcare sector across Wales has been significant and the Council is incredibly proud of all the Childcare providers in RCT who have continued to deliver safe , quality care for children and their families throughout the last year in a professional and compassionate manner.

The Temporary Service Director 21st Century Schools and Transformation updated Members on the effects of the pandemic. It was explained that data from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) suggests that 18 registered settings permanently closed in RCT during the last year, the vast majority of these being childminders and those that remain have adapted their settings physically to comply with protective and preventative measures required.

Officers explained that in response to the national lockdown in March, Welsh Government instructed all childcare settings in Wales to close for all children , other than for those who were deemed vulnerable or of critical workers . Members acknowledged that Welsh Government established the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme. This provided eligible children aged from birth to four years with fully funded childcare if there were no other caring options available to the families. The Education and Inclusion Services childcare team took lead in this scheme with support from the Resilient Families Service. It was highlighted that 717 children accessed the scheme from March to August 2020, including 95 vulnerable children. 102 childcare settings participated in the scheme at various points including three council run Flying Start setting.

Members were provided with a summary of the support under the following headings:

- Guidance and Support;
- Stakeholder feedback from the sector;
- PPE Provision;
- Financial Support;
- Positive Covid-19 Cases – Impact on Setting;and
- Attendance of children at childcare settings;

The Chair thanked the Officer for the Report and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

Members asked clarity in respect of communication with the childcare settings as he was aware that some parents were having issues relating to contacting the Resilient Families Services. Officers explained that there had not been any issues with regards to accessing the childcare settings however Resilient Families Service is a different area and there may be some confusion in this regard.

The Member requested clarity on the no smoking policy in school ground and wanted to know if signage was being made available to all childcare settings to discourage any social gathering for parents etc.

In response the Officers explained the protocols that have been put in place.

A Member asked for clarity on what measure were going to be put in place once the restrictions were lifted to deal with decline of registered childminder provision when children go back to school, and parents go back to work.

Also the Member asked what financial support was available for the sector going forward especially those whose grant application were unsuccessful.

The Officers explained that with regards to grant funding and the unsuccessful applications this was down to the applicants not being able to provide all the required evidence.

Members continued to discuss the report in great detail and before proceeding to the recommendation the Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Education and Inclusion to comment.

The Cabinet Member thanked the officers and Members for their time and effort that had been put into tonight debate and congratulated the Service on the work it has carried out of the last twelve months along with all the childcare provider who have continued to deliver a safe quality of care for children and families across the County Borough.

Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report
- Receive any updating information in due course.

66 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Officers and Members for their contribution to the meeting and reminded Members that the next meeting would take place on the 3rd March 2021 where the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service would be in attendance to provide an overview of the service.

This meeting closed at 7.10 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 20/21

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21ST APRIL 2021

UPDATE OF EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members of the Children and Young People's Committee with some contextual information on the most recent changes in Education during the spring term in response to the ever-changing COVID-19 position.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider the verbal update from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services on the Council's most recent responses to Ministerial announcements in relation to the COVID-19 situation.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to report on further information in any future meetings.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Members with an update on the critical actions taken by the Council as a result of recent announcements made by the Education Minister and the recent gradual easing of lockdown measures.
- 3.2 To update Members of the current COVID-19 processes and practices in Rhondda Cynon Taf schools and to ensure that they are kept abreast of all developments.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Wales entered Alert Level 4 on the 20th of December 2020.

- 4.2 Schools reopened in January 2021 with schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf advised to allocate Monday 4th of January and Tuesday 5th of January as planning days to enable all schools to update risk assessments and prepare for the delivery of remote learning for the majority of pupils. Schools were also required to update their Business Continuity Plans to ensure that they were well-placed to deal with any eventuality from a COVID-19 emergency planning perspective. Schools were also advised to provide face to face learning for high priority vulnerable learners and the children of eligible critical workers from Wednesday 6th of January 2021 onwards.

DEVELOPMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE EASING OF NATIONAL RESTRICTIONS

- 4.3 On the 5th of February, the Education Minister announced that schools would begin a phased return for foundation phase children from the 22nd of February. Learners in nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 2 were all able to return to their school setting by the end of that week.
- 4.4 On the 3rd of March, the Education Minister announced that from the 15th of March, further year groups would be able to return to school settings. Schools were given a degree of flexibility to develop a plan for the phased return of learners back into schools from the 15th of March, and the following arrangements applied to all schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf:
- **All foundation phase learners (i.e., nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 2)** continued to attend school throughout the phased introduction of new year groups back in to school.
 - Arrangements for the phased return of learners in **Key Stage 2 (i.e. Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)** commenced on the 15th of March 2021.
 - Arrangements for the phased return of learners in **Years 11 and 13** commenced on the 15th of March 2021.
 - Flexibility was offered to secondary schools, all-through schools and PRUs to provide access to the onsite education provision for learners in **Years 10 and 12** from the 15th of March 2021 onwards.
 - Learners in **Years 7, 8 and 9** were to access at least one check-in on school premises prior to the Easter break.
 - **Vulnerable learners** and the **children of critical workers** continued to access face to face education in school until their year group returned to school.
 - Remote learning continued to be provided for **self-isolating learners** and those **year groups not accessing face to face learning** in school.
- 4.5 The First Minister confirmed (on the 1st of April) that all learners will return to school settings on Monday the 12th of April, immediately following the Easter break.

Preventative measures will continue to be implemented in school settings and updated guidance has already been circulated to schools in readiness for the pending post-Easter return of all learners.

5. EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

The local authority continues to work very closely with all of our schools and provides advice and guidance to school staff as well as regular updates to parents/carers (see section 6 below).

Guidance was provided throughout the Alert Level 4 period reflecting the management of on-site learning during periods of limited attendance. This guidance was updated throughout the various phases of the lockdown easing to reflect the return of more learners to on-site learning provision.

Guidance has also been provided in relation to the introduction of the offer of lateral flow testing for all school staff and more recently, all learners in Year 10 and above.

5.1 Remote learning

On-site learning provision was available to the children of critical workers and to vulnerable learners throughout the whole of the Level 4 lockdown period. Remote learning provision was in place for all other learners from the 14th of December (for secondary schools) and the 16th of December for all other schools. (With learners returning to their school setting as outlined in sections 4.3 and 4.4 above as permitted by Welsh Government dependent upon their year group.)

Remote learning allows pupils to continue accessing the curriculum beyond the classroom. It allows them to learn through a guided study programme set by their teachers. A remote learning task could be a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities.

Schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf implemented a variety of remote learning options with support from the Council's school improvement officers and colleagues at the Central South Consortium. Welsh Government's Hwb digital platform for learning and teaching also provides a wealth of educational resources for schools, parents/carers and learners.

The local authority produced an information document for parents/carers in January 2021 outlining the differing types of remote learning strategies that may be implemented at various schools – 'Guidance for Parents and Carers on Distance and Blended Learning'.

With the return of all learners to school settings from the 12th of April, remote learning will still be made available to learners who need to self-isolate due to COVID-19.

5.2 Digitally Excluded Learners (DELs)

From the start of the pandemic, digitally excluded learners who did not have access to an appropriate internet-connected device and/or internet connection have been supported to engage in online learning activities from home. The local authority frequently communicates with schools to identify families facing such difficulties and have sourced ICT equipment and Mifi devices to enable learners to access education.

The audit of digitally excluded learners was refreshed this academic year to identify any new families that had moved into the area or were experiencing challenges in accessing education remotely.

A total of 2,868 devices were provided to DELs in the 2019/2020 academic year and a further 2,570 were provided to newly identified DELs in NCY 1 to 13 between January 2021 and March 2021. It is also expected that Welsh Government will make a further 4,456 Chromebooks available to Rhondda Cynon Taf learners in May 2021. The plan will be to prioritise further learners that are eligible for free school meals for this allocation.

5.3 Examinations

On the 10th of November 2020, the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, announced there will be no end of year examinations for learners taking GCSEs, AS levels or A-Levels.

Having received proposals from a Design and Delivery Advisory Group (DDAG) (comprised of headteachers and college principals) set up to support 'wellbeing, fairness and progression' for learners in 2021, the Education Minister advised (on the 16th of December 2020) that her intention was for general qualifications in Wales to be supported by a three pillar approach made up of:

- non-examination assessments;
- internal assessments;
- assessments that are externally set and marked.

However, as a consequence of the Welsh Government's announcement on the 8th January of 2021, that schools were to remain closed to the majority of learners until at least the 29th of January 2021, a decision was made to cancel the spring term assessments (for GCSE, AS and A level learners) that were planned to take place between the 22nd of February and the 23rd of April.

The Design and Delivery Advisory Group have developed revised proposals which have been accepted by the Education Minister. In summary, these are:-

- Learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales will have their qualifications awarded through a Centre-Determined Grade (CDG) model – this means that grades will be determined by their school or college based on an assessment of the learner's work. This will be

a holistic approach underpinned by evidence of attainment in areas a learner has covered.

Schools and colleges will be able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to their learners, which could include Non-Examination Assessment elements, mock-exams, and classwork. In addition, the WJEC has offered a set of adapted past papers for each qualification which will enable schools to continue to assess learning within their teaching plans, providing extra support for teachers and learners. All evidence used to identify grades must be the learners' own work, but there will be no formal external assessments.

Qualifications Wales has worked with the WJEC, supported by the DDAG, to provide an assessment framework to support schools and colleges in developing their assessment plans, which should demonstrate sufficient coverage of key concepts to allow learners to progress, and detail for how the centre has determined a learner's grade. These assessment plans will be quality assured by the WJEC.

- The deadlines and controls around Non-Examination Assessment have been removed and will not be moderated by the WJEC. However, where possible schools and colleges are encouraged to support learners to undertake some of their Non-Examination Assessment to continue to build learning and skills.

Qualifications Wales have published a timeline for learners which shows that a learner's school or college will discuss the provisional Centre Determined Grades that have been decided for the learner in each of their subjects in June.

Vocational Qualifications

The Minister's policy decision did not relate to vocational qualifications. The awarding of vocational and technical qualifications in 2021 is proposed to differ depending on the type of qualification.

A summary document can be accessed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964614/Infographic_-_how_vocational_and_technical_qualifications_will_be_awarded_in_2021.pdf

Qualifications Wales has confirmed that there will be a three-stage appeals process:

Stage 1 – By June schools and colleges will share provisional centre determined grades with their learners. A learner can ask their school or college to review provisional grades and/or check for any errors before they are submitted to WJEC.

