

Committee	Care Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Update Report: Youth Service
Date of Meeting	10 November 2022
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Elin Walker Jones
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## 1. Background

- 1.1. The Cabinet resolved to remodel the Youth Service in 2018. The remodelling of the Youth Service to establish the new model commenced on 1 September 2018.
- 1.2. The Youth Service has been reporting on the progress of the remodelling and the service's performance via the Performance Challenging procedure. The Service submitted a Progress Report on the first year of the remodelling process to the Education Scrutiny Committee in January 2020.
- 1.3. Very soon after that report, Covid restrictions came into force. The Cabinet Member wishes to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an update of the effect of the pandemic on the remodelling, and the service's latest position.

## 2. The Structure of the Remodelling: Youth Service

- 2.1. The provision of Youth Support Services is a statutory requirement under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The Welsh Government (WG) directs local authorities to provide, ensure the provision of, or participate in the provision of youth support services. WG does this for the Youth Work and Youth Services of Local Authorities through the "Extending Entitlement – Direction and Guidance (2002)", the National Youth Work Strategy for Wales 2014-18; the Engagement and Progression Framework 2015-2018; and the Youth Charter 2016.
- 2.2. The following structure was established for the Youth Service back in 2019:
  - Provide a Programme of Youth Work Activities and Projects for young people aged 11-19 through the schools (14 secondary schools and 2 special schools) through a 11-19 Youth Support Team with eight full-time Youth Workers.
  - Provide a Programme of Social Activities and Projects for young people aged 11-19 in communities throughout the year, by moving from place to place. This work is carried out by the Community Youth Work Team, with 37 part-time staff.
  - Support Community and Town Councils to establish Social Youth Clubs for young people according to demand. This work is carried out by the Community Youth Work Team, with 24 part-time staff.
  - Provide personal support to young people aged 16-25 who are facing barriers to engaging with education, training or employment, through the 16-25 Youth Support Team – XX full-time Youth Workers.
  - Commission the 3rd Sector to deliver activities, projects on behalf of the Youth Service as required.
- 2.3. The main conclusions of the first-year review were as follows:
  - the service's performance was somewhat better than expected;
  - young people's rates of engagement with the Service have remained the same despite the reduction in service;
  - those young people who have been involved with the Service report that they get the help they need.
  - recruitment challenges had meant that the Service was not operating at full capacity;
  - that more of the Management Team's time has been spent on helping to establish Community Council Clubs as they dealt with recruiting and managing staff, identifying and negotiating a suitable venue, responding to and supporting with behaviour management on Club nights.

### **3. The Service during COVID and its effects.**

- 3.1. All face-to-face activities were suspended by the Youth Service, the commissioned partners, and the Community Council Clubs.
- 3.2. The Service moved to virtual activities fairly smoothly, and managed to attract young people during a very competitive time in terms of the "digital offer" that was available (the world of on-line gaming, on-line groups etc.)
- 3.3. The Service continued to maintain contact with small groups of young people either virtually or through phone calls; and some door-step visits, as well as outdoors face-to-face meetings for some very vulnerable young people.
- 3.4. As we recovered the Service we recommenced face-to-face provision, focusing on work in schools. Working through the schools allowed the easiest access for young people to a youth worker, and the support provided added value to the wider well-being support in the schools.
- 3.5. During the pandemic the Ad-Trac project ended, which was our main intervention for the Youth Work with 16-25 year olds. A review of the team's work was completed and a restructure of the team was carried out to address young people's needs, thus moving away from focusing on work, training and employment support for young people to emotional, personal and social development support.
- 3.6. Recommencing the work in communities was difficult because of the restrictions which meant having to register in advance, and placing limits on numbers for TTP purposes. Forcing young people to register, and also limiting their ability to socialise without any stipulations, was contrary to the principles of youth work which is meant to be an open, voluntary, easily-accessible offer. The restrictions stopped us from meeting the demand, and many young people failed to access activities, trips and projects for a period of time.
- 3.7. Re-opening the Community Clubs was one of the final things we resumed. The main barrier to this was that the entire provision relied on a Voluntary Committee completing assessments and putting procedures in place to control the spread of COVID before they could open their doors and hire out to users.

### **4. What were young people telling us?**

- 4.1. The Youth Service engaged and discussed with young people throughout 2020-2021 regarding what mattered to them, and we responded and altered our provisions to address what they said, when circumstances and restrictions allowed.
- 4.2. Our virtual provision was stopped once the young people reported to us that too much of their time was spent on screen, and that they needed to prioritise screen-time for school.
- 4.3. Young people also told us that as they returned to schools, they needed emotional support rather than project work such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- 4.4. Parents and partners of Youth Support told us that the general social restrictions as well as having to manage their interactions with their peers in strict bubbles in schools had affected young people's social skills and opportunities.
- 4.5. In addition, a survey by the BBC in 2021 found that the group that had suffered most from loneliness due to the pandemic were the 16-24 age group. This survey led to local consultation work with young people aged 16-25 years old which shaped the work of the Youth Support Service (as noted in 3.5 above).
- 4.6. Young people stated that the most prominent challenges they had faced were social isolation, loneliness and the negative effect on well-being. As we asked them what and how could the Youth Service help them, young people stated that they were keen to see more social, fun activities being held which would help them to go out, come together with other young people and have fun.
- 4.7. As well as the change of emphasis by young people, parents and partners, the Welsh Government also announced a new Youth Work Strategy and a review of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, together with the release of the revised Youth Support Grant which places emphasis on homelessness, health and well-being and language.

