



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 20/21

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27TH JANUARY 2021

EYE TO EYE COUNSELLING

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

Author: - Ceri Jones, Head of Inclusion Services (Tel No: 01443 744333)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with an overview of the provision and effectiveness of counselling services for children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) during the academic year 2019/20 and to inform Elected Members of current plans to ensure ongoing provision that meets the needs of service users

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider if any further information is required.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 1st April 2013 the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 came into force. This Act places a statutory duty on local authorities (LAs) to provide an independent counselling service in respect of health, emotional and social needs for children and young people in their area.
- 3.2 At the same time that this new Act came into force, the specific grant funding for independent counselling services transferred to Local Authorities' Revenue Support Grants as part of the Local Government Settlement. LAs are consequently required

to make reasonable provision of counselling services for children and young people aged between 11 and 18 and for year 6 pupils. All children and young people residing in RCT are entitled to access counselling services, irrespective of whether they attend school or not.

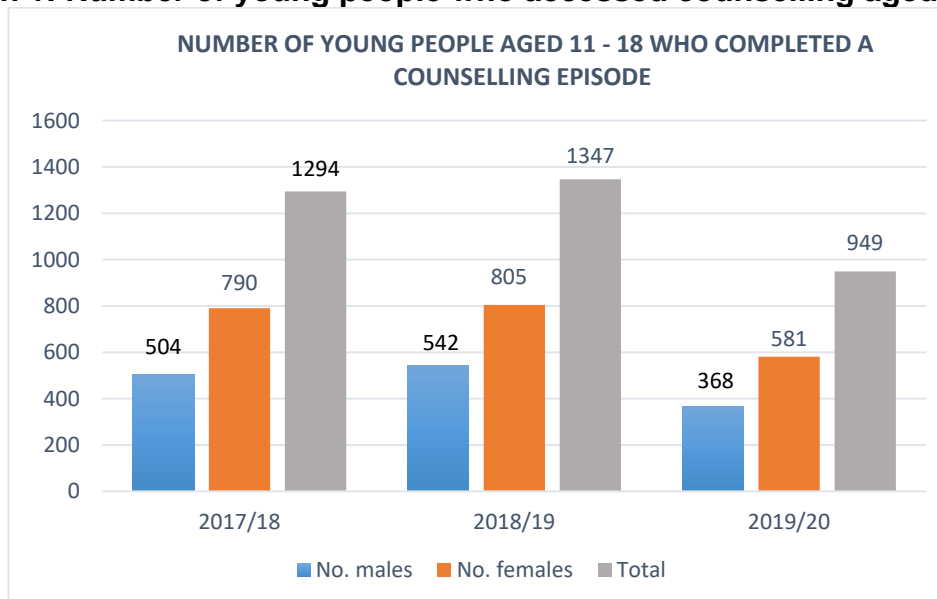
- 3.3 The 2013 Act requires the LA to provide an independent counselling service on the site of each secondary school that it maintains and also offer counselling services at other locations for young people who are not in school and/or wish to access counselling outside of a formal education setting.
- 3.4 Within schools, counselling is a specialist intervention that complements other approaches to support the health and wellbeing of learners, such as school based wellbeing interventions and pastoral support or more specialist interventions from LA central support teams such as the Educational Psychology Service or Behaviour Support Service, as well as services provided externally through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- 3.5 The appointment of counselling services in each LA is carried out via a tendering process every three to five years. In RCT the Eye to Eye Young People's Counselling Service is currently contracted to provide the statutory service within schools and in the community. In addition, to the statutory requirements of the 2013 Act, the local authority commissions Eye to Eye to provide counselling services to primary aged pupils aged 7–10 years (academic years 3–5) and for young people from the ages of 19–25 years. The current contract has been in place since July 2019 and ends in August 2022.
- 3.6 Eye to Eye is a registered charity comprising of a professional team of fully qualified counsellors who are registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and who practice in line with the BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy. The organisation consists of 17 employed counsellors (10 fte) and a number of volunteer counsellors who work in the community setting in the evening. Volunteer counsellors may still be in training but their practice is supervised by a fully qualified and BACP certified counsellor. Community based counselling is provided in community buildings on the site of Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School and 4 outreach centres across the county borough.
- 3.7 During the academic year (2017/18) a Counselling Service Management Board was established, comprising representation from the Educational Psychology Service, Children Looked After (CLA) team, Attendance and Wellbeing Service (AWS), Youth Engagement service, a local Secondary Headteacher, LA data and procurement teams and the Eye to Eye Counselling Service. The purpose of the management board, is to ensure that the Eye to Eye Counselling Service is meeting the requirements set out in their contract, that the service provided meets the needs of children and young people in RCT and to consider the necessary requirements of an effective counselling service for children and young people, as we move towards the next tendering process.
- 3.8 For the financial year 2020/21 Welsh Government provided all local authorities across Wales with additional funding to enhance their school and community based

counselling provision due to the anticipated increased need to support the emotional and mental wellbeing of learners as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. RCT received additional funding of £102,664 which has been used to support priority areas specified by Welsh Government for the use of the funding: reducing waiting lists for counselling and increasing capacity; facilitating the delivery of support to young people in line with current requirements around social distancing; supporting work already underway to meet the needs of young people below the current year 6 statutory counselling threshold. References to the use of additional funding and impact will be linked to the appropriate sections of the report.