Stage 2 – After results day in August, a learner can appeal to WJEC that the grade judgement that their school or college has made is unreasonable and/or a procedural error has been made.

Stage 3 - Following completion of the Stage 2 appeal, learners can request an Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) review from Qualifications Wales to check whether WJEC has followed their procedures correctly.

Final qualification grades will not be issued to learners until the results days, which are 10 August for AS and A levels and 12 August for GCSEs.

5.4 **Business Continuity Plans**

Business continuity planning is critical to ensuring that schools are able to quickly respond to any challenges and are able to maintain effective delivery of education to all learners throughout various stages of the impact of the pandemic at school, local and national level. Education and Inclusion Services have provided schools with detailed guidance and template documentation to assist with this planning. This guidance is updated to reflect the changing national position.

All schools must have Business Continuity Plans in place that detail the school-based actions that will be taken to mitigate risks and to ensure that it is possible to ensure continuity in delivering education safely. These have been shared with the local authority and are reviewed by officers. Schools are requested to revisit, update and submit their Business Continuity Plans to the local authority on a regular basis.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

Education and Inclusion Services have provided schools with comprehensive guidance documentation (*'Guidance for the Safe Re-Opening of Schools' version 8 – March 2021*) regarding the safe operation of schools during the current pandemic. This document contains information on numerous areas including – hygiene; cleaning; transport; catering; health and safety; face coverings; dealing with suspected and confirmed cases, etc. The document is regularly updated to reflect changing advice and guidance from Welsh Government in light of the current national position. (During periods of limited attendance on site between January 2021 and March 2021, the local authority issued further guidance documents *'Guidance for schools - Management of on-site learning during periods of limited attendance'* specific to these periods (see section 6 below), with this document being updated regularly to reflect the phased return of more year groups to the school setting as lockdown restrictions were gradually eased.)

All schools have undertaken a COVID-19 specific Health and Safety Risk Assessment in consultation with their governing bodies and staff. The above-mentioned guidance document contains template documentation to assist schools in writing their risk assessments. This template documentation is regularly updated to reflect the national position and Welsh Government guidance. Schools are requested to revisit, update and submit their COVID-19 specific Health and Safety Risk Assessments to the local authority on a regular basis for review by Health and Safety Officers who also offer assistance and guidance, as requested.

5.6 **Managing Confirmed Cases**

Schools work very closely with the Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) Service and are key in identifying close contacts of confirmed cases, thereby enabling those contacts to isolate for a 10-day period and prevent the spread of the virus. The local authority has provided schools with template letters to issue to parents as part of this process. Schools have also been provided with flow charts and process maps to summarise the actions needing to be taken in various scenarios.

Any learner required to self-isolate as a result of being a confirmed case themselves, or a close contact of a confirmed case is provided with remote learning to ensure continuation of their education.

5.7 **Lateral Flow Testing**

Welsh Government have provided all schools and childcare/play settings with Lateral Flow Tests. This twice weekly self-administered testing is undertaken at home and can help to regularly and quickly identify positive asymptomatic cases and ask them to self-isolate before coming into schools and childcare/play settings. Test kits are made available to all school staff (including catering, cleaning and supply staff), as well as to peripatetic staff, school transport workers and pupils in Year 10 and above (subject to written consent having been provided).

Staff in all CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales) childcare/play settings have been provided with test kits directly from Welsh Government. Test kits for childminders and unregistered childcare/play settings have been distributed by the RCT childcare team, with 53 of these settings participating in the scheme to date.

Anyone testing positive using a lateral flow test should undertake a PCR test within a 24-hour period of their positive lateral flow test.

Schools and childcare/play settings are aware that testing is to supplement other preventative measures and that maintaining contact groups, wearing face masks, ensuring adequate ventilation, hand washing, cleaning and social distancing etc. must all still be implemented. Along with all of these current preventative measures put in place by schools and settings, testing will help reduce the likelihood of adults unwittingly spreading the virus to others in the setting.

The number of cases of Covid in our schools continues to fall. Between the 20th and 27th of March there have been 6 confirmed cases in 6 school settings.

5.8 **Attendance**

Following consultation, the Welsh Government has revoked the School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 (in force from the 7th of August 2020). As a result, schools are not required to set targets for future years or report on those previously set for 2019/20 onwards. The annual attendance data collection for attendance has also been suspended for the 2020/21 academic year for primary and secondary phase.

Due to Welsh Government deciding not to reinstate Fixed Penalty Notices/Prosecutions, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service continue to operate Wellbeing Response Visits into the summer term. The Attendance and Wellbeing Service liaise with schools on a daily basis and schools advise of pupils who have unauthorised absences from school and request a Wellbeing Response visit from the Attendance and Wellbeing team which aims to discover the reason for the absence and provide any support/assurances as required.

If a learner is unable to attend the physical setting of the school due to self-isolation, the school will continue to engage regularly with the learner remotely.

Attendance rates for the autumn term (from the 14th of September following the staggered start) were 89.8% in primary and 85.6% in secondary.

For the first half of the spring term, only key worker and vulnerable children provision was made on school sites. Attendance figures increased from 2.48% of the whole school population (964 pupils) at the start of term to a high of 6.84% (2,654 pupils) during the final week before half term.

For the second half of the spring term, attendance increased significantly with the return of the foundation phase and later the whole of primary settings as well as isolated days for some secondary year groups. This increase was from 17.86% of the whole school population (6,929 pupils) on the 22nd of February to 72.04% (27,954 pupils) on the 23rd of March.

Attendance for statutory year groups for the spring term was 94.0% in primary and 89.6% in secondary.

5.9 Partnership Working

Education and Inclusion Services work closely and meet regularly with Welsh Government, Central South Consortium and many departments within the local authority (in particular, Public Health and Protection; Children's Services) as well as many other partners to share up to date information and facilitate opportunities for discussion, questions and problem solving:-

- The Senior Management Team of Education and Inclusion Services meet regularly with headteachers, this includes fortnightly meetings with secondary school leaders and meetings every 2-3 weeks with primary and special school colleagues depending on national announcements.
- Trade Union meetings are held with senior officers usually on a fortnightly basis.

The senior management team of Education and Inclusion Services hold termly meetings with Chairs of governing bodies and updates on the operational guidance for schools is circulated regularly to Chairs of Governors. Governing body meetings continue to be held virtually to ensure all governors are fully informed. Governor training is also offered virtually.

5.10 Free School Meal Provision

The Council has seen a significant growth in the number of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM). The data is summarised as follows:

Month	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20
eFSM	8367	8619	8698	8764	8960	9051	9089	9089
Total	38561	39004	38997	38991	38989	38985	38832	38832
%	21.70%	22.10%	22.30%	22.48%	22.98%	23.22%	23.41%	23.41%

Month	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
eFSM	9284	9328	9439	9546	9513	9689	9816
Total	36771	38755	38757	38806	38750	39231	39211
%	23.71%	24.07%	24.35%	24.60%	24.55%	24.70%	25.03%

Free school meals are provided at school on days that an eligible learner attends the school setting. Where an eligible free school meals learner is unable to attend school due to them needing to shield or self-isolate due to COVID-19, BACS payments of £3.90 per day are made to their parent/carer.

For the periods that schools were open only for vulnerable learners and children of critical workers, BACS payments of £3.90 per day were made for all eligible free school meal learners due to schools being required to provide remote learning.

BACS payments of £3.90 per day per child also continue to be made to the parents/carers of eligible free school meals learners throughout all holiday periods. Welsh Government have this provision in place up to and including Easter 2022.

5.11 Breakfast Club Provision

Breakfast club provision continues with a significantly reduced capacity following a health and safety review undertaken prior to the schools returning in September 2020. This review took into account the size of school halls, staffing provision and the need to maintain contact groups. Demand for places has been high but prioritisation cannot be given to any specific groups (e.g., previously unsuccessful applicants, vulnerable groups or key workers) as this provision is intended to provide a healthy breakfast to all learners and is not an emergency childcare provision. The regulatory framework does not allow certain groups to be prioritised above others. Places are allocated on a 'first come - first served' basis in relation to online applications. In the event of regular non-attendance by a pupil (excluding self-isolation and sickness absences), places are re-allocated to pupils on the waiting list.

A further application process was recently undertaken for the summer term (period from the 12th of April to the 20th of July 2021). The Council has continued to allocate all available places based on the previously agreed application processes and capacity calculations, to ensure that social distancing and effective hygiene

and preventative measures can be maintained. All applicants have remained within year groups and this has ensured that risks can be mitigated.

As places are restricted, parents/carers were encouraged to only apply if their child required access to a free, healthy breakfast before the start of the school day. Despite the robust approaches adopted to keep everyone safe, Rhondda Cynon Taf still allocated 3,025 breakfast club places for the spring term.

5.12 Childcare Settings

Between the 20th and the 27th of March, the Council was notified of two confirmed cases in childcare settings. These were both in the same setting and resulted in a full closure.

The majority of childcare and play settings are open. Some out of school, holiday and play settings remain closed. This is mainly due to venue restrictions and concerns about mixing groupings with children from different schools.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a decline in demand for childcare for some age ranges, particularly for after school and holiday care. This can be attributed to parents working from home or losing their jobs, and parental concerns about COVID. However, the childcare sector has adapted well to current restrictions, and has implemented all protective measures to ensure that staff and children remain as safe as possible.

