



Children's Rights Annual Monitoring Bridging Report 2020-21

This report offers insight into progress in respect of children and young people's rights-based work in Swansea during the period of April 2020-March 2021, offering current thinking about what rights-based work, particularly the engagement of children and young people, as the Council recovers from the effects of Covid-19. This report is in addition to, and follows-on from Swansea's Annual Children's Rights Scheme Monitoring Progress Report 2018-2020.

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1. Engagement of Children and Young People: Lessons Learned through a Pandemic

In Swansea, meaningful and inclusive opportunities for children and young people to be heard in decisions that affect them is a priority. Since 2014, the county mechanism to ensure this has been called the Big Conversation, offering opportunities for nearly 10,000 children and young people aged 5-25 years to engage in accessible and meaningful opportunities to be heard.

The Pandemic meant that thought had to be given to how and where we engage with children and young people, in this new and unprecedented time of working. Engagement with children, young people, families, practitioners and data was undertaken between April-September 2020 to understand what good involvement may now look like.

Learning through a pandemic	
Who engaged?	What did this engagement look like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and Young People • Education colleagues • Social care colleagues • Third sector colleagues • Colleagues working with younger children • National participation officers across Wales regarding what effective engagement of CYP does/might look like moving forward; • Children’s Commissioner’s Office for Wales • Children in Wales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of information and support services, and how they have been adapted during Covid, to promote online for children and young people. • Coronavirus and Me • Making use of partner data from families and practitioners • Children in Wales/ UNCRRC call for evidence • Scoping and mapping what exists and what works well in respect of group work and participation

Examples of engagement practice during Covid

The embedding of children’s human rights as part of our commitment to the UNCRRC requires a whole Council approach to engagement and involvement. The effort of Council departments to adapt and change to continue to work with children and young people was significant, and often effective. Where direct work was required and where groups of young people already existed, good examples of rights based practice were evident. A selection of case studies highlighting this good practice are attached in **Appendix A**.

How have children’s rights been protected and affected during the pandemic?

In a paper published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2020), concern was raised to National Governments within the UK, about how the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, having a devastating impact on children’s rights, well-being and futures. Key concerns included more children being pushed into poverty, an observed widening of educational inequalities and worsening mental health. Their evidence shows:

Poverty: Poverty is one of the main barriers to the full enjoyment of children’s rights – living in poverty can have a negative impact on children’s health, well-being, education and development.

Even before coronavirus the number of children living in poverty in Britain was increasing. However, more families now risk being pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic, and the groups who already faced poverty are likely to see their income reduced further. Families with children are among those who have been hit the hardest.

Education: School closures and inequalities in home-learning environments also risk exacerbating growing attainment gaps for certain groups, including disabled pupils, some ethnic minorities, and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. The shift to online learning risks undermining the right to education and may have a long-term effect on attainment.

Mental health: Although the effect of the pandemic on children's mental health is not yet fully understood, the combined impact of limited capacity within mental health services and children having reduced access to services, and time in school, could be severe and long-lasting.

What were our lessons learned from engagement in Swansea?

- Individual and specific services quickly adapted and tailored services to accommodate online and 121 need.
- Where groups already existed, participation continued more seamlessly.
- Potentially, there is more opportunity to engage with key decision makers as this can be done online.
- Recruitment and retention has been problematic – participant's priority has been the pandemic. This has been particularly true, and exacerbated for those already regarded harder to reach.
- Focus shifted to wellbeing alongside consultation, where check-ins and check-ups have become priority,
- CYP, particularly some considered vulnerable thrived in lockdown and in 121 and small group settings.
- Some prefer online mechanisms, for others (EAL and/or BAME communities, children with ALN, young children, gypsy and traveller communities have potentially become digitally excluded.
- Age: online engagement brings to the fore new and complex issues to consider regarding safe and appropriate ages to engage online and how.
- Diversity of platforms used, and permissions (for example to Zoom or Hwb) make broad engagement complex.
- Trusted adults and flexible approaches are key in lockdown participation,
- Feedback remains an issue

