

<b>MEETING</b>	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
<b>DATE</b>	10 April, 2025
<b>TITLE</b>	Youth Service
<b>REASON FOR SCRUTINY</b>	Council Plan 2023-28 - Tomorrow's Gwynedd
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<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	Cllr Dewi Jones

## 1. Why it needs scrutiny

1.1 The Youth Service provides an important service for the young people of the county.

1.2 The service's work was scrutinised by the Care Scrutiny Committee on 10 November 2022, prior to the transfer of the service to the Education Department. The Committee scrutinised developments in the field after the Youth Service was remodelled in 2018.

1.3 'Extending Opportunities for Play' is a priority project in the Council Plan 2023-2028. It is intended to review how the new provision for youth is implemented across the county, identifying and evaluating the outcomes it delivers for the young people of Gwynedd.

## 2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

- The conclusions of the evaluation
- What do young people think of the provision?
- Does the service meet the demand?
- Are there any new funding opportunities available to develop the service?

## 3. Summary of the Key Matters

3.1 The Youth Service is included as one of the priorities of the Council Plan, under the Tomorrow's Gwynedd project - *'Assurance that suitable facilities and playing fields are available for children and young people in their free time.'*

3.2 The Scrutiny Committee is required to provide guidance on the direction of the Youth Service in the future to discuss whether or not it still meets the needs of Gwynedd's young people and delivers its objectives following the restructuring in 2018.

3.3 Since the restructuring in 2018, there have been significant changes in terms of COVID, working methods, funding streams and policy expectations, including an increasing emphasis on youth well-being, equality of opportunities and provision that responds to local needs. It is crucial that the Youth Service assesses the impact of

these changes, with guidance from the Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that the quality and accessibility of the Service continues to offer relevant and effective support for young people.

- 3.4 Young people's needs have continued to evolve over the years, especially considering factors such as the impact of the pandemic, mental health challenges and changes to the education and employment landscape. This means there is a need to review the provision regularly to ensure that it remains relevant and reflects the reality that young people experience.

## **4. Background / Context**

4.1 The Cabinet decided to remodel the Youth Service in 2018. The Youth Service was remodelled to establish a new model from 1 September 2018. 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 members.
- 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 members.
- 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 with five full-time Youth Workers.
- Commission the 3rd Sector to deliver activities and projects on behalf of the Youth Service as required.