6. SUPPORTING PAPERS AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 As general information for the committee, the following table reflects the key guidance documents sent to stakeholders since January 2021 with attached links to the Council website where appropriate:

Document		Date of issue/ circulation
1.	Schools – correspondence/information	
	Remote learning until the 18 th of January 2021	05/01/21
	Clarification of critical worker categories	06/01/21
	Update regarding lateral flow testing in schools	25/01/21
	First Minister’s announcement on 29/01/21 regarding a possible phased return after February half-term 2021	29/01/21
	Letter regarding arrangements for the return of the Foundation Phase following February half-term	10/02/21
	First Minister’s announcement regarding more year groups possibly returning to school from the 15 th of March 2021	19/02/21

	Free school meals update during phased return of foundation phase learners from the 22 nd of February	02/03/21
	Letters for schools and parents regarding the 15 th of March return for further learners	03/03/21
	Free school meals update during phased return of further learners from the 15 th of March	11/03/21
	Lateral Flow Test information regarding accurately recording results and not testing during holiday periods	17/03/21
	Updated staff risk assessment and returning to work video following pausing of shielding advice from the 31 st of March 2021	23/03/21
2.	Distance Learning Guidance for Schools	
	Safeguarding Considerations for Distance Learning v5 – 19.01.21	19/01/21
3.	Frequently Asked Questions – for parents/carers: Covering a number of issues including – school safety measures; cleaning; transport; catering and free school meals; confirmed cases of COVID-19. These FAQs are published on the Council’s website and updated regularly – www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolreturnfaqs	
	FAQs for parents/carers – versions 9, 10, 11 and 12	02/01/21 – 07/04/21
4.	Parents/carers – correspondence	
	Letter to parents/carers from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services - Remote learning until 18 th January 2021	05/01/21
	Letter regarding arrangements for the return of the Foundation Phase following February half-term	10/02/21
	Letter for parents re: 15 th March return for further learners	03/03/21
	Lateral Flow Test information regarding accurately recording results and not testing during holiday periods	17/03/21
5.	Guidance for Parents and Carers on Distance and Blended Learning	
	Guidance document for parents and carers outlining the different forms of learning that can be provided for pupils	25/01/21
6.	Parents/carers – social media – spring term. The below videos/captions have been published many times via the	

	Council's social media channels (Facebook and Twitter)	
	Updated social media graphics (22 nd February 2022) – reflecting return of Foundation Phase	From 22/02/21
	COVID-19 Related Pupil Absence: A Quick Reference Guide for Parents - updated	From 22/02/21
	Updated social media graphics (15 th of March 2022) – reflecting return of further year groups	From 15/03/21
7.	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) guidance	
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Schools in RCT – V1	22/02/21
	Lateral Flow Testing flowchart	23/02/21
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Schools in RCT – V2	12/03/21
8.	Business Continuity Guidance (Guidance to assist schools with business continuity planning at various stages of escalation of the coronavirus pandemic)	
	Business Continuity Planning – Guidance for Schools v.2	25/01/21
	Business Continuity Planning – Guidance for Schools v.3	25/03/21
9.	Management of on-site learning during periods of limited attendance (Guidance specific to the Alert Level 4 lockdown period - updated to reflect the changing national position and the phased reopening of schools for different year groups)	
	Guidance for schools - Management of on-site learning during periods of limited attendance – January 2021	28/01/21
	Guidance for schools - Management of on-site learning during periods of limited attendance – v2	11/02/21
	Guidance for schools - Management of on-site learning during periods of limited attendance – v3	04/03/21
10.	Reopening Schools - Guidance document issued to headteachers: Regularly updated to reflect changes in the local and national position and to reflect updated guidance from the Welsh Government	
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 8 – March 2021	29/03/21

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not currently required - the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 There is no requirement to undertake any consultation. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provides regular and detailed Covid updates at Scrutiny Committee meeting.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

11.1 This is an information report presenting the Cabinet report which outlines how the Council is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 Whilst it is proposed that Scrutiny is presented with regular updates on the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation relating to schools and education is often very fluid and fast-moving. In view of this, a termly update will be provided to encapsulate all of the key changes and the wide-ranging documentation sent to schools to ensure that they are kept abreast of national and local changes.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

21st APRIL 2021

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND INCLUSION SERVICES**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

21 April 2021

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Agenda Item No:
Children's Services: Covid 19 Recovery and Contingency Planning

Authors: Liz Pearce Head of Service Improvement and Edge of Care, Annabel Lloyd, Director Children Services,

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Scrutiny Members in relation to: Children's Services response to the continuing impact of the pandemic, recovery, and contingency planning.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report.
- Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

3. BACKGROUND

- Children's Services provided a report to Scrutiny Committee on 4 November 2020, in relation to the functioning of the service during the Pandemic and the then developing Recovery Plan. The period since has been a demanding one operationally, and saw the service move to a business

critical approach due to the national lockdown implemented 20 December 2020 following the First Minister's announcement on 19th December.

- The service has however moved forward with some focussed improvement and development work during this period and is beginning to respond to the adjustments to restrictions at the exit of the lockdown, as they occur.
- There continues to be uncertainty about the specific mid and long term impact of the Pandemic for vulnerable families, however, given the rate of referral and the conditions families face which, in many cases are understood to compound adversity, the service is sadly still projecting increasing demand, whilst working to connect as many families as possibly to early help or preventative services.

4. CHILDREN'S SERVICES CRITICAL BUSINESS APPROACH

4.1 As much of Children's Services' provision is required by statute and is not altered by the Pandemic and related legislation, the Service continues to work to Welsh Government statutory guidance, subject to risk assessment and physical distancing requirements, adapting methods of service delivery as necessary.

4.2 Agile working remains in place and staff continue to work from home wherever possible.

4.3 Guidance for staff was revised in December 2020 to take account of the Alert Level 4 national coronavirus restrictions, as Children's Services focused activity on the four critical areas of work previously identified: access to services and family support, safeguarding duties, children looked after and youth offending. A detailed breakdown can be found at Appendix 1.

4.4 Community Well-Being staff, Children's Services and YOS are now once again beginning to deliver what is likely to be a staged return of services in step with the easements of the previous restrictions. The guiding principle must be how we safeguard the health and wellbeing of our service users and staff as well as minimise the continuing risk of infection.

4.5 Priority is being given to safely visiting and hearing the voices of children most at risk, this includes those on the child protection register, those looked after where there is potential placement breakdown or those where input is critical to maintaining children at home. We continue to look after children in both residential and foster care, prioritising children and carers most in need of support.

4.6 In line with Welsh Government expectations, arrangements have been put in place for all visitors to Children's Homes to have a lateral flow test which must be negative before entering a children's home. This does not change the existing arrangements for regular residential staff testing.

4.7 Children's Services' have terminate the commissioned external resource to increase social work capacity in our Intensive Intervention Services where we are working with a social work vacancy factor, which had a significant impact on service provision.

5. HOW ARE WE DOING?

Performance Area	Last year / This year as at 31 st March		Comment
	31.3.20	31.3.21	
Number of Contacts	17782	19478	10% increase in contacts received when compared to Apr19-Mar20
Number added to Child Protection Register	598	592	1% decrease in new child protection registrations when compared to Apr19-Mar20
Number of children on the Child Protection Register	463	425	8% decrease in the overall numbers of children on the Child Protection Register
Number Becoming Looked After	179	148	17% decrease in the number of children becoming looked after
Total Number of Children Looked After	717	695	3% decrease in the overall number of children who are looked after
Rate of Looked After per 10,000 child capita	143.1	138.7	Decrease in the rate of children looked after per 10,000 population
Number of Exits from CLA	136	170	25% increase in the number of care leavers
Number of Adoption Placements Made	25	20	20% decrease in the number of children placed with prospective adopters
Percentage of children who are looked after who are placed with their parents or extended family	302 (42%)	307 (44%)	Small increase in the percentage of children who are looked after who are placed at home with parents or placed with extended family
Number of Care Leavers Being Supported	244	293	20% increase in the number of care leavers requiring support

Care leavers not in education, employment or education	140	144	3% increase in the number of care leavers who were not engaged in education employment or training
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6. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Despite the demands of the Pandemic response, the service has identified some key strategic areas to make progress on. For example, a **Workforce Strategy** has been developed, our vision being to have a motivated, engaged and valued workforce, with the capacity, competence and confidence to meet the needs of children and families..

6.2 A staff well-being week was held in December 2020, which included a programme of events designed to give staff the opportunity to focus on their physical and emotional wellbeing given the impact of the Pandemic. Feedback is being considered as part of the Workforce Strategy to maintain the focus on the wellbeing of staff during the pandemic

6.3 Action plans have been developed, and key components are being implemented in response to **Care Inspectorate Wales Reports** regarding disabled children and 16+ services

This includes:

- The remodelling of the Disabled Children's Teams (DCT), the new structure being in place from April 21
- Development of a strength based outcome focused work model of social work practice for the whole Children's Service and accompanying training programme
- Taking forward key elements of the 16+ Support and Accommodation Strategy assisted by the new Mercury Project Team which will look at accommodation pathways currently operating for children looked after who are 16+ years of age. This is due in part to the clear pressures being experienced across the services and also the impact the pandemic has had on the functioning of our systems and pathways.

6.4 Children's Services has appointed the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University to undertake an independent evaluation of the **Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy**, which was developed in 2017-2018 to:

- Safely prevent children from needing to become looked after.
- Safely reduce the amount of time that some children remain looked after, helping them to return home where it is safe to do so or supporting them into special guardianship or adoption, as appropriate.
- Safely reduce reliance on out of county placements for some looked after children.

The purpose of this evaluation is to inform future service development as part of Children's Services Delivery plan 2021/22.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This is an information report.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 This is an information report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The legal requirements for children and young people are set down within the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Children Act 1989.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

11.1 This consultation links to the corporate priority of promoting independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring that the Council listens to the people it provides for.

11.2 It also contributes to the following well-being goals:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsible Wales

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 Early help and statutory children's services have, and will continue to be provided during the Pandemic, delivery adjustments being made dependent on the national alert level.

12.2 The service will continue to provide services to families with a priority approach on the basis of risk and need and with an emphasis on prevention in line with the Welsh recovery framework principles for children's services.

12.3 In anticipation of increasing challenges for families, our focus on early help and prevention remains a priority.

Appendix 1: Children's Services' critical business services includes the following business areas:

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND FAMILY SUPPORT:

- Emergency Duty Team (EDT)
- Front Door for referrals – Information Advice Assessment (IAA) / Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Assess and provide support at home where there is potential breakdown or where input is critical to support children and young people to remain at home
- Direct Payments, where Personal Assistant (PA) support cannot be accessed due to PA sickness or isolation.
- MASH: Child Protection and Adult Protection functions and Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC – High Risk Domestic Abuse) referrals
- High risk cases identified by Resilient Families Service
- High risk cases identified by Youth Engagement and Participation Service

SAFEGUARDING DUTIES:

- Strategy discussions and section 47 investigations
- Child protection visits- children at the most immediate risk will continue to be identified and prioritised
- Child protection medicals-in accordance with CTMUHB guidance on medical examinations
- Children requiring placements due to safeguarding concerns
- Child Protection Conferences
- Pre-birth assessments
- PLO meetings for cases that require agreement to placement or court application
- Access to Child Protection Register and arranging temporary registration in other Local Authorities
- Hospital discharges: new-borns
- Court work (in accordance with Family Court guidance)

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER:

- Continuing to provide care to all children and young people placed in our residential children's homes. Non-essential visits to children's residential homes are restricted.
- Ensuring we provide residential care to children with external residential providers.
- Ensuring care is provided to children looked after with foster carers and prioritising support to placements RAG rated as requiring the highest level of support.
- Children looked after statutory visits- children at the most immediate risk will be identified and prioritised including potential placement break down.
- Adoption transitions for children to proceed only following joint risk assessment with VVC.
- Contact for children with family members will continue to be assessed on a case by case basis, with particular consideration being given to new-born babies and court agreed arrangements.

