

Good afternoon,

This is just to remind you that Click Off have yet to receive a response to this.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

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**From:** Click Off

**Sent:** 09 November 2019 16:43

**To:** Monica Fogarty

**Cc:** cllrmsseccombe@warwickshire.gov.uk; cllrndavies@warwickshire.gov.uk

**Subject:** Re: Respect Yourself Guidance

Dear Ms Fogarty,

Thank you for your response.

Using the reduction in teenage pregnancy as a metric for success is limited, and the conclusions drawn about the reduction in Warwickshire are questionable. Such a reductive measure does not consider the wider well-being nor the attitudes of children and young people towards body image, relationships, sex and equality.

As you may be aware, the rate of teenage pregnancy has been reducing across the whole UK for the past few years. It has been suggested that this has been a result of changes in the dispensing of emergency contraception and a significant shift in sexual behaviours, such as frequency of anal sex.

Collated below are data from the Office for National Statistics. Contrary to your claim, the figures clearly show that Warwickshire have experienced a below average decline across the past three years. As such, even if 'success' is measured in terms of teenage conception, the *Respect Yourself* guidance has been a demonstrable failure.

**Quarterly conceptions to women aged under 18**

Area of usual residence	2018	2017	2016	2015	Reduction
ENGLAND AND WALES	17.25	18.3	19.7	21.7	4.5
ENGLAND	17.1	18.1	19.6	21.5	4.4
NORTH EAST	24.1	24.8	25.9	28.7	4.6
NORTH WEST	21.3	22.1	23.2	25.4	4.1
YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER	20.25	20.9	22.8	25.0	4.8
EAST MIDLANDS	17.55	18.0	19.5	20.8	3.2
WEST MIDLANDS	18.95	20.6	22.3	24.4	5.5
Warwickshire	16.35	17.3	20.1	19.8	3.4
EAST	15.15	16.1	17.9	19.3	4.1
LONDON	15.05	16.8	18.2	19.9	4.9
SOUTH EAST	13.75	14.4	15.8	17.9	4.2
SOUTH WEST	14.25	15.0	16.0	17.8	3.6
WALES	19	21.0	22.0	24.5	5.5

If guidance were to be genuinely 'sex positive' surely the right of young people to have enjoyable, safe sex should be prioritised rather than a reduction in the rate of pregnancy.

At present many girls are being coerced into sex acts which have been normalised by pornography. Recent research by the Universities of Bristol and Central Lancashire found that a fifth of girls had suffered violence or intimidation from their teenage boyfriends, a high proportion of whom regularly viewed pornography, with one in five boys harbouring "extremely negative attitudes towards women." It seems Warwickshire is not immune from this trend, indeed it was recently reported that 'peer on peer' sexual abuse in schools increased by 521 per cent in Warwickshire between 2013-16. Perhaps commissioning studies into the reasons behind this spike would provide more valuable data than simply looking at rates of teenage pregnancy.

In addition, it must be stated that consulting with young people and children is of limited benefit, and as adults it seems like a dereliction of duty to be led by those without the life experience to make positive choices about sex. Young people who have been brought up in a climate where the casual racism, homophobia and sexism of pornography has been normalised are not necessarily best placed to evaluate its impact. As you should have noted from the fully referenced petition which was submitted by ourselves and Safer Schools Alliance, those watching pornography through adolescence have been shown to be more accepting of rape myths.

Advice from Respect Yourself included misleading and ideologically biased statements, such as describing concerns about the proven impact of pornography on the developing brains of adolescents as “myths floating around in the media.”

In addition, a growing and persuasive body of research into the harms of pornography was dismissed as below:

“To date there has not been a single piece of recognised research to show conclusively that porn is in any way addictive or causes any sort of psychological harm to people who watch it.”

The numbers of clinics treating people (overwhelmingly men) for pornography addiction belie this evident falsehood, as does the latest neurological research which suggests behaviours, which are repeatedly reinforcing the reward, motivation and memory circuitry, are all part of the disease of addiction.

The (unevidenced) assertion that ‘the sex industry is one of the few in which women make much more money than men’ is particularly concerning, seeming to be little more than an advert for pornography. The *Respect Yourself* guidance could have equally pointed out that pornography is one of the few industries where women can routinely expect to suffer anal prolapse, or that a high proportion of those in the industry develop drug problems to cope with the emotional and physical pain – could you perhaps explain why these points were not deemed worthy of inclusion?

The pro-pornography bias across the *Respect Yourself* website is clear and serious questions remain about why this was deemed acceptable for consumption by children and young people. It is baffling that Warwickshire County Council approved such dangerous, sexist and ideologically motivated propaganda and concerning in the extreme that in subsequent media interviews the council sought to defend this decision.

The investigation promised is overdue, as is an apology to those who raised concerns and were dismissed on social media; the clear inference being that we were out-of-touch, insufficiently educated on the subject and prudish.

Finally, by ignoring the disproportionate impact of pornography on girls and young women it could be argued that the *Respect Yourself* guidance is in breach of Warwickshire County Council’s responsibility to adhere to the Public Sector Equality Duty. Furthermore, by focusing on pregnancy the experiences of those who are same-sex attracted are ignored. To avoid making any further potentially discriminatory errors Click Off suggest that you seek

advice from groups such as ours and Safer Schools Alliance, rather than relying upon the questionable expertise that has informed your guidance to date.

To conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to repeat some of the questions put to you in the first email which to date remain unanswered:

- Given that the Respect Yourself website has now been suspended it seems fair to assume that this is an admission that the content is not suitable for the target age group- please clarify the official reason for the withdrawal of the website.

- Who will conduct the review into the Respect Yourself guidance?

- What questions will be asked?

As ever, in anticipation of a full and prompt response.

Kind regards,