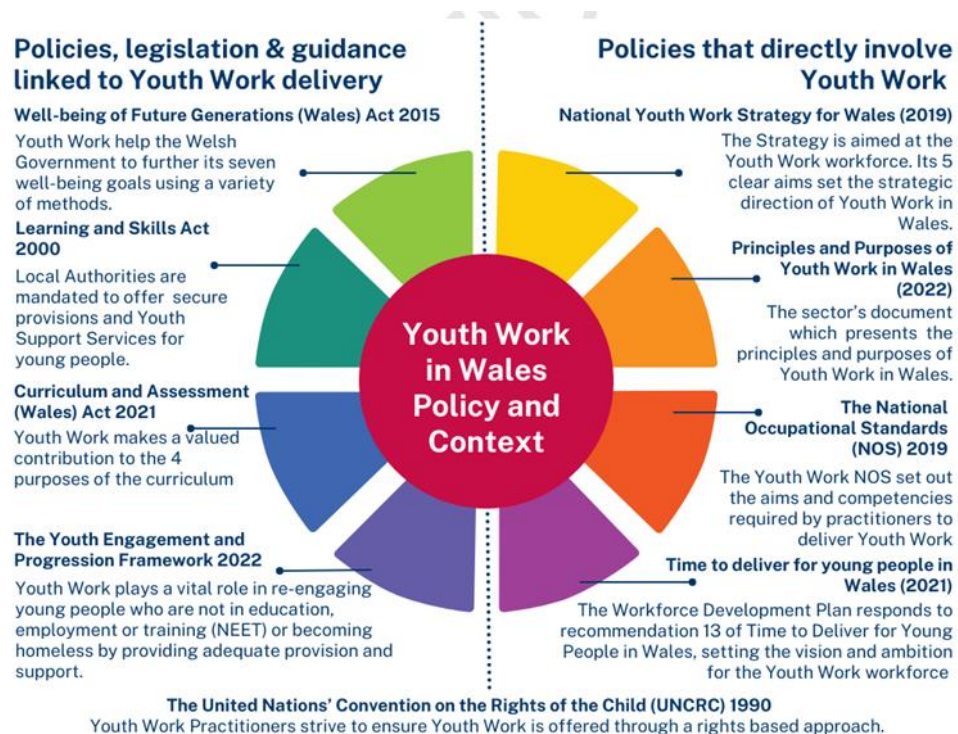
## **4.2 Legislative Context**

4.2.1 The Youth Service is one of the priorities of the Council Plan within the Tomorrow's Gwynedd project - *'Assurance that suitable facilities and playing fields are available for children and young people in their free time.'* The service works to create safe spaces for young people, and offers education and adventure opportunities, and develops community activities and competitions to promote social skills and cohesion.

4.2.2 Providing Youth Support Services is a statutory requirement under the Skills and Education 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 2019; Engagement and Development Framework 2022; Curriculum for Wales and the Youth Charter 2016.

4.2.3 The Youth Service's provision also contributes to other broader Welsh Government Strategies - the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024, Ending homelessness in

Wales: a high-level action plan 2021-2026, Children and Young People Plan and Housing Support Grant.



4.2.4 The Welsh Government is also in the process of consulting to strengthen statutory guidance with a new statutory guidance for youth work in Wales. This statutory framework will incorporate the following crucial elements:

- a definition of youth work as part of the broader youth support services.
- introduction of the new youth work entitlement for young people.
- an amended strategic planning and reporting mechanism for youth work.

4.2.5 Estyn has now started reviewing Youth Work as part of its national monitoring process to assess the quality and provision of youth services in Wales. The aim of the inspection is to evaluate how effective the youth services are at supporting the personal, social and educational development of young people. The inspectors will consider a broad range of factors, including service accessibility, the impact of activities on the well-being and skills development of young people, and the quality of leadership and governance. The feedback and the findings will steer the strategic development of youth services in the future, ensuring that young people receive the best possible support.

4.2.6 The Service's entire provision is now based on the "Five Ways to Well-being" model 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.

### **4.3 Other Funding Sources:**

- 4.3.1 To support the core funding the Youth Service receives within the Council, a percentage of the service's budget comes from the Welsh Government Youth Support Grant (the figure for 2025-26; £449,314), a reduction of 6.75% of the previous year. This funding has been confirmed in principle until March, 2028. The funding has conditions and priorities that have been identified by Welsh Government;
- The Implementation of the Youth Engagement and Development Framework in Gwynedd
  - Mental Health and emotional Well-being through youth work methods
  - Homelessness among young people
- 4.3.2 In addition to the above funding, the Youth Service is commissioned by town councils (9 areas) to lead on community provision in its cluster. This provision is in addition to our statutory offer, with a focus on providing safe locations for young people to socialise and participate in well-being activities. The service is open to collaborating with other town councils around the county who want to offer community provision in their local area however; it is an ongoing challenge to recruit part-time staff to lead this provision.
- 4.3.3 The Gwynedd Youth Service works with the Council's Youth Justice Team to fund a Preventative and Early Intervention Youth Worker as part of the 'Be Di'r Sgôr?' project. This provision, which is available for every young person across the county, provides essential support to reduce risks and prevent young people from issues relating to substance misuse. Through a combination of information, advice, targeted work and specialist support, the service responds to the individual needs of young people, helping them to make positive decisions and develop life skills. This collaboration is an example of how services integrate to create opportunities and provide effective support for young people in Gwynedd.
- 4.3.4 The Youth Service has also been successful in receiving funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which funds one additional 16-25 Youth Support Team Lead Worker to increase the resource to respond to the needs of these young people.