YOUTH OFFENDING:

- Children held in police stations and requiring an appropriate adult.
- Young people on Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Orders and Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Bail Support.
- Young people who are remanded into the secure estate or sentenced and residing in the secure estate.
- Transition and resettlement of young people being released from the secure estate.
- Young people subject to MAPPA level 2 processes.
- Young people appearing in Court.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

21st APRIL 2021

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No:

**REPORT OF THE GROUP
DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY &
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND
PARTICIPATION SERVICE: AN
OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT AND
PROVISION DURING COVID-19**

Author: Jessica Allen, Children and Young People's Service Manager
Email: Jessica.allen@rctcbc.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an overview of the support the Youth Engagement and Participation Service has offered young people during the Covid-19 period, whether directly or indirectly via partner agencies.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 At the request of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, this report is being presented to Members to raise their awareness of the nature and impact of the Youth Engagement and Participation Service's targeted support and youth work provision offered to young people over the past 12 months.
- 3.2 The aim of this report is to give Members a clear understanding of the needs of young people at the present time and provide an opportunity

for Members to contribute towards the service's recovery plan that will support young people to recover from the impact of the pandemic

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On 23rd March 2020, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service suspended all face-to-face work with young people and colleagues, as a direct result of the country entering lockdown.
- 4.2 The Covid-19 restrictions required staff to demonstrate personal resilience in the practical implementation of emergency contingency plans to manage crisis, whilst at the same time predict and plan for the longer term impact on young people.
- 4.3 The situation required transforming the service's delivery methods almost overnight; this was only possible due to the active engagement of staff across the Youth Engagement and Participation Service to effect cultural change, supported by their managers who were confident to let staff take measured risks.
- 4.4 Focusing on service users, the team was tasked to assess needs and identify requirements, which were then used to reallocate resources and develop contingency plans. Their previous engagement in service innovation and their confidence to use their expertise and knowledge of the needs of young people resulted in a comprehensive youth offer of both targeted and universal services to assist young people process and manage their situation.
- 4.5 The Service has demonstrated its ability to anticipate the immediate, mid-term and longer term impact of Covid-19 on young people, through the number and range of projects it has undertaken over the last 12 months and the plans in place to continue to develop youth work provision over the coming months.

5. OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY DURING COVID-19

- 5.1 **Referral work:** The service's core work over the past 12 months has been its referral work, supporting identified young people on a 1:1 basis. Despite lockdown restrictions, the service has amended its delivery model to offer dedicated and targeted support to young people remotely. This included text messages, WhatsApp, telephone and Zoom calls. In exceptional circumstances, if a young person was deemed to be at crisis point and remote support was not effective, face-to-face meetings have been authorised in Covid-secure environments.

Resilience assessments and subsequent action plans continued to be undertaken at the start of intervention, where possible, to provide clarity on the issues the individual was facing and provide guidance on the support plan being offered.

From the first day of lockdown, open cases have been routinely assessed and categorised to ensure those most at risk received enhanced support, time and attention from the youth workers. This practice has continued throughout all lockdown periods.

5.2 Mental health and wellbeing support: Many young people's mental health and wellbeing has been adversely affected by Covid-19 for a variety of reasons. This impact is likely to continue for a prolonged period of time as a legacy of the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, the service invested in additional capacity in their team of Mental Health and Wellbeing Officers within YEPS. The team work directly with young people who are referred to the service for support to improve their mental health where they don't reach the threshold for other services, like CAMHS. In exceptional cases, the team will work with individuals who are open to CAMHS but require further additional support within their community or school on a more frequent basis than the health appointments. The staff employed within this team are qualified youth workers who have received enhanced training to be able to assist young people with their specific wellbeing needs.

5.3 Wellbeing packs: Packs have been sent out to over 200 young people struggling with the social restrictions and those referred for support through the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway. These packs included:

- Life journals
- Affirmation cards
- Art pads
- Colouring pens
- Stress ball
- Chatter box – provide daily tips on supporting wellbeing

Feedback has been positive and the life journals will become a legacy of the pandemic, to be used with future referrals as appropriate.

5.4 Reflective practice sessions: The service has been working in partnership with Education Psychology Service (EPS) colleagues, who have provided reflective practice sessions for the YEPS's Mental Health and Wellbeing Officers (MHWOs). These reflective sessions have offered the MHWOs the opportunity to develop their knowledge

and skills to more effectively support young people with mental health concerns. The clinical expertise of the EPS has assisted the MHWOs to consider the needs of young people in an alternative way and challenged the officers to develop more targeted plans for individual young people. These sessions will continue as part of the legacy of Covid-19, and a similar model of professional support is being investigated for other YEPS staff.

- 5.5 **Emergency childcare hubs:** The service was an active partner in the delivery of the emergency childcare hubs from March to June 2020. Staff were deployed to key hubs where there were a high number of secondary aged young people attending, either as children of key workers or vulnerable individuals. The staff supported the staffing of the hubs, delivering activities not only to attendees aged 11 years and above, but also supporting those under 11 years as well. The key hubs supported were Ysgol Nantgwyn and Heol y Celyn. The wider service collated activity packs and delivered to each school on a weekly basis, offering staff the flexibility to use the resources with the children and young people.
- 5.6 **School-based support:** At times when secondary schools have been operational, the Youth Engagement Officers have continued to base themselves on their allocated school sites, to ensure they are visible and accessible to the learners. When schools returned to sites in June and July 2020 and again from September to December 2020, the YEOs undertook their usual duties to support learners via offering support on a 1:1 basis (referral work); group work where a common need or issue was identified, such as managing anxiety about returning to school; targeted work for young people impacted by suicide; etc. After school sessions were offered to all schools in line with their Covid-19 risk assessments, where pupils could come together to participate in an activity as long as they remained within their bubble. An example of this is a Year 7 friendship group, to help pupils get to know their new classmates as many other social activities had been suspended.
- 5.7 **Summer holiday childcare:** Following the success of the emergency childcare hubs, the Council committed to the provision of childcare throughout the summer holiday period for children of key workers and vulnerable individuals. The YEP Service facilitated and delivered the summer holiday childcare programme across six hubs (Darran Park, Hawthorn, Penywaun, Porth, Tonyrefail and Ynysboeth), in conjunction with Leisure Services and internal Education and Inclusion Service teams. 336 spaces were available across the hubs, with an average

attendance of 160 daily. In total, 3677 attendances were recorded at the hubs over the five-week period.

The staff led the delivery of the programme across the six sites for five weeks of the holidays, offering children and young people exciting and safe activities, supported by a select number of Covid-secure external providers. Activities included sporting activities, pyrography, clay model art, wellbeing/mindfulness, to name a few, and each were tailored for the age range of the group they were working with. The feedback from parents, carers, professionals and the children and young people was overwhelmingly positive.

- 5.8 **Integrated Wellbeing Pathway:** The Attendance and Wellbeing Service (AWS) and YEPS jointly developed the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway in response to the reported needs of young people as they were due to return to school following the first lockdown period. The pathway provides a continuation of support for young people who are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety about returning to school during the pandemic.

Young people who were at risk of not returning to school were identified by the school who informed the AWS. The AWS conducted Wellbeing Response Visits to the family home to ascertain the reason for the individual not returning to school. If, during the discussion with the family, it is identified that the young person was nervous or anxious about returning, the AWS would make a referral to YEPS for virtual sessions to build the young person's confidence so they felt ready to return to school.

The referral was managed over a series of sessions and provided the opportunity for the individual to work through a programme of support with the young person. This programme included mindfulness practices, sleeping techniques, positive affirmations, and understanding stress and how to manage it.

The additional capacity was funded by additional School-Based Counselling funding from Welsh Government, to provide an alternative option to counselling. For full details, see Appendix 1.

- 5.9 **Enhanced EET programme:** School leavers' exit from mainstream education has been significantly affected by Covid-19, leaving many without a destination or clear progression plan for their future. Therefore, the service, with input from schools, Careers Wales and the Gatsby Project workers in HR, developed an enhanced support programme to offer current year 11 pupils, 2019/20 leavers and

electively home educated a range of interventions to help them identify an appropriate further education, employment or training opportunity. Such interventions included virtual support session with individuals identified as at risk of becoming NEET; coffee mornings with career advisors; virtual volunteering experience days; virtual employment days, including CV writing skills, interview techniques; developing the basic skills of those in work to ensure they continue to be employable in the post-Covid world.

5.10 Tackling youth homelessness: Preventing youth homelessness continues to be a priority for the service, and whilst the number of young people presenting as homeless has reduced over the past year, it is likely that there are many young people who do not have a permanent residence and are temporarily living with other family members or friends. The service continues to develop its universal interventions to reduce the risk of homelessness, like awareness sessions and education programmes to improve life skills. It has also piloted a project with Llamau, to identify those most at risk of becoming homeless in the future. The learning from this pilot project will be used to develop an identification tool that can be rolled out to all schools during academic year 2021/22. Once identified, YEPS will provide a series of young person-centred and family interventions to improve relationships that allow the young person to remain within the family home.

5.11 Street-based youth work: From October 2020, the service entirely re-focused its community youth offer to deliver street-based youth work across the county borough. This was in response to the escalation of young people's needs who are seeking a trusted adult/support during the pandemic.

