



Report of the Cabinet Member for Care Services

Child and Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 13th September 2023

Working with Adolescents

Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide an overview of the approach taken within Child and Family Services when working with Adolescents
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This report includes a summary of the context of working with Adolescents and the challenges and solutions and opportunities within this area of work. The report concludes that while there is a lot of positive work being undertaken with this age group within Child and Family Services, there are also a number of challenges for which solutions have needed to be sought. Development in this area continues and the participation of children and young people in such developments will be essential.
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the report and its conclusions
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Legal Officer	N/A
Finance Officer	N/A
Access to Services Officer	N/A

1. Background and context

When working with adolescents in Swansea, the focus is on understanding them as individuals, their lived experiences and what matters the most to them. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 stipulates that understanding what matters is significant in supporting individuals to achieve their personal outcomes. As children move into adolescence they will, quite rightly, wish to explore their own autonomy and independence. While we strive to promote the rights of each individual, the responsibility to safeguard remains a primary consideration.

- 1.1 Adolescence is broadly defined as the phase between childhood and adulthood and therefore incorporates the age range between 10 and 25 years. For the purposes of this report the focus will be on how we are supporting those within the age range of 16-25 years.
- 1.2 The context in which we work with adolescents can be varied. There are a number of factors that impact on children and young people as they move towards adulthood. The Serious Violence Duty which came into force in January 2023 requires all Local Authorities to develop a strategic needs assessment to identify the causes and drivers of serious violence locally. We are required to produce our strategic needs assessment by January 2024. In Swansea, data from the youth justice service shows that violence against the person is usually the highest offending type amongst young people. The approach taken with young people who offend is always child-first, understanding them, their strengths, aspirations and lived experiences is essential to support a move away from this type of behaviour. We seek to promote, engagement and social inclusion.
- 1.3 Swansea, along with all Local Authorities across the UK, have been mandated by the UK Government to support the Home Office National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, as such we have been developing our accommodation and support offer to those who are now residing locally. The developments in this offer are outlined in more detail below.
- 1.4 While we always strive to work alongside our children and young people there are times when we recognise that where risks are significant, we need to prioritise safety and make decisions based on the best interests of the child/young person. Where this is necessary, we work within the parameters of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 which requires the least restrictive methods are used and capacity is formally assessed, should it be felt that a young person aged 16/17 years lacks the capacity to make particular decisions for themselves.
- 1.5 The following report will highlight key examples of current support that is in place for young people aged 16-25 years accessing our services. It will reflect on some of the most significant issues that impact our

young people. The report will also highlight some of the key opportunities young people have for involvement in participation and will reflect on some of the challenges we face when working with this age group.

- 1.6 While this report will not be exhaustive of all the work being undertaken with adolescents within Swansea, it is hoped that it will highlight the priority areas we are addressing.

2. Approach to supporting Adolescents

- 2.1 As a whole service we acknowledge that adolescence is a time when young people are seeking greater independence. This can often mean that young people experiment in different types of behaviours, which can include risk-taking behaviours including substance use, missing episodes and risk of exploitation. What is important is that we acknowledge the adolescent developmental process while ensuring that where significant harm is likely, appropriate actions can be taken to prevent harm.

- 2.2 The Bays Plus Service, based in InfoNation in Swansea town centre is the 16+ service within Child and Family Services and also incorporates the Leaving Care Service for 18-25 year olds. The team is made up of Social Workers, Support Workers and Young Persons Advisors (YPA's). Social Workers in the teamwork with 16 and 17 year olds who are looked after or are care leavers, those who are in need of care and support and those subject to child protection procedures. Social Workers are responsible for undertaking single assessments, pathway planning and child protection and care and support plans.

- 2.3 Every 16 and 17 year old who is looked after or is a care leaver will be assigned a Young Persons Advisor in addition to the allocated Social Worker. The Young Persons Advisor will continue to support the young person beyond their 18th birthday, up to the age of 25 years. Personal Advisors work with care leavers to help plan for their future. Young Persons Advisors support Care Leavers in terms of emotional well-being, employment, education, training, housing and health.

- 2.4 Accommodation can often be an issue for those within the adolescent age group. We often see examples of young people becoming homeless due to family breakdown or, where they are looked after, breakdown of placements. Where young people find themselves requiring accommodation support, the following are available to them:

- There are two housing support officers based in Bays Plus who are able to support 16 and 17 year olds who are experiencing

homelessness, at risk of eviction or are requiring accommodation advice and support.