## **5. How the Youth Service has responded.**

- 5.1. The re-modelled structure is still operational in the Youth Service. That structure was established because young people had told us (prior to the remodelling) that they wanted the Youth Service to help them with what mattered to them, which was learning and developing their life-skills that they don't get at home or in school; to help them with their personal development, and to give them support with their health and well-being. Young people had also told us that socialising and having fun with their friends was important to them. These things remain a priority for our young people, but the emphasis between them might have changed. Young people have also told us that issues around accommodation and homelessness, and language, equality and inclusion have become more of a priority for them since the pandemic.
- 5.2. *Appendix 1* states what is currently provided by each team to address the above; and it also provides an outline of how the Service has responded to the change of emphasis in priorities and addressed new priorities.

## **6. The Service's Strategic Themes – Health and Well-being, Youth Homelessness and Language and Inclusion**

6.1. The Service's whole provision is now based on the "Five Ways to Well-being" in order to ensure that all its activities, projects and interventions build personal resilience and promote young people's emotional well-being. Through grant-funding the Service has a Health and Well-being Worker to lead on this work and ensure that the provider teams all address the five ways to well-being in the work they do from day-to-day.

6.2. We have returned to implementing the recommendations from the Young People's Emotional Well-being and Mental Health report that was commissioned by the Mental Health Foundation in 2021. The main recommendations of the report were:-

- To review the Service's Communication Plan so as to promote good well-being and mental health messages using plain language.
- To develop a simple evaluation process that is consistent across the service, using it to measure the effect of our work on young people's well-being
- To clearly define the role of youth workers in relation to the five ways to well-being
- Develop a staff well-being plan.
- Develop a young people well-being pathway jointly with other youth support services (such as CAHMS, Barnardo's, ALNI Service) and with young people so that they understand what is available from services and specialist services.

6.3. A Well-being Festival for the Young People of Gwynedd aged 11-25 was held during 21-27 March 2022, in response to the need identified by young people following COVID restrictions. The aim of the festival was to promote young people's mental health and well-being. A whole host of virtual and face-to-face activities were planned during the week. We worked in partnership with young people and over 31 organisations from the voluntary and statutory sectors, and we worked with a group of 15 young people and partners to stage the festival across the county of Gwynedd. This project has reached the short list for nominations for the Youth Excellence Awards this year.

6.4. The Youth Service is one of six organisations that will be running the 'Mind our Future' project across Gwynedd and Anglesey. It is a unique and pioneering project, funded by the National Lottery

for a period of five years to address low-level mental health in young people aged 11-25 years old. This project enables young people to lead so that they can imagine and create a more resilient and mentally healthy future for young people. Aspects of this project, and its evaluation will steer our well-being plans and objectives in future.

6.5. As well as the above the service has received additional funding from the Welsh Government to appoint members of staff to provide a bespoke service to tackle youth homelessness and well-being.

6.6. The Youth Homelessness Prevention Coordinator works alongside the homelessness and community housing service, and other departments and partners to provide education, training and assistance to young people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

6.7. The Youth Homelessness Prevention Coordinator will provide targeted support to young people across the county who are homeless/at risk of homelessness. This work will include 1 to 1 work and small group work with young people through the youth service's referral procedures, including tier 2 PIP. The Coordinator will deliver educational sessions, services and workshops to schools and colleges. The Coordinator will work in partnership with other departments and external partners such as GISDA to incorporate a youth work approach to supporting young people.

6.8. The Service has also enhanced its provision to address the promotion of the Welsh language and equality issues for specific groups of young people through an external grant for the next three years. We have established arrangements with partners to collaborate on projects across Gwynedd, which include developing Language Forums with Hunaniaith, strengthening the provision and developing the Young Farmers' local eisteddfod, the Urdd Ambassadors project, extending the LGBT+ provision by GISDA, providing Christian Youth Clubs with the Presbyterian Church, developing and extending the provision by the North Wales African Society, offering well-being activities jointly with Homes for Ukraine and workshops for young parents to the Council's Edge of Care Team.

## **7. The Future and our challenges**

7.1. Recruiting staff to work on our community provision remains a major challenge for the service. We have tried to overcome this by revising the way we promote the jobs and have attended a number of job fairs, but it is still challenging especially in the rural areas.

7.2. We are seeing a continuation of behavioural challenges amongst some groups of young people, and/or in some specific areas. We are continuing to work with North Wales Police and the Youth Justice Service when these situations arise. Often the young people choose not to engage in the activities provided by the Youth Service, nor do they wish to receive support from a Youth Worker. We try to adapt our offer, talk to groups of young people to find out their interests, to help them be involved in activities or to provide directly for them, but because of the voluntary nature of Youth Work we cannot force young people to engage with us or what we offer. At times young people's behaviour in their communities can be challenging and be the subject of statutory intervention by the Police, Youth Justice Service, but it can at times involve improving society's understanding and tolerance of young people.

7.3. As some young people's needs become more profound, and as the number of young people needing support increases, the challenge of working with other partners continues. Many of our young people are finding it increasingly difficult to live a full life because transport is now one of the

main barriers to them being involved with the Youth Service, but also in general in their lives in terms of having access to education, training, employment, social opportunities and enjoyment.