

West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee: 20 April 2011

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Youth Counselling Service

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To provide members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee with information on the evaluation of the secondary school based counselling service, and an update on the latest extension to the service.

2. Background

- 2.1** In December 2008, West Dunbartonshire Community Health Partnership (WDCHP) and West Dunbartonshire Educational Services commissioned Recovery Access Mental Health (RAMH) to provide a Youth Counselling Service in all West Dunbartonshire secondary schools. The service commenced in March 2009 and is ongoing at the present time.
- 2.2** The service continues to provide confidential counselling for young people aged 11-18 in all 5 secondary schools within West Dunbartonshire. The service also aims to promote positive emotional health and well-being by;
- Signposting and facilitating onward referral of young people experiencing crisis to appropriate agencies;
 - Supporting and enabling staff to support emotionally vulnerable young people;
 - Raising the visibility of emotionally vulnerable young people in schools, the community and at home where appropriate.
- 2.3** Every school has a dedicated Counsellor for 1½ days each week and young people are seen during the school day. The Counsellors work as part of a wider multi-agency team both within and outwith the school, committed to supporting young people in the most appropriate and least intrusive way.
- #### **3. Main Issues**
- 3.1** As part of the original commission it was agreed that there should be an external evaluation of the service carried out by Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS, Public Health Researcher. The evaluation data collection period was from 1 April 2009 until 30 June 2010. The evaluation report entitled "West Dunbartonshire Youth Counselling Service – Defining and measuring the benefits of a secondary school based counselling service" was produced in October 2010.

The full report is available on request from Educational Services and the Executive Summary is attached as Appendix 1.

- 3.2** Throughout the period of operation the service has engaged with significantly more girls than boys, with the peak in referrals occurring at 3rd year.
- 3.3** On average young people present with 3 key issues of concern family and anxiety/stress feature in the top 3 areas of concern for both boys and girls.
- 3.4** The interventions by the Counsellors have been evaluated on an ongoing basis at individual client level through pre and post counselling measurement. The level of psychological distress is noted before the counselling intervention and then again at the end of the intervention period. Using these measurements, of the 244 referrals, over 70% engaged with the service, and of those who engaged 80%, 132 young people, can be defined as having benefited from the counselling intervention.
- 3.5** As well as evaluating the effectiveness of the counselling service in terms of reliable change for individual young people, the evaluation was also tasked to carry out a cost benefit analysis. The overall service cost £100,000 during the evaluation period giving an individual cost of approximately £757 per 'benefited pupil'. This includes the start-up costs of the service. Excluding start-up costs, the cost per pupil is approximately £733.

New Developments

- 3.6** The main Youth Counselling Service operates within the 5 secondary schools and therefore is available to pupils accessing mainstream secondary education. Following discussion at the Joint Strategy Group for Children's Services it was agreed that additional funding should be made available to extend the service by employing an additional Counsellor to give access to young people outwith mainstream schooling. These young people are still within the 11-18 age range but may be receiving support through the Interrupted Learner Service, Through Care Team, Addictions Service or Homelessness Service. This extension to the service has just completed the setting up phase and will now be piloted. To date only a very small number of young people have been referred and have started to engage with the service.
- 3.7** Early indications are that the young people who will access this extended service are likely to have significant difficulties in relation to emotional health and well-being and there will be an increased need for the Counsellor to work as part of a multi-agency team and link closely where appropriate with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

4. People Implications

- 4.1** The professional Counsellors are employed by RAMH. The service links to the Council both at a strategic and operational level through staff in Educational Services and Community Health and Care Partnership. There are no people implications in relation to this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The service is jointly funded by Educational Services and Community Health and Care Partnership on a commissioning basis with RAMH. The total cost of the service is £80k per annum. The additional funding to support the extension of the service amounting to £32k has been provided through the Community Health and Care Partnership.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** Supporting the health and well-being of young people during the crucial years of secondary education is an important strategy to avoid or detect mental health issues which may have a detrimental effect on future development and progress. Prior to commissioning, evidence indicated that a school-based counselling service would assist children's services in providing the most effective early intervention.

7. Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** No significant issues were identified in a screening for potential equality impact of this service.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 8.1** The West Dunbartonshire Youth Counselling Service has been operating within the secondary school sector since March 2009. Informal feedback from school staff and users indicate that the service is valued and it provides an important strand in the multi-agency response to young people experiencing health and well-being difficulties within the secondary school stage.
- 8.2** A formal evaluation of the service carried out by the Public Health Resource Unit covering the period from 1 April 2009 to 30 June 2010 provides evidence of a service which has to reliable improvement in the level of psychological distress for a large number of young people.
- 8.3** Based on the positive evaluation of the basic Youth Counselling Service within schools, additional funding has been used to pilot an extension of the service to meet the needs of young people outwith the mainstream secondary sector. This service is at the very early stages and will be monitored via the West Dunbartonshire Youth Counselling Service Steering Group.

- 8.4** It is recommended that Members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee note the content of the report.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 Defining and measuring the benefits of a secondary school based counselling service: Executive Summary

Background Papers: Defining and measuring the benefits of a secondary school based counselling service evaluation report October 2010

Wards Affected: All Wards