4. **UPDATE/CURRENT POSITION**

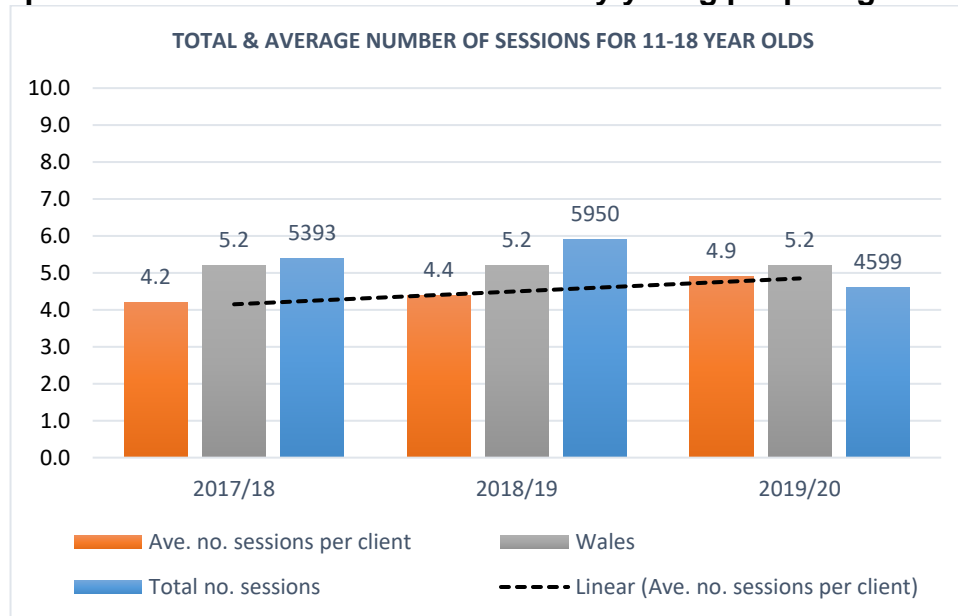
- 4.1 Graph 1 details the number of young people who completed counselling during the three year period from 2017/18 to 2019/20. The graph shows an increase in the number of young people aged 11-18 receiving counselling support in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18 but this decreased by 29.5% in 2019/20. An additional 46 young people received counselling and remained open going into academic year 2020/21. Analysis of the data suggests that the overall decrease is due to a reduction in the number of referrals received during summer term 2020.
- 4.2 In addition to providing formal counselling sessions, school counsellors also made 714 recorded contacts with school staff over the lockdown period and provided additional wellbeing and emotional support to families and young people.
- 4.3 When comparing males and females completing counselling during this three year period, significantly more females than males had counselling. This is a common trend across Wales and is an area that was identified for targeted intervention and development. This included the recruitment of 2 male counsellors, marketing strategies in the community, online and in schools such as featuring a male on the Eye to Eye website and a Facebook publicity campaign specifically targeted at young males. However, despite this, the number of males accessing counselling remains low at only 39% of the overall cohort.

Graph 1: Number of young people who accessed counselling aged 11–18



4.4 Graph 2 indicates the average number of counselling sessions attended by young people over the three year period has increased each year from 4.2 in 2017/18 to 4.9 in 2019/20. This is slightly lower than the national average of 5.2 in 2018/19. (National data is not yet published for 2019/20 and, therefore, until this is available, 2018/19 national data is used for comparison). The service is client led and, as such, clients can choose not to engage in the full counselling offer.

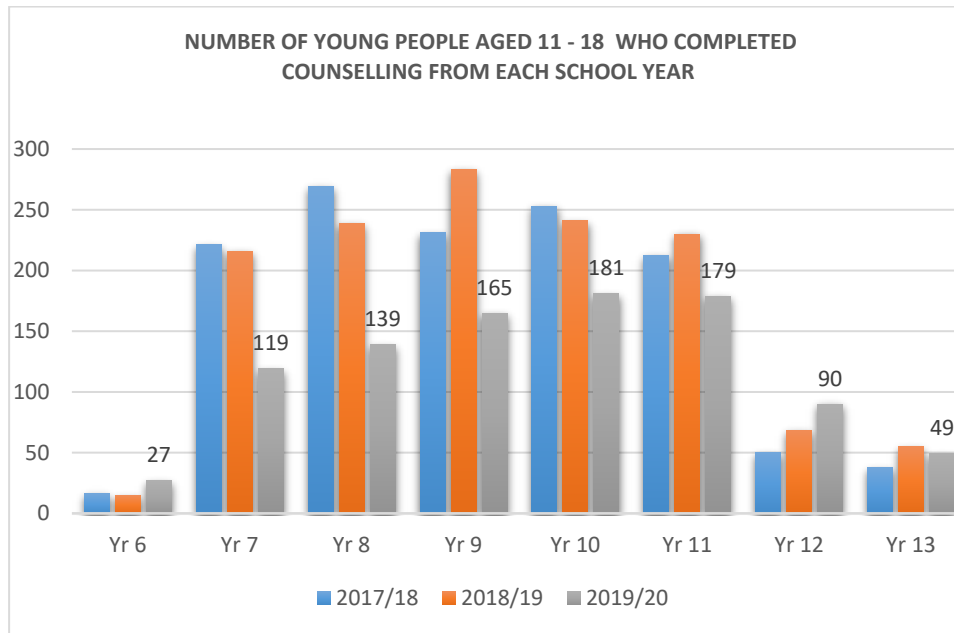
Graph 2: Number of sessions attended by young people aged 11–18



