



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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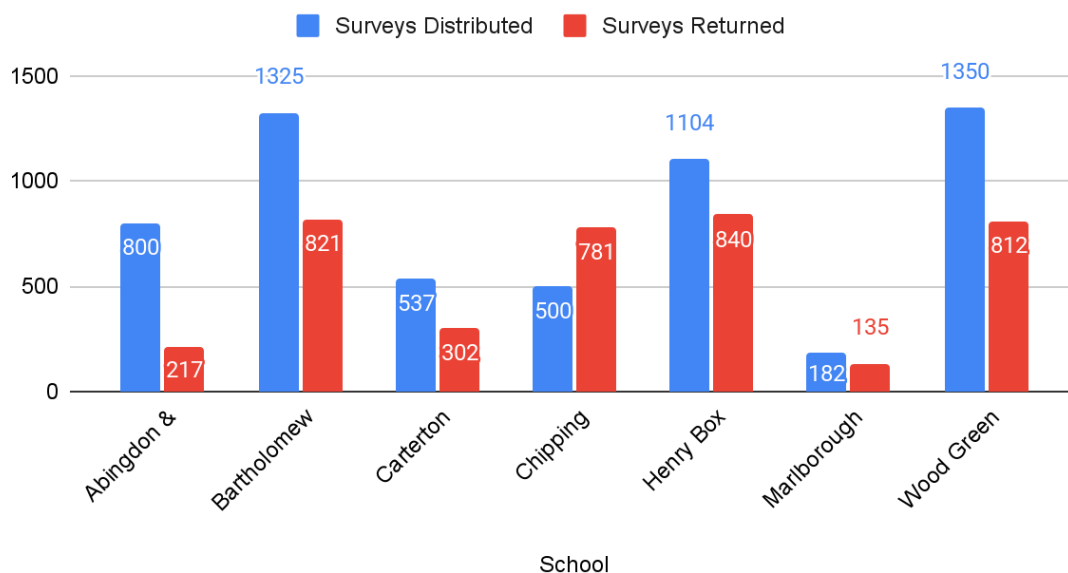
Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 11 OCTOBER 2023
Subject	YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Members	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare. Email: <a href="mailto:geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk">geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk</a>  Councillor Joy Aitman – Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities. Email: <a href="mailto:joy.aitman@westoxon.gov.uk">joy.aitman@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Andy Barge – Assistant Director, Communities. Email: <a href="mailto:andy.barge@publicagroup.uk">andy.barge@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report Author	Heather McCulloch – Community Wellbeing Manager. Email: <a href="mailto:heather.mcculloch@publicagroup.uk">heather.mcculloch@publicagroup.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To consider the recommendations made to the council as a result of the Youth Needs Assessment, in which we gained the views of just under 4000 young people to better understand the challenges they face.
Annexes	Nil.
Recommendation(s)	<i>That the Executive Resolves to:</i>  <i>a) Ask officers to engage with Oxfordshire County Council to work up a proposal to create a dedicated youth specialist role for the Council to lead on Young People and carry forward the recommendations of the Youth Needs Assessment. This proposal should come back to the Executive for approval if it has direct financial implications for the Council.</i>  <i>b) Dedicate a specific stream of funding on the WestHive platform for youth activities particularly those led by young people themselves.</i>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting Residents First</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>The Youth Needs Assessment gained the views of 3908 young people aged 11-25 in secondary and sixth form education settings through a paper survey of 39 questions.</p> <p>The views of 177 parents were gained through an online survey.</p> <p>Focus groups were held, engaging approximately 70 young people were involved in these discussions.</p>

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Young people were disproportionately affected by Covid-19, learning was interrupted, opportunities to develop skills were lost and young people had difficulties accessing professional services to support their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- 1.2 Across Oxfordshire we have seen a loss of youth services and providers due to their inability to seek sustainable long-term funding.
- 1.3 The YMCA reported that government funding for youth services saw a significant decrease, with £1.4b in 2010/11 reducing to £430m in 2018/19.
- 1.4 The Council through its Covid-19 Recovery Plan made young people a priority. Recognising the Council's limited involvement with young people to date it was agreed that a period of engagement was essential in understanding their needs ahead of making decisions about what services should be provided. It was agreed that the Council would undertake a Youth Needs Assessment.
- 1.5 Between January and March 2022, paper surveys were distributed to young people aged 11 and above. The surveys were handed out during registration period in 5 of our 6 mainstream secondary schools and also at Abingdon & Witney College. One school did not have capacity to participate.