### **4.4 The Future and our Challenges**

4.4.1 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.

We are seeing a continuation of behavioural challenges amongst some groups of young people, and/or in some specific areas. We 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 / Justice Service, but it can at times involve improving society's understanding and tolerance of young people.

4.4.2 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.

## **5. Performance Data**

5.1 The Youth Service provides reports on its performance every term during Education Performance Challenge meetings. The monthly measures are scrutinised by the Chief Executive, the Head of Education and the Cabinet Member. The following data is used to monitor and evaluate the impact of the provision on young people;

- Number of individuals who have used the Youth Support Service for 11-19 year olds
- Number of individuals who have used the Youth Community Service
- Number of accreditations young people have completed (measured every three months)
- 16-25 Youth Support Service Caseload
- % of young people who have enjoyed the service provided
- % of young people who have improved their well-being over a three month period (16-25 team)
- % of young people who have achieved the objectives of their personal plans.
- % of young people whose Well-being has been improved after attending the service
- % of young people who would wish to continue to attend well-being sessions in the future.

5.2 The Youth Service is currently reporting on young people's participation in its activities, rather than the number of unique individuals who participate in the provision. It will be possible to provide this information at the end of the financial year, as soon as the registrations of the community clubs have been received and analysed.

5.3 The Service recognises the need to modernise our data collection, monitoring and evaluation methods and we have set this as a key priority for the next year. Accordingly, meetings have been held with Cyngor Gwynedd's Innovation and Technology Team to develop an internal data gathering system that will be more effective and efficient.

5.4 There is also a requirement for the Youth Service to complete reports on progress against the activities funded by the Youth Support Grant;

- ◆ The Implementation of the Youth Engagement and Development Framework in Gwynedd
- ◆ Mental Health and emotional Well-being through youth work methods
- ◆ Homelessness among young people

The aim of the performance report is to ensure that we provide;

- Tailored / targeted open access youth work, in accordance with identified local needs, with consideration of equality and variety of opportunities for young people, and in accordance with National Occupational Standards and 'Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes'.
- Strengthening youth work to ensure that it is in a better position to introduce, and increase access\*, to provision, in order to identify young people's mental health, emotional or well-being problems early on and support them.
- Provide early intervention activity within the Youth Engagement and Development Framework and youth work which has the aim of addressing youth homelessness.

## **6. Consultation**

6.1 Gathering opinion and feedback about the Youth Service after its restructuring in 2018 is essential to evaluate its impact and ensure that it meets the needs of young people in an effective way. It offers an opportunity to understand how relevant and efficient the changes are, identifying any gaps or fields that need improving. By listening to the views of young people, staff and other stakeholders, the provision can be amended and developed continually to ensure that it continues to be accessible, inclusive and supports the personal development and well-being of young people.

6.2 To obtain feedback about the Youth Service, a questionnaire was distributed to secondary schools, colleges, third sector organisations and on social media platforms. The Council's Research and Analysis Unit facilitated access to the questionnaire to all partners. This enables us to gather wide ranging and diverse views from young people and stakeholders, ensuring that the feedback represents different experiences and viewpoints on the service provision. Following the process of gathering information, the core data was evaluated by the Council's Research and Analysis Unit.

6.3 In addition to the questionnaire, conversations were held with our contacts in the schools to discuss the direct experiences of pupils and the support that was available to them through the Youth Service. This was an opportunity to hear directly from teachers and youth workers who support young people on a daily basis.

6.4 Discussions were also held with Llais Ni, the Youth Service's young people forum, providing a place for young people to express their opinion and to have an influence on improvements to the service. Additionally, discussions were held with the Gwynedd Young People Support Service Forum for 11-25 year olds including partners and organisations that work with young people to ensure that the opinion

and views of professional stakeholders are considered when assessing the impact and performance of the service.

