

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 08 November 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	School and Community Based Counselling Service for Young People
Purpose of Report:	To seek approval to undertake a tendering exercise and enter into a contract for the delivery of a School and Community Based Counselling Service in line with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.
Report Owner:	Deputy Leader and Cabinet for Member Education and Regeneration
Responsible Officer:	Paula Ham Director of Learning and Skills
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	David Davies, Head of Additional Learning Needs and Wellbeing Gill Toon, Principal Educational Psychologist Operational Manager, Legal Services Nicola Monckton, Finance Manager
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget; and is a matter for Executive decision.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report seeks approval to undertake a tendering exercise and enter into a contract for the delivery of a School and Community Based Counselling Service in line with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. • The Vale of Glamorgan Council has delivered a School and Community Based Counselling service since the release of Welsh Government funds (2008) in response to the CLWCH report in 2004. The service has always been tendered out and provides independent, highly praised and valuable services to all young people aged 11-19 in our 8 secondary schools, special school and various other settings. • The service last year provided a valuable therapeutic intervention to over 180 young people through in excess of 600 sessions. This is significantly lower than pre Covid numbers where the number of young people accessing the service was over 400 per year and over 2000 sessions per year. As a preventive service it reduces stress and anxiety leading to reduced need for young people to access higher level services. 	

Recommendations

- 1.** That Cabinet considers the information provided, noting the positive impact of the service on young people since its inception and delegate to the Director of Learning and Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration, to prepare and issue tender documents in order to procure a new contract for the provision of counselling services.
- 2.** That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Learning and Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member of Education and Regeneration, to tender for and award a contract for a School and Community Based Counselling service
- 3.** That Cabinet delegates authority to the Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Director of Learning and Skills, to execute a contract with the successful bidder.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 1-3.** To ensure contract standing orders and financial regulations are followed and that officers enter appropriate arrangements to procure and deliver a service.

1. Background

- 1.1** Following the Clywch report in 2004, issued by the Children's Commissioner Peter Clark, a key recommendation was the establishment of a counselling service for young people.
- 1.2** Following a broad consultation, the Welsh Assembly Government launched its National Strategy for a School-Based Counselling Service for Wales in April 2008. The benefits to young people of such a service are well documented.
- 1.3** During 2008 the Vale of Glamorgan was successful in its proposed model to deliver a counselling service. Following confirmation of the grant a full tendering exercise was undertaken, with Barnardos Cymru Ltd being the preferred service deliverer.
- 1.4** Funding allocated in 2008/09 was £42K, which had risen to approximately £184K in 2012/13. The increase each year was in order to grow the service slowly and ensure all secondary and special schools receive a service.
- 1.5** The guidance ensures that all 8 mainstream secondary schools currently receive a service of 2 days per week. Additional days are allocated for special schools, out of school provision and some primary provision. The service will also cover out of school provisions such as those in pupil referral units, those receiving home tuition and so forth.
- 1.6** In 2012 the Welsh Government Education Minister confirmed that funding would be devolved within the Revenue Support Grant (from April 2013). The devolved funds were slightly increased, and the remit expanded to include provision for post education young people up to 19 years old.

- 1.7 In March 2013 the School Standards and Organisational (Wales) Act set in place a legal requirement for all Local Authorities to secure 'reasonable provision' for an 'independent counselling service' in respect of health, emotional and social needs.
- 1.8 Robust monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to comply with Welsh Government requirements. The service reports to Welsh Government as required and is part of any Estyn inspection that takes place of the local authority or individual schools. Feedback from school staff and pupils remains very positive.
- 1.9 During the 2 years preceeding Covid over 400 young people accessed the service and with over 2000 sessions per year being attended. Despite an increase in funds and a digital offer the numbers accessing during Covid dropped to 180 young people and 600 sessions. The main reason given by young people was their desire to wait until face to face sessions resumed to access the service.
- 1.10 In April 2020 Welsh Government issued a specific grant of £59,140 to increase counselling in secondary and primary schools, with a particular focus on reducing waiting lists and initiating both counselling and other therapies in primary schools. This has been followed in 2021-22 by another £82,838 under the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing Funding. The long term future of the additional money is yet to be confirmed.
- 1.11 The main issues for referral (presenting issues) are often highlighted as family, anger and stress issues. Predominant issues highlighted during counselling include family, pupil self-worth and anger. Although the last 2 years have seen anxiety become both a presenting and predominant issue at local and national levels.
- 1.12 YP Core is used as a tool to assess psychological wellbeing. Outcome data continues to show significant positive progress for the young people undertaking counselling. The YP Core tool shows a consistent 4 to 6 point reduction in pre and post counselling intervention on a scale of 0 (healthy) to 40 (severe). The annual report demonstrates areas covered within the YP Core scale. The reduction in outcome scores pre and post counselling from previous years is partially down to counsellors working with the young people to complete the outcome tool (previously this was self-scored) and it is felt that by having a better understanding of the questions, young people are scoring themselves more appropriately. Inconsistencies across Wales in YP Scores are being explored by Welsh Government.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Council has exhausted its option to extend the current contract with Barnardo's Cymru which ends in May 2022.
- 2.2 An open procurement process will be undertaken in line with the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations to identify a suitable provider of a School and Community Based Counselling service.
- 2.3 It is intended that refreshed documentation for procurement would be completed between November and December 2021 and an OJEU advert would be posted (due to the funds available) and an advert be posted on the 'Sell2Wales'