The service is currently deploying up to four teams every evening to the key localities across RCT where young people are known to frequent. Youth workers have been keen to establish this method of engaging with young people whilst other community options are suspended due to Covid-19 restrictions. This work has been well-received by young people with 2785 contacts made in the Autumn alone. The staff engaged with young people to ask them how they were managing in lockdown, what they feel the issues they are facing and what they would like to see in their local communities to support them. Responses such as re-opening youth clubs and after school provision was a primary request, alongside additional mental health and wellbeing support, better outdoor shelters and street lighting, and access to the condom card scheme. This feedback has helped the service to formulate its recovery plan for the coming 12 months, including adding capacity to key provision offered by the service.

- 5.12 **Other community provision:** During the street-based sessions, staff have started to establish new relationships with local businesses to consider what they are able to offer young people in their own area. For example, in Treorchy, a supermarket has offered YEPS the use of a parcel of land for free to develop as a safe outdoor space for young people to congregate and for the service to host outdoor activities, such as street dance. In addition, discussions are underway about the use of tennis courts in the area for additional physical activities hosted by both YEPS and external partners to offer several sporting activities throughout the week. This work was suspended during each lockdown period, but work will continue with the relevant organisations once it is safe to do so.
- 5.13 **Staff support in children's homes:** Covid-19 regulations have meant that most frontline services in RCT have seen a staffing shortage at some point over the past 12 months, as staff have had to self-isolate when they develop symptoms. This has resulted in cross-team working to ensure that essential services can continue to be provided despite staff sickness. YEPS staff have provided staffing support in the Council's children's homes at such times, working with children and young people in these homes during the working week, evenings and weekends. This practice has strengthened the working relationships between these teams and has informed service improvements for the future as part of the service's recovery plan.
- 5.14 **Commissioned mobile youth clubs:** Utilising core budget and external capital grants, the service commissioned two vehicles to act as mobile youth clubs. The vehicles will provide the opportunity for a hub in a locality where access to a suitable permanent venue is not available. They can be used as mobile youth clubs, as the base for community activities like fun days and street-based youth work, as well as a hub for use at times when an immediate response is required within a community. The vehicles will be in full use by the service and its partners from April 2021 onwards.
- 5.15 **Virtual youth offer:** Transforming service delivery methods required the active engagement of staff across the service to effect cultural change, supported by managers who were confident to let staff take measured risks. Focusing on service users, the team was tasked to assess needs and identify requirements, which were then used to reallocate resources and develop contingency plans. Their previous engagement in service innovation and their confidence to use their expertise and knowledge of the needs of young people resulted in a virtual youth work offer available within 72 hours of lockdown

commencing. Service data demonstrates significant levels of online engagement with users in addition to the 1:1 support for over 1000 young people delivered remotely.

The service realigned its online offer, with a significant increase in the volume of information, advice and guidance, as well as universal activities available to young people via the website (www.wicid.tv) and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) The comprehensive offer was delivered by YEPS with significant contributions from delivery partners including sexual health teams, substance misuse organisations, and commissioned providers.

- 5.16 **Youth fora:** the service has been proactive in consulting with young people throughout the pandemic. From seeking opinions during 1:1 sessions to surveys on social media platforms, YEPS staff have been committed to listening to young people to inform service developments.

To further inform the service's decisions on future developments, officers have worked to transfer the physical local youth fora into online sessions. The three local youth fora have met eight times to discuss the concerns young people have as a result of Covid and the support they would like to see implemented as part of the service's recovery plan. In addition, the fora met with, discussed and contributed towards:

- Votes@16 campaign *#yepsisthisyourfirsttime*
- Police and Crime Commissioner's "Young Voice Conversation" and the development of their young people's website
- Safer Wales "Champions of Wales" project
- Jigsaw Project, looking at how girls and women have been impacted by Covid-19
- Poetry Project, to create a series of short poems to change the negative views of young people within their wider community.

- 5.17 **Workforce development:** The pandemic has required the service to be dynamic and quickly adapt to the emerging needs of young people. Reviewing the levels of engagement and reporting rising levels of needs, the service has been able to review its staffing requirements to meet the future needs of young people. As such, the service commenced a management of change process in February 2021, realigning its priorities to the current and future needs of young people and adding capacity to the service in key areas where more additional staffing hours will be needed.

Furthermore, the service has made a firm commitment to the upskilling of the youth workforce across RCT, not only for Council employed youth workers but for those working in our partner organisations, such as third sector and housing partners and also community members.

Delivering youth work qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3, this commitment will not only benefit community members and organisations but most importantly the young people with whom they will be supporting.

In January 2021, the service appointed two youth work apprentices. Throughout their two-year contract, they will work in all areas of the service and gain Level 2 and 3 qualifications in Youth and Community Work.

6. IMPACT TO DATE

6.1 Over the course of the year, 2020/21, the service has provided targeted support to:

- 1035 individual young people on a 1:1 basis through its referral work, which includes 784 new referrals accepted during the year. The number of referred open cases peaked at 504 in November 2020.

6.2 In addition to this, the service has provided open access opportunities to young people to the level of:

- 250 exciting virtual activity programmes for young people to take part in during lockdown, totalling 708 individual sessions;
- 1,521 individual young people attended these sessions over the year, who attended 3292 times in total;
- 124 street-based sessions in the Autumn 2020 (they weren't introduced until October 2020 and had to be suspended in December 2020) and during those sessions, officers made contact with 2785 young people on the streets of RCT.

6.3 For a breakdown of these figures by month, please see Appendix 2.

7. YOUNG PEOPLE'S FEEDBACK

7.1 Over the course of the year, there have been multiple opportunities for young people to provide their opinion on the issues they are facing and the provision they would like to see in the future.

7.2 Throughout June 2020, Rhondda Cynon Taf's Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) launched its Covid-19 Response Consultation to capture the views of young people aged 11-25 on the support offered by YEPS throughout the Covid-19 Lockdown. There were 125 respondents and the results included:

- 68% stated they felt happy or very happy at that time;
- 60% stated they enjoyed or really enjoyed being at home during lockdown;
- 71% stated they felt bored during lockdown;
- 34% stated they felt lonely during lockdown;
- 29% state they felt anxious during lockdown;
- 28% stated they felt sad and worried during lockdown.
- 79% stated the worst part of lockdown was not being able to see their friends;
- 56% stated the worst part was not being able to go to school or getting help with their school work.

For all response, see the full consultation report in Appendix 3.

7.3 During the street-based sessions in Autumn 2020, staff actively sought the young people's views on future developments, with the responses including:

- Better access to information, advice and guidance;
- Youth clubs to reopen;
- Commence trips and activities in line with pre-Covid programmes;
- Resumption of the condom card scheme;
- Improved street lighting;
- Install street shelters, with benches and access to wifi;
- New skateparks.

7.4 Young people's feedback informed the service's delivery plan over the past year and will continue to influence the recovery plan from April 2021 onwards.

8. STAFF FEEDBACK

8.1 The need for change, respond promptly to critical events and advocate for young people's need has never been required more than in the past 12 months. Covid-19 has required staff to demonstrate personal resilience in the practical implementation of emergency contingency plans to manage crisis, whilst at the same time predict and plan for the longer term impact on young people.

8.2 Management were conscious of the pressure placed on staff and have provided additional opportunities for individuals to discuss the impact the pandemic is having on their workloads and their own wellbeing. Opportunities include more frequent virtual meetings, informal team time for officers to come together to share their experiences both within

work on their personal lives and expanded the use of messaging facilities.

8.3 Furthermore, staff have had the chance to respond to formal questionnaires to gain service-wide experiences and use the information to better support staff going forward. In May 2020, a snap survey was promoted to all full time YEPS staff, of which 34 responded. An overview of the responses included:

- 72% responded to say they were feeling 6 or above (scale 1 low – 10 excellent);
 - Many felt positive and relaxed about the opportunity to work from home;
 - Staff were excited to be involved in new projects and lead on innovative ideas;
 - Some stated they felt isolated, trapped and bored at home;
- 59% responded to say that they were enjoying the alternative way of working more than the previous way of working (rated it 6 or above);
- 66% stated they enjoyed the flexible working hours and virtual meetings;
- 63% stated that working from home was beneficial/productive for them;
- 59% stated they felt they could be more creative;
- 36% stated they felt anxious about having to work in different ways and areas of the service than they normally work.

As part of the survey, staff were asked what areas of the new ways of working should be continued when lockdown is lifted. Responses included:

- Maintain an element of virtual work between staff (meetings) and with young people;
- Working with other agencies more regularly than previously able to;
- More regular staff 'check ins';
- More opportunities for home working.

Staff were also asked what areas of the new ways of working should NOT continue after lockdown is lifted. Responses included:

- Virtual work should be balanced with face-to-face work as remote working is not always beneficial;
- Supervision sessions to be in-person, not virtual.

9. RECOVERY PLAN – NEXT STEPS

- 9.1 The work of the service over the coming 6-12 months will be centred around key deliverables:
- Engagement with schools to offer universal and targeted support to pupils onsite;
 - Enhanced engagement with communities, both with the young people who live there and local businesses and organisations who can offer their own services to young people;
 - Specialist support for young people aged 16 years and above, including support into education, employment and training, preventing homelessness and support to build resilience;
 - Wellbeing (including mental health) support for young people;
 - Consultation with young people and the promotion of their rights and entitlements;
 - Enhanced digital youth offer, offering information, advice and guidance, as well as universal and targeted activities via online platforms.
- 9.2 The management of change process will be complete by the end of April 2021 will deliver additional capacity in the key priority areas. This includes realigning the priorities of the service into school and community engagement; young people's wellbeing; young people's rights; and 16+ support. It also enhances the service's capacity for 1:1 work with young people as it is acknowledged that there will be more need of this targeted work as a result of Covid-19.
- 9.3 In April 2020, the service received additional investment from the Council's Cabinet to grow and the develop the community element of the service to deliver youth work 5 evenings a week and at weekends, in multiple locations. This initiated the development of the Safe Space initiative to support the creation of community based young people friendly locations, supported by local businesses and organisations where young people could get information, advice and assistance safely. Whilst put on hold during the pandemic, the development of the Safe Space initiative will continue to be implemented as restrictions ease.
- 9.4 School-based support will be a priority for the service. Youth workers will continue operate from secondary and through-school sites for part of their contracted hours. This will ensure the workers are visible and accessible to the majority of 11 – 16 year olds in RCT. The officer in each secondary school will provide targeted support to those referred

to them, as well as issue-based group work, including positive wellbeing, tackling anti-social behaviour and support into a post-16 destination upon leaving school.

