



HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

15 December 2021

REPORT TITLE:	EXPERIENCES OF THE PANDEMIC BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The report provides a summary of the experiences of children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on the future needs and priorities for young people.

The report summarises findings from a series of consultation and engagement events held nationally and locally, both of which involved children and young people with SEND in Wirral.

At its meeting of the 15th of December, members of the Health and Wellbeing Board will receive a presentation from members of the SEND Youth Voice Group who will share their (and their peers) experiences of the pandemic directly.

The report will also highlight some of the additional participation and engagement work which enables young people to have a voice as well as emerging developments around a Youth Partnership and Participation and Engagement Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

- a) Note the feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) around their experiences of the pandemic and the information contained in the report.
- b) Agree to continue to engage with young people through the Youth Partnership and other forms of engagement, ensuring that the views of children and young people are considered and encouraged: and,
- c) Agree to engage in the development of the Participation and Engagement Strategy and receive a final version of the Strategy for review and endorsement.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To recognise the importance of children and young people's voice in the work that the local authority and its partners carry out and the policy and decisions that are taken.
- 1.2 To listen to the voice of young people with SEND and to help shape the future direction and priorities for SEND transformation.
- 1.3 To commit to building and establishing a constructive relationship with young people through existing forums/groups e.g. Voice Groups, Youth Partnership whilst recognising the multi-dimensional opportunities to listen and engage.
- 1.4 To establish strong partnership connections with young people that will lay the foundation for positive co-production activity moving forward.
- 1.5 To enable the Director of Children's Services and the designated 'Lead Member' for children to fulfil their responsibilities in promoting the participation and involvement of children and young people.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do nothing: The Chair and members of the Health and Wellbeing Board have requested the attendance of children and young people to share their experiences of the pandemic. The option of doing nothing has been discounted given that this would not allow young people's voice to be heard in line with wishes of the Board.
- 2.2 Engagement as a 'one off': The report proposes the development of a constructive relationship between the Health and Wellbeing Board and children and young people, to ensure that engagement is regular and meaningful. The option of doing engagement as a 'one off' has been discounted, given that it negates the potential to explore further opportunities for dialogue and communication.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to all children and young people, and even more so for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND).
- 3.2 The closures of schools, settings and community/youth provisions as well as retail and business caused disruption for children, young people and their families. Families were initially unable to access some health services given the wider need to reprioritise resources to manage an overwhelmed health system.
- 3.3 In order to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with SEND, it is important to listen and encourage them to share their experiences. The value of this for organisations such as the local authority and partners is to help

identify what additional support may be needed to help them recover. Understanding which new ways of working have worked well and could or should be continued can help drive improvement in the sector and better provision for children and young people.

- 3.4 Since February 2021, a series of consultation and engagement events have been held with young people to share their experiences of how lockdown has impacted them, in relation to their support network, academic goals, and social and emotional wellbeing. These included:
- A commissioned programme of work by the Council for Disabled Children: This was a national engagement exercise involving focus groups and an online survey and young people across the country and included Wirral young people. A detailed summary of the consultation and the findings are included in the 'Lessons Learnt from Lockdown' report attached at appendix A.
 - Wirral consultation and engagement events with SEND Youth Voice Groups.
 - Online survey and questionnaires sent via the Wirral Local Offer website and targeted at children and young people with SEND in the borough.
- 3.5 Over 800 young people nationally, including 20 Wirral children and young people took part in the engagement events and contributed in different ways to the engagement activity to share their experiences. The Local Offer continues to provide a forum for communication and engagement of young people, regularly seeking views from young people across Wirral.
- 3.6 Findings – the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with SEND**
- 3.7 In relation to overall experiences, the findings of the engagement work highlighted:
- Some children and young people with SEND enjoyed being at home with their family and were less anxious because they didn't have to go to school. The time to do things together was important for young people.
 - For others, the break from the security of school routine and environment was a particular challenge, particularly with the constant stop start of lockdowns and especially for children and young people who found change difficult.
 - Young people missed their wider family and friends and the limited opportunity for social interaction impacted on their confidence and wellbeing. For some, this culminated in feelings of loneliness and social isolation which has had a longer-term impact on their social and emotional health.
 - Some young people found that doing things online worked for them as they could interact without the pressure of being physically in the spotlight.
- 3.8 In relation to the support and help provided, the feedback from young people highlighted:

- Young people enjoyed the activities put on by youth groups and school learning online became easier and fun. The provision of IT equipment helped those to access learning who did not have a computer, but the quality of equipment was poor.
- Young people valued a phone call from school to check-in on the progress with learning and their wellbeing
- Young people who remained in school enjoyed learning in smaller groups with more support from teachers. Some young people felt they learned more during this time.
- Appointments were rescheduled or cancelled which meant that some children and young people waited a long time before they were seen.
- Some young people really welcomed online appointments as it meant they could stay at home but for others, the need for face-to-face appointments was important to them and not offered.

