



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 20 April 2023

Hearing the Voices of Children and Young People

Purpose:	To brief the Panel on work undertaken during 2022-2023 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 year. The Education Directorate works closely with the Partnership and Involvement Team in Social Services, who 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 Hearing the voices of children and young people is a corporate priority and was detailed as a step to meet the Education & Skills well-being objective in the Corporate Plan 2022/23 which states that 'Pupil Voice – Continue to involve

children and young people in their education and community through Schools Councils and engagement events’.

Learner voice remains in the corporate plan 2023/28 under the Education & Skills objective. The importance 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 detail this, 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 Since the original Children’s Rights Scheme was adopted in 2014, work has been carried out with stakeholders to ensure the most recent scheme compliments the ‘Right Way’ principled approach that is being embedded nationally and led by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales. Principles include Participation; Empowerment; Embedding; Accountability; and Non-Discrimination. A copy of the ‘plan on a page’ which outlines what the Council will do to ensure that Children’s Rights are at the heart of decision making are included in Appendix A.
- 2.2 On 7 July 2022, learner representatives from Swansea secondary schools presented to Council their ‘Swansea Pupil Voice Manifesto 2022’. The manifesto was developed as a result of their discussions of ‘what matters to us’ and suggested a range of ideas that could be considered by the Council to help them and support their communities.
- 2.3 The Manifesto covered eight topics:
 - Safety and feeling safe in our community
 - Improved sports, equality and facilities
 - Mental health
 - Climate change and environmental awareness
 - Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic – equality
 - LGBTQ+
 - Substance abuse and vaping
 - Visible and invisible disability awareness and equality
- 2.4 At the end of the presentation, a final request was made for “Could the Council provide a presentation on ‘you suggested – we did’ that we could share with all pupils in all schools?”.
- 2.5 Following this, the priorities and suggestions shared by the Children’s Rights events, Human Rights City events and the Manifesto were collated and shared with managers across all Directorates in order to respond to children and young people. The response template was extended to include ‘what we will do’ in addition to what ‘we did’ so that feedback could show that important suggestions would still be actioned, even if there had not been opportunity to do so to date.

3. Universal Children's Day Event

- 3.1 On 21 November 2022, the Council held an event to mark Universal Children's Day at the Waterfront Museum. It was a well-attended event, with over 150 learners representing primary and secondary schools from across Swansea.
- 3.2 A presentation sharing feedback for the 'you said.. we did...' was given, followed by a workshop on how children and young people would like to be communicated with, to ensure regular dialogue, updates and feedback is shared in a way that is accessible to all. The feedback was collated and will now inform future communication methods with children and young people.
- 3.3 A presentation from an ex-Swansea school pupil sharing their personal journey around visible and invisible disability followed, as well as a presentation on climate change and environmental awareness. Both presentations resulted in lively discussion and questions from the children and young people in attendance.
- 3.4 Thirty-five stalls were also set up as part of a networking session in the event, which provided an opportunity for services and organisations to reconnect with children and young people. This also included local authority teams, e.g. contribution to the development of the Wellbeing Plan.

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.

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 Some examples of workshop activities include:

- A session held at Olchfa school involving 29 young people aged 14-18 from secondary schools (including sixth forms) on 'Shared Values – Celebrating Similarities and Understanding Differences'.
- A session held at Swansea Grand Theatre Multicultural Hub involving 14 young people from secondary schools for White Ribbon Day 2022, discussing safety and Domestic Violence
- Children's Rights Workshops – in 2023, there have been 37 sessions across nine schools, with 748 learners to help children understand their Rights wants and needs.
- Student representatives from a Swansea secondary school joining police youth volunteers and other supporting adults attending the Bouygues UK construction site on Oxford Street in the city centre to view two murals that had been produced by Fresh Creative Co inspired by young people and aim to celebrate diversity and encourage people to be respectful in our communities. This was following a group of 60 young people from across Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend aged 11-18 who came together to discuss important issues and share their personal experiences, feelings and emotions on topics such as racism, religion, culture and social backgrounds.
- The first 'Us Girls' session, aimed at 14-18 year old women, with a focus on personal safety.

More details of these sessions can be found in Appendices B to E.

5.3 Following the introduction of the ability to vote at 16 in Wales, a Votes at 16 Ambassadors project was established between Democratic Services, The Partnership and Involvement Team and secondary schools. 19 ambassadors were recruited from 10 secondary schools to promote and encourage their peers to register to vote for the elections. Ambassadors were supported in schools and youth settings.

A tender was awarded to Swansea MAD who worked with 30 secondary school pupils from YGG Bryntawe and YG Gwyr to develop a social media video promoting votes at 16, changes in law enabling young people to votes, voting as a democratic right and information on how to register to vote. The video can be viewed at <https://www.swanseamad.com/vote/>.

