



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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| Name and Date of Committee | EXECUTIVE – 14 FEBRUARY 2024 |
| Subject | IMPROVING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT |
| Wards Affected | ALL |
| Accountable Member | Councillor Joy Aitman – Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities. Email: joy.aitman@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Accountable Officer | Andy Barge – Assistant Director, Communities. Email: andy.barge@publicagroup.uk |
| Report Author | Heather McCulloch – Community Wellbeing Manager. Email: heather.mcculloch@publicagroup.uk |
| Purpose | To set out the Council's approach to supporting young people and building on the results and findings of the recent Youth Needs Assessment. |
| Annexes | Nil. |
| Recommendations | That the Executive Resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Agree to the recruitment of a dedicated Youth Development Officer on a full time, 2-year fixed term contract;2. To note that £60,000 external funding from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) will be used to support the post;3. Approve up to £28,000 from the Council Priority fund to meet the balance needed for the post;4. Approve the use of the £20,000 COMF budget allocated to youth activities to enable test and learn opportunities as developed by the postholder, which tackle the barriers faced by young people, to access activities, services and opportunities. |
| Corporate Priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Together for West Oxfordshire |
| Key Decision | NO |
| Exempt | NO |
| Consultees/ Consultation | <p>Youth Needs Assessment comprises responses from 3900 young people living locally.</p> <p>Report to the Executive of 11th October 2023 summarised the findings of the assessment, set out how the contents have been disseminated to the wider system and suggested some actions for the Council to consider.</p> |

1. CONTEXT

- 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 Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, leisure-time activities and facilities for young people aged 13 to 19 and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24. In two-tier authorities such as Oxfordshire this statutory duty sits with the county council.
- 1.5 Rationale for the duty states that –
 - ‘Over 85% of a young person’s waking hours are spent outside of school and formal education. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities provided during those hours can have a significant effect on young people’s development and well-being’.
- 1.6 Section 507B of the duty ‘requires local authorities to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people to a sufficient quantity of ‘youth services, namely:
 - *a sufficient quantity of educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities and*
 - *a sufficient quantity of recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities’*

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council carried out the first Youth Needs Assessment for West Oxfordshire in 2022, surveying young people between January and March of that year. The 3908 paper responses and feedback from focus groups has informed our approach set out in this document.
- 2.2 At the Executive meeting of 11th October 2023 the findings from the Youth Needs Assessment were considered and as a result Executive resolved to ask officers to engage with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) 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. It was agreed that a proposal should come back to the Executive for approval if there are direct financial implications for the Council.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1 Engagement with OCC has been ongoing and will continue. Officers and Councillors have energetically sought financial support from OCC to match funding secured by the Council towards a dedicated youth specialist role. OCC is not able to provide such direct financial support, but it should be acknowledged that over the last two years a West team has been reintroduced.

- 3.2** OCC has agreed that the Council can utilise £60,000 from the remaining Contain Outbreak Management funding (COMF) towards a youth role and a further £20,000 towards projects for young people.
- 3.3** Currently OCC's youth work team in West Oxfordshire comprises one senior youth worker and one junior youth worker. Their workload is completely dominated by work with young people on a 1:1 basis who have been referred by schools. They are extremely busy and it is not felt that this staffing level is adequate in order to meet the current demand from schools. In response the staffing structure of the youth service is being reviewed and likely to increase in capacity to provide a shared youth worker and shared Apprentice youth worker covering north Oxfordshire (Cherwell and West Oxfordshire). It is not clear how long it will take to recruit additional staff and how quickly they will be effective on the ground. The focus of the 1:1 work is on young people who are not currently accessing others services in the hope that by offering some help at this early stage their intervention can make a big difference and achieve a positive outcome. This work takes place on school sites mainly during the day.
- 3.4** Young people are mainly referred in to the service by schools. Currently the team is working in Henry Box and Bartholomew schools and will start to work with Carterton and Burford schools in early 2024. They have connected with the Remix Youth worker in Chipping Norton and can provide support for more complex cases as they arise.
- 3.5** In 2022 the team did some ad hoc detached work as a trial in a range of areas with mixed results. In 2023 the team provided some detached youth work in Witney in the summer holidays after another local youth service ceased operating. They started a group activity linked to a school in Witney in January and utilise the Witney Hub building next to the Windrush Leisure centre. Part of the role of the team is to respond to need identified in neighbourhoods and recently staff from across the county provided youth interventions in the Blackbird Leys area following a stabbing involving a young person.
- 3.6** The universal, open access youth offer in West Oxfordshire is extremely limited and of varying quality. There is no independent dedicated medium scale youth organisation based in or operating across the district. There are a number of small scale, community organised youth clubs in villages and towns in West Oxfordshire. These groups operate largely independently of each other and only a small number are affiliated to and engaged with Oxfordshire Youth. Churches and faith groups also play a part in providing services to young people in West Oxfordshire.
- 3.7** In our main settlements of Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton, town councils have invested in youth provision over recent years but it is more challenging now to identify delivery organisations.
- 3.8** Young people told us through the Youth Needs Assessment that they want to be active and social. They said that activities they want to participate in are not always available locally and public transport can be difficult to access in rural areas. They said that activities can be really expensive to access, with the cost of transport, the activity, equipment and clothing, drinks and snacks. Living rurally can also mean that young people are isolated from friends at the end of the school day.

