



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 18 April 2024

Hearing the Voices of Children and Young People

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| Purpose: | To brief the Panel on work undertaken during 2023-2024 to hear the voices of children and young people in Swansea. |
| Content: | An overview of work undertaken by the Education Directorate and work undertaken by the Partnership and Involvement Team based in the Social Services Directorate. |
| Councillors are being asked to: | Consider the information provided and give views. |
| Lead Councillor: | Cabinet Member for Education & Learning |
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the work undertaken to listen to the voices of children and young people over the last municipal year. The Education Directorate and the Partnership and Involvement Team in Social Services engage with children and young people, both in educational settings and also in the community to ensure their voices are heard. The Partnership and Involvement Team have also facilitated events linked with Education.
- 1.2 In 2014, Swansea Council launched its Children's Rights Scheme, which sets out the arrangements that Swansea Council will put in place to ensure compliance with its duty to have due regard to the UNCRC. The Council continues to uphold its statutory commitment to facilitating County-wide mechanisms to hear the voice of children and young people, as set out in Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and Article 12 of the UNCRC.

- 1.3 The importance of hearing the voices of children and young people is reflected in the 2023/28 Corporate Plan under the Education and Skills objective. This is detailed under '*Involving People – by involving learners in their education through a range of engagement mechanisms in order to demonstrate we value these key stakeholders*'.

Specific strategies also refer to learner voice, e.g., the Inclusion Strategy will promote learner participation in decision-making.

2. The Children's Rights and Human Rights City Schemes and the Pupil Manifesto

- 2.1 A second version of the Children's Rights Scheme was published in 2021. This was updated from the 2014 scheme following public consultation and ensures the scheme compliments the 'Right Way' principled approach that is being embedded nationally and led by the Children's Commissioner for Wales. A progress report outlining work of the Children and Young People's Rights Scheme 2021-2023 was presented to the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 14 November 2023.
- 2.2 As part of the Children's Rights Scheme, children and young people have identified seven County-wide priorities to be addressed by Swansea Council and its partners of the Public Service Board:
- Protecting the Environment
 - Quiet Voices
 - Supporting Disabled Children
 - Equality for LGBTQ+ Children and Young People
 - Politics
 - Listening to Learners
 - Feeling Safe – with a focus on Women and Young Women's Safety in Public Spaces
- 2.3 Targeted training is provided to schools around the rights of children and young people, with several quality checks in place to provide assurance around schools promoting these effectively. Many schools embrace the principles that underpin the work of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- 2.4 The Education Directorate provides direct support to children and their families. Person centred approaches are central to the work of teams that provide support, where children's views and voices are part of decision-making. Examples of this include the work of the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Team and support for learners who are excluded. Schools are encouraged to display advocacy information that has been provided to them.
- 2.5 An action plan engagement event took place in June 2023, following the establishment of Human Rights City priorities and the declaration of Human Rights City status. 20 young people from secondary schools attended this event, which fed directly into Human Rights City Action plans, published in December 2023.

- 2.6 In November 2023, work began with the Pupil Voice PLC in the secondary sector on the next Swansea Pupil Voice Manifesto. Initial indications show similar topics to the 2022 Manifesto, but we look forward to receiving this to further shape our priorities going forward.

3. Universal Children's Day

- 3.1 Following a successful event in November 2022, the Council held another event to mark Universal Children's Day at the Waterfront Museum on 20 November 2023.
- 3.2 100 children and young people across primary and secondary schools celebrated Children's Rights in Swansea. During the day there were talks and workshops from the Children's Commissioner's Office, a presentation about a schools' project with Taith, and Ysgol Crug Glas demonstrated how they learn through play and adapt their teaching.
- 3.3 Workshops were held by Swansea MAD and STOPP Period Poverty and an interactive marketplace with 30 organisations that work with children and young people across Swansea was held.
- 3.4 During the day, the new relaunch of The Big Conversation – Swansea's county-wide mechanism for hearing the voice of children and young people was launched. Children and young people gave their views on what they wanted from The Big Conversation and how they wanted it to run.

4. School Councils and Beyond

- 4.1 The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 sets it out clearly that the governing body of a school must establish a school council, the purpose of which is to enable pupils to discuss matters relating to their school, their education and any other matters of concern or interest and to make representations on these to the governing body and the headteacher.
- 4.2 The headteacher of a school must ensure that meetings of the school council are convened on six occasions during the school year and ensure that all school council meetings are supervised by at least one member of the school staff. Both the governing body and the headteacher of a school must consider any matter communicated to them by the school council and provide a response to the school council.
- 4.3 The membership of the school council must consist solely of registered pupils at the school. The governing body of a school and the headteacher must make arrangements for at least one registered pupil of each year group, from Year 3 and above, to be elected to membership of the school council.
- 4.4 The headteacher of a school must ensure that the school council has the opportunity to nominate up to two pupils from years 11 to 13 (inclusive) from its membership to be associate pupil governors on the school's governing body. The governing body must accept any pupil nominated and appoint him or her as an associate pupil governor on the governing body.