2. Areas of focus to address the learning and issues raised above

In order to effectively take on board the learning above, the following areas of focus have been/are required:

- Development of fit for purpose infrastructure, including a review and repurpose of the Life Stages Team and redevelopment of a partnership approach to children's rights via the Children's Rights Network;
- Review and refresh of Swansea's Children and Young People's Rights Scheme, including SMART and robust methods for measuring and evidencing its impact on the lives of children;
- Further development of fit for purpose, meaningful and inclusive mechanisms that engage children and young people aged 0-18 in decisions that affect them. The evidence aforementioned shows that children and young people in Swansea and across Wales/UK who are already considered vulnerable and sometimes harder to engage, have experienced further marginalisation during lockdown periods. Therefore, mechanisms must be inclusive, accessible and flexible to enable all children and young people to engage and relay their own personal experiences.

Redevelopment of a new structure and team to support rights based practice moving forward:

In order to efficiently take on board the learning above, a review and repurpose of the team with remit for the co-ordination of Children and Young People's Rights Scheme was undertaken. A refined focus on partnership, rights-based policy and involvement of stakeholders was established:



Team purpose

- To facilitate a partnership/stakeholder approach to realising objectives of the CR Scheme: raising awareness, developing understanding and assessing impact of rights based approaches.
- To ensure at the earliest opportunity, stakeholders can work in collaboration (at any level they wish) to ensure that services and strategies meet the need of those who are affected by them.
- To fulfil our statutory duty to ensure meaningful and quality mechanisms, through which children and young people are involved and listened to in decisions that affect them, exist at a National, regional, local and individual level.
- To promote rights to children and young people, supporting them to feel empowered to exercise them.
- To fulfil our duty in paying due regard to the UNCRC, ensuring children's rights are embedded across the workforce, and place at the forefront of decision making processes affecting children and young people.

This has enabled clarity about remit, posts, responsibilities and gaps in capacity.

Plan on a Page: Restructure and Remodel of Children’s Rights work

On Universal Children’s Day (November 20th 2020), Swansea’s Children’s Rights Network was re-launched. The Network comprises of over 80 organisations, services, schools and individuals with remit for children and young people, and aims to facilitate a whole authority approach to embedding a rights based approach in County work, split into two elements; involvement and policy:



- **Involvement**

As a result of the pandemic, we have recently reviewed the Big Conversation forum mechanisms to accommodate new need. In response to survey, feedback and engagement work with children, young people and practitioners, a Right of the Month approach will be rolled out as a council wide mechanism for engaging children and young people in matters that affect them. This mirrors approaches already used by organisations such as Unicef Rights Respecting Schools and the Children’s Commissioner’s Office for Wales. In Swansea this involves:

- Sharing, developing and co-ordinating resources relating to a particular right for stakeholders monthly
- Providing a calendar of events, national days, and consultations linked to each right of the month.
- Facilitating co-ordination, recording and monitoring data from stakeholders in line with National Participation Standards.
- Bringing together centrally CYP when emergent themes occur to discuss in more detail.
- Facilitating social media relating to particular right each month
- Supporting partners to involve their own customers in their decision making processes.

This approach applies consistency across sectors and age, but is flexible enough to be incorporated into individual organisations/services/projects work plans. This allows trusted adults to tailor participation work around a specific right to meet the needs of the population of children/young people they work with, and know well – this is in response to feedback, where children have reported the importance of trusted adults when engaging online.

- **Policy**

2021 sees the review of Swansea’s Children and Young People’s Rights Scheme. Consultation with children and young people and practitioners has informed the core of what a refreshed scheme looks like. Combined with consultation with families and practitioners. Academic review data, survey findings and UNCRC monitoring submissions, a refreshed policy and accompanying action plan that is fit for purpose in these new times will be developed.

