



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23

EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15th SEPTEMBER 2022

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION SERVICE:
OVERVIEW OF ADDITIONAL FUNDING 2020 - 2022**

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

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an overview of the additional support the Youth Engagement and Participation Service has offered young people as a result of the Council's additional investment since 2020.

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 further depth, matters contained in this report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Members of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee with an update on the service developments for the Youth Engagement and Participation Service over the past two years that have been supported by the Council additional investment the service has received.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the end of 2019/20, the Council announced its commitment to providing additional funding in support of youth services to the value of £200,000. The purpose of this funding was to provide additional capacity for community-based support, including extending youth work provision on Friday evenings and weekends, and alternative means of engagement in areas where there was no permanent youth centre, for example via a mobile youth base (vehicle).
- 4.2 On 23rd March 2020, a national lockdown was imposed in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. At that time, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service suspended all face-to-face work with young people and colleagues. This lockdown had a significant impact on the plans to review of the key priorities of the service, mainly the priority of increasing the community offer available to young people.
- 4.3 The Coronavirus 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. 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 the change.
- 4.4 Maintaining these close working relationships with young people throughout the past 29 months has allowed the service to gather the views of young people and plan its recovery out of the pandemic in a way that meets the emerging needs of the various cohorts. This feedback has informed the service's plans and subsequent developments to ensure it offers a balanced programme that fulfils as many of the presenting needs as possible, whilst maximising capacity in both targeted and universal interventions.
- 4.5 More recently, a further £75,000 has been made available to the service to support its community engagement efforts, including investment in expanding its fleet of mobile youth club vehicles. These vehicles have been well-received by young people and are making positive impact in terms of engagement and reach of the service.
- 4.6 The additional core funding (£275,000 in total) has been instrumental in transforming the service's provision into a comprehensive hybrid offer over the past two years. It has added much-needed capacity to

the team's front-line delivery, especially in the community where young people have been most adversely affected by restrictions.

5. OVERVIEW OF SERVICE DELIVERY AREAS DIRECTLY FUNDED BY THE ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT

- 5.1 The implementation of plans to extend the youth work community offer was suspended as a result of the introduction of the national lockdown and the service focused on establishing a virtual offer to support young people. This section provides an update on what the service has done already, or is in the process of implementing, to add capacity and introduce innovative solutions in response to the needs of young people post-pandemic as a result of the additional investment.
- 5.2 **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 and made possible as a result of the additional youth service funding. The service is currently deploying up to four teams every evening to the key localities across RCT where young people are known to frequent. This work has been well-received by young people and community members.
- 5.3 **Developing 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.
- 5.4 **Mobile youth club vehicles:** The Council has invested in three vehicles utilising core and grant funding to act as hubs in localities where access to a suitable permanent venue is not available. The vehicles are 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, such as following a serious incident that requires enhanced youth work support. The mobile vehicles proved invaluable during the pandemic, offering a safe space for young people and support for the street based work. A fourth vehicle has recently been purchased and in line with the priorities of the new Cabinet, the ongoing expansion of the community street based youth work supported by the YEPS vehicles will remain a priority in line with available funding opportunities.

5.5 **“RCT Safe Spaces”**: The service is establishing a network of organisations that support our “Safe Space” initiative. A Safe Space is a youth-focused location that provides an open access space for young people within their local community. Every Safe Space will be different depending on the community it is based in. A Safe Space may be a youth club, community centre, park, sports club, or business like a café or activity centre. The Safe Spaces Network will provide support to individual organisations by offering advice, guidance and training opportunities to provide an inclusive and safe location that young people can benefit from. YEPS will provide their own Safe Spaces as well as support wider local authority service areas, third sector organisations and private businesses to develop additional Safe Spaces across the County Borough.

5.6 **Workforce development**: Reviewing the levels of engagement and reporting rising levels of needs, the service has invested in the development of future qualified and competent youth workers, ensuring a sustainable workforce into the future. Facing a national shortage of youth workers, the Council has dedicated resources to developing its own talent at a local level. 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 community members. Delivering youth work qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3, this commitment is not only benefiting community members and organisations but most importantly the young people they will be supporting.

5.7 **Apprentices**: 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. It is hoped that they will further their career within RCT either by securing a post within YEPS or a partner agency within a youth support role.

6. **SUMMARY OF THE ADDITIONAL PROVISION OFFERED BY THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION SERVICE**

6.1 The wider work of the Youth Engagement and Participation Service has indirectly benefited from the additional investment. This section provides an update the wider youth work offer of the service delivers across the County Borough. For further detail on service delivery during the pandemic, please see [Cabinet Report MTSP One4aLL LG \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk).