4.5 Graph 3 indicates that in 2019/20, year 10 (181) and year 11 (179)) pupils used the counselling service the most. In 2019/20 there was a notable increase (44%) in the number of year 12 pupils and year 6 pupils (40%) accessing the service. However, despite this increase, it is important to acknowledge that the number of year 6 pupils remains low overall in comparison to other year groups and remains an area for further development.

4.6 As part of this focus, Eye to Eye have accessed the additional funding made available by Welsh Government to provide training to six counsellors in online Lego Play Therapy for primary aged children from years 3–6. As a result, 6 counsellors were trained by August 2020 and, at the time of writing, have provided 67 sessions of Lego therapy to 15 children.

Graph 3: Number of young people aged 11-18 in each school year who had counselling



4.7 Under the current contract, Eye to Eye is commissioned to provide counselling services to primary aged children in school years 3–5. Since the introduction of the enhanced provision in September 2019, 38 children were referred to the service, of which 19 children completed an average of 4.8 sessions of counselling each. Despite the low numbers, it is encouraging to note that, of the 19 children who completed counselling sessions, 10 (52%) were males. 8 cases remain open for support in 2020/21.

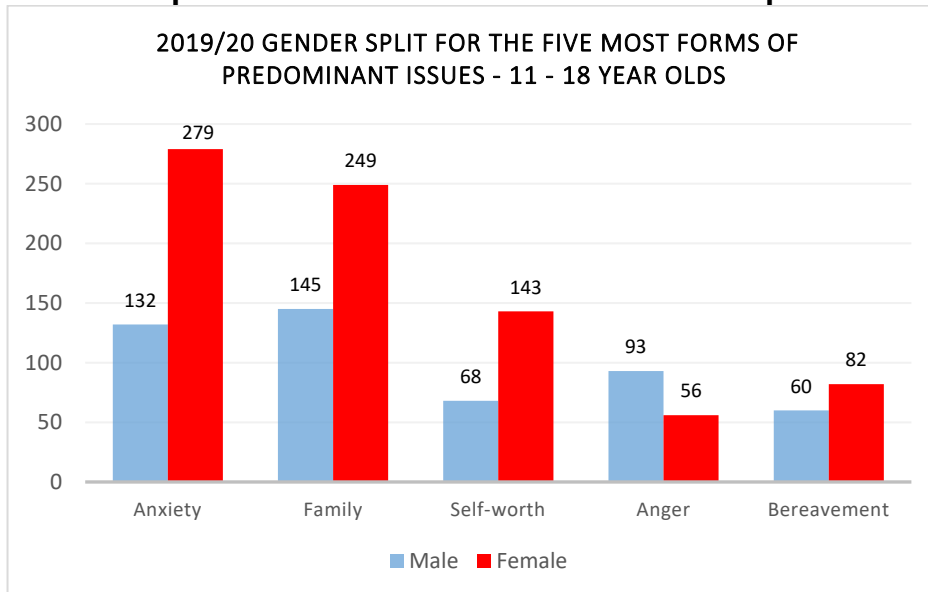
4.8 Table 1 demonstrates the percentage of young people with special characteristics receiving counselling, as a proportion of the total number of young people attending counselling. These special characteristics include Special Educational Needs (SEN), a registered disability or where a child who is looked after (CLA) by the LA. Concerns have been raised previously regarding the low number of CLA receiving counselling, due to this cohort of young people being a particularly vulnerable group. As a result, membership of the Counselling Management Board has included members of the CLA Education Team who have contributed to the development of a new counselling referral pathway. In 2019/20 a slight increase was evident in the number of CLA who received counselling, particularly in the number of males (47%) accessing the service. However, due to the low numbers involved, further analysis of data over time is needed to establish whether this increase will be sustained. In this context, it is important to note that the CLA Education Team has also developed a comprehensive range of evidence-based wellbeing approaches that are proven to be particularly effective in supporting the emotional and mental health wellbeing of children looked after and their carers. This includes a focus upon building the capacity of educational and residential settings to better equip staff to implement a range of tailored wellbeing approaches as part of a graduated response to meeting the needs of learners who are looked after without the need to refer to other specialist services.

Table 1: Percentage of young people with special characteristics attending counselling.