- Bays Plus also work in partnership with Barnardos Youth homeless Service, through which young people have access to a homeless prevention advisor, home support and medication service and a specialist eviction worker who is able to provide practical advice and support. Barnardos additionally provide accommodation options through their supported lodgings provision and training flats.
- The Supported Accommodation Pathway (SAP) provides options for supported accommodation within the Swansea area. We work closely with providers to ensure that the right mix of young people are placed together. These provisions are funded through the Housing Support Grant.
- We also have access to additional supported accommodation locally through providers commissioned on a case-by-case basis where our SAP provisions are not available.

2.5 Where young people are looked after and wish to remain in their homes beyond the age of 18, they are able to do this through the When I'm Ready provision, providing both the young person and the carer want to continue the placement. Young People can stay with carers up until they are 21. Or up to 25 if they are in education or training.

Eligibility for WIR

The young person –

- ▶ is in foster care in Wales
- ▶ wants to stay with their carers
- ▶ lived with their foster carers for at least 6 months, prior to 18th birthday
- ▶ wants to remain living with their foster carers past the age of 18
- ▶ foster carers want to continue the relationship

2.6 Accommodation has also been an issue in respect of working with our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In order to address this, we have commissioned a provider who is experienced in working with asylum seeking children. Regionally, we have access to 4 properties (offering a total of 21 places) specifically to support those coming to reside in our area. We have also employed a regional UASC Young Person's Advisor to ensure that all young people living in our area have access to the specific support they require.

- 2.7 Bays also work in partnership with Barnardos in relation to the offer of a front of house service at InfoNation, this service allows young people to drop into Infonation and access support when they require it. The support available includes a sexual health clinic which runs weekly, access to Barod's Choices Service which offers support to 11-25 year olds within the City and County of Swansea who either want support for their own substance use or if they have been affected by someone else's substance use, and the opportunity to be involved in arranged activities.
- 2.8 The child and family Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Team is also based at Info Nation and work with young people aged 16-25years Young people requiring this support have easy access to the staff from the service when attending InfoNation, Child and Family Services, Contextual Missing Exploited and Trafficked (CMET) Team lead our work in relation to exploitation and missing young people. Regular CMET panels have attendance from approximately 23 agencies all of whom meet regularly to focus on disruption of risk and safeguarding young people at risk of exploitation.
- 2.9 Where there are significant concerns relating to vulnerability and risk consideration can be given to whether deprivation of liberty is required, in a very small number of cases the Mental Capacity Act guides practice and could for example lead to a young person being subject to a deprivation of liberty order which allows for restrictions to be put in place to ensure safety. This would always require the least restrictive measures and any restrictions must be reviewed on a regular basis so as not to be in place longer than is absolutely required.
- 2.10 In relation to serious youth violence, we are seeing a rise in organised crime within the local area and exploitation of children and young people is a concern. As stated above, CMET is a proactive service which seeks to understand this behaviour and disrupt as much as possible. The Youth Justice Service also takes a lead on working directly with children and young people identified as being at risk of criminal exploitation and with those who have been involved in offending behaviour because of criminal exploitation. Youth Justice data confirms that youth violence is the largest offending type and as a result this is monitored closely to identify any trends. It is important to note that not all violence amongst adolescents is to do with concerns around exploitation and organised crime. The Youth Justice Service works closely with partner agencies including Media Academy and St Giles Trust to ensure that young people have the right support and education in relation to youth violence and criminal exploitation.
- 2.11 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) identified 10 ASB hot spot police force areas as having high levels of reported and perceived anti-social behaviour, of which the South Wales Police Force was included, there has also been a recent enquiry by the

Council into this locally. The Youth Justice Service has received additional funding through the Ministry of Justice to support in addressing this issue. The funding is being utilised as part of a wider programme called Turnaround which is aimed at identifying and working on a prevention basis with children and young people on the periphery of offending behaviour. This additional funding has allowed the project to expand to work with young people in areas of concern for anti-social behaviour or groups of young people who may be identified as being involved in anti-social behaviour. The Youth Justice Service has employed a dedicated project worker to run the project and to identify opportunities to support and deter from further involvement in anti-social behaviours.

2.12 The Youth Justice Service also offers additional support through the following provisions, accessible to our children and young people:

- Speech and Language support – the Turnaround project is also funding part of this provision to ensure that children and young people eligible for turnaround can access this support.
- CAMHS – There is a dedicated CAMHS practitioner working with the Youth Justice Service able to work directly with children and young people as well as offering support to staff where necessary.
- Emotional wellbeing support – there is a dedicated emotional wellbeing worker within the team.
- Education, Training and Employment support with partnership working with the NEET Team and Careers Wales
- A Barod staff member is also seconded to the Youth Justice Service to offer substance use support to young people accessing the service.

