



Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Response by the Portfolio Holder:

The safety, health and well-being of all children and young people are and always will be a priority for the council and for schools. This includes any issues related to harmful sexual behaviour, child sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Abuse in any form is completely unacceptable and any degree of discrimination, harm, assault or abuse within any environment should not and cannot be tolerated.

To that end, maltreatment and abuse of any person, whether child or adult, is unacceptable, no matter where it takes place. Nobody should have to feel that maltreatment or abuse is a normal part of their lives, especially children who have a greater need to be protected by adults, organisations and society in general. While the problems of abuse and maltreatment of others are not confined to schools and educational settings – indeed, society has been and is still on a journey of progressive improvement in respect of the treatment of all citizens, particularly those with an individual or group vulnerability – what the testimonies gathered by Everyone's Invited show, however, is that schools and educational settings are not oases of respite from such harm.

We take the issue of sexual violence and harm very seriously and will work with all appropriate bodies – Welsh Government, the Regional Safeguarding Board, the police, Powys Teaching Health Board, third-sector organisations and others – and with school leaders to tackle this harmful and unacceptable behaviour.

Schools have two main, distinct roles in respect of this work, both of which require them to work collaboratively with others; children, their families and other agencies and bodies. They have a reactive role, to deal swiftly and robustly with issues of actual harm that are brought to their attention. They must make sure that appropriate protective measures are put in place to support victims. Where appropriate, this will inevitably include sanctions against individuals. They must also ensure that appropriate interventions are undertaken with those who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour or committed acts of abusive sexual behaviour.

Schools also have an important proactive role, educating learners: on what appropriate behaviour is; on how to interact appropriately with others; on how to keep yourself safe and report any concerns. This is also work that they cannot carry out in isolation: those messages need to be supported and repeated by all others in society, including families. And families, parents and carers may themselves need support and education so that they have the knowledge, understanding and tools to support schools in this work and, more importantly, directly support their children themselves.

Schools are already undertaking these reactive and proactive roles well. But this work cannot stand still and does not have an endpoint. Risks and needs change and evolve, whether for an individual or for a society in general: twenty years ago, online exploitation was not the issue it is today. Therefore, we are committed to ensuring that we are doing everything we can, in the best way possible, and to making improvements where those can be made.

Prior to the publication of the names of schools by Everyone's Invited, the Audit Sub-group of the Powys Local Operations Group had resolved to undertake an audit of processes, procedures and support in relation to Harmful Sexual Behaviour across all agencies in Powys, including schools. This audit is already under way. Through the mechanism of the Audit Sub-group, the Schools Service will be able to evidence the good work that already happens and to identify areas for improvement.

And there is plenty of good work. Schools already have in place programmes of Personal and Social Education and Relationships and Sex Education, both universal interventions and targeted interventions. They liaise with partner bodies for general advice and guidance, as well as in response to specific cases and situations, whether informally (such as seeking advice from the Youth Offending Service) or formally, such as in Child Exploitation strategy processes or the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings.

There is a timely opportunity to improve on proactive work, with the implementation of the new Curriculum, through the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience, as well as the new requirements for Relationships and Sexuality Education.

Education services (both corporate and individual schools) will continue to work with Children's Services, partner agencies and local communities to ensure that schools are safe environments. If incidents do occur, then effective responses will be implemented.