Table 1: PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS WHO COMPLETED COUNSELLING						
Year	Group	Males	Females	Total	Total No. C&YP who had counselling	%
2019/20	SEN	55	30	85	949	9%
	Disability	13	10	23		2%
	CLA	10	11	21		2%
2018/19	SEN	63	46	109	1,347	8%
	Disability	22	22	44		3%
	CLA	4	10	14		1%
2017/18	SEN	90	46	136	1,294	11%
	Disability	9	15	24		2%
	CLA	7	8	15		1%

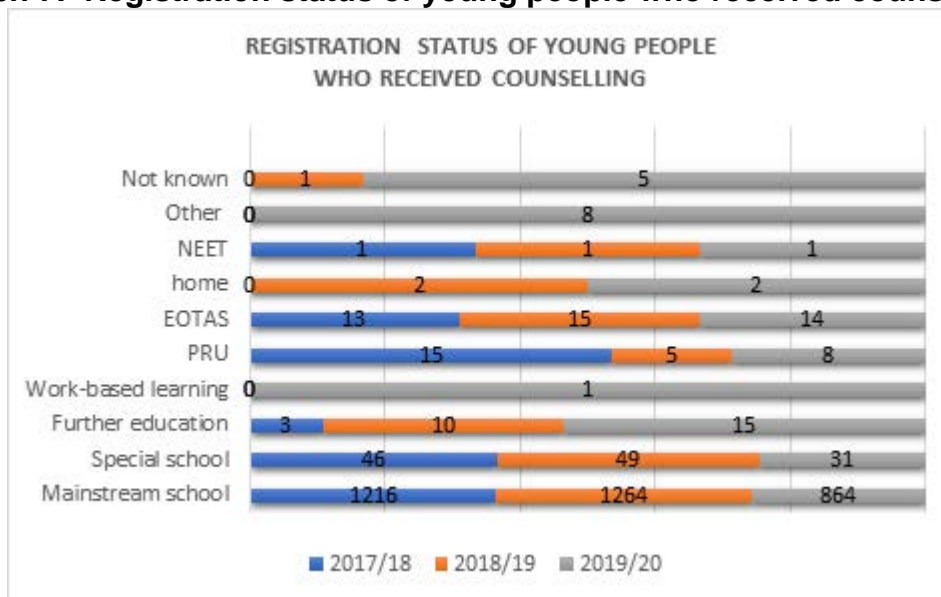
4.9 An analysis of the gender differences exhibited for the five most common forms of predominant issues for young people aged 11–18 years is highlighted in graph 6. Despite ‘family’ issues being the predominant issue for both males and females in this cohort over the past three years, this has been replaced by ‘anxiety’ issues amongst females in 2019/20. Anxiety and stress combined presented in 42% of the young people. Issues relating to Covid-19; isolation, exam stress and the potential loss of parents and grandparents to the virus, were the predominant reasons for seeking counselling. It is notable that this is the first year that ‘anxiety’ issues have replaced ‘family’ issues as the predominant issue overall for counselling from the Eye to Eye counselling service for the 11- 18 age cohort.

Graph 6: Gender split for the five most common forms of predominant issues



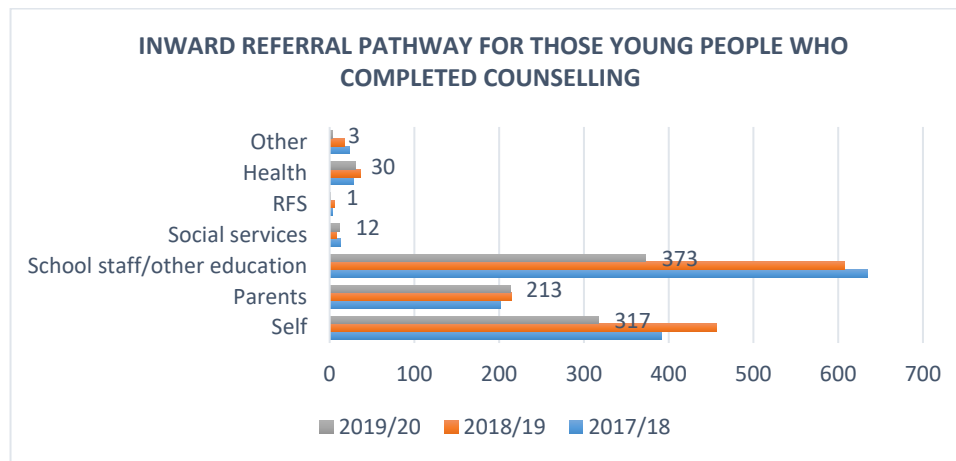
- 4.10 The predominant issue for primary aged children in years 3–5 in 2019/20 was ‘family’ issues for both males and females, followed by ‘anxiety’.
- 4.11 Graph 7 demonstrates the educational provision attended by the young people accessing counselling. Over the last three years, the majority of young people that received counselling were registered at mainstream schools. The lower figures from provisions other than mainstream school are reflective of the lower numbers of young people attending these different provisions.

Graph 7: Registration status of young people who received counselling



- 4.12 Over the last three years, the majority of referrals made to the counselling service continue to be made by school staff although there was a notable reduction in school referrals during the last academic year, primarily during summer term 2020. In 2019/20, 39% of referrals were made by schools or other educational establishments, 33% through self-referral and 22% made by parents. The other 6% were made by Health, Social Services and ‘other’.
- 4.13 Those referrals categorised as ‘other’ include those from the Resilient Families Team and college and voluntary organisations such as Valleys Kids. It is considered positive that, in addition to school staff and parental referrals, a significant number of referrals for counselling are self-referrals, demonstrating the young people themselves are aware of the counselling service and are choosing to seek help and engage in counselling in order to manage their difficulties.