- 4.5 Swansea schools have a long history of ensuring that pupil participation goes way beyond the requirement of having a school council, with the national definition of participation being at the centre of our schools' ethos in that *participation means that it is a learner's right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect them. Having a voice, having a choice.* This has been evident as all our schools plan the development and delivery of the Curriculum for Wales. For example, the way in which schools engage in the long-term planning for the development of concepts within their individual curricula and on a day-to-day basis when consulting pupils over what they want to learn within a given topic or theme.

5. Partnership and Involvement Team

- 5.1 Over the last twelve months, the Partnership and Involvement Team have continued to undertake an extensive variety of activities that have provided opportunities to listen to the voices of children and young people.
- 5.2 In May 2023, the Team created a cross-directorate working group to:
- Support the Children's Rights commitment and contribute to a Children's Rights Scheme Implementation Plan
 - Assist in the co-ordinator of the statutory responsibility of local authorities to promote and facilitate participation of children and young people in decisions that might affect them. (Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010)
 - Review and Refresh the "Big Conversation" model for a cluster/area model to hear the voice of CYP within their communities – linked in with early help hubs, youth provision, Primary & Secondary schools as well as wider community groups & forums etc.
 - An opportunity to shape and work on countywide, community & school-based priorities for CYP
 - Co-ordinate the feedback of progress to children and young people via multiple mechanisms and forums in Swansea
- 5.3 The Team works with directly with children and young people. Some examples of activities include:
- Sessions to embed the 'Right Way Approach' at Ysgol Pen y Bryn Special School, including observation of classes.
 - Drop-in sessions at the Ysgol Pen y Bryn Thrive breakfast where Council staff have had the opportunity to get to know the children and young people and learn from them.
 - 18 Sessions for children and young people who have additional needs were held during the summer holidays, where suitable spaces are available for families to spend time together. This was funded by Enabling Communities. Sessions included physical activities such as Rock Climbing, Surfing and Ninja Warrior. There were animal handling sessions at Plantasia and the community farm, along with two ALN youth clubs which had art and crafts and cooking activities. All sessions were chosen by children and young people and based on what they had told us they wanted. This work has been developed from listening to children and young people with ALN and

their views on the lack of inclusive and accessible activities available to them.

- Intergenerational LGBTQIA+ Family sessions during the summer of 2023. These sessions were primarily arts and craft sessions, where participants were encouraged to explore their identity and their community

- 5.4 Since 2014, there has been a mechanism called 'The Big Conversation' to involve children and young people aged 5-25 years to provide an opportunity for them to engage in accessible and meaningful sessions to shape services and to have a voice on issues that impact their lives. This model was originally delivered through large events, then was delivered in a different way following the pandemic. A review has been undertaken, with a new model launched in November 2023. This model has a mixture of opportunities to facilitate participation and provide opportunities to feed back to children and young people in relation to how their voice is being heard and influences decision-making.
- 5.5 The first relaunched 'Big Conversation' which focused on the theme Equality was held in February 2024. There were 80 young people from primary and secondary schools in attendance, along with teaching and support staff. During the day, children and young people across Swansea looked at current priorities set by children and young people in 2021 and told us if they thought those priorities should stay and if there were any other priorities that should be focused on. Children and young people also had the opportunity to feed their views into the Council's Human Rights Strategic Equality Plan. The afternoon focused on equality workshops where children and young people shared their views and ideas through three activities that looked at identity and equality.
- 5.6 The Partnership and Involvement team were involved in setting up the Junior Safeguarding Board priority for 2023, which is Sexual Harassment. Young people have been working on projects across Swansea that look at reducing gender-based violence, sexual harassment in schools and safe places.
- 5.7 As a follow on from the Plan UK project that worked with young boys, a White Ribbon Day event was held to showcase and celebrate the work that had been done. This was through an exhibition at Swansea Grand Theatre where members of the public, schools and council officers had the opportunity to meet the boys and view the work they had been doing over a number of months. The work had focused on positive masculinity, stereotypes, and roles in society. The work has been continuing with the boys who have chosen to become ambassadors and are putting together an assembly for primary schools.
- 5.8 A 'Lost Voices' project was undertaken in June 2023 to provide opportunities to engage with young people who have not traditionally been heard. These included young people with experience of the care system, young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, young people experiencing mental health and young people struggling to find their own path.
- 5.9 During February 2023, a large event was held at the Waterfront Museum in partnership with Sadie's Butterflies to raise awareness of Trans issues and

offer support to those in the Trans and LGBTQIA+ Community. The event saw 951 visitors which included many children, young people and their families.