## School Participation



- 1.6** In total we received responses from 3,908 young people aged between 11 and 25, some with additional needs.
- 1.7** We considered sending the survey electronically, but based on evidence decided that a paper survey was most appropriate as these have a higher response rate. Chipping Norton School requested the survey electronically initially and we received 281 responses in that format from them. We followed up with 500 paper surveys and received 100% response rate.
- 1.8** We also held some focus groups with young people to further explore some of the common themes coming out of the survey, including feelings of safety, living in the real world vs online communication and accessibility of services and activities.
- 1.9** We also spoke to parents and conducted a Parents Survey, to which 177 parents responded, 70% of which were parents of children attending school in Witney.
- 1.10** Our Commitments as a council are to:
- To continue to listen and learn from young people, and where possible, act on recommendations they make.
  - To share the results of the Youth Needs Assessment as widely as possible to amplify the voices of young people in the district.
  - To use the insight gained from the Youth Needs Assessment to inform decision making and service delivery.

## 2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF THE YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### 2.1 Words of a young person

## Young People's Words Can be Powerful

We need support, we need inclusivity and it needs to be real and not from a five minute google-ing session, we need to be taken seriously, the people meant to look out for us need to look and talk to us if they see something, and stuff like this needs to be done privately, we need people to trust, we need outlets, we need to be able to be relaxed around adults and teachers and be able to trust and talk to them about anything, we need to not be put on the spot, we need to be able to choose how much to share and not be forced to open up, we need to be allowed to choose what to do, we need options, we need to be provided proper opportunities that are affordable to help us get an idea of what we want to do when we're older, we want to be protected and safe, we want to not be coddled or patronised, we want to act like the children we are, we want to be included in the important conversations, we want to be able to grow and have a safety net ready to catch us and someone standing there comforting saying it's alright to fail and understand how much it hurts to do so. We want to speak and we want to be listened to

## 2.2 Being Active

Young people want to be active and social, activities they want to participate in are not always available locally and public transport can be difficult to access in rural areas.
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Activities can be really expensive to access, with the cost of transport, the activity, equipment and clothing, drinks and snacks. Some families cannot afford them, and the cost-of-living crisis is impacting on many that are unable to access the support offered to families that receive benefits.
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Many young people live in rural areas, and with school catchment areas being so large, and public transport options being limited, for some, the only place to socialise with friends is at school.
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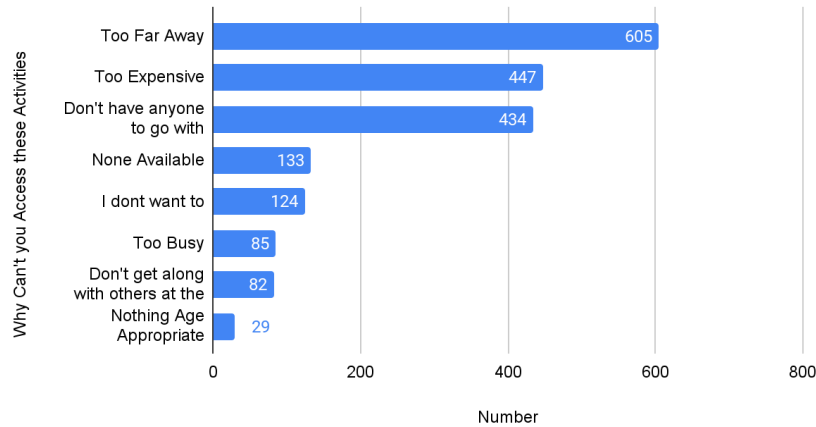
Young people want access to more adventurous sports, like climbing, winter sports, skating and horse riding
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Some sports activities are universally popular across genders and ages, including football, boxing, basketball and swimming
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Young people with additional needs may struggle to access some activities because of a lack of equipment at leisure facilities
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Young people want us to know that climate change is important to them
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## Why Can't you Access these Activities