- 9.5 Developing a comprehensive programme of community-based youth work is a significant priority for the service going forward. Engagement with the local community will be key to achieving this, both in terms of individuals and organisations, and the service has been reconfigured to ensure this priority can be achieved and maintained.

Street-based youth work will continue beyond the pandemic, as it has been vital in reaching young people that otherwise would not have been known to the service. The feedback from interactions with these young people will be used to inform service developments and ensure that their needs are met in the future.

Youth clubs will be reintroduced once it is safe to do so and will complement the street-based youth work as it will be provision to signpost the young people in to. The geographical location of youth clubs will be reviewed and if necessary revised in line with feedback and take up.

A full community youth offer that meets all the needs of young people across RCT cannot be met by the YEP Service alone. Therefore, a key part of this priority will be building relationships with local businesses, voluntary sector organisations and individuals to jointly plan and implement a sustainable youth work offer within each locality. These plans will be tailored to the needs within the local areas, complementing what is already available without duplication.

- 9.6 Thanks to the Council's financial investment in the service, coupled with successful grant bids, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service has commissioned two vehicles to be used as mobile youth clubs/hubs. The vehicles provide the service with the ability to bring youth support and provision to all areas of RCT, even if there are no suitable venues in the local area. They include seating areas, laptop connection, wifi and television screens (for use in playing presentations, games consoles and much more) within the heated vehicle itself, whilst also offering a covered outdoor space on the platform accessed by large bifold doors. It is a perfect space for use all year round and also covid-secure, as the doors can remain open, providing shelter from the elements with full ventilation.

These will be used to fill historical gaps in community provision, where there have not been suitable venues to host youth activities. They can host internal activities such as general youth clubs activities, gaming sessions, arts and crafts sessions, and well as more targeted provision like one-to-one support for young people in a confidential space and pre-employment activities like CV writing, job application support and interview techniques. Within a few steps, the outdoor space allows youth workers to simultaneously host these indoor sessions alongside outdoor chill out zones, film nights, sporting and leisure activities, to name a few.

They will also act as bases for use during community events, as well as during times when an immediate response is required within a community, such as following a public incident.

- 9.7 Additional mental health and wellbeing support will be required by young people as a result of the pandemic. The number of young people actively seeking assistance from a trusted adult in relation to their poor mental health has risen significantly over the past 12 months, and as such the service has responded by enhancing its capacity within the service to be able to provide additional support. These staff work closely with the Education Psychology Service, have developed their working links with CAMHS and will continue with their own professional development to ensure they have the skills and expertise to provide the correct support to young people struggling with their wellbeing.
- 9.8 Workforce development is a key priority for the service. The aim is to ensure it is fit to support the emerging needs of young people as they recover from the pandemic, whilst also providing training opportunities for future youth workers to ensure succession plans can be fulfilled. The development opportunities will not only be offered to internal staff but will also commit to the investment of staff/volunteers in external partners/organisations for the benefit of young people across RCT, regardless of the organisation they wish to engage with.
- 9.9 The workforce development priority will include a comprehensive volunteer training programme to cultivate a skilled and flexible local workforce.
- 9.10 The work of the enhanced education, employment and training programme (prevention of NEETs agenda) will continue to be rolled out, reviewed and revised in line with the changing needs of school leavers. As part of the new 16+ Support Team, a team of officers will be involved in the delivery of a continuum of support for school leavers,

from pre-employment activities, to applying and accessing college and university courses, to general life skills and support with wellbeing.

9.11 Virtual youth fora will continue to be embedded over the coming months. Part of the discussions at these fora will include their future operational model, considering young people's opinions as to whether they should be in-person or virtual meetings, or a hybrid model to allow those who are unable to attend a physical meeting to contribute. Gaining young people's views will be as important as ever as the service transitions from emergency planning into the resumption of normal practice. The service understands the needs of young people will be greater and more diverse than pre-pandemic, and in order to swiftly and effectively meet these needs, young people need to be the driving force behind the necessary service developments.

9.12 Whilst the 12-month data depicts a declining trend in the number of young people presenting to statutory services as homeless, this likely masks a larger issue within our local communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there many young people are currently living with friends and other family members on a temporary basis, since their relationship at home became too strained in lockdown. Furthermore, it is likely that as young people find it difficult to secure an education, employment or training destination post-July, further family breakdowns may occur.

Therefore, the service, together with key partners like the Housing teams, are developing a youth homelessness prevention strategy. This strategy ranges from early intervention provision, such as a universal education programme and identification methods to recognise those most at risk of becoming homeless to offer support at an early point, to intensive support for those presenting as homeless and either supporting their to re-engage with their families or support them into appropriate housing.

9.13 The Council has made a commitment to developing a prevention strategy, focusing on preventing children and young people taking part in anti-social behaviour and crime. Building on the initial Safe Spaces concept, this is a joint endeavour between YEPS, Community Safety Partnership and the Youth Offending Service initially, and will be widened to include additional partners such as the Police as the work develops.

9.14 Building on the Safe Space initiative noted in 9.3 and linked to the above priority is the need to improve the wider community's perception of young people. It is widely recognised that some young people's

activities are interpreted to be anti-social in nature, when this is not always the case. Therefore, this priority will be focused on building relationships between different members of the community through intergenerational projects, links with community groups and promoting of positive work and achievements of young people.

- 9.15 Following the service's involvement in the delivery of the emergency childcare hubs last summer and based on the assumption that full-service delivery will not resume before July, the YEP Service is planning its covid-compliant summer holiday programme. This will involve face-to-face activities, as well as virtual provision. This programme will continue to account for the 1:1 sessions the youth workers will still need to carry out to support their open cases, but will also provide more universal access to fun, exciting and supportive opportunities to young people across RCT.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Referral work with young people in need of dedicated 1:1 support has been the focus of the service's work over the past 12 months. This has included support with mental health concerns, as well as those who are confined to their homes due to shielding.
- 10.2 In times of crisis, the team have been able to request a face-to-face meeting with young people in need of it to reduce the risk to themselves and/or others, albeit in a Covid-secure environment.
- 10.3 Vulnerable young people, including those with additional learning needs, were prioritised for support in the emergency childcare hubs and summer holiday childcare provision.
- 10.4 This report, its findings and the subsequent actions are fully inclusive of all young people from across Rhondda Cynon Taf. Service developments arising from this report will have positive outcomes for all young people.

11. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 11.1 Throughout the past 12 months, all work that has been undertaken has been based upon consultation responses from young people, contribution from our internal youth workers and feedback from key delivery partners, such as Children's Services, Health and Education colleagues, as a result of their own work with young people across RCT.

11.2 In line with the Council's Management of Change policy and procedures, both staff and Trade Unions have been fully consulted throughout the process of service change to deliver additional staffing capacity in key priority areas.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

12.1 The service has maximised the opportunities to utilise Covid-specific funding over the past 12 months to add capacity to the service when it was most required.

12.2 Additional capital funding was secured to purchase the new mobile youth club vehicles.

12.3 In conjunction with Education and Inclusion Services, the service secured funding to support young people in need of support either pre- or post-school based counselling. The funding supported the service's contribution to the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway, by allowing the appointment of an additional youth worker to offer wellbeing-type interventions to those experiencing severe anxiety about returning to, and engaging in, school.

12.2 Going forward, the service is confident it can meet the priorities as outlined in this report from existing budgets. The additional investment in the Service from the Council's Cabinet in April 2020 and the recent service changes allow the service developments to be implemented and the anticipated outcomes to be realised without the need for additional funding.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

13.1 There are no legal implications that need to be considered concerning the report.

13.2 Going forward, the service will need to continue to operate in line with Covid-19 regulations to keep staff, young people and community members safe and supported.

14. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

14.1 The appropriate provision for young people aged 11 – 25 years across Rhondda Cynon Taf will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan vision of *'a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all'*, as it will deliver against the specific priorities of *'People - Promoting*

independence and positive lives for everyone and 'Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work'.

14.2 Young people are a key cohort of our community as they are the next generation of Rhondda Cynon Taf. As such, they are a priority group under The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It is felt that this report, the survey findings and the subsequent developments that are occurring as a result, will contribute to all of the seven elements that the Act is aiming to achieve:

1. A prosperous Wales;
2. A resilient Wales;
3. A more equal Wales;
4. A healthier Wales;
5. A Wales of cohesive communities;
6. A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh language;
7. A globally responsible Wales.

15. CONCLUSION

12.1 The Service has demonstrated its ability to anticipate the immediate, mid-term and longer term impact of Covid-19 on young people, through the number and range of successful projects it has undertaken over the last 12 months and the plans in place to continue to develop youth work provision over the coming months.

12.3 It is recognised that young people wish for face-to-face services to be reinstated as soon as it is safe to do so, and the service will champion the resumption of services on their behalf.