Graph 8: Inward referral pathway



- 4.14 Information has been gathered in relation to young people who did not receive counselling following a referral. Concerns relating to the high number of unsuitable referrals received by the service resulted in the development of an integrated referral pathway, outlining the graduated response that should be considered prior to making a referral to Eye to Eye with guidance on alternative support/interventions that may be deemed more appropriate. Since the implementation of the pathway, data indicates that the percentage of unsuitable referrals received in 2019/20 has dropped to 1.8% of the overall number of referrals compared to 4.1% in 2017/18. However, there has been an increase in the number of young people declining to take part in counselling following a referral from 6.1% of the overall number of referrals in 2017/18 to 10.5% in 2019/20. This will need further investigation.
- 4.15 Due to concerns regarding the length of time children and young people were waiting for counselling following referral, changes were made to the contract agreement with Eye to Eye in 2019 to introduce a triage system and referral pathway (as mentioned above).
- 4.16 In addition and with the aim of reducing waiting times for counselling and providing an alternative avenue for support for young people who may not wish to engage in formal counselling, an element of the Welsh Government additional funding was used to enhance the capacity of the Youth Engagement Service to deliver pre and post counselling support initiative. This has been designed specifically to support learner wellbeing during the COVID-19 period, particularly in relation to re-engagement with learning and attendance at school. Through this initiative, young people are able to access a range of support activities and interventions both on an individual and group basis and a combination of virtual and face to face activities. These include virtual youth clubs, individual support from a youth worker via chat sessions and virtual issue-based wellbeing group chat sessions. At the time of writing, 251 additional sessions have been provided to young people to support their wellbeing. Funding was also used to support the Educational Psychology Service to develop and deliver a series of wellbeing training packages for school staff to support them to meet the emotional and wellbeing needs of their pupils together with the successful the roll-out of wellbeing training for head teachers during summer term 2020.
- 4.17 Data analysis indicates that there has been a significant improvement in waiting times for counselling, with 89% of young people aged 11-18 commencing

counselling within 30 days of referral in 2019/20 compared to 65% in 2017/18 (last time of reporting) of which 70% commenced counselling within 10 days compared to 54% in 2017/18. However, this will be monitored closely to ensure that this improvement can be sustained.

- 4.18 Data relating to the waiting times for children in years 3–5 is less positive with only 54% commencing counselling within 10 days. (As this is a new provision, no comparative data is available).

Table 2: Counselling waiting times for young people aged 11-18 who completed counselling and those that remain open

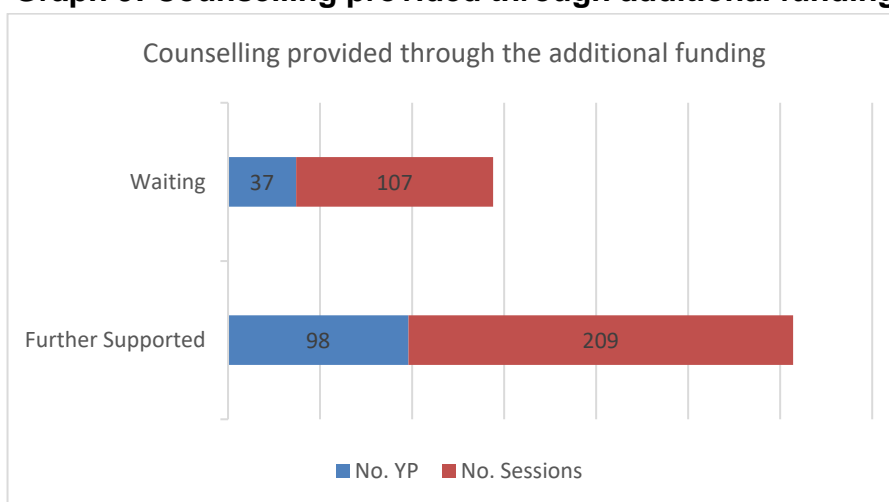
No. of Days	Same day	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 20	21 - 30	31 - 50	51- 70	71 - 99	100 - 112
No. YP	351	176	170	138	94	67	34	7	1
% YP	34%	17%	16%	13%	9%	6%	3%	1%	0%

Table 3: Counselling waiting times for children in Yr3 to Yr5 who completed counselling and those that remain open

No. of Days	Same day	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 20	21 - 30	31 - 49
No. YP	1	5	5	5	2	3
% YP	5%	24%	24%	24%	10%	13%

- 4.19 Due to the anticipated impact of COVID–19 on counselling services additional funding was provided to Eye to Eye to provide counselling services to young people during both the Easter and Summer holiday periods. Graph 9 illustrates that 316 sessions were provided during holiday periods to support 135 referrals. This consisted of 98 referrals (73%) where young people had received at least one session of counselling from the Service and 37 (27%) who were on or would have been placed on the waiting list.