- 5.10 The Team explored opportunities to gather views through digital sources. This was not possible with the existing configuration of Hwb, however other ways are being explored.
- 5.11 A Bright Ideas Campaign, an intergenerational campaign to look at the development of community spaces within the city centre, was launched in January 2024. This campaign was shared with schools to promote, alongside other services that work with children and young people.

6. Learner Voice in Schools' Quality Assurance and Monitoring

- 6.1 The Education Directorate's School Improvement Team continue to speak to learners during 'listening to learner' activities as part of schools' quality assurance and monitoring.
- 6.2 Of the reports published to March 2024 for schools inspected from April 2023, seven primary schools and three secondary school had references to pupil voice in their Estyn reports. Nearly all reports provide examples of the positive impact of including learner voice. Examples include:
- Parkland Primary 'Most pupils, including those with ALN, take on leadership roles with enthusiasm via involvement in the extensive range of pupil voice groups across the school. Through these responsibilities they are beginning to influence the work of the school. For example, the Digital Heroes help improve pupils' awareness of cyber bullying.'
 - YGG Y Login Fach 'The pupil's voice is prominent in the school's day to day life. For example, pupils contribute ideas to their learning and it was their idea to place a 'quiet time bench' on the playground to promote their well-being.'
 - YGG Tirdeunaw 'Most pupils are proud that their voice is valued and respected, for example when expressing an opinion through the councils, the 'bocs beco' worry box and the 'inspiration week'.
 - Cefn Hengoed 'Staff use pupil voice as an important element in evaluating pastoral and academic provision. The school council has its own development priorities, which are part of the school's planning for improvement.
 - Y G Gwyr 'Pupils benefit from a range of valuable opportunities to undertake leadership roles through the school council and the various working groups. These working groups work diligently and raise others' awareness of important issues such as the dangers of vaping, women's rights and the importance of raising money for local and national charities.'
 - Pontarddulais Comprehensive 'While senior leaders use the views of pupils to inform their self-evaluation well at a whole-school level, the use of pupil voice in areas of learning is less well-established.'

7. Education Directorate

- 7.1 Following a survey for post-16 learners, the findings have been used to inform the development of future provision in Swansea, within the available

qualifications offer. The post-16 strategy is making good progress against its aims.

- 7.2 The Education Directorate is currently developing a number of workstreams linked to the vision of anti-racist Wales 2030 which will be formulated into an action plan. The voice of those with lived experience is central to current training opportunities for Education Directorate and school staff and will inform workstreams and developments moving forwards.
- 7.3 As part of the recommissioning of the schools counselling service, a series of learner workshops were held to understand views around emotional health and wellbeing. All key stages were represented, and their needs will form the foundation of the procurement framework. Within the resource available, it is hoped a model that captures learners' expectations will be delivered.
- 7.4 In the past few months the Directorate has prepared its draft Accessibility Strategy which is currently out for consultation. As part of the drafting process, disabled learners shared their views via completion of a Microsoft Word or Microsoft Forms questionnaire, either independently or with support, eg from an Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) to ensure that the draft strategy reflected what was important to them. They will be further engaged during the consultation period prior to the approval of a final Strategy.
- 7.5 In June 2023, Swansea Council partnered with Swansea MAD to access a "Democracy Grant" from Welsh Government Democratic Engagement Fund, which will support school and community sessions continuing the work of how to register and how to vote but also exploring the need for new Voter ID. Sessions will be done through creative means, for example DJing, Virtual Reality and Stop Motion.

8. Future workstreams for learner voice / next steps

- 8.1 Continue the work of the 'A Whole School Approach – Mechanisms for Hearing the Voice of Children and Young People' working group, led by the Partnership & Involvement Team. This group has representatives from all Directorates to improve opportunities to listen to children and young people with a more joined up approach between services.
- 8.2 Further develop working in partnership with the Partnership & Involvement Team on opportunities to hear the voices of children and young people, including those who are marginalised, those with protected characteristics and those with quiet voices.
- 8.3 The School Improvement Team will continue to listen to learners as part of schools' quality assurance and monitoring.
- 8.4 Undertake audits of all school councils in Swansea.
- 8.5 Development of further opportunities using digital mechanisms.

9. Legal implications

9.1 There are no legal implications within this report.

10. Finance Implications

10.1 There are no financial implications within this report.

11. Equality and Engagement Implications

11.1 The report is for information and not for decision.

Background papers: None

Appendices: None.