



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
Neath Port Talbot Council

## **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Education, Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Scrutiny Board**

**8<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

#### **Report of the Director of Education**

##### **Matter for Information**

##### **Wards Affected:**

All Wards

**Report Title:** School Based Counselling Service Update.

##### **Purpose of the Report:**

This report will provide Members with an update on the School Based Counselling Service including statutory roles and responsibilities, referral data and outcomes for children and young people, recruitment and retention of staff and an update on plans and delivery.

##### **Executive Summary:**

School Based Counselling is a statutory service offered to children and young people in Year 6 and above across Wales. Welsh Government have recently committed grant funding to Local Authorities through the *Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Wellbeing* for services to be extended to children below this

statutory school age. Neath Port Talbot (NPT) however have invested core funding to ensure that children below Year 6 will have sustainable access to counselling and therapeutic support, without reliance upon grant funded money. In consultation with Welsh Government NPT will invest this grant money into services for school staff in line with the whole school framework which will enable us to expand this area over the next financial year.

While it is acknowledged that waiting lists and times to access the service have increased over the last 18 months, when pupils receive counselling, the outcomes are significant. In the academic year 2020/2021 NPT SBCS was ranked second out of the twenty one Local Authorities across Wales in terms of improvements made following counselling. It is expected that when the national statistics for School Based Counselling is released by Welsh Government in March 2023, that NPT School Based Counselling Service (SBCS) will rank highly for 2021/2022 also. It is anticipated that when the service is able to overcome current recruitment issues and are at full capacity, waiting lists and times will reduce.

### **Background:**

The Neath Port Talbot School Based Counselling Service is comprised of School Based Counsellors, Play Therapists and a Drama Therapist. In addition to the SBCS Manager, there are currently 13.7 core funded FTE school based counselling staff who hold permanent posts within NPT. The service currently has 1.8 FTE vacancies, for which we are currently endeavouring to recruit.

NPT SBCS is committed to helping Children and Young People (CYP) address emotional and mental health issues so that they may rise through adversity, achieve their potential and lead fulfilling lives. This is achieved through the provision of counselling and child therapy to CYP in Years 1-13 across NPT. Counsellors, Play Therapists and Drama Therapists provide targeted therapy to CYP in order to address a range of emotional and mental health issues. We

support schools in this joint endeavour through consultation, support and high quality in house training which is available to Head Teachers, Governors, teaching and non-teaching staff. We also offer support to primary school parents through the Primary Parent Helpline.

The work of the SBCS is underpinned by The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. Under this framework, all Local Authorities in Wales have a duty to provide SBCSs to Year 6 pupils and above. However, since the pandemic and in recognition of the increased need for counselling and therapeutic support to children, Welsh Government have directed Local Authorities to provide a counselling service to children below Year 6. No specification was given as to how far to extend the service, however, in order to ensure early intervention, and to meet need, NPT SBCS was keen to extend as far as possible in order to meet the needs of children. For this reason, the service was extended to Year 1 and a new school based child therapy model created.

Waiting lists for Secondary School Based Counselling and Primary School Based Child Therapy are monitored frequently and resources allocated accordingly. Pupils are invited to complete feedback forms for each area of the service which then informs any changes or continuation of service delivery. Secondary school pupils are able to self-refer directly into the service via the service website.

In addition to support for CYP, the service is passionate about addressing school staff wellbeing, through initiatives such as the School Staff Supervision Service Pilot and School Staff Counselling Service.

## Recruitment and Retention of Staff

In line with national trends across Wales, NPT SBCS is currently experiencing challenges in relation to recruitment and retention of staff. For a significant period in the academic year 2021/2022, there were 7.7 vacancies. School Based Counsellor salaries are typically nationally lower than those across the wider counselling profession, particularly within the NHS. This makes retention and recruitment of staff challenging; this funding issue has been highlighted to Welsh Government. While additional grant funding has been welcomed, it has also put pressure on the demand for school based counsellors, as all local authorities across Wales have sought additional staff within the same period of time.