To do this we must ensure:

- Stakeholders are involved in the review and redraft of rights based policies, are aware of existing policies and understand the links between them.
- At the earliest opportunity, stakeholders can work in collaboration (at any level they wish) to ensure that services and strategies meet the need of those who are affected by them.
- Effective partnership approach to ensure a whole Council (**and wider**) approach to rights is reflected in reporting, and a robust framework is in place to achieve this.
- Effective networks and governance mechanisms would exist to achieve the fulfilment of due regard

Therefore, as of early 2021, the Policy sub-group of will act as the vehicle through which a new Children and Young People’s Rights Scheme is drafted, consulted on, published and monitored.

A draft Children and Young People's Rights Scheme 2021-23

It is proposed that the refreshed Children and Young People's Rights Scheme in Swansea aligns to the Right Way principled approach that is being embedded nationally. Although not a far leap from the existing Scheme in Swansea, alignment provides consistency in terms of language and measurement (using the Children's Commissioner for Wales matrix), and provides increased opportunity to access resources. Alignment to the National process means opportunity to provide clear guidance, and tangible benchmarks for council departments to embed a whole council approach and evidence outcomes.

A draft Children and Young People's Rights Scheme (2021-2023) has been set out below. This plan incorporates National Principles for a Rights Based Approach to Children, and takes account of previous consultation work with children, young people and practitioners on what a new Scheme should look like. **Consultation on this plan on a page is required during 2021.** The format and content of this draft has been recognised as good practice in terms of its accessibility and usability, and has been requested by the Children's Commissioner, for consideration to be rolled out as a National tool.

A robust action plan will be developed to support the Children's Rights Scheme. Developed and monitored by the Children's Rights Network Policy Sub Group, the action plan will incorporate data from Swansea's response to the UN Call for Evidence, treaty tracker recommendations and feedback from CYP and practitioners to provide an overarching framework for embedding rights.



Doing it the Rights Way: Swansea's Children and Young People Rights Scheme 2021-23

This Means:

Making sure good quality arrangements are in place to ensure children and young people are listened to, and that their opinion is heard, in decisions that are being made that affect them.

Promoting rights to children and young people so that they feel able to exercise them.

Having systems in place to write down and evidence how we give thought to the impact of decision on children's rights.

Making sure workers understand the UNCRRC and how their work impacts on children's rights.

Having systems in place to report on what we are doing to make children's rights a reality in Swansea

Making special efforts to ensure children and young people who may be less likely to access their rights, have an equal opportunity to be able to do so.

Participation

Empowerment

Embedding

Accountability

Non Discrimination

We Will:

- Involve children directly in the design, monitoring and evaluation of services they receive.
- Learn about how other organisations are doing this, and develop plans that meet the needs of children and young people in Swansea.
- Develop clear targets to listen to children and young people from marginalised groups.
- Involve children in the recruitment of staff who have responsibilities that impact on children.
- Adopt the National Participation Standards for Children and Young people, to make sure when children participate, their experience is a quality one.

- Give children the information they need to influence decisions that affect them (e.g. simple language reports).
- Give children the opportunities they need to influence decisions that affect them(e.g. opportunities to scrutinise decision makers e.g. giving a group of young people the chance to ask questions directly to a key decision-maker).
- Establish relationships with groups of young people to allow them to consistently scrutinise work. E.g. youth groups/forums, or you could consider forming your own youth group.
- Give children and young people the training or information they need to do this properly.

- Make sure that leaders and staff have a good knowledge of children's rights (UNCRRC), and help them understand how it can benefit our organisation's work.
- Use our resources to deliver training on children's rights.- Set up a network of champions with responsibility to promote children's rights and set targets for how to embed children's rights in all work.
- Make sure there are HR/financial resources to support and promote children's rights.

- Publish an accessible annual update showing how we've worked towards making children's rights real in Swansea.
- Feedback regularly to children in a suitable format.
- Provide children with accessible information on how to provide feedback about what we're doing well or what we could improve, make complaints or hold staff to account.