## 7. What was the response to the questionnaire?

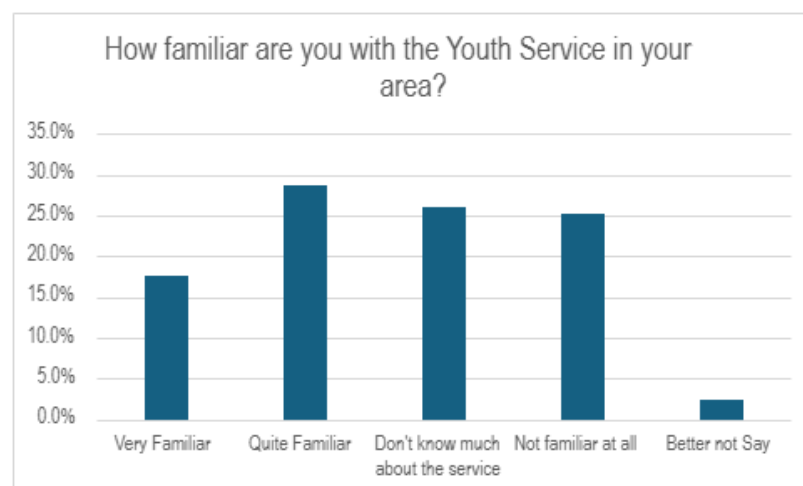
### 7.1

- 801 responses were received from young people.
- 707 responses were received from pupils (we were reliant on the schools to administrate/distribute the questionnaires to school pupils). Some schools shared it with a specific year and others shared it with a specific group / school council. Pupils from all of the secondary schools responded to the questionnaire.
- 65 responses were received from young people who attend one of the colleges located in Gwynedd.
- 10 responses were received from young people in work / apprenticeship or on a training scheme.
- 8 responses were received from young people who were unemployed.

## 8. What were the main findings of the Questionnaire?

### 8.1 The Current Service

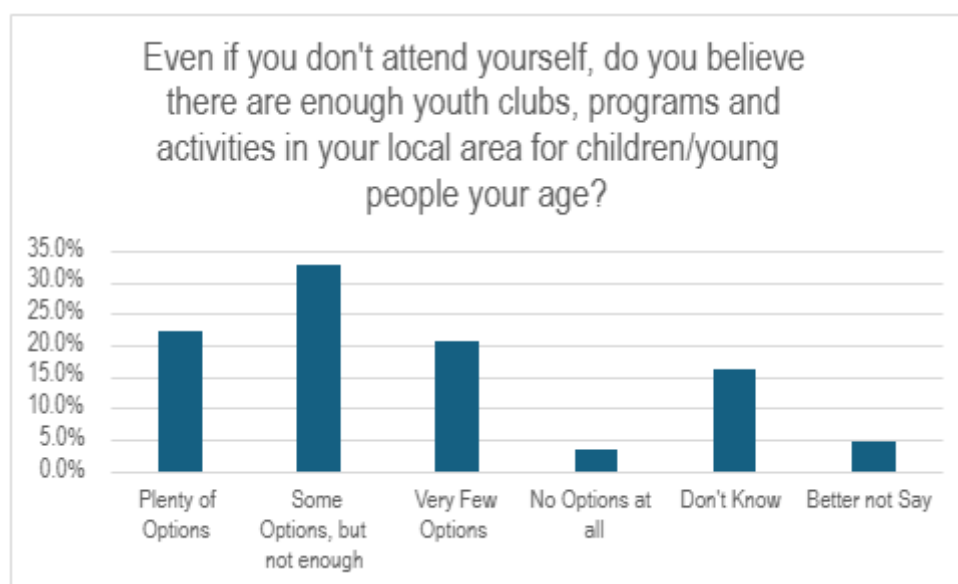
8.1.1 Of the 801 respondents, 17.6% were very familiar with the Youth Service in our area, while 28.7% were relatively familiar. However, 26.1% have heard about it but without much information. This shows that awareness of the service is mixed, with an opportunity to improve the recognition and understanding of what is available to young people.



