

Brighton & Hove City Council

Children, Families & Schools Committee

Agenda Item:

Subject: School Based Counselling Pilot

Date of meeting: 29 February 2024

Report of: Executive Director Families Children & Learning

Contact Officer: Name: Linsey McGill
Tel: 01273 296762
Email: Linsey.Mcgill@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to Members about the proposed School Based Counselling Pilot. The pilot is aimed at supporting young people in Year 9 in the academic year 2024/25, for whom mental health is a barrier to accessing learning. It is anticipated that £200,000 will be allocated in the 24/25 budget to undertake the proposed pilot.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Committee agree with the proposal to undertake a School Based Counselling Pilot project to support Year 9 students across our city state schools.

3. Context and background information

3.1 This project has been initiated in response to presentations from the Citizens UK group. This group is a civil society alliance linking universities, charities, schools and colleges, churches, and synagogues across Brighton and Hove. Their stated purpose is to organise to overcome injustice and win change on the things local communities care about (ref [Brighton & Hove - Citizens UK](#))

3.2 The level of children and young people's mental health as a concern can be evidenced through the recent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on Mental health and Wellbeing in Brighton and Hove (Public Health in 2022) provided in the appendices. The report identified that Brighton and Hove have a significantly higher percentage of school pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs than the England average.

3.3 The number of Education, Health and Care Plans with a primary area of need of social, emotional and mental health needs have significantly increased from 180 in 2017/18 to 297 in 2022/23 showing a 65% increase overall.

- 3.4 The Brighton & Hove from the Safe & Well at School Survey (SAWSS) of pupils in primary and secondary schools in the city confirms the findings of the JSNA data. The most recent survey in November 2021 shows that young people's emotional wellbeing has seen a significant deterioration compared with previous surveys, particularly for secondary school pupils, including an increase in self-harm and in suicidal thoughts. Struggles with issues related to food and body image were also significant for young people. Some groups are disproportionately affected with consistently lower levels of wellbeing: girls; older pupils; pupils who do not identify with the gender given at birth; LGBT+ pupils; young carers; those who receive extra help at school; children in care.
- 3.5 It is clear from the JSNA that compared to England, Brighton & Hove has areas of poorer outcomes with a much higher rate of young people in contact with secondary mental health services, with rates rising. Therefore, it is important there are a range of strategies in place to support these vulnerable children and young people with their mental health so that we can have a positive impact on their well-being.
- 3.6 This project is aimed at supporting young people in year 9, for whom mental health is a barrier to accessing learning. The pilot will be one of a range of offers currently available within schools and working alongside the Brighton and Hove Schools Mental Health Service and will form part of a stepped care approach.
- 3.7 This project would be developed in co-production with Head Teachers of state Secondary schools in Brighton and Hove. The evaluation will be co-produced with BACP and the Schools Mental Health Service.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

4.1 Option 1: Continue with current arrangements.

The evidence provided through the JSNA and the SAWSS survey demonstrates the increasing demand for support for this vulnerable group. Although the Council have an effective early intervention offer through the Schools Mental Health Service, they are not able to provide the next tier of support. Current capacity is stretched and young people who do not meet the threshold to access the current mental health offers are not always getting a service. If the project is not delivered it is likely more young people will not access the right service at the right time and their mental health will suffer placing further pressure on Tier 3 services such as CAMHS.

4.2 Option 2: Run pilot project

This will provide added capacity within schools that will compliment the Schools Mental Health Service to provide a stepped care approach for those young people in year 9 who need support around their mental health needs. This is likely to have a positive impact on a number of young people across the city and prevent their mental health needs from escalating and requiring longer term more specialist intervention.

- 4.3 The preferred option is Option 2 because this would provide schools with an increased capacity to provide much needed mental health support to some of their most vulnerable students, thereby reducing the impact of their mental health issues and improving their wellbeing.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 Meetings have been undertaken with Members, Citizens UK and BACP.

- 5.2 Further meetings will be held with Head Teachers and key staff to outline and agree:

- Key criteria for referrals to this offer
- The referral process
- The before, during and after evaluation based on young people's hopes for this intervention
- How the impact of this intervention will be measured in terms of the young person's access to education
- How this offer will link into the stepped care offer alongside other interventions and services

- 5.3 Further meetings will be held with BACP to agree:

- Clinical outcome measures to be used within interventions
- Milestones for evaluation of overall pilot project, based around demographics, numbers of young people accessing the offer, improvement in access to education and barriers to accessing the offer
- Final evaluation delivery

- 5.4 Further meetings will be held to set out milestones for sharing data and progress with relevant parties.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposed Option 2 would provide 20 days of Counselling per week across the city to support some of our most vulnerable Year 9 students with their mental health needs. It is clear from the data that there is an increasing need within the city for further support with regards to young people and their mental health needs. The School Based Counselling Pilot project would provide another intervention to respond to the pressures alongside other mental health offers available to our young people who are struggling within school.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 A sum of £200k has been identified for the school-based counselling pilot as part of the corporate general fund budget setting process for 2024/25. Using current rates for counselling professionals, £200k of funding would equate to approximately 3.9 fte practitioners. This will provide circa 20 days of counselling per week across the city. This funding would also need to cover the costs of admin, supervision and line management.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams Date consulted: 19/02/24

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 Local Authorities have a duty under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 to make arrangements to ensure that their education functions are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The pilot outlined in this report will assist the Council in fulfilling this duty.

Name of lawyer consulted: Serena Kynaston Date consulted 19/02/24

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is undertaken annually to ensure that our Schools Mental Health Service offers link to our identified inequalities. This assessment is conducted to also clearly consider health inequalities considerations. This assessment is being updated to include the Schools Based Counselling Pilot project should approval be provided by this committee.
- 9.2 Should the pilot project go ahead, a specific EIA will be undertaken to support the evaluation process and will inform any further decisions about an offer of this type.
- 9.3 There is detail provided above about some rich data sets available to inform this EIA, plus detailed data from within the Schools Mental Health Service and the pilot itself, details to be agreed as described in paragraph 5.2 above. This will help inform the current understanding of the local context and continue to inform our knowledge on the impact of interventions with young people in the city.
- 9.4 With regards to considering young people's protected characteristics within the pilot, the Schools Mental Health Service EIA will provide details that can inform the pilot project. The EIA also provides details on how the work of the wider service, and that of the pilot project will inform wider work to support children and young people in the city for example informing the ongoing implementation of the city's SEND Strategy. It also details how partners within the city and especially those from the Voluntary and Community Sector provide valuable insight into this cohort and will be informing the development of the pilot.
- 9.5 An essential element of the EIA is around considering the needs of those young people who are in care or who have been care experienced and those who live in socio-economic disadvantage. Our data is already clear that children in those categories are more likely to have a mental health disorder.
- 9.6 We also know that those young people who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to suffer from poor mental health.

9.7 We know that more work is to be done to better understand the mental health needs and experiences of our Black and Racially Minoritised children and young people and welcome the continued collaborative work with Voluntary and Third Sector groups in the city on this.

9.8 These are all important factors that will help inform the development of the pilot project and be further informed by the EIA produced at the point of evaluation.

10. Sustainability implications

10.1 This is initially a pilot project and the longer term sustainability of the project will be considered once the evaluation has been completed.

11. Public health implications:

Health Inequalities Assessment is undertaken within the main EIA for the Schools Mental Health Service.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

Appendix 1 Executive Summary of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment programme.

Appendix 2 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment full report

