

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-2015

**EDUCATION & LIFELONG
LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

11th December 2014

**REPORT OF:
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND
LIFELONG LEARNING**

Agenda Item No. 8

**Implementation of the recommendations
of the Sick Lit Report**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the implementation of the recommendations made by the 'Sick Lit' Working Group.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the content of this report.
- 2.2 Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.
- 2.3 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth, any matters contained in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 31st January 2013 the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee set up a Working Group to look into issues relating to young adult fiction, referred to by the press as 'sick lit.'
- 3.2 The Working Group completed its Report in May 2013 and made the following 8 recommendations:
- 3.2.1 That Rhondda Cynon Taf's Library service implement the following definition as a safeguarding measure when considering whether a book falls into the Sick Lit books category:-

'Young Adult (12 – 18 years) books that explicitly promote, encourage and / or provide guidance on how to self harm and or commit suicide.

- 3.2.2 That the Executive recognises the importance of the role of branch librarians and the need for the retention of the key post of Children's librarian and ensure that this post is retained as a crucial safeguarding measure.
- 3.2.3 The Working Group fully supports the creation of a teenage plus category of books and support the implementation of a pop up message on branch librarians' screen as a further safeguarding measure.
- 3.2.4 That School Governing Bodies are provided with copies of the Authority's 'Collection & Stock Policy' for information and consideration to how they take forward, if deemed appropriate.
- 3.2.5 A copy of the working group's report highlighting the Authority's concerns over Sick Lit Books be circulated to governing Bodies for information.
- 3.2.6 That the importance of the role of parents and guardians in supervising the reading of their children and in assessing whether a book is appropriate for their child is promoted within libraries and schools.
- 3.2.7 That the Council recognises the good work of the multi agency strategy for reducing suicide and self harm in Children and Young People in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil.
- 3.2.8 That the protocol for the management of self harm in the Community be circulated to elected Members for information.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The Library Service has amended its Stock Selection and Collection policy to reflect the recommendation of the Working Group. The effect of this change has been of negligible impact from an operational perspective as we have not been sent any titles for purchase during the past year that has fallen within the definition recommended by the Working Group. However, the staff will continue to assess all materials that are sent for consideration according to the Working Group's recommendation and any that can be classed as 'Sick lit' under this definition will not be bought.
- 4.2 The Library Service underwent a major restructure as part of the medium term service planning in May 2014. Despite major reductions in funding a role that specifically focuses on young people was retained so that we continue to have a professionally trained librarian who can review and assess new titles prior to purchase for children and young people as well as offering a range of activities and initiatives designed to encourage young people to read.

- 4.3 From an operational perspective procedures have been introduced for the identification, classification and cataloguing of Teenage Plus Books. Existing teenage collections have been assessed retrospectively and all Teenage Plus books are shelved separately from teenage books. The Library management System has been amended so that staff issuing Teenage Plus books now have to enter a manual override code to issue the book. This provides them with an opportunity to check on the age of the borrower and get parental/guardian consent if required. These measures have raised awareness amongst staff of teenage issues and the importance of their duties with regard ensuring that young adults do not access inappropriate materials.
- 4.4 Copies of the Stock Selection and Collection Policy as well as copies of the Working Group's 'Sick Lit' Report were distributed to all schools on 7th March 2014 (Circular 24/2014).
- 4.5 Librarians have been reminded of the importance of their role in promoting good reading practice and being specifically requested to approve the loan of books for their children (if the librarian is concerned about the suitability of the child's choice) has reinforced this message with parents and guardians.
- 4.6 The distribution of the Protocol for the management of self-harm to Members has not yet taken place as, due to changes in a number of services, it needs to be changed. Relevant officers are aware of the need to distribute the final document to Members.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Library Service has implemented all the recommendations relating to its service as required by the Working Party and it is believed that this is resulting in more safeguards for young people as well as highlighting the important role that parents and librarians have in influencing the reading choice of young people.