8.1.2 The data shows that 14.6% of the respondents consider the provision for young people in their area to be "very good", with 28.6% calling it "good". Additionally, 21.5% consider it "satisfactory". Although the majority of respondents provide a positive or acceptable assessment of the offer that is available, the results suggest the need to consider measures to improve the provision and address any areas of dissatisfaction.

8.1.3 The data shows that the majority of responders consider the role of the Youth Service in schools and in the community important. In terms of its role in the school, 42.7% rate it as "very important" and 34.2% as "quite important", suggesting that youth support within the school is considered essential for developing skills, well-being and awareness. In the community, 33.8% consider the service to be "very important", while 40.9% see it as "quite important", drawing attention to the need for the Youth Service's strong presence beyond the schools, to ensure that young people receive support in different contexts. These results show that the service has a central role to play in different locations, offering opportunities and support to local people in their educational community environments.

8.1.4 The following graph shows there is a mixed opinion about the availability of provision for young people in local communities. Only 22.2% of the respondents believe there are enough options available, while 32.7% acknowledge there are some opportunities but feel there are not enough. Also, 20.7% note that the opportunities are very scarce, and 3.4% report there are no options at all in their area. These findings draw attention to concerns about accessibility and provision for young people, suggesting there is a need to strengthen the offer to ensure more opportunities available to young people in every area.

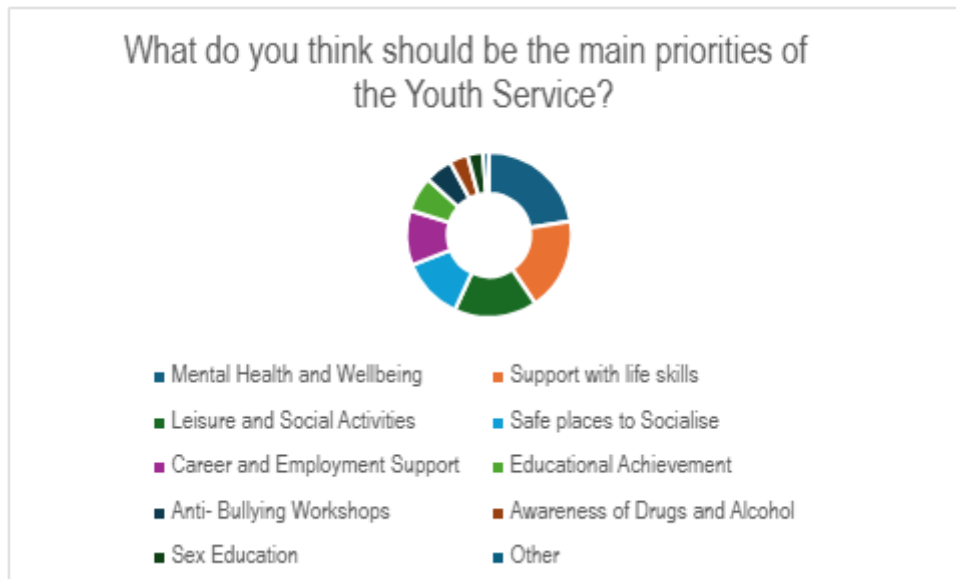


## 8.2 Service Priorities

8.2.1 According to the responses, the greatest priority for the Youth Service in the future is the support for mental health and well-being, with 56.3% of respondents identifying it as a key matter. Additionally, 45.9% consider support with life skills important, while 40.9% emphasise the need for social and leisure activities. Safe places to socialise (30.8%) and employment and careers guidelines (27.2%) are also considered important.