Graph 9: Counselling provided through additional funding



4.20 Additional funding was also used to employ a part-time temporary support therapist to provide a number of additional services. This resulted in 162 initial contacts with young people in relation to the following:

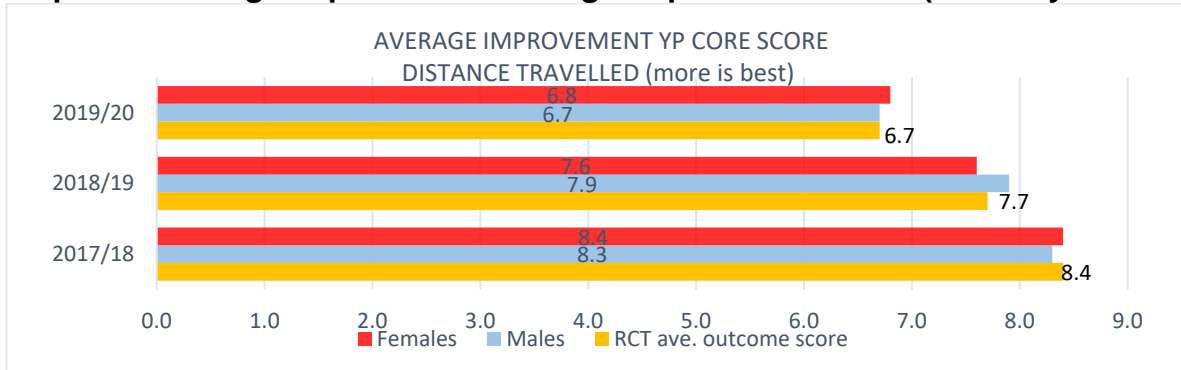
- Assessment using the YP CORE score in relation to anxiety, stress, self-worth and confidence with relationships and signposting to the most appropriate service or online help, including, where necessary, useful websites and Apps to support mental health.
- Assessment for issues relating to safeguarding.
- Weekly check-ins for the young people who were considered vulnerable and not yet in counselling.
- Additional support for the parents and extended family of the client, such as helping with concerns regarding school homework, anxieties about returning to school or even being at home and the effect of lockdown on the children and young people.

4.21 Other areas of expenditure for the Welsh Government additional funding include:

- Training for counsellors on delivering online counselling. This has enabled counsellors to develop the necessary additional skills and understanding of specific issues such as online transference and disinhibition identification, in order to provide high quality online counselling to clients.
- Additional resources for Eye to Eye and the Youth Engagement Participation Service to facilitate virtual delivery methods in line with new service and project requirements.
- Additional wellbeing support for counsellors.

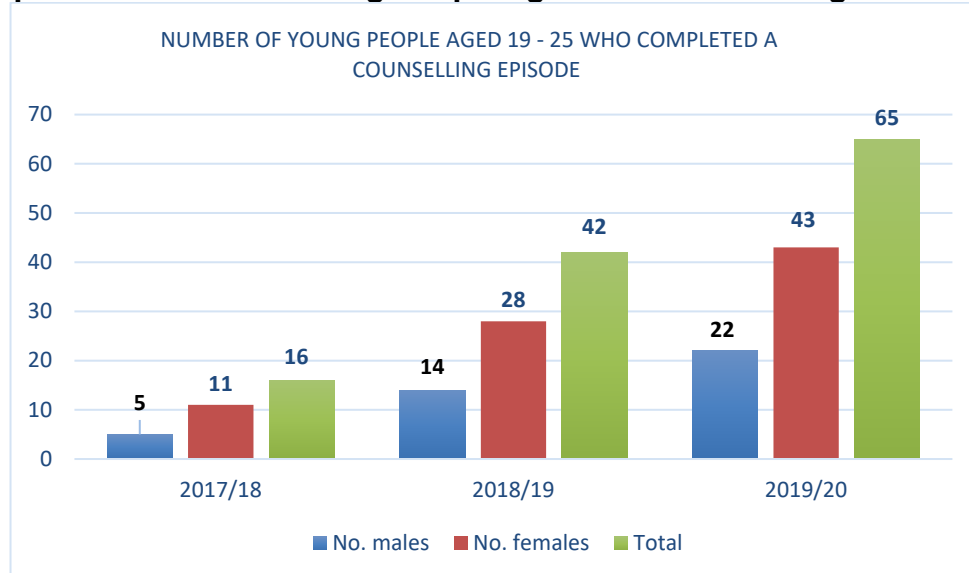
4.22 In order to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of counselling Eye to Eye uses the Young Person's CORE assessment for young people aged 11-18 years old. This is a 10 item self-report measure of emotional wellbeing and is a useful tool for measuring progress. Scores from the first and last counselling sessions are measured to evaluate the impact of therapeutic intervention upon the young people's emotional distress. In graph 10 it is evident that the average gain was lower in 2019/20 than in 2018/19. Reasons cited by Eye to Eye for this decline relate in the main to the reported increased level of need amongst the overall cohort in 2019/20 and the impact of COVID-19. However, this would not account for the year on year decline since 2017/18. Unfortunately, national data is not yet available for comparison for 2019/20 to determine whether a similar decline has been evident across Wales that could be attributed to factors relating to the pandemic.

