

Perth & Kinross Council

Current plans and progress

Perth and Kinross Council (PKC) are working toward full implementation from September 2020 on a Tayside wide basis, given a Tayside Mental Health strategy for children and young people, currently under development. There will be local adaptations as appropriate. In this phase each authority is piloting and will conduct a simultaneous consultation with all key stakeholders. The Tayside Collaborative is in the process of recruiting a Counselling Coordinator and Research Assistant to ensure a consistent framework for implementation. To support school readiness, masters level training has been commissioned from Abertay University for Tayside teachers with responsibility for pupil support. The three authorities are working collaboratively on data protection and procurement processes, ensuring best value.

In PKC the pilot is in two parts. The first aim of each part is: -

- *To work with PKC and schools to support school level engagement and ownership of counselling, in order to ensure effective practice.*

The aim specific to the first pilot is: -

- *To provide feedback on the best local ways to align and manage a counselling service, in particular within PKC in relation to potential barriers such as rurality and small schools, and so clarify flexible and effective ways of working in these circumstances.*

'Place To Be' will deliver this pilot, an organisation experienced in safe systems for counselling for children and young people within schools. The aim specific to the second pilot is:-

- *To provide feedback on the best local ways to align and manage a counselling service, in particular to feedback on effective practices and processes in integrating counselling inputs with existing supports, in order to enhance a continuum of provision within an LMG (Secondary School and its related feeder Primaries).*

PKC are currently working with a local third sector organisation, with qualified young peoples' counsellors and with a therapeutic team within Social Work, to align with existing supports around schools, including the new School Nursing role. This should ensure a continuum of mental health provision.

Issues for consideration

Timescales.

The timescales are tight, in particular to learn from the pilot prior to commissioning for September. There is a need to ensure good alignment

with local policy along with a sufficiency of understanding of counselling standards. Effective, sustainable impact requires preparation time with schools (particularly if no prior experience of counselling) to ensure that the service will match their analysis of need and supports. This also requires a fulsomeness of understanding by staff of the criterion and parameters of counselling. Without this, there is a risk that counselling could be misused through children and young people, whose needs have not been well established, referred to something that may not be suitable, with that referral process being in itself potentially harmful. Educational Psychologists are well placed to work alongside schools in this way but securing additional capacity for an EP across Tayside is considered highly unlikely. Data processing is an important aspect but the processes for getting this clarified and understood are time consuming.

Alignment with early intervention and prevention.

To date within PKC and taking cognisance of the evidence base there has been a focus on the promotion and teaching of coping skills, on Health and Wellbeing as the 'Responsibility for All' and on the role that attuned relationships and school ethos have in supporting mental health. It is important that time is taken to work with education staff to ensure that with the introduction of a service in response to mental health difficulties, the principles of early intervention and relationships work is not denigrated. The Scottish Government guidelines do not appear to contain enough flexibility to support capacity building of staff around mental health interventions and approaches.

Robust evaluation

Given that the evidence base for counselling for children and young people is in its infancy this is an important area but robust evaluative outcome data is not possible within the pilot timescales.

Practicalities and the evidence base around accessibility

PKC has a high number of rural schools and small schools. Finding a safe, protected space for counselling in such areas is highly challenging. Provision of space is also problematic for secondary schools during exam periods. There is a need to be clear on evidenced best practice around the use of IT to support with these challenges. Similarly, on best practice in relation to pupils with significant additional support needs, for whom alternatives to counselling may be assessed as being more appropriate.

Consent, confidentiality, transparency and effective practice

To best adhere to the guidelines, need for evaluation and desire to ensure counselling is a transparent part of a school's continuum of support it would be expedient to ensure all counselling is accessed through the existing GIRFEC planning system. Counselling works best however when children and young people are owning the issue and potential solution. Young people also have a have a right to access services in confidence. There is therefore a need to design the system to be both transparent but work effectively. There will be a need to manage parental expectations around access and confidentiality.

Recruitment

The ability to deliver will be dependent upon the recruitment of qualified staff.