- Make sure staff have up-to-date knowledge of the Equality Act and receive regular training to increase their awareness of different groups of children and young people's needs.
- Use a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to consider how individual decisions (e.g. projects/services) could impact different groups of children and young people.
- Use information we have about children and young people's need to consider whether our services reach all groups of young people.
- Provide information to children in a language or format appropriate to their age and maturity, culture, or disability

3. Gaps and Recommendations for the Recovery from Covid

It has been recognised that a gap exists in dialogue between children and young people and senior change-makers. **Mechanisms that build upon and act as a bridge between the Big Conversation, right of the month approach and involvement of children and young people in project work, and decision makers is required.**

- It is recommended that during the financial year 2021, a formalised structure for the inclusive and effective engagement of children and young people is co-produced. Development of timelines and key milestones for the exploration of a refined model in Swansea and consultation of a refreshed model for engagement to be developed during 2021.
- These opportunities must:
 - Increase the accessibility of decision makers to children and young people;
 - Increase the number of opportunities for children and young people to meaningfully engage with decision makers in decisions that affect them;
 - Be inclusive to those who would be traditionally be marginalised from civic participation, e.g. cyp who possess protected characteristics and/or have additional needs, lack confidence, or do not wish to commit to a formal elected positions, but equally have a right to have their voice heard;
 - Be appropriate to the age and maturity of the children participating.

Votes at 16

Building on changes in law enabling 16 and 17 years olds to vote, consideration should be given to how we support the political literacy of children and young people (and wider), equipping them with the knowledge and understanding to access and participate in voting. This includes:

- Understanding what politics means;
- Where to find party information;
- Accessibility of information;
- Who political members are;
- How to register to vote;
- The process of voting.

These recommendations should be viewed in conjunction with recommendation made in the Children and Young People's Rights Scheme Annual Monitoring Report 2019/20.

Appendix A - Examples of engagement practice during Covid-19

Info-Nation

Info Nation as an information, advice and guidance services for young people was able to adapt quickly, building on previous knowledge and experience of online platforms.

While drop-in services were unavailable due to lockdown, immediately young people were able to continue to access one-to-one information, advice and support enquiries online via email, direct messaging opportunities, via social media and online chat sessions. As a central hub of information, Info nation were also able to quickly disseminate information young people regarding coronavirus, and the rules cascaded from Welsh Government.

What difference has this made?

The right to access information has been fundamental to all during lockdown. Being able to access quality information, support and guidance has not only enable young people to receive accessible information about how to stay safe and abide by the rules of lockdown, but also to have direct access to workers who are able to support young people's well-being at a time where this has never been more important.

Pitchin', in the Kitchen: Opportunities for Care Experienced Children and Young People

Pitchin', In the Kitchen is a set of activity packs designed to build relationships and combat feelings of isolation that young people have seen as a priority during lockdown. These packs were created in collaboration with the amazing Care Experienced young people of Swansea, Swansea Children's Services Team and Mess Up The Mess Theatre Company, as part of a Well lawn project funded by the the National Lottery Community Fund. In the midst of Covid19 lock-down, Mess Up The Mess met with young people over Zoom; a very different way of working but still a lot of fun.

The pack was created in partnership with a team of artists, and cake designers to make the young people's vision come true. The young people have been vital to designing this pack from start to finish. The pack contains a number of activities including opportunities to have fun, bake together, play together, and laugh together – in either the real or virtual world. Anyone who would like to check out the tasty recipes or fun activities that bring people together and make them feel extra special, you can find Pitchin', In the Kitchen at <http://messupthemess.co.uk/pitch-in>

What difference has this made?

This project is fundamental to the principle of participation, not only in listening to what matters to children and young people, but also in supporting them to feel connected and part of a community, in times where it is easy to feel isolated. This work has been instrumental during lockdown for social care practitioners, who have made effective use of it to build rapport and relationships with children, young people and families, where they usually do so face to face.

Young People's Recruitment Panels

2020/21 was series of firsts in terms of young people's involvement in interview panels, participating in both the recruitment of Head of Child and Family Services and the Director of Education.