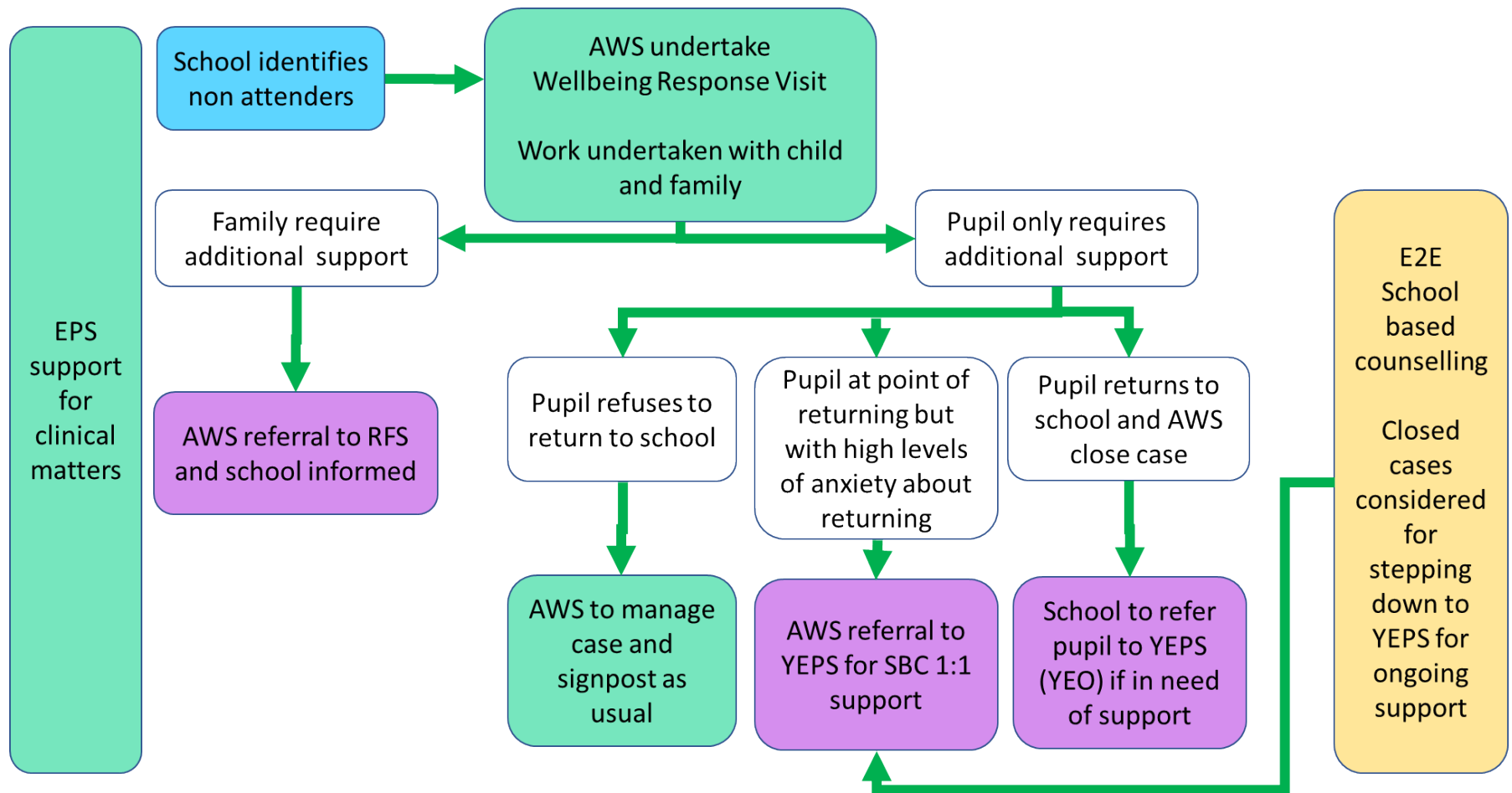
12.4 Young people have provided positive feedback on their experiences with the new virtual platforms developed during Covid-19, leading to these being mainstreamed alongside the re-introduction of in-person provision and support.

12.5 The priorities cannot be achieved without competent and effective staff, hence the service's commitment to workforce development.

12.6 Partnership working will be key to achieving the service priorities, and work with schools, community partners and other local authority services will underpin their successful implementation.

APPENDIX 1

Integrated wellbeing support – return to school

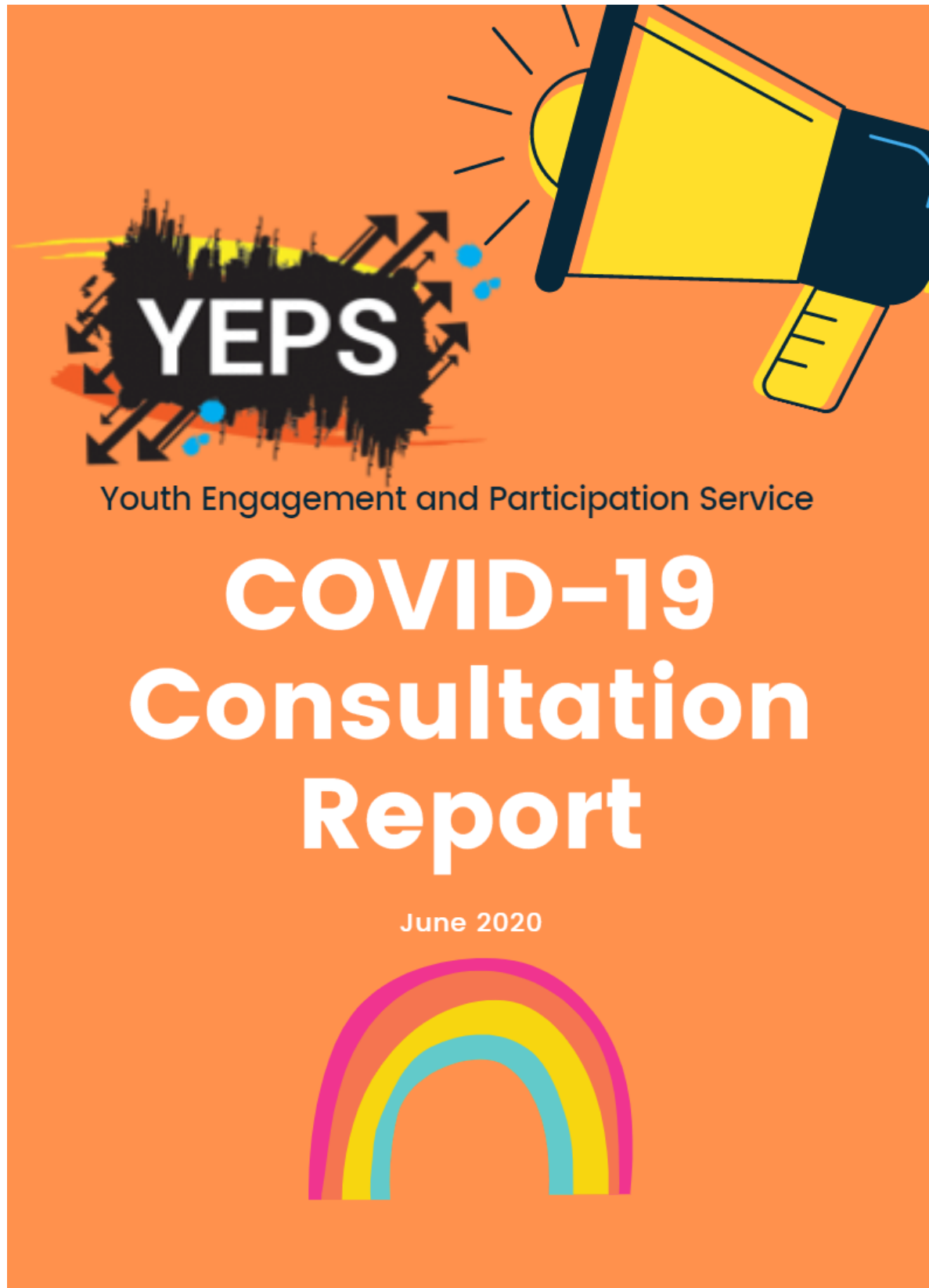


APPENDIX 2

YEPS Activities 2020 / 21				
Month	Activities	Sessions	Participants	Contacts
Apr-20	24	91	190	301
May-20	22	81	133	319
Jun-20	21	82	114	261
Jul-20	22	72	113	338
Aug-20	15	41	67	213
Sep-20	8	14	47	67
Oct-20	22	37	143	234
Nov-20	11	43	110	234
Dec-20	18	30	135	158
Jan-21	31	78	165	509
Feb-21	36	119	174	552
Mar-21	20	20	130	106
TOTAL	250	708	1521	3292

Street Based Youth Work		
Month	No. of Sessions	No. of Contacts
Oct-20	34	590
Nov-20	60	1751
Dec-20	30	444
TOTAL	124	2785

Referred Open Cases (1:1 Support)		
Month	Open Referral 2020/21	New Referral 2020/21
Apr-20	375	25
May-20	295	19
Jun-20	299	52
Jul-20	309	37
Aug-20	295	22
Sep-20	334	65
Oct-20	440	159
Nov-20	504	142
Dec-20	469	59
Jan-21	463	57
Feb-21	462	76
Mar-21	416	75



INTRODUCTION

Throughout June 2020, Rhondda Cynon Taf's Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) launched its Covid-19 Response Consultation to capture the views of young people aged 11-25 on the support offered by YEPS throughout the Covid-19 Lockdown.

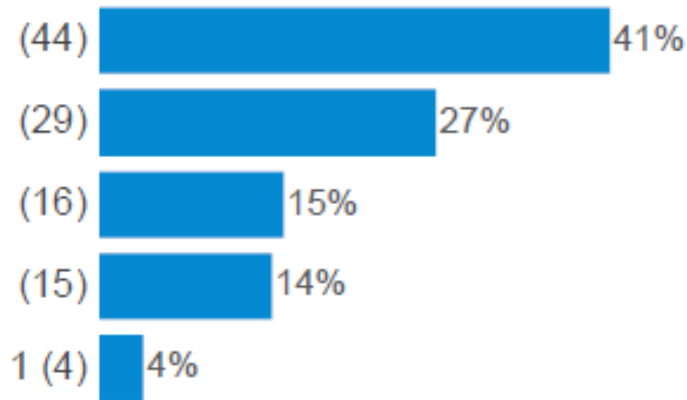
The aim of this report is to outline the results of the consultation, which will be used to inform the future planning for YEPS of its online presence and support in the months ahead following the Covid-19 Lockdown.

Further information, and an opportunity to discuss this further with a youth worker within YEPS can be found at our young person's website Wicid.tv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

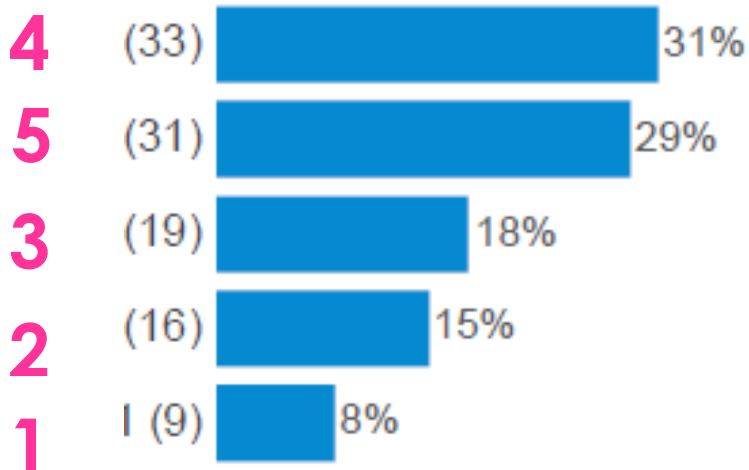
The Youth Engagement and Participation Service would like to thank the 125 young people who took the opportunity to complete the survey and all those who supported with the delivery of the consultation.