8.2.2 These results show that the Youth Service is expected to provide a range of support that goes beyond leisure activities only, including personal development and mental health, see the following chart.

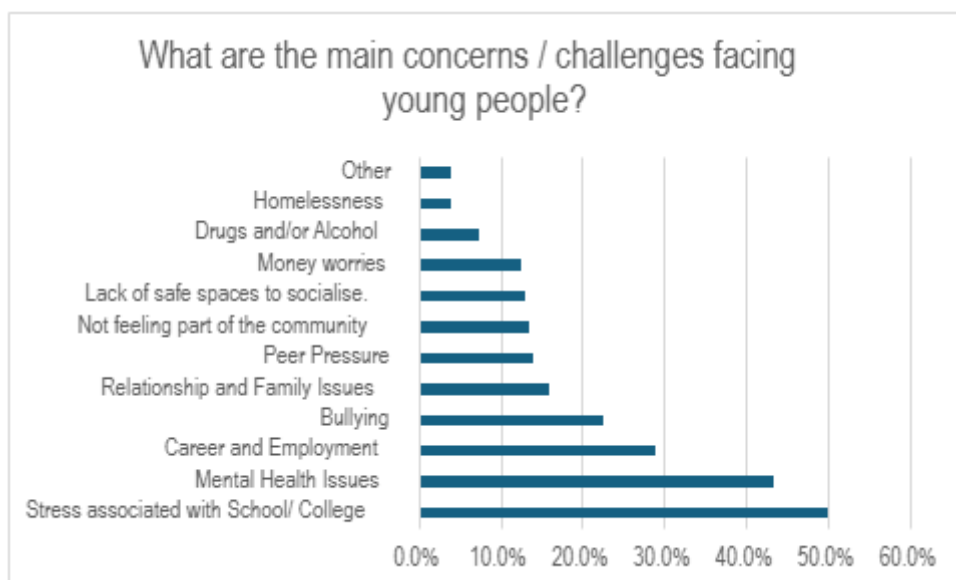




8.2.3. In terms of access to youth support, the majority of respondents (46.4%) favour having this support in a youth club, while 40.8% see schools and colleges as a suitable location. Additionally, 19.5% like the idea of receiving support in a community location, and 14.6% prefer receiving this support in their home. These results show that a variety of locations is important to ensure that youth services are accessible and meet the needs of young people.

### 8.3 Current Challenges for Gwynedd's Young People

8.3.1 The data shows that young people face a variety of concerns and challenges, with the most common relating to stress associated to school, college or university (50.1%). Mental health problems are also a significant concern, with 43.3% of respondents identifying this as an important challenge. Additionally, 29% are concerned about finding a job or career path, while 22.6% identify bullying as a great concern. Family or relationship problems (16.1%), peer pressure (14.1%) and not feeling safe in the community (13.6%) are also highlighted as key matters. 13.1% see the lack of leisure areas or activities as a challenge, while 12.5% are worried about financial matters. Concerns relating to drugs and alcohol (7.5%) and homelessness (4%) are less common but are still important issues for some young people. These results show the need for comprehensive support to address these matters, especially in relation to mental health, education and career opportunities.



**8.3.2** The data shows there is a variety of experience among young people in terms of feeling that their opinion is being heard during youth activities. 18% feel they are always heard, while 33.3% note that they are heard often. However, 22.7% say they are heard only occasionally, and 17% feel that their opinion is never considered.

**8.3.3** These results draw attention to the need to strengthen engagement methods with young people to ensure that their voices are heard and that they feel part of the process of forming youth activities.