For the first time at Director level in Swansea, 8 young people have were recruited to form a Youth Interview Panel for the appointment of Swansea's Director of Education post. The young people participated in week long set of exercises to plan, develop and implement an interview process for Director Candidates. Leading the interview process, young people actively questioned and evaluated candidates performances to make recommendations to appointing Council officials.

LP, a panellist commented, "This process has been so valuable. We are thankful to have the opportunity to lead, and be heard in decisions like this, that have such a huge effect on our education. I hope there are many more opportunities for young people to be involved in projects like this in the future".

What difference has this made?

Co-involvement in senior decision-making process such as this underpins our commitment to make rights a reality for children in Swansea, specifically in respect of being involved in decisions that affect their lives. Young people have been able to co-produce decisions about recruitment, and for them this was significant, feeling empowered and proud of decisions they were deemed able to be a meaningful part of.

UNCRC Call for Evidence

2020 marked the start of the journey towards the next examination of government's progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children in Wales, in partnership with the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group, have been commissioned to facilitate the development and submission of a State of Children's Rights in Wales Report for the UN Committee to aide their review. As such, a call for evidence to gather children's rights priorities was issued.

A co-ordinated approach meant that Swansea submitted 23 of around 90 submissions to the call for evidence, telling of the Authority's commitment to children's rights. Broad ranges of issues were raised contributing to the final list of priorities and recommendations submitted to the UN (report to be published later this year).

What difference has this made?

Not only has Swansea been able to significantly contribute to influencing the priorities and issues the UN will monitor Welsh Government on in respect of children's rights, but internally detailed information now exists from 23 organisations, outlining issues that should prioritised locally in respect of children's rights. This information alongside feedback from children and young people, practitioners and academic review will inform a refreshed Children and Young People's Rights due for publication in 2021.

Coronavirus and Me

On 13 May 2020, the Children's Commissioner for Wales launched the 'Coronavirus and Me' consultation to find out about the experiences of children and young people in Wales. 2,205 children and young people completed the survey in Swansea, the second-highest total in Wales. This equates to roughly 5.7% of the targeted age range of 3 to 18-year-olds. The information was shared with schools, and school leaders used the information to inform their planning as they prepared for the return of pupils in the CICUP sessions.

The Coronavirus and Me report was circulated and shared with the membership of Swansea's Children's Rights Network – a Network of over 120 organisations, projects, services and individuals working with children, young people and families in Swansea. Links to the reports were also shared for children and young people via our #dillydragonswansea social media accounts and associated social media accounts including through Best Start Swansea and Swansea Play Service social media platforms.

What difference has this made?

Headteachers and officers found the report and the summary informed their actions in the summer term in ensuring effective transition from primary to secondary school. For example, 75% of Year 6 respondents said they wanted to return to their primary school to say goodbye. As a result, primary Headteachers prioritised this year group.

Actions are also being taken to tailor the Council's approach to listening to cyp in respect of lessons learned from Covid and the Coronavirus and Me survey:

- In response to survey feedback and engagement work with children, young people and practitioners, a Right of the Month approach is to be trialled as a council wide mechanism for engaging cyp in matters that affect them. Resources and consultations will focus on a particular right and resources circulated through social media, the Children's Rights Network and to individual schools for use.
- A mapping exercise will be undertaken in all schools to 1) check the correct details of all lead staff for pupil voice and/or children's rights, and 2) understand the current status of pupil voice work (and needs) within individual schools.

Votes at 16

Swansea Democratic Services and Children's Rights Team have been working together to ensure as widely as possible young people aged 14+ years are aware that laws have changed in Wales enabling young people aged 16+ years to vote in the forthcoming Welsh election. Work is ongoing to ensure young people have the tools that enable them to a) register to vote and b) understand how to access information about politics and how to participate in the voting process.

