 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2025</b>
Subject	<b>YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OFFICER UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Rachel Crouch - Executive Member for Stronger and Healthy Communities Email: <a href="mailto:rachel.crouch@westoxon.gov.uk">rachel.crouch@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Phil Martin – Director of Place Email: <a href="mailto:Phil.martin@westoxon.gov.uk">Phil.martin@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
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Summary/Purpose	The purpose of the report is to share with the Committee the progress made by the Youth Development Officer to date and set out the priorities for the role moving forwards.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to: I. Note the report
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting Residents First</li> <li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO

<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>The following groups have been engaged :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community groups providing activities for young people</li> <li>• Parish and Town Councils</li> <li>• System partners – eg Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley Police</li> <li>• Specialist youth agencies working countywide</li> <li>• Internal officers</li> <li>• Councillors</li> </ul>
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## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** This report sets out the work undertaken by the Youth Development Officer in the first phase of the role since February 2025 and goes on to set out the priorities moving forward which have been informed by this initial research and the findings of the Youth Needs Assessment 2022 (YNA).

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The role of the Youth Development Officer was created following the publication of the YNA. The report captured responses from 3,908 young people attending 7 secondary schools or colleges in West Oxfordshire. It provided a wide range of insights into the experiences of young people growing up in West Oxfordshire, and their priorities for action. The Council determined that it would prioritise funding for a dedicated role to enable some of these priorities to be taken forward. The findings of the YNA were summarised in a report to the Executive on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023
- 2.2** In the YNA young people identified the following priorities:
- Activities – were too far away, too expensive and they didn't have someone to go with
  - Mental Health - was identified by young people as the biggest area of need
  - Climate crisis – young people identified that they were concerned about the Climate emergency
  - Safety – many young people reported that they had experienced feeling unsafe in their community.
  - Safety - Violence Against Women and Girls, followed by Crime and Drugs were identified as particular concerns
  - Employment & Education and Advice/Support/Help – were also areas of concern for young people

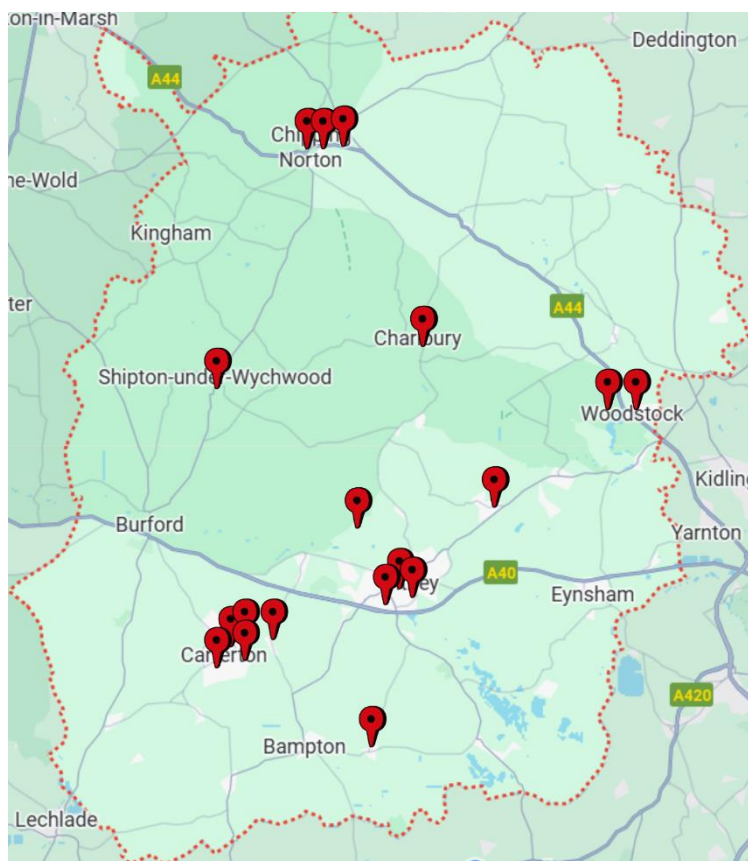
## **3. PHASE I – RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT**

- 3.1** In the first phase of the role the Youth Development Officer has undertaken research into the current provisions available to young people in the district. This research was in the main engagement with providers and partners. The engagement was directed as follows:
- Existing youth providers in the voluntary sector – e.g. youth clubs
  - Existing providers in the professional sector and youth infrastructure organisations – e.g. youth organisations/activity providers
  - Town and Parish Councils where provision appears limited or non-existent
  - System partners and statutory services – Oxfordshire County Council Targeted Youth Support and Serious Violence leads and Thames Valley Police Neighbourhood team and Schools Officer
  - Community leaders in areas with little or no provision
- 3.2** This approach enabled the Youth Development Officer to build relationships and visibility, gain an understanding of the current landscape relating to young people, hear about any historical work that may have taken place and discern what level of interest there was in exploring new possibilities.