- 6.2 **Referral work:** The service's core work continues to be its referral work, supporting identified young people on a 1:1 basis. This includes meetings in school, college, home or community setting (including the mobile youth vehicle), as well as via text messages, WhatsApp, telephone and Zoom calls. Referrals rates are currently at an all time high with an average of over 100 new referrals per month.
- 6.3 **Mental health and wellbeing support:** Mental Health and Wellbeing Officers 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. 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.
- 6.4 **School-based support:** Youth workers are based at each secondary school across RCT on a daily basis during term time. Their usual duties to support learners include offering support on a 1:1 basis to build resilience (referral work); group work where a common need or issue is identified, such as managing anxiety about returning to school and behaviour concerns; and targeted work for young people impacted by family events or incidents in the community such as suicide; etc.
- 6.5 **After-school sessions:** Youth workers deliver sessions after the school day, on school sites, to provide opportunities for young people to participate in fun activities within their own time and free of charge.
- 6.6 **Holiday provision:** In addition to the term time provision, YEPS offers a comprehensive holiday programme, except for the Christmas break. These programmes include sporting, leisure and cultural activities, chill out rooms, workshops and arranged trips. Many of the activities are delivered within the community, in parks, skateparks, and town centres, utilising the community assets across RCT. The mobile youth clubs feature heavily in the delivery of these sessions, offering a base for the activities with a power supply, lighting and shelter in the event of adverse weather. These vehicles have broadened the offer that the service is able to offer at a local level.
- 6.7 **Youth clubs:** Youth clubs are currently in the process of re-opening following the pandemic. The delivery of youth club provision from both fixed centres and mobile vehicles is providing greater opportunity to engage with a wider range of young people.
- 6.8 **Enhanced education, employment and training programme:** Year 11 leavers were significantly affected by Coronavirus, with many

leaving school without a destination or clear progression plan for their future. YEPS, with input from schools, Careers Wales and the Gatsby Project, have developed an enhanced support programme for those at risk of becoming NEET. Interventions include in-person and virtual support sessions; coffee mornings; volunteering experience days; in-employment days, including CV writing skills, interview techniques; and developing the basic skills of those young people in work to ensure they continue to be employable in the post-Covid world.

6.9 **Tackling youth homelessness:** Preventing youth homelessness continues to be a priority and the service continues to develop its universal interventions to reduce the risk of homelessness as well as delivering targeted specialist support; training to prepare for independent living; and family interventions to improve relationships that allow the young person to remain within the family home.

6.10 **Virtual youth offer:** The service has maintained an element of virtual delivery post lockdown offering information, advice and guidance, as well as universal activities for young people via the website (www.yeps.wales - formally www.wicid.tv) and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) with contributions from delivery partners including sexual health teams, substance misuse organisations, and commissioned providers. The new YEPS website is supported by a downloadable YEPS app.

6.11 **Youth Fora:** one of the fundamental priorities of YEPS is to proactively consult with and support the active participation of young people, and this continued throughout the pandemic. The locality youth fora have been revised from geographically based groups to ones that focus on key thematic areas, as chosen by the young people themselves. These community fora include:

- Environment
- Community Safety
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Equality and Inclusion

Representatives on these groups include those working with YEPS, third sector organisations and schools. They will also form part of RCT's County Youth Forum, as the main group for ensuring that the voice of as many young people in RCT can be collated and shared with relevant partners and decision makers.

7. PERFORMANCE DATA FOR 2021/22

7.1 Over the course of the last financial year, 2021/22, the service has provided targeted support to:

- 1,666 individual young people on a 1:1 basis through its referral work, which includes 1,346 new referrals accepted during the year. The number of referred open cases peaked at 512 cases in May 2021, of which 175 were new referrals.

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

- 450 activity programmes for young people to take part in during term time, totalling 2,994 individual sessions;
- 250 activities during the holiday periods, totalling 343 individual sessions;
- 6,112 individual young people attended these sessions over the year, who attended 39,514 times in total.

7.3 Furthermore, the service undertook 355 street-based sessions during 2021/22 and during those sessions, staff made 12,930 contacts with young people on the streets of RCT.

8. SERVICE PRIORITIES FOR 2022-23

8.1 The work of the service over the coming 12 months will be centred around six key priorities

- Provide a visible, accessible, and inclusive youth provision in RCT;
- Ensure high-quality youth work provision in RCT;
- Support youth workers to provide the best and most suitable support for young people in RCT;
- Increase and improve the available support for young people aged 16-25 in RCT;
- Continue to enhance the mental health and wellbeing support for young people in RCT;
- Develop sustainable partnerships with all key agencies in RCT to offer a co-ordinated approach to issues facing young people;

8.2 In addition to these priorities, as part of the wider Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service YEPS is working with the specialist Autism training and consultancy Outside Education to review its current activities and practices considering accessibility and inclusivity for children, young people and adults who are neuro divergent to remove barriers to participation and improve professional practice.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 9.1 An Equality and Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

10. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no Welsh Language implications as the contents of this report are for information purposes only

11. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 11.1 All work of the service is based upon consultation responses from young people, contributions from our internal youth workers and feedback from key delivery partners, such as Children's Services, Health, Education and the third sector, as a result of their own work with young people across RCT.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 12.1 The Youth Engagement and Participation Service utilises both core funding and grant funding to deliver a comprehensive and responsive youth work offer across RCT. The additional financial investment provided since 2020 has allowed specific service improvements to be implemented, which may not have been possible otherwise, including the purchase and operation of mobile youth club vehicles alongside the use of grant funding.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

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

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

- 15.1 The Service has, and continues to demonstrate, its ability to anticipate and mitigate the immediate, mid-term and longer term impact of Covid-19 on young people across the County Borough and to adapt service provision accordingly.
- 15.2 Despite the challenges of the past two years, the Youth Engagement and Participation has continued to develop youth work provision in a timely manner to respond to the existing and emerging needs of young people, facilitated by the additional Council investment it has received.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

None

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