The following information has been all Headteachers and Rights leads in Secondary Schools, as well as being regularly publicised on social media:

- Electoral Commission information regarding how to register to vote:
- Information regarding the Politics Project, a project run by the Children's Commissioner's Office for Wales to support young people's understanding of the politic process and how to cast a vote;
- 'Votes at 16' workshop opportunities hosted by the Senedd.

What difference has this made?

4 schools have expressed interest in participating in the Children's Commissioners project after Easter.

Swansea Neath Port Talbot Junior Safeguarding Board: Keeping Connecting, Staying Safe

The SNPT Junior Safeguarding Board worked hard during National Safeguarding Week (16th- 20th November 2020) to promote every child's right to be safe, under the wider Safeguarding Board banner of 'Keeping Connected, Staying Safe'.

This has been a particularly pertinent theme during lockdown where feelings of isolation and disconnect have been voiced by children and adults alike. Children and young people across the region addressed this theme in the following ways:

- Highlighting the need for workshops for foster carers on discussing sensitive topics that can foster connectedness between carer and young person;
- Combatting isolation and engagement in activities that promote connectedness with others;
- Raising awareness of safeguarding in sport;
- Promoting children's right to be safe and to participate and be connected in society;
- Promoting how and where children and young people can contact services if they feel they are not safe or need support.

What difference has this made?

The Junior Safeguarding Board, with support from Participation Officers in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot worked hard to develop a programme of events, information and advice for Safeguarding Week. A multi-agency approach was taken to offer focussed regional workshops for foster carers on discussing healthy relationships, consent and sexual health.

Children, young people and senior decision-makers including Head of Child and Family Services and the Children's Commissioner took part in regional 'Pitchin, in the Kitchen' events to work together, connect, build relationships and have fun.

Over the past year members of the Junior Safeguarding Board have been campaigning to improve sporting events for children and young people. The JSB have highlighted abusive behaviour of adults on the touchline and collaborated with South Wales Police to produce graphics for social media to raise awareness.

A week long campaign focussing on Article 19: Every child's right to be Safe was promoted via social media accounts across the region, including raising awareness of who children can contact if they do not feel safe (Here for Swansea CYP webpages) as well as promoting information, advice and youth services available for them to access.

The Success of the junior board in 2020 has called for them to initiate an agenda to work on through 2021. A theme common to both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot and decided by young people for focus this year is LGBTQ+ issues, equality & discrimination.

Play Services

Swansea Play Service has been as busy as ever during lockdown promoting and supporting children's right to play and relax. Work has included:

- Information and advice, provision of links to play ideas, and the promotion of play through social media;
- Distribution play bags to vulnerable families;
- Funding support to partners to ensure covid safe playful opportunities;
- 121 socially distanced outdoor family play sessions;
- Partnership working to advise on the safe opening of play spaces and parks;
- Piloting 4 outdoor activity trails to enable safe opportunities for play and physical literacy in the community;
- Successfully hosting a virtual National Play Day where organisations such as Circus Eruption, Menter Iaith, Swansea Museum, Faith in Families Family Centres, the Children's Rights Team, the Best Start Team and early years providers offered online and digital opportunities for children and their families to get involved in play opportunities through the day, and to take away ideas for play through lockdown.

What difference has this made?

In these unprecedented times, play and leisure for children and young people has been a priority in ensuring good wellbeing in difficult situations. The difference this has made includes:

- Extended contact and reach via online platforms, e.g. activities viewed and engaged with virtually on National Play day of reached over 1,000 people at a time.
- Delivery of over 1800 play bags to vulnerable children. As well as opportunities for children's play, for some parents and carers, this provided much needed doorstep support, where in some cases, further action was required to signpost and refer to services that could provide specialised support to families in need.
- Funding support for play equipment, play bag resources and even PPE has ensured that 3rd sector services have been able to continue to provide playful support to citizens.
- Safe outdoor family sessions has meant that support for vulnerable people who need it can continue.
- The pilot of 4 outdoor activity trails has led to the purchase of an additional 30 trails to support and promote the safe outdoor play of children in communities across Swansea.