- 3.3** This exploratory phase identified several key themes, localities where there appears to be potential for exploring new provisions, opportunities for partnerships working and creative solutions to some of the more complicated issues.
- 3.4** During this period the Youth Development Officer has met 29 community groups who offer services to young people in West Oxfordshire - 18 of these are local to West (listed below):

<b>Organisations local to the district</b>	<b>Organisations not local to the district</b>
Transition Chipping Norton	Oxfordshire Youth
Charlbury Youth Club	Cranstoun
Airplay Carterton	TOPAZ
Carterton Family Centre	Survivor Space
Chipping Norton Theatre	Hope After Harm
Aspire	Sport in MIND
Ngage Youth Club Wychwood	OCVA
The Station Witney	OPA
Ascot & Cote Youth Club	Reducing the Risk
North Leigh Youth Club	Be Free Young Carers
Carterton Community Centre	Youth Challenge Oxfordshire
The Branch Trust Chipping Norton	
Woodstock Youth Club	
Witney Junior Young Farmers	
Courtside Witney	
Against the Grain Alternative Provision	
APCAM	
West Oxon Boxing and Fitness - WOBC (Community Loft)	

- 3.5** The map below is of groups local to the district to give a sense of spread. For purposes of clarity the pins show an approximate location for the group. A small number of groups will operate across a wider geographic area and some have been found to attract young people from a wider area – eg young people travelling from Kingham to activities in Charlbury.



- 3.6** The Youth Development Officer mapped provision across the parishes of West Oxfordshire and identified 8 wards where there was little evidence found of positive activities being available for young people. These were Burford, The Bartons, Eynsham & Cassington, Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt, Bampton & Clanfield, Freeland & Hanborough, and Stonesfield & Tackley. Representatives from The Bartons, Freeland, Hanborough, Tackley & Stonesfield, and Eynsham have all been proactive in responding and engaging. Meetings have also taken place with Witney Town Council and Chipping Norton Town Council.
- 3.6.1** **The Bartons** expressed some positive engagement through uniformed and sports groups as well as a local charity work via Destiny's Fund. An introduction to Oxfordshire Youth was made as a support network for reestablishing a youth club that closed over COVID and ways to engage some young people who have been less open to taking part in existing provisions.
- 3.6.2** **Freeland, Hanborough and Stonesfield** have been eager to explore new ways of engaging with young people. With the YouMove Team, 'Have a Go Days' are being planned with activities and local community groups involved specifically designed to promote a positive experience and engaging the community and its young people in what might be sustainable in the long-term.
- 3.6.3** When initially met with, **Eynsham** were in the early stages of exploring the idea of a youth council. Cllr Rylett had held informal conversations with the school. Since then, a group of local residents have formed a community group to revive the youth centre and clubs in the

village. The Youth Development Officer has introduced them to Oxfordshire Youth who have been helping them in their preparations and formation. They have been engaging with the school and have received positive traction from the wider community. Their goal is to open in September.

**3.6.4 Tackley** asked for help around consultation and to how to reach young people and get their views regarding the development of a pump track. The officer has met with the Parish Council. They are currently finalising how much they will be able to invest in the project before taking this conversation forward.

**3.6.5** Following an introduction with the Clerk at **Chipping Norton Town Council**, a meeting with their Events Manager was arranged to discuss their concern over the loss of the LGBTQI+ group for young people which had been being run by Got2B before their closure. This demographic does not feel any of the existing provisions in the town are 'their space'. The Youth Development Officer is working on creating a partnership between the town council and TOPAZ – to develop a solution to this. TOPAZ do not currently have a presence in West Oxfordshire and this would be a very positive development.

**3.7** The Youth Development Officer has also met with 4 of the secondary schools in the district - Henry Box in Witney, Woodgreen School in Witney, Burford School, and Bartholomew School in Eynsham. These meetings were predominantly to introduce the role, discuss the YNA and hear about any challenges and opportunities faced by the schools.

- **Bartholomew School's** enrichment programme has grown since 2022 when the YNA research was undertaken. Bartholomew also provide late after school transport for students living in villages making after-school provision more available to students.
- **Henry Box School** expressed a need for more help in supporting pupils with poor mental health. They said that the OCC Targeted Youth Support Service had been very helpful and do as much as they can but felt there was still more that was required. They are interested to develop a male mentorship programme that could help support those displaying and vocalising misogynistic mindsets.
- **Woodgreen School** shared the view of Henry Box, that more could be done to support those with more complex Mental Health difficulties.
- **Burford School** did not take part in the original YNA in 2022. At this meeting it was clear that the school is keen to engage and asked if it would be helpful to conduct a survey at this stage just with their school. As there is the potential for another assessment to be done during the YDO tenure, it is our preference to encourage the school to delay and take part in the wider piece of work rather than undertake something in isolation.

**3.8** Regular communications with now in place with larger stakeholders including Thames Valley Police Neighbourhood team, Oxfordshire County Council Targeted Youth Support Service and Serious Violence Coordinator and Oxfordshire Youth.