In recognition of the need to recruit highly specialised and experienced staff, NPT has recently undergone a Management of Change process, which has created core funded positions within the service, ensuring sustainability of staff who were previously reliant upon grant funded money. Following some successful recruitment drives, NPT has been fortunate in securing 5.9FTE counselling staff, leaving a current shortfall of 1.8FTE.

Team members are well supported through half termly one-to-ones, peer supervision, external clinical supervision, team meetings and Performance Development Reviews. Performance Development Reviews are held annually in line with corporate policies and there are regular continuing professional development opportunities provided in accordance with British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)/ Play Therapy UK (PT UK)/ British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT)/ British Association of Drama Therapists (BADTh) regulations.

## Secondary School Based Counselling and Primary School Based Child Therapy Service

During the academic year 2019/2020 and throughout the pandemic, the SBCS delivered 3654 sessions to 551 pupils across NPT. This was an increase of 49 pupils and 1065 sessions in comparison to the previous year (2018/2019). It is worth noting that this achievement was in stark contrast to the trend across Wales during 2019/2020 which showed a decrease in the number of CYP accessing SBCSs nationally. This was possible due to the pro-active response of NPT SBCS in initiating remote therapy for secondary school pupils, with no gap in provision.

The academic year 2020/2021 saw the reopening of schools to pupils, however attendance at school for a portion of the client group was sporadic for various reasons, including isolation requirements and social anxiety. For this reason, engagement reduced to 3009 sessions delivered to 480 pupils (447 for Years 6-13, 33 for Years 1-5). In order to reduce the likelihood of missed sessions, the team adopted contracting for remote therapy at the first session so that pupils could access therapy remotely if appropriate. The SBCS also experienced long term sickness during the year 2020/2021, further contributing to the challenges the service was facing and the reduced number of pupils and sessions. Average waiting times during this year were 4 weeks for initial assessment and 5 weeks for commencement of counselling.

YP CORE is an assessment tool used to monitor change, i.e. improvements in emotional wellbeing. Scores above 30 are deemed to be indicative of severe emotional distress whilst scores below 10 are within the normal range. During the year 2020/2021, average YP scores reduced from 24 to 14 showing a significant improvement.

During the academic year 2021/2022 the service delivered counselling sessions to 436 pupils across primary and secondary schools (406 for Years 6-13, 30 for Years 1-5). This equates to 2616 sessions which is a reduction compared to the previous year. This is a direct result of recruitment and retention issues which we hope to

overcome. The additional staff recruited to date will help to alleviate this issue. Average waiting times during this year were 3.66 weeks for initial assessment and 6.77 weeks for commencement of counselling. The service accepted 578 referrals (346 secondary, 90 primary) meaning that 142 referrals were carried over into the following academic year. Of those referrals 103 were assessed and signposted to other appropriate services for the summer holidays. During the year 2021-2022, average YP scores reduced from 25.10 to 13.3 which again is a significant improvement.

The current average waiting times at the time of writing (22/11/2022) are 4.33 weeks for an initial assessment and 12 weeks for commencement of counselling in secondary schools. There is no waiting list for the Primary School Based Counselling Service at the present time.

Since the pandemic, the highest presenting issue for counselling is 'Anxiety'. Prior to the pandemic, the highest presenting issue was 'Family'. This is a trend which is consistent across Wales.

### **School Staff Wellbeing and Consultation Helpline**

In recognition of the increased pressure on school staff during lockdown, the SBCS offered a wellbeing and support call back service for school staff. This service had two purposes:

1. To support the emotional wellbeing of school staff.
2. To provide consultation for staff who may be supporting CYP presenting with complex difficulties either at the hubs or in the community.

During 2019/2020 this service supported 11 staff over 16 sessions and during 2020/2021 supported 12 staff over 15 sessions.

## **School Staff Counselling Service**

During 2020/2021 a School Staff Counselling service was created in order to further support staff in recognition of well documented low levels of school staff wellbeing. This service replaced the School Staff Wellbeing and Consultation Helpline.