Graph 10: Average Improvement Young People CORE Score (11 – 18 year olds)



- 4.23 The effectiveness and impact of counselling for the year 3 to year 5 cohort is measured by the CORS assessment. This is a simple, session by session four-item self-report measure designed to assess areas of life functioning known to change as a result of therapeutic input. The scores from the first session and last session are measured to provide the therapeutic movement of emotional distress during counselling sessions. The average improvement gain for year 3 to year 5 children is 8.2, with girls confirming a better outcome at 6.9 compared to boys at 10.4. No comparative data is available due to this being the first year of counselling support for this cohort.
- 4.24 Eye to Eye has seen a year on year increase in the number of young people aged 19-25 years receiving counselling with 60% of young people referred completing counselling sessions in 2019/20 compared to 53% in 2018/19 and 21% in 2017/18 as shown in Graph 11. Targeted interventions for encouraging more males to take up counselling have continued to be implemented during 2019/20 and has resulted in 34% males taking up counselling compared to 31% in 2017/18.

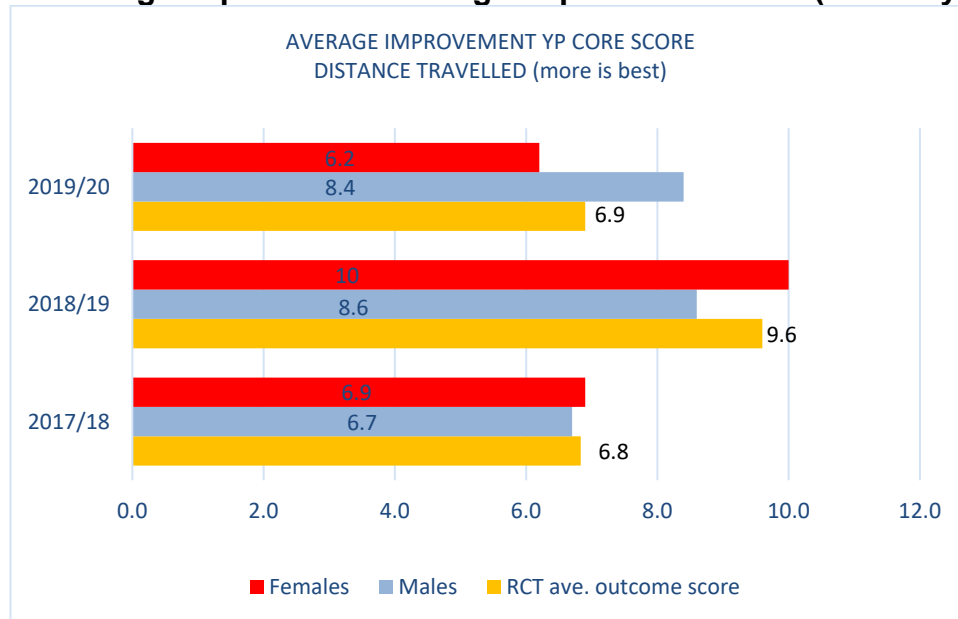
Graph 11: Number of Young People aged 19 – 25 receiving counselling



- 4.25 The number of counselling sessions attended by the 19-25 age cohort increased significantly from 53 sessions in 2018/19 to 314 sessions in 2019/20. Reasons reported by Eye to Eye for this increase relate to the young people not being able to access their usual mental health services during COVID.
- 4.26 Data indicates that 'anxiety' issues were the predominant issue for both males and females in this cohort, followed by 'family' issues in 2019/20. This is consistent with the predominant issues for the 11-18 age cohort.
- 4.27 The effectiveness and impact of counselling on young people aged 19-25 is measured using the Young Person's CORE Score. As illustrated in Graph 12, the average improvement gain for 19-25 year olds in 2019/20 is 6.9 which has declined from 9.6 in 2018/19. Eye to Eye report that this is due to the exceptionally high levels of distress initially presented by young people in crisis and the inability of

clients to access their normal support from peers and other mental health providers due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Graph 12: Average Improvement Young People CORE Score (19 – 25 year olds)



4.28 Service evaluations are carried out every year with the young people using the service. It is not mandatory for service users to complete an evaluation. 372 evaluations were completed for 2019/20. The outcomes are extremely positive with regards easy access to appointments and, also, in relation to their views of counselling as a way of dealing with problems and having a positive overall impression of the service provided. The number of service evaluations completed in 2019/20 is significantly lower than previous years and may not be considered to be as reliable a measure of service performance. However, it is important to note that service evaluation by service users has consistently been extremely positive in previous years and has not been raised as an area of concern.

Table 4: Service Evaluations (completed by service users)

	School	Community
No. evaluations completed	372 (36%)	58 (22%)
% easy to get an appointment	98%	98%
% good way of dealing with their problems	99%	98%
% 'good' or 'great' overall impression	96%	100%

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 No consultation exercises have been undertaken.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 Under current arrangements the counselling service is grant funded by Welsh Government. As part of the negotiation for the current contract, funding for Eye to Eye Counselling Services increased from £376k annually to £400k.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

9.1 One of the key priorities of the RCT Corporate Plan 2020-2024 Making a Difference is to 'encourage residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles and maintain their mental wellbeing'. It is considered that an effective counselling service is key to ensuring that the needs of vulnerable young people are met, in order for them to develop independent coping strategies, build good mental health and positive lives. The vision and working practices of the counselling service support the Council to implement the Wellbeing Goals of the Wellbeing for Future Generations Act (Wales).