1. How are you feeling today?

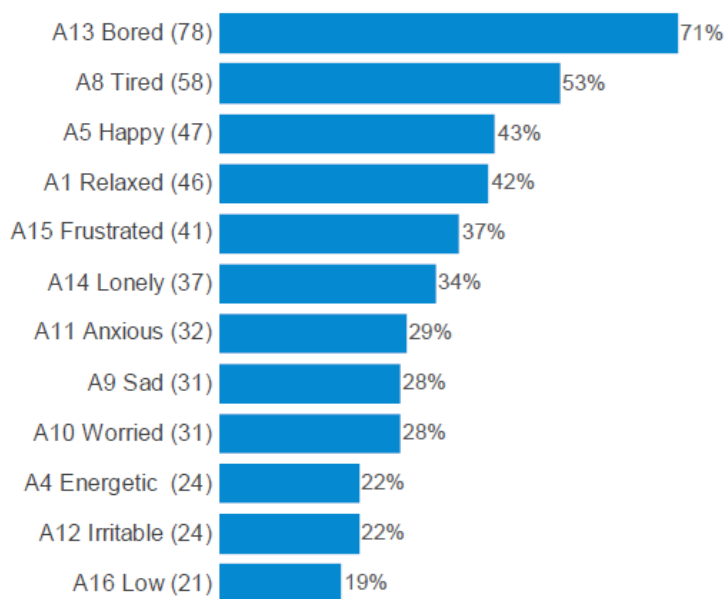


4
5
3
2
1

2. How much have you enjoyed being at home during lockdown? (5 really enjoyed – 1 not enjoyed at all)



3. Which words best describe how you have felt at home during lockdown?



Other (please specify)

Depressed	Scared
Eager to get back to a normal routine	Depressed
Calm	Not motivated

4. What have you enjoyed about being at home during lockdown?

A2 being able to spend more time relaxing / doing the things I like (75)	62.0%	A3 trying out new hobbies/activities (44)	36.4%
A1 spending time with family (74)	61.2%	A5 being able to stay in touch with YEPS staff and take part in YEPS activities / provision (26)	21.5%
A4 being able to learn / do school work in my own time (51)	42.1%	A6 other (please specify) (7)	5.8%

Other (please specify)

Sit ups challenges

FaceTime friends and family members

FaceTime friends

Nothing

seeing friends going on walks

SEEING MY FRIENDS

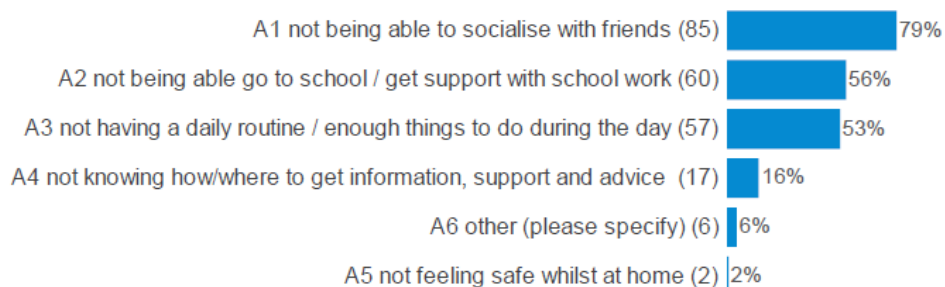
I have been inspired by a tv show called 911 and 911 lone star. I'm inspired to be a firefighter.

Alone time.

Nothing really

playing with friends in hub

5. What have you have found difficult about being at home during lockdown?



Other (please specify)

Not being able so see family

Bored

being with my family all of the time

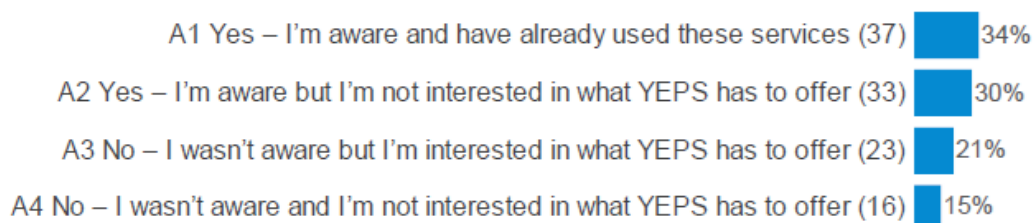
Worrying about family and friends.

School was a place where I could socialise without the pressure to.

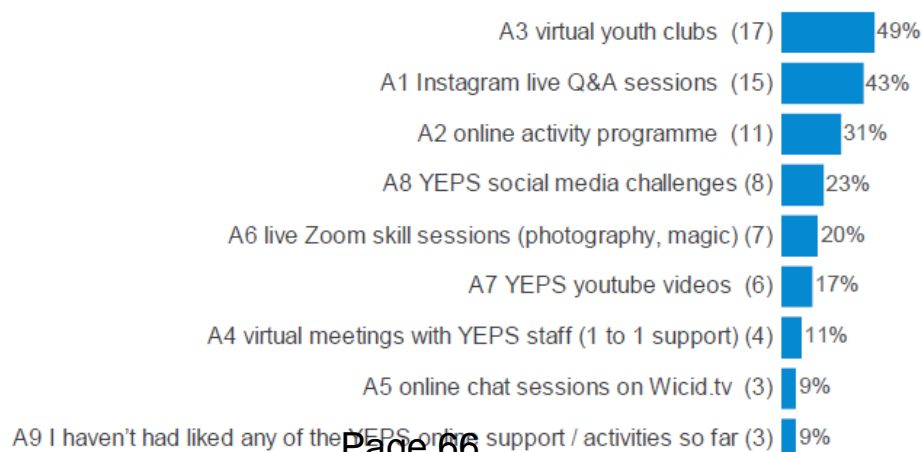
How my caring duties have increased more than I am use to

I can't get focused at home

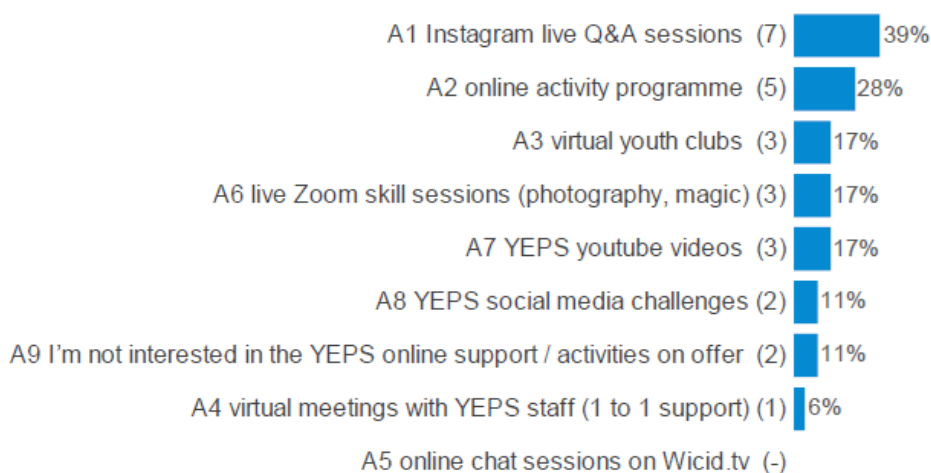
6. Are you aware that YEPS are offering online support and activities for young people during lockdown on the Wicid.tv website and social media channels?



7. Which YEPS Online support/activities have you liked so far?



8. Which online support/activities would you like if changes or improvements were made to how they are delivered?



Comments:

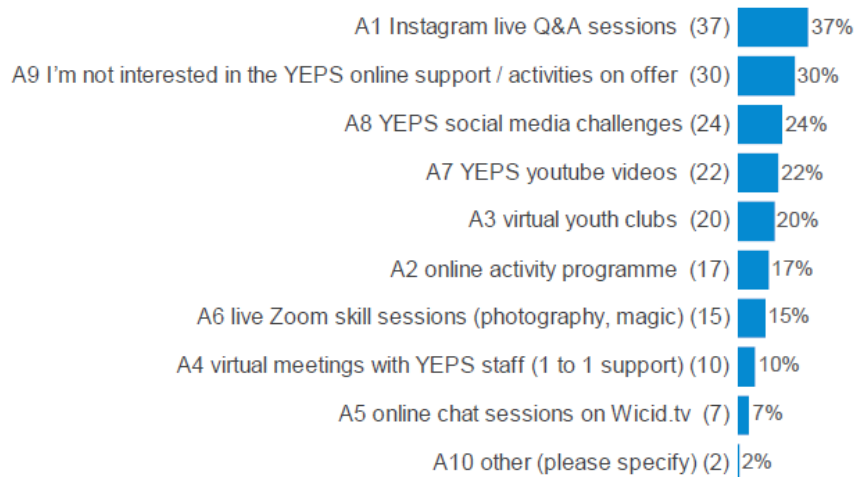
N/A

Also sit ups was good

To make sure we know when the online classes are so we know when to join as on the Instagram stories it just says what we are doing not when it is

To let us know when it is and what's the code on virtual youth club or on Instagram story

9. Which online support/activities would you like YEPS to continue to run after lockdown has lifted?



Other (please specify)

Stuff like the challenges

Fitness

this would help if you kept online meeting with pupils as they could be struggling in the holidays

Online prevision

it isn't that im not interested, i just don't feel the need to use them

Dal ati gyda popeth rydych yn gwneud!

Perhaps YouTube live-streams where something like Kahoot is this played.

Drama and singing lessons

Challenges /goals of the week

I would like to see virtual youth club continue

I would like yeps to offer online classes on YouTube because they are something fun for us to do if we are bored and if someone can't make it to the youth club or after school clubs they can still take part but in their own time

I would like yeps to offer online meetings one to one as they could feel alone or stressed and they can get in touch with you in the holidays

We would like to be creative and continue to develop the support we provide online, however it is important that we hear from you as young people about what you would like to see. Please share below your ideas of what additional support/activities YEPS can provide throughout lockdown and into the future.

Art competition

Email links

Some activities I would enjoy would be trips to adventure places e.g Llangranog or Rock UK

I dont know really

I think there is loads provided already

I am unsure because I haven't seen everything that YEPS is providing for people my age

zoom drawing, show pets/videos with pets

no.

crafts and workouts

Making sure you check up on people whether they look like their okay

Session on cycling such as bike maintenance.

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