

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013-2014**

**EDUCATION & LIFELONG  
LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF  
LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**Agenda Item No. 6**

**EXECUTIVE RESPONSE – SICK LIT  
BOOKS SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to make Members aware of the response received from the Executive to the findings and recommendations of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny - Sick Lit Books Scrutiny Working Group.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is Recommended that:-
- 2.2 Members note the responses received from the Executive

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The report of the Committee's Sick Lit Books Scrutiny Working Group was agreed by Committee on the 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2013 and subsequently passed to the Executive for consideration.
- 3.2 The response of the Executive to the Working Groups recommendations are attached as Appendix A.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**as amended by**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**12<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2014**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**Item: Response of the Executive**

Minute 18 Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.

(Officer to Contact: Emma Coates, Scrutiny Support Officer – Telephone No. 01443 424098)

## **Executive response to the Recommendations of the ‘Sick Lit’ Books Working Group**

**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.**

The Library Service has amended its Stock Selection and Collection policy to reflect the recommendation of the Working Group. All books for young adults (aged 12 – 18 years) will, in future, be assessed for suitability and purchased only if they cannot be categorised as ‘sick lit’ as by the Working Group Report. Following purchase all books for young adults are further assessed and classified as either Teenage, suitable for all young adults, or Teenage Plus, suitable for young adults over 14.

**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.**

The importance of the role of branch librarian in providing advice and support to young people in their choice of suitable reading materials is recognised and valued. Their skills are seen as being vital to the delivery of an efficient service and of great importance in the promotion of reading and information literacy.

The current service cuts being implemented by the Library Service has necessitated a slight change in the senior management team due to the impact of closure of 14 libraries on the workload of management and central support services. The perceived reduction in workload has enabled the service to merge the role of Children’s Librarian with the role of School Librarian. This merged role has been designated Senior Librarian Youth Services. The change will ensure that this senior post will have as its focus, among other things, the safeguarding of children who use static library points and those whose books are supplied through Service Level Agreements with primary schools across the county. This is seen as a further strengthening of a key post that is recognised as a crucial safeguarding measure.

**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.**

This is a very welcome recommendation and is recognised as a means of further safeguarding young people in the county. The library service has introduced the Teenage Plus category for young adult titles that are suitable for young adults over the age of 14. All new titles are assessed and classified as either Teenage or Teenage Plus. A retrospective classification of all existing teenage stock has been carried out and any teenage stock that falls within the teenage plus category has been re-classified. All Teenage Plus books are clearly marked and shelved

separately from normal teenage stock. The library service has worked with the IT department to alter the parameters governing the issuing of Teenage Plus stock. Consequently a pop-up message appears each time a Teenage Plus book is issued and a password has to be entered by the issuing staff member to allow the item to be loaned. This in effect both reminds and allows the staff member to check the age of the young adult borrowing the title in question.

**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.**

The Library Service's Stock Selection and Collection Policy has been updated with the new guidance. This is a publicly available document and copies of the Stock Selection and Collection Policy have been distributed to the Headteacher and Governing bodies of all schools within RCT.

**A copy of the working group's report highlighting the Authority's concerns over Sick Lit Books be circulated to governing Bodies for information.**

Arrangements are in hand to ensure that each Governing Body will receive a copy of the Working Group's report.

**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.**

We recognise that parents and guardians have a responsibility to supervise reading materials accessed by their children, and that ensuring children and young people are safeguarded from materials that are not appropriate for their age is best achieved through a partnership between library staff, schools and parents/guardians. Librarians have been reminded of the importance of their role in promoting good reading practice with parents and guardians.

**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**

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.

The Partnership Protocol for the Immediate Response to Critical Incidents Involving Children and Young People continues to be implemented following all suspected or apparent suicide of children and young people under the age of 25 years to ensure that those affected including friends, family, professionals and the wider community are effectively supported.

Level 2 Reduction of Suicide and Self Harm training sessions have been provided with over 500 multi-agency staff from across Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr

Tydfil trained to date. The one-day course is provided free of charge to anyone working directly with children and young people. A programme of monthly sessions for each area for 2014 / 15 is currently being finalised. In addition to this the Training Delivery Group is offering bespoke training sessions to different groups where appropriate and twilight sessions for schools in order to support staff in accessing the training.

A level 1 training course (1½ hours) has been developed and will be rolled-out in 2014/15 for staff working indirectly with children and young people.

**That the protocol for the management of self harm in the Community be circulated to Elected Members for Information.**

The Protocol for the Management of Self Harm in the Community is currently in draft form and will be finalised early 2014. Once signed-off the protocol will be made available to all those attending the level 1 and level 2 training sessions, including a colour-coded flow-chart with co-ordinating contact details for local services on the reverse side.

**Councillor Craig Middle**

**Cabinet Member for Social Justice**

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