3.9 The barriers of cost, rurality, isolation and availability of activity affect many young people and will require proactive action on numerous fronts. OCC's service will not be able to provide a solution for all young people.

| Type of service | Targeted specialist services and interventions | 1:1 youth activities and referred group work, ad hoc detached | Open access youth activities |
|-----------------|--|---|---|
| Delivered by | Commissioned statutory services | OCC | OCC (not active) Voluntary sector, social enterprise and communities |
| | Operating – high demand | Operating – high demand | Limited operation - at risk |

3.10 Furthermore it was identified in the report to Executive of the 11th October that a shift in practice internally by the Council could make a valuable contribution to improving the experience of young people in West Oxfordshire. This could include being 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; raising concerns at every level over the inadequacy of mental health services in West Oxfordshire for children, young people and parents; and, creating a clear communications plan for engagement with young people which identifies how, where, when and what topics the Council will engage young people in.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 To achieve the shift and approach described at 3.8 and 3.10 it is recommended that Executive approves:

4.1.1 To recruit a dedicated Youth Development officer on a full time basis for 2 years. This role would be sufficiently senior to be able to influence and negotiate with external partners, tackle barriers and recognise and implement appropriate solutions. It will add additional resource to the sector at a time when resources are very limited and stretched. The role would:

- work to tackle the barriers faced by young people as expressed in the Youth Needs Assessment including cost of activity, access to services, isolation and range of provision;
- work externally to grow and develop the offer from local providers, tackle the rural deficit and test new activities to broaden the offer and its distribution;
- work internally in the Council to support and guide officers and members to enable greater youth engagement;

- engage with young people directly;
- link closely with OCC.

4.1.2 To approve the use of the £20,000 COMF budget allocated to youth activities to enable test and learn opportunities as developed by the postholder, which tackle the barriers faced by young people, to access activities, services and opportunities.

4.1.3 To utilise funding from the Council Priority fund to meet the shortfall when the COMF budget for a youth post (£60,000) has been applied. This is estimated at £28,000 over two years.

4.1.4 To review the effectiveness of the role after 12 months.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 The Council could decide not to recruit to a dedicated post – instead relying on OCC to deliver Youth services in isolation. This would not tackle the barriers set out by young people in the Youth Needs Assessment. Furthermore, it would not see the internal change in approach as there is no alternative specialist officer available.

5.2 The Council could decide to recruit to a part-time dedicated post and keep the level of spend within the £60,000 COMF budget allocation. This option would significantly reduce the impact and achievements possible from a full time resource.

5.3 The Council could decide not to spend the COMF funding in this way. If the COMF money is not allocated or spent by March 2024 OCC has the right to reclaim the money from the Council.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The salary costs for the new role over a 2 year period would be £88,000. There is £60,000 available from COMF leaving a shortfall of £28,000. This sum is being requested from the Council Priority fund.

6.2 A budget of £20,000 for seed funding new activities developed as a result of work by the postholder, will be drawn from external funding set aside within the revised COMF proposal.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 As noted above, the statutory duty to provide youth services falls upon the County Council, not WODC. Nevertheless, if the district council assumes responsibility for the delivery of a statutory service, if it in the future decides to cease that service, it will need to be alive to a possible legal challenge based on the failure to fulfil a legitimate expectation, which is a ground for judicial review.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 By not taking this action and making this investment the Council will not be tackling the barriers faced by young people and this could have a negative impact on their development and well-being. Additionally failing to take action to address the issues raised by young people may result in the Council being seen in a negative light by young people.

8.2 The Council does not have a statutory duty to carry out this activity and is not an expert in youth work. There is a risk that poor communication and engagement throughout with statutory services might lead to duplication, poorly designed and limited opportunities and ultimately poor outcomes for young people.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 The recommendations in this report seek to secure a Youth Development role with funding to deliver opportunities to better meet the needs of young people in West Oxfordshire. This work will be conducted in a manner which is inclusive, and which works to provide open and accessible opportunities to any young person.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The recommendations in this report seek to tackle the barriers faced by young people to access opportunities. These barriers include the cost of travel across our rural district and the location and availability of opportunities. We would encourage public transport use where available including access to community transport providers and explore solutions to address the cost barriers. Furthermore we would look to develop a greater range of opportunities which are available at more locations resulting in shorter journeys.

10.2 Through the Youth Needs Assessment young people identify that they are concerned about Climate Change and motivated to take action in this area. Tapping into this resource could be impactful and should be explored as part of this work and more generally by the Council.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None

(END)