procurement site. The closing dates for applications and evaluation of applications would be completed by the end of January 2022 with interviews conducted and contract awarded by the end of February 2022. Following the formal 10 day stand still process (following a preferred provider being identified) and assuming this is not challenged the contract would be entered for legal engrossment for an official start on 1st June 2022.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.
- 3.2** The Council has committed as part of the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 to achieving a vision of ‘Working Together for a Brighter Future’. This plan is reflective of the Welsh Government’s Well-being of Future Generations Act and is comprised of four Well-being objectives to deliver this vision:
- Objective 1 - To work with and for our communities
 - Objective 2 - To support learning, employment and sustainable economic growth
 - Objective 3 - To support people at home and in their community
 - Objective 4 - To respect, enhance and enjoy our environment
- 3.3** There are actions and objectives within the Corporate Plan that a School and Community Based Counselling Service directly contributes towards. Particularly Objective 3 'to work with our partners to ensure timely and appropriate mental health and emotional wellbeing support' and to 'undertake our safeguarding duties to protect people from harm
- 3.4** The Five Ways of working are embedding within the School and Community Based Counselling Service.
- Looking long term - the service aims to prevent escalation to higher need service by addressing issues at a community/school level and therefore reducing long term harm to the young people.
 - Taking an integrated approach, the service links many of the wellbeing goals and objectives by contributing towards young peoples' mental wellbeing and its documented longer term benefits not only to their ability to engage and become physically active, but towards their ability to become more productive citizens,
 - Involving young people by involving them in the decision making process of the new service provider and regularly taking on board their views and comments of the service.
 - Collaborating with others by ensuring the service compliments existing provision, works closely with schools and in the community to deliver a distinct and highly praised service.

- Prevention by providing an independent talking therapy, which is both free and easily accessible, allowing young people to access as required and therefore preventing the need to access higher level and more costly services.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** Welsh Government previously provided a specific grant for this service: the funding is now included in the Revenue Support Grant. The Learning and Skills Directorate seeks to utilise this funding to procure a service from April 2022 for £174,000 per year for an initial 3 years (until April 2025) and the right to extend for up to an additional 2 years.

Employment

- 4.2** Staff are all currently employed by Barnardo's Cymru and are protected via TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings - protection of Employment) Regulations. The purpose of TUPE is to protect employees if the business in which they are employed changes hands. Its effect is to move employees and any liabilities associated with them from an old employer to the new employer by operation of law.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** Under the [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act](#) (2013) Local Authorities are required to make reasonable provision for counselling services for registered pupils at secondary schools in their area, and for other young people aged 11-19 who belong to the local authority's area.
- 4.4** Inspections of local authorities are carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 which provides that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training Wales (HMCI) 'may, and, if requested to do so by the Secretary of State, shall, arrange for any local authority to be inspected'. Estyn's [Common Inspection Framework](#) includes learner wellbeing as a reporting feature.
- 4.5** The inspectorate has powers relating to section 51 of the Children Act 2004, namely in co-operating to improve the wellbeing of children.
- 4.6** Welsh Government guidance on the development of a universal counselling service will ensure all young people aged 11-19 have equal access to the service regardless of perceived need.

5. Background Papers

None.