## 2.3 Mental Health

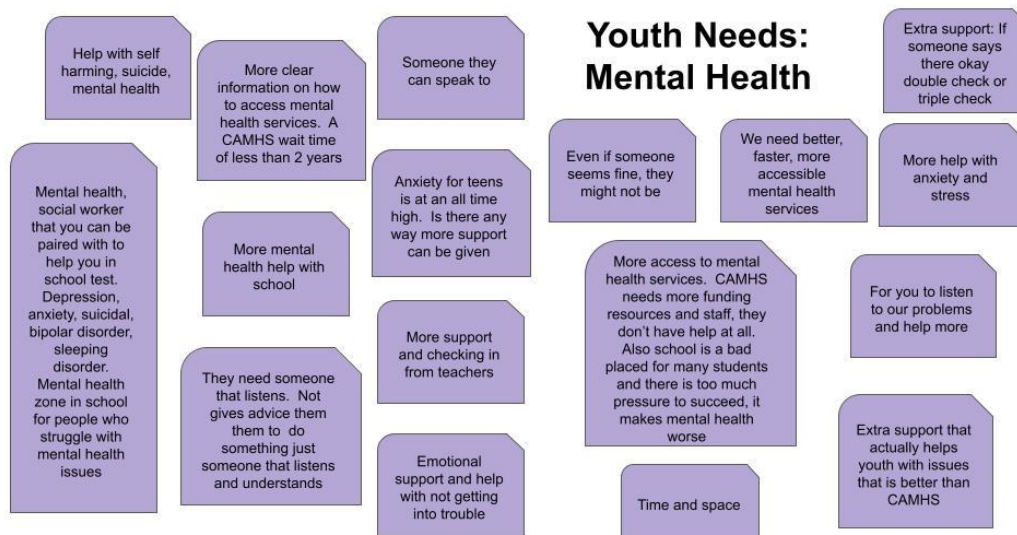
Young people want better access to mental health support, including the ability to access them locally

Young people want access to mental health support without having to be added to lengthy waiting lists.

Young people want adults to check in with them to see if they are ok, not relying on their first response but to check, then check again

Parents want to access low-cost alternatives to CAMHS

Some young people want access to mental health support at schools, others want to access support outside of school so that it is private, and their peers do not become aware. One size does not fit all



## 2.4 Safety

Young people want to feel safe everywhere
Young people want to be safe from bullying and for adults to challenge them and others when they say something discriminatory or offensive
They want access to safe and youth friendly environments to socialise in, these spaces need to be inexpensive, local and easily accessible. They also need to provide protection from the weather, be well lit and have internet access
Young people want to be safe from gangs, knives and violence of any sort
Young people do not want to be pressured into vaping, smoking or doing drugs
Young women want to feel safe and supported without fear of predatory or sexist behaviour.

### Violence, Substances and Alcohol



## 2.5 Reflections on the Impact of Covid

The mental health of young people and their families was affected by the pandemic, for some this was an exacerbation of existing anxiety and worries and for others the case.
Young people had felt worried about the future and how not being able to attend school would affect their exams and grades. Others had difficulty returning to school due to their mental health, social anxieties or concern for loved ones who were clinically vulnerable
Young people missed out on socialising with friends and participating in activities, for some of them this restricted their access to safe adults outside of the family home they could talk to.

Young people want to talk about the issues they are concerned or passionate about and for adults to listen and act on the information they give them.

### 3. DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS TO DATE

3.1 The results of the Youth Needs Assessment have been disseminated widely through a range of workshops, presentations and meetings. To date these have included:

Q&A Session for Councillors	7 September 2022
Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee	11 October 2022
Youth Needs Assessment Launch	8 December 2022
Mental Health West Forum	21 January 2023
West Oxfordshire District Council Action Plan: Young People	30 January 2023
West Oxfordshire District Council Senior Officer and Business Manager Workshop	2 February 2023
Thames Valley Police Away Day	9 February 2023
Full Council Briefing	15 February 2023
Oxfordshire Communications Group	24 February 2023
Oxfordshire County Council Youth Offer Strategic Group	30 February 2023
Youth Needs Assessment webinar	22 March 2023
West Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Alliance	18 April 2023
West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership	26 April 2023
Public Health, Full Team Meeting	16 May 2023
Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy Task and Finish group	Ongoing
Children and Young People's Forum	26 June 2023
Oxfordshire Youth in Mind Conference	4 July 2023
Oxfordshire Youth Offer Steering Group	17 July 2023

### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL

4.1 Based on the results of the Youth Needs Assessment and given that the primary authority with responsibility for young people is Oxfordshire County Council, these are the recommendations with potential financial implications for the Council:

- Officers be asked to engage with Oxfordshire County Council to work up a proposal to create a dedicated youth specialist role for the Council to lead on Young People and carry forward the recommendations of the Youth Needs Assessment. This proposal should come back to the Executive for approval if there are direct financial implications for the Council.
- Dedicate a specific stream of funding on the WestHive platform for youth activities particularly to support projects led by young people themselves.