## **9. Other results from the questionnaire:**

- 73% have noted that the Youth Service should be available to every young person rather than prioritising the whole service to provide targeted work.
- Lack of Time (44.8%) and Social Anxiety (26.6%) are noted as the main reasons that prevent them from participating in the Youth Service provision in the community.
- Young people note that the main reasons to participate in youth work activities in the community are; to have fun (40%), to spend time with friends (25.7%), to have new experiences (21.4%) and to improve my well-being (20.6%).
- Participating in youth work activities has improved their:
  - Confidence / Self-respect for 53.6% of respondents.
  - Life Skills for 51.7% of respondents.
  - Mental Well-being for 52.1% of responders
  - To help make positive life choices for 48.4% of respondents
  - Access to new opportunities for 51.8% of respondents

## **9. Findings from Meetings with Secondary School Contacts**

**9.1** The schools have expressed an appetite to see more presence from youth workers at the schools to be able to increase the positive impact of their work. It was shared there was a need to focus in particular on providing valuable experiences and developing life skills for young people in KS3 to prepare them for KS4 challenges.

There is a need to prioritise the offer of completing Agored Cymru accreditations, work to target specific groups and facilitate health education workshops for KS4 pupils.

- 9.2** The schools have drawn attention to the need for the Youth Service to work with specific groups of young people in KS4, including those with low attendance, year 10 / 11 pupils without a concrete plan after leaving school, learners who do not follow a core timetable, and young people with low level mental health needs and who find it difficult to cope within a school environment.
- 9.3** Additionally, the schools appreciate the need to have better communication between the Youth Service and schools, including sharing information about the available provision by creating a prospectus. There is also a suggestion that youth workers meet the school every term to introduce their work plan and session goals, in addition to sharing what's been delivered by the end of the term.
- 9.4** The consultations held with young people about the Youth Service have provided valuable insights to the way the service is perceived and experienced by the users. By gathering feedback using a variety of methods, it has become apparent that young people acknowledge the value of the existing provision. Although suggestions have emerged on improving certain areas, the general feedback has confirmed that the current structure continues to meet the needs of Gwynedd's young people. Therefore, the Youth Service can continue to develop within the existing framework, building on their strengths to ensure that the support offered continues to be relevant and effective.

## **10. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

- 10.1** The Youth Service contributes to improving social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in Wales by operating in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. By providing learning opportunities, personal development and meaningful experiences, it supports young people to deliver their potential and build a sustainable future. The service adopts the 5 ways of working through long term planning, working with partners, integrating services, including young people in the decision process and preventing social problems with early support. In doing so, it contributes to each of the 7 well-being goals, including a healthier, more equal, resilient and cohesive Wales, strengthening its cultural identity and encouraging the active participation of young people in their communities.
- 10.2** The Youth Service plays a key role in helping the Council to deliver its well-being duty by acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle. By planning and implementing services that support young people to develop skills, knowledge and confidence, the service considers the long term impact of decisions on future generations. By working with partners and including young people in the decision process, it ensures that their present needs are met without risking future opportunities. This method contributes to building more resilient, equal and

sustainable communities, strengthening social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being in the long term.

**10.3** Have you **involved** residents / service users? If not, when and how do you intend to consult with them?

We have already held engagement sessions with young people, stakeholders and schools, see point 8 for more information. Additionally, the Gwynedd Youth Service often engages with residents and service users to address the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Through schemes such as 'Llais Pobl Ifanc' and the process of developing the service's community provision, young people's opinions are heard and incorporated in decisions. The service promotes a participatory method, ensuring that young people are involved in creating safe social opportunities, meaningful activities and community competitions that contribute to economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Through collaborating with partner agencies and international organisations, the service supports a sustainable method of working that reflects the principles of the Act.

**10.4** How have you considered the long term and what people's needs will be in years to come?

To prevent problems from arising or intensifying in the future, we will continue to work on a multi-agency level and regularly evaluate the impact of any change. This procedure is already in place, with £60,000 of the Youth Service's funding being shared with third sector organisations this year to identify the gaps in service, expand our community provision and meet the needs of young people in the county.