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 Overall there has been a decrease in the number of children and young people referred for counselling during the 2019/20 academic year which resulted in fewer children and young people attending counselling sessions. The reduction in referrals was particularly evident in the summer term 2020, during the school closure period. However, it is important to note that, due to COVID-19, providing a range of enhanced support to support the wellbeing of children and young people has been a high priority for both Education and Children's Services. Protocols were put in place to ensure regular contact between schools and learners and their families with a focus upon supporting wellbeing and identifying at an early stage whether additional support, intervention or signposting to other support services would be beneficial. Significant resources were dedicated to developing a range of wellbeing support mechanisms for children, families/carers and school, including a comprehensive training offer for school-based staff to ensure that our education settings are better equipped to identify and address the wellbeing and emotional and mental health needs of learners within their school environment without the need for referrals to more specialist services.

10.2 Following previous concerns regarding the limited provision of counselling services for primary aged children the current service level of agreement with Eye to Eye now includes provision for primary children aged 7–10 years (years 3–5) in addition

to those aged 11 (year 6). As a new provision since September 2019, baseline data has now been established in 2019/20 and will form the basis for future monitoring of impact.

- 10.3 Despite the use of a range of targeted approaches such as online materials and social media platforms to encourage males to engage in counselling, the uptake of males remains low compared to females. However, despite low cohort numbers, it is encouraging to note that there has been an increase in the number of male CLA accessing counselling compared to females and the baseline data for the primary aged children in years 3–5 indicated that there was more or less an equal uptake in counselling of males (52%) and females (48%).
- 10.4 A slight increase in the number of CLA accessing counselling sessions was noted in 2019/20. However, it is important to acknowledge that the very individual and specialist needs of this vulnerable group of children may not always be best addressed via formal school-based counselling but through the broader range of differentiated evidence-based wellbeing approaches that the CLA Education Team have developed to support our children and young people who are looked after, their families/carers. Further work will be undertaken by the CLA Education Team in conjunction with the Counselling Management Board to ensure that there is a robust and collaborative approach to supporting our children who are looked after to access the most appropriate support to meet their individual needs either through counselling or through alternative approaches.
- 10.5 Issues relating to ‘anxiety’ is the predominant issue for the 11-18 and the 19-25 age cohorts in 2019/20, followed closely by family relationships. These areas are not unexpected, particularly so during a global pandemic and periods of school closure. Eye to Eye is working collaboratively with Education and Children’s Services to support children and young people to develop coping strategies and resilience to address these issues.
- 10.6 The number of young people self-referring for counselling is considered to be a positive reflection on young peoples’ awareness of the counselling service. Eye to Eye continues to use social media and a range of partner organisations to promote its services to young people.
- 10.7 Waiting times for counselling have shown improvement during 2019/20. However, due to the reduced number of referrals received by the service in 2019/20 compared to previous years, particularly in the summer term during the school closure period, this improvement should be monitored closely to ensure that it can be maintained should referrals increase when schools are fully operational following COVID-19 restrictions.
- 10.8 Data suggests that the development of the new integrated referral pathway has reduced the number of unsuitable referrals to the service whilst also providing guidance to schools on a range of alternative approaches to counselling that are available to schools to meet the wellbeing needs of learners. The implementation of an improved screening process and the introduction of an electronic referral enquiry form have further supported in the reduction of unsuitable referrals.

- 10.9 Data for 2019/20 indicates that there has been an increase in the number of young people who have declined to take part in counselling following a referral. Reasons for this increase will be explored by the Counselling Management Board.
- 10.10 Over the past three years there has been a decline in the average gain in the Young Person's CORE Score for the 11-18 age cohort, together with a significant dip in the average gain between 2018/19 and 2019/20 for the 19-25 age cohort. Reasons cited by Eye to Eye counselling to account for this decline relate in the main to the increased severity of need of the young people accessing counselling that have been exacerbated by factors relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this does not fully explain the sustained decline over a three year period and, as the national data for 2019/20 is yet to be published, it is not possible to see whether this a common issue across other local authorities. It is therefore felt that this matter warrants further investigation by the Counselling Management Board.
- 10.11 Evaluations of young people using the existing counselling service continue to be overwhelmingly positive with regards their view of the service and how helpful they consider it to be in solving their issues and meeting their needs when referred.
- 10.12 Effective use has been made of the additional funding provided by Welsh Government to enhance counselling services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding has provided capacity for Eye to Eye to provide additional services to young people and their families and has supported the local authority to develop innovative and collaborative approaches to supporting the wellbeing of children and young people. However, it is not clear whether additional funding will be made available for the next financial year.
- 10.12 As the COVID-19 pandemic continues during academic year 2020/21, resulting in further periods of school closure and additional stresses and anxieties for our children, young people and their families, the need to provide effective, high quality, co-ordinated and evidence-based support for wellbeing continues to be one of the local authority's highest priorities.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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