3.9 A full summary report on the national research is attached at appendix A. Local insight gathered from young people has been shared with members of the Partnership for Children, Young People and Families and SEND Strategic Board as well as Ofsted inspectors when they visited in March. This has helped to strengthen understanding of the impact of COVID on young people and to outline the actions and priorities moving forward.

3.10 Establishing a constructive relationship between the Health and Wellbeing Board and children and young people

3.11 At its meeting of 15th December, members of the Board will receive a presentation from young people about their experiences of the pandemic. The young people, as members of the SEND Youth Voice Group are proactive in wanting to share their views and engage in a range of different participation and engagement events and activities.

3.12 The SEND Youth Voice Group and a range of other Voice Groups are facilitated and supported by the local authority Participation and Engagement Team. This Team facilitates young people/s engage in a whole host of activity which allows them to exert influence and be empowered to share their views. Examples of this include:

- Budget consultations in January 2021 ‘Have Your Say’ – The Youth Voice Group had a say on this.
- Violence Reduction Survey – working with Young Advisors in a pan-Merseyside group to build a survey, where 80 young people from Wirral were interviewed and a report developed.
- Youth Justice ‘Children First Plan’ development
- Digital media consultation and feedback to the Youth Matters Digital group

- Keeping Streets Safe June 2021 - The females of the YVG's put in their views as young women about public spaces where they may feel unsafe.
- Regeneration of Birkenhead
- Commissioning of new disability care home

3.13 The voice groups are keen to strengthen their connection with key stakeholders including senior leaders and elected members and would welcome the opportunity to develop a constructive and positive relationship with the Health and Wellbeing Board. This could be through presenting at meetings or being consulted and engaged on key decisions which impact on the health and wellbeing of young people in the borough.

3.14 The development of a Youth Partnership for the borough as endorsed by the Partnership for Children, Young People and Families in November 2021, which will consist of elected young people who will represent 11 portfolio areas, would also provide opportunity for representative young people and the Health and Wellbeing Board to collaborate on health and wellbeing issues as well as wider issues which affect young people so that this can be used to inform strategic planning and decisions.

3.15 In this regard, members of the Health and Wellbeing Board are requested to support the approach to build a sustainable relationship with young people through voice groups and the establishment of the Youth Partnership.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. By law, the Director for Children's Services and the designated Lead Member for Children have a statutory duty to promote the participation and engagement of young people in decisions.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Wirral's SEND Youth Voice Group and other voice groups are supported by the local authority Participation and Engagement Team. This Team is made up of one manager and one part-time participation and engagement officer. Their role is not only to establish the networks and forums of young people but to provide nurture, wellbeing support and skills training which enables them to play a professional and proactive role in sharing their voice.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Young people are the adults of the future, and their needs and experiences are important in shaping a society that they will grow into. Failure to listen and enable young people to influence presents a danger that the priorities and services are not fit for purpose for our future citizens.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 There are over 2000 children and young people who are engaged by the Participation and Engagement Teams. They engage in a variety at a variety of different levels with some more directly engaged than others. All activity is co-ordinated by the Participation and Engagement Teams who use a variety of different methods and practices to engage young people and ensure that all children can be involved in exerting influence and sharing their voice.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality or diversity implications arising from the report. Any associated actions following from the report including the development of a Participation and Engagement Strategy may need an equality impact assessment.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Wirral's youth voice group members are active participants on the Environment Youth Action Group which sits under the Cool Wirral Climate Board. Young people are keen to play an active role in championing positive action to address the climate crisis.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The empowerment and support of children and young people through the offer of participation and engagement is vital in supporting the growth of confidence and self-esteem. Learning skills around self-development and professionalism provides vital skills for young people as they move into adulthood and explore opportunities for employment and career development. Overall, providing young people with opportunity to share their experiences helps to develop their skills to become active and engaged citizens for the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Lessons learnt from lockdown

Disclaimer: The PDF file below may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact Hannah.myers@wirral.gov.uk if you would like this document in an accessible format.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SEND Interim Visit Presentation
Youth Partnership Presentation

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date