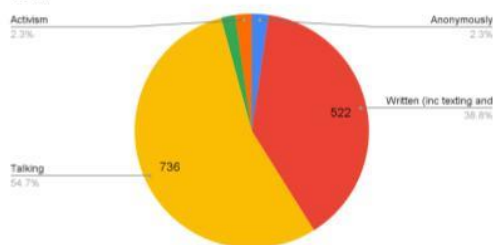
4.2 Furthermore, these are recommendations where a shift in practice could make a significant contribution:

- Be ambitious about involving young people in consultation, decision-making processes and policy development at the Council – such as the Local Plan, Climate Strategies and Council Plan – so that services meet their needs;
- Raise concerns at every level over the inadequacy of mental health services in West Oxfordshire for children, young people and parents, and seek urgent action – both Councillors and officers;
- Press for serious violence (including knife crime), violence against women and girls, and drugs and gangs to be a priority in the new Community Safety Partnership Plan;
- Make more happen together and in collaboration with town councils where investment in young people’s provision is in place - Witney, Chipping Norton and Carterton;
- Subject to appropriate resources being secured enact a Year of Youth, to ensure the voices of young people are celebrated and championed;
- Create a clear communications plan for engagement with young people which identifies how, where, when and what topics the Council will engage young people in. This will look afresh at digital ways to engage in conversations with young people, review accessibility and introduce easy read formats as standard.

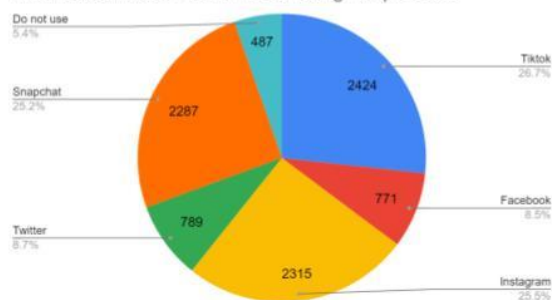
## Young People want us to be interested in them, to listen to their views and understand that what they have to say is important

Young People have told us how they like to communicate with adults around them, and which social media platforms they use. It is now time to think about how we can use this information to continue our conversation with them

What is the easiest way to share your thoughts and feelings - How



What Social Media Platforms do Young People Use?



## 5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 Whilst not recommended, Executive could choose not to act on the findings from the Youth Needs Assessment.
- 5.2 An alternative to having a youth focused role, would be to create a multi-disciplinary project group within the council, with officers having protected work time to carry forward the work



of the Youth Needs Assessment. Additional time would need to be found within the Communications Team to develop a communications plan and future engagement.

- 5.3 For this to be a viable option, the work would need to be clearly coordinated and directed, with each member an active participant in the work going forward. With competing demands across departments, it is unclear if this could work effectively and make more than superficial changes to the way the council works with and for young people in our communities.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 Councillors and officers of the council regularly participate in conversations, meetings and activities which indirectly and directly impact on young people. The Council now has a better understanding of what it is like to be a young person in West Oxfordshire, their aspirations and the barriers and challenges they face.
- 6.2 It would be advantageous over the next 12 months for the council to capitalise on the data and intelligence provided through the Youth Needs Assessment. The Council can demonstrate that it has listened and is taking action as a result.
- 6.3 This report has highlighted how the council can move forward, with youth in mind, and making every contact count.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 It is envisaged that the dedicated youth funding for Westhive would be set at a level of at least £20,000 and this would be found from existing resources.
  - 7.1.1 £2,500 would be ring fenced specifically for specific projects / activities that were generated from young people.
- 7.2 The annual cost of Westhive would be met from the Council's priority fund, so not impacting on the Council's revenue budgets for 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- 7.3 Officers will bring forward to Executive a fully costed proposal following conversations with Oxfordshire County Council if there are any direct financial implications for this Council.
- 7.4 The Year of Youth would be reliant on securing external resources and would be deliverable only if additional staffing is secured.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no legal implications that arise from this report.

## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 The risk to the Council of not committing to taking action as a result of the consultation with young people is that the Council would lose the trust and confidence of this segment of the population. Furthermore, young people will continue to face the challenges they have identified.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

**10.1** This report sets out the first steps the Council can take to tackle inequality for young people in terms of their access to services and what opportunities they have to influence policy. Acting on the findings from the Youth Needs Assessment could have a positive impact on young people, with a subsequent benefit on parents, guardians or carers. There is also the potential for a positive impact on rural considerations, such as access to services.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**11.1** It is not expected that this activity will have a negative impact. 75% of young people responding stated that climate change was important to them. It is recommended that young people are engaged with more fully. If the recommendations are agreed there will be opportunities to engage further with young people around climate change.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**12.1** The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Full report and analysis of Youth Needs Assessment

**12.2** These documents will be available for inspection online at [www.westoxon.gov.uk](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk) or by contacting democratic services [democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk) for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)