- 5.4 The Partnership and Involvement team were involved in supporting 26 young people from Swansea to work in partnership with young people from Neath Port Talbot as members of the Western Bay Junior Safeguarding Board to develop a LGBTQ+ resource pack for schools, 'Equali-tea'. These packs have since been distributed to all secondary schools in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The team have also attended secondary schools who have requested support in teaching of the pack.

The Junior Safeguarding Board made up of 23 young people have also facilitated sessions on the pack with senior decision makers – CMET in Swansea, NPT Corporate Parenting Board and the Western Bay Children's Safeguarding Board. Each session was deemed highly successful by adult participants.

Based upon requests from primary school children, there are plans to establish how the Equali-tea pack can be used in primary school settings.

- 5.5 Previous reports talk about work planned for ALN, disability, climate and nature emergency, quiet voices, UNCRC Action Plan.

6. Learner Voice in Schools' Quality Assurance and Monitoring

- 6.1 The Education Directorate's School Improvement Team speak to learners during 'listening to learner' activities as part of schools' quality assurance and monitoring. Examples of questions used are included in Appendices F to G.
- 6.2 Of 15 schools inspected from February 2022 to January 2023, seven primary schools had references to pupil voice in their Estyn reports. Examples include:
- Clwyd Primary 'Pupils take full advantages of opportunities to be influential, for example through their work in a considerable number of pupil voice groups'
 - Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn 'pupil voice has contributed to the development of courses in construction and design and technology'
 - Penclawdd Primary 'Almost all pupils enjoy opportunities to participate in leadership roles through involvement in the numerous pupil voice groups... they undertake their roles conscientiously and confidently and use their skills productively by leading initiatives such as operating the school's savings bank. This encourages pupils' positive attitudes towards careful financial management.
 - Clydach Primary 'Following the pandemic, the re-established pupil voice groups are beginning to engage pupils in making a difference to school life. However, the role of pupil voice groups is at an early stage of development and does not yet have a significant impact on school life'.

7. Post-16 Learner Voice

- 7.1 The background and progress to the end of 2022 for post-16 learner voice was shared with the Education Scrutiny Panel on 15 December 2022. This was as part of a progress update following the Estyn inspection of Local Government

Education Services in June 2022, who made a recommendation to 'review post-16 provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners'.

- 7.2 A survey is currently being undertaken for all post-16 learners to have an opportunity to participate. The University of Wales Trinity St David have acted as an independent support partner and critical friend in the design and delivery of the survey. It has been shared with sixth form settings and will soon be extended to Gower College Swansea learners in order to provide the opportunity to capture the views of all post-16 learners in Swansea.

The survey is open until 2 June 2023 and has had a positive response of over 300 form submissions to date.

The survey has a main focus on post-16 choices. It also covers academic delivery; pastoral and wellbeing support; and advice, information and guidance. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix H.

- 7.3 In addition to the survey, focus groups will be held during the summer term with different groups of learners to provide learners with other opportunities to share their views.

8. Future workstreams for learner voice / next steps

- 8.1 The Partnership and Commissioning Service have created a new working group 'A Whole School Approach – Mechanisms for Hearing the Voice of Children and Young People'. 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.

The group met in March 2023 and a mapping document will be developed to outline all learner voice activity currently taking place across services before planning future activity. The next steps will be to identify wider partners, including members of the PSB to consider a more joined up approach to the local mechanisms that hear the voice of children and young people in Swansea.

- 8.2 The working group will also consider the future of specific mechanisms that have been in place. An example of this is 'The Big Conversation'. These events took place from 2014 until the pandemic. These events moved away from a traditional youth forum model that would have had a small number of elected members, to a model where 60-80 children and young people from primary and secondary schools could participate based on an agenda initiated by young people in addition to local, regional and national priorities.
- 8.3 An 'Action Planning Workshop' has been organised on 5 May 2023, which will involve around 20 children and young people to discuss participation opportunities moving forward.
- 8.4 The School Improvement Team will continue to listen to learners as part of schools' quality assurance and monitoring.

- 8.5 Analysis of findings from the post-16 learner voice surveys and focus groups will take place once they have concluded and will inform future planning for post-16 provision.
- 8.6 Undertake audits of all school councils in Swansea.
- 8.7 Development of ideas to provide further opportunities to listen to 'quiet voices', using digital mechanisms, e.g. Hwb.

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 An IIA is not required as this report is for information only.

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Doing it the Rights Way Plan on a Page
- Appendix B: Shared Values Session at Olchfa School
- Appendix C: Children's Rights Workshops January-March 2023
- Appendix D: While Ribbon Day Session
- Appendix E: Community Murals Event
- Appendix F: Listening to Learners – General Template
- Appendix G: Listening to Learners – With Work Template
- Appendix H: Swansea Sixth Form Questionnaire 2023