Since its implementation, NPT has supported 26 members of staff over 165 sessions. The impact on staff wellbeing is assessed using the CORE-10 measure. Outcomes are extremely positive showing an average starting score of 21.5 and an average end score of 8.0.

## **School Staff Supervision Pilot**

The creation of a School Staff Supervision Pilot began in 2020, with one to one, monthly clinical supervision being provided for pastoral school staff in three secondary schools. This was in recognition of low staff wellbeing levels in the education sector and the link between this and pupil wellbeing. This work also recognised the formalisation of the responsibility of school staff in regards to emotional wellbeing as highlighted in The Together for Mental Health Plan, the 'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being' (Welsh Government, 2021) and the Mental Health Measure Wales (2011) as well as the low levels of confidence of school staff with regards to work of this nature.

Supervision is able to address two issues in the education sector through supporting the wellbeing of staff and upskilling them in their pastoral role which has increased in complexity over time. Supervision was provided by qualified counsellors and supervisors. This work was underpinned by academic research, the aim of which was to evaluate the efficacy of the pilot and is now being used to inform future work in this area. During 2020/2021, this service provided 142 supervision sessions to 34 members of school staff. During 2021/2022 51 school staff over 91 sessions benefitted from the service. Additionally, 2 primary schools received training in

'Peer Supervision Skills' and 10 staff received group supervision from the SBCS.

Feedback from the project has been positive and the service is currently reviewing more sustainable arrangements for supporting staff wellbeing in schools. Supervisees' report improvements in wellbeing with the average score on the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale increasing from 51.8 to 54.9. The vast majority (81.8%) of supervisees showed elevations in levels of wellbeing, and 72.72 % demonstrated meaningful change of three points or more.

### **Primary Parent Support Service**

During 2019-2020, throughout periods of lockdown, it was significantly challenging to provide a remote service to younger children for practical and ethical reasons. The SBCS therefore created a Primary Parent Support Service. The aim of the service was to support parents in supporting the emotional wellbeing of their children. This was achieved through telephone support and parent-child/parent programmes which were delivered online. During 2019/2020, this service supported 28 parents over 42 sessions and during 2020/2021 9 parents over 9 sessions. During the academic year 2021/2022 the service supported 9 parents over 13 sessions. Parents reported that the service helped them in supporting their children throughout the pandemic.

Due to the creation of the School Based Child Therapy Service, there has been less of a need for this service although, it is still available to parents.



## **Collaboration with Partners**

The SBCS collaborates well with other services and partner agencies which enables children and young people to receive a holistic service through the utilisation of relevant skill sets. This is particularly pertinent in relation to the Emotional Health and Psychological Wellbeing (EHPW) forums. These consultations take place once per term in each school cluster, which provides a reflective space for schools to discuss emotional health and wellbeing related issues.

The 'consultation team' is comprised of a school-based counsellor (SBC), a wellbeing service (WBS) practitioner, an educational psychologist (EP) and a practitioner from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Occasionally, other relevant professionals who have expertise in children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing (e.g., Cynnydd worker, Education Welfare Officer, etc.), may also be present. Additionally, the Manager of the SBCS represents the Education Directorate as part of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing programmes within the Regional Partnership Board. This joint working has strengthened working relationships with local CAMHS services.

### **Financial Impacts:**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment:**

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring / information purposes.

### **Valleys Communities Impacts:**

There is no impact or implications.

### **Workforce Impacts:**

There are no workforce implications associated with this report.

**Legal Impacts:**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

**Risk Management Impacts:**

No implications.

**Crime and Disorder Impacts:**

No implications

**Counter Terrorism Impacts:**

No implications

**Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Impacts:**

No implications

**Consultation:**

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

**Recommendations:**

The report is for information.

**Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

Not applicable .

**Implementation of Decision:**

Not applicable.

**Appendices:**

None

**List of Background Papers:**

Counselling for children and young people: September 2020 to August 2021 (Welsh Government, 2021)

Together for Mental Health Plan (2021)

Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being' (Welsh Government, 2021)

Mental Health Measure Wales (2011).

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

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