2.13 One of the most important areas of development has been the promotion of meaningful participation of young people across the service. The progress made in this area has been positive with a number of young people taking part in forums and recruitment processes for key roles. Some of the ways in which young people are involved are outlined below:

- CMET youth panel
- YJS Youth Forum
- Direct participation in system reviews
- Participation group within SAP review process

2.14 Feedback from young people is always a key indicator in relation to what is working well and what may need to be done differently. Some of the feedback received from young people 16-25years who access our services include:

- “Without their support I wouldn’t be where I am today”

- “As hard as being in the system is, the staff at Bays have always made things easier”
- “They always get back to me quickly and sort out things as quickly as they can”
- “My YPA’s have supported me through leaving a DV relationship and them completing college and getting my own flat. Now that I am over 21, I am still receiving support and I am glad and grateful to still have this help”
- “There’s not many people who would listen to me scream and shout and put up with it. They know I don’t mean it and they stick by me anyway. I always say sorry.
- “They need to do more work at Info to teach us street safety at a much younger age”

Throughout the youth justice service review, young people who engaged with the process repeatedly reflected on the importance of building relationships with staff and appreciating staff having time to spend with them. These were the most important things to the majority of young people spoken to.

Challenges and next steps:

- 2.15 We have seen a rise in the number of 16 and 17 year olds becoming homeless through family breakdown. This has resulted in the Local Authority having to step in to provide accommodation support. This places additional pressure on the spaces available to us. While we recognise the need to offer support, we also recognise the importance of young people remaining in the care of their families, where it is safe for them to do so. To address this, we are focusing on work within the family home to rebuild relationships. We are also seeking to build skills across the service in relation to family finding/networks, to assist staff to feel more confident in helping young people to expand appropriate support networks.
- 2.16 In relation to working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, we are striving to ensure that the support we provide is meeting their needs. We recognise that we would benefit from learning from our neighbouring authorities where they have been working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children for longer. We are working closely with colleagues in Newport and are seeking to have a national forum for shared learning. We have regional strategic and operational groups already in place and we are seeking to expand the representation within these groups.
- 2.17 In relation to the serious violence duty, within child and family services we have made a start in gathering relevant data as we were seeing a consistent trend in youth violence, this information will be utilised in the development of a strategic needs assessment. Working in partnership with colleagues in the Police, Health, Education and third sector continues to be important in addressing this issue. The strategic needs

assessment is being considered regionally and is likely to be completed by the end of this year ready for sign off from Police and Crime Commissioners Office with a subsequent report being prepared for local CMT approval.

- 2.18 Motivating and supporting young people to engage in education, training and employment can present a challenge to those working with them. The NEET team in Child and Family Services are available to help and support our young people to identify opportunities. We have found that factors, such as the introduction of the Basic Income Pilot have limited motivation to work amongst the older age group, reaching 18 years. It can also be difficult to maintain children in school provisions where behaviours are having an impact and we are working in partnership with our colleagues in education to seek to find solutions which result in alternative education offers being made.
- 2.19 Although the numbers coming through child and family services are not large, there are cases where we do have to consider imposing restrictions under the Mental Capacity Act. We recognise that not all staff are confident in this area of practice and in order to increase understanding and confidence we have developed an MCA/DOLs team, working across child and adult services. Within that team there is a dedicated Practice Lead to support child and family practitioners in this area of work. This is important in relation to our understanding of the needs of the children we work with and particularly where there is a need for transition to adult services for ongoing support into adulthood.

3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary

- 3.1 There is a lot of positive and proactive work already being undertaken across child and family services when working with adolescents. There is a recognition of taking a risk sensible approach and enabling our young people to learn and develop safely. Where safeguards are required, these are considered in partnership with the young people we are working with and plans strive to reflect what matters to each individual, and what their personal outcomes are.
- 3.2 There is a recognition however, that there are some challenges in respect of working with this age group and that there is continued learning and further developments to ensure that we are offering the right support at the right time.
- 3.3 Ensuring children and young people have opportunities to share their feedback and participate in service developments, including recruitment remains a priority across child and family services.
- 3.4 Working with families to prevent youth homelessness and support families staying together where safe is also a priority for the service following an increase in youth homelessness.

4. Legal implications

4.1 None

5. Finance Implications

5.1 None

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

6.1 None

***Glossary of terms:* None**

Background papers: None

Appendices: None