The Youth Service is also considering the long term needs of young people by adopting a strategic method that focuses on developing skills, resilience and opportunities that prepare them for the future. By gathering evidence internally through questionnaires, Young People's Voice forums, engaging with partners, and monitoring social and economic trends, the service is able to anticipate emerging challenges and opportunities. By working with partners in education, employment, health (through SHRN findings) and support services, it ensures that young people receive the necessary support and resources to develop to become confident and responsible adults. This method ensures that the service is ready to respond to changing needs in the future and contributes to the long term well-being of communities.

**10.5** To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?

The Youth Service ensures integration by working closely with other public bodies, including local authorities, schools, health services and community organisations to provide holistic support to young people. By coordinating services, sharing information and co-developing enterprises, the service improves the impact on broader policies such as well-being, education and community safety. This method not only avoids duplicating services but also strengthens strategic cohesiveness and ensures that the voice of young people influences public decisions. This integration will highlight itself further over the next 12 months, when a 5 year strategy will be designed in accordance with the requirements of the New Statutory Framework for Youth Work.

## **11. Next Steps**

**11.1** Following the general consultation process with young people, partners and secondary schools regarding the Youth Service provision, the Youth Service proposes to act to ensure that the provision meets the needs and expectations of these groups. This work includes developing a strategy and action plans for the future and is based on the opinion and input provided during the consultation process.

### **11.2** Developing a three-year strategy

**11.2.1** We are in the process of developing a three-year strategy to coincide with the confirmation of three year's funding through the Youth Support Grant. This strategy will provide a clear direction to develop services and offer opportunities to young people, ensuring that the resources and provisions that are available support the needs of this group. The strategy seeks to ensure that youth services are accessible, adequate and that they respond to the new challenges that young people face nowadays, while also working closely with key partners such as schools, community organisations and health services to provide holistic support. The strategy will also include measures to increase young people's participation in local decisions and activities, giving them a place for their voice to be heard and ensuring that their needs are considered when developing services and policies in the future.

### **11.3** Developing the Gwynedd Support Services Forum for Young People aged 11-25 years old

**11.3.1** To respond to the new Statutory Framework for Youth Work that has been formed by the Welsh Government, where there is a requirement to strengthen the process of planning and delivering by working with local partners, the Youth Service has established the Gwynedd Support Services Forum for Young People aged 11-25 year olds. This group includes a range of professional workers and key partners who have an important role in providing youth services in Gwynedd. The

membership includes third sector organisations, representatives of the health sector, statutory partners and other departments in local government. The group plays a key role in the process of discussing, developing and implementing long term plans for youth work in the future.

#### **11.4 Youth Forum**

- 11.4.1 To ensure that the voice of young people is heard and that their needs are considered in the strategic decisions, a Youth Forum has been established. This forum will give young people an opportunity to come together to share their opinions and experiences, including any challenges and opportunities that arise from the consultation process. The forum will be an integral part of the plans, ensuring that every element of the provision is based on the requirements and the viewpoints and values that come from the young people.

#### **11.5 Work Contract with Schools**

- 11.5.1 As part of our efforts to standardise our provision in the schools, we will look to concentrate on strengthening our communications with schools to ensure clarity of the role of the Youth Service within the schools, and our expectations of the schools' commitments. Our plans include sharing our prospectus with the schools that will outline our offer and also a

#### **Relevant Timetable:**

- We have already started the process of developing the strategy by holding meetings with staff in-house, holding conversations in our young people's voice forums and discussions with third sector organisations. The feedback received as part of these consultations will add to the wealth of feedback to be used to develop the strategy by May, 2025.
- The Young People Support Services Forum is already in place and meets on a quarterly basis. The terms of reference are in the process of being approved by the members, which will provide clarity on the purpose of the forum and its objectives in the future.
- Meetings will be arranged with our school contacts during the summer term for September '25. A prospectus will be shared with the schools and an agreement with the schools will be discussed in terms of their expectations of the Youth Service and the school's commitment.

#### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Youth Service Annual Report 23/24
- Appendix 2 - Findings of the 2025 Questionnaire