### 3.9 Work has begun to establish internal working relationships as follows:

- Economic Development - discussing plans for working together on youth employment and business volunteering.
- Communications - positive coworking already in terms of distributing information and have begun discussions on utilising various communication platforms and strategies to raise the profile of young people.
- Climate - ongoing communications on the concept of a Youth Assembly
- Leisure – developing a broader understanding of the resources and activities available via Leisure centres for young people and those working with them.
- Partnering with YouMove to support engagement in communities and extend the reach of YouMove to teenagers.
- Community Funding – Keeping informed about funding available, signposting and making introductions where necessary.

## 4. PRIORITIES

### 4.1 Through these interactions, discussions and based on the results of the YNA, 6 thematic areas have been identified as priorities for the role:

- **Develop & Grow** – the Youth Development Officer will encourage and develop new youth provisions and activities in places where there is a shortfall and demand.
- **Sustain** – the Youth Development Officer will ensure existing provision is recognised, supported and strengthened.
- **Safety & Wellbeing** – the Youth Development Officer will encourage and develop approaches which tackle challenges around Mental Health, Anti-social behaviour and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- **Work and skills** – the Youth Development Officer will seek to highlight youth positive employers and encourage innovation and youth friendly policies to enable young people to access work.
- **Volunteering** – the Youth Development Officer will promote volunteering
- **Youth Voice** – the Youth Development Officer will engage with young people directly and develop opportunities for young people to be heard and to influence service delivery.

### 4.2 **Develop & Grow: New youth provisions in places where there is a shortfall.**

#### 4.2.1 The work to support those in the wards identified above to develop their ideas further, will continue.

#### 4.2.2 In Eynsham support will be available to the organising group as they continue to develop their governance and navigate the process of creating a new group with the support by Oxfordshire Youth. This could lead to a potential case study on how a drive for more youth provisions in a locality can be community-led and successful.

#### 4.2.3 The Have a Go Days in Stonesfield and Hanborough developed in partnership with the YouMove team will provide a launch activity from which to build more ongoing provision. The Youth Development Officer will continue to provide support and guidance to local residents who are seeking to build on these events with ongoing activities for young

people in these communities including offering support around how to engage with young people prior to the event.

- 4.2.4 In Tackley where the community is keen to hear the honest opinions of young people around the development of a pump track, the Youth Development Officer will continue to support around how to do that well.

#### **4.3 Sustain: Supporting existing work that is already taking place.**

- 4.3.1 A Youth Partnership is being established in Witney working alongside Witney Town Council and building on their summer provision coordination initiative. Facilitated by the Youth Development Officer, organisations engaged and committed to this emerging network include The Station, OCC Thames Valley Police and Witney Town Council. This partnership evolved out of the Community Safety Partnership as a response to ASB data presented showing spikes of ASB in the after-school period. Terms of Reference have been agreed for the Partnership and members are currently reviewing the local organisations they would like to invite into the group. The group is considering the possibility of expanding to those operating beyond Witney in the future once they have some experience of working together.
- 4.3.2 The Youth Development Officer will act as a conduit for existing youth service providers in the district as well as those wishing to develop provision. Some groups are operating in isolation and might benefit from access to links with others – some groups need support around training and strengthening their offer and could benefit from links to training providers or expert professional youth organisations. For some organisations the need could be financial, and the Youth Development Officer will continue to share details of funding opportunities including Westhive and the Community Activity Grants.
- 4.3.3 Overall, the Youth Development Officer will seek out any opportunities to build relationships across the sector. This will happen through informal meetings, visits to settings, potential networking events and electronic and face to face communications.

#### **4.4 Safety & Wellbeing: Incorporating Mental Health, Anti-Social Behaviour(ASB) and Violence Against Women and Girls.**

- 4.4.1 Mental Health is a key topic for young people. Since the YNA was carried out in 2022, Response have received funding to compliment the Mental Health Support Teams in schools, but this funding was short term and came to an end in March 2025. Response is seeking ways of resuming this offer but it's a challenging landscape.
- 4.4.2 A broader concept of supporting young people's mental health is being adopted that recognises the positive impact activities such as sports, the arts, being outdoors, engaging in culture, healthy eating, learning and community engagement has on an individual's mental wellbeing. With this understanding, the Youth Development Officer is seeking out existing groups demonstrating good practise of how engaging with young people, through these mediums, impacts their mental health. Examples of such groups include The Community Loft at WOBC, Transition Chipping Norton, Charlbury Youth Club and Witney Junior Young Farmers Club. The YDO will learn how they evolved and what support they need

including any ambitions they have to expand – and use the learning to inspire new developments.

**4.4.3** TVP recently formed a task and finish problem-solving group to address ASB in 2 hotspots (The Leys, Witney and The Dell, Carterton). The Youth Development Officer has been actively involved in these sessions along with The Station, OCC Targeted Youth Support Service, Witney and Carterton Town Councils, the RAF and local educational establishments. This is 12-month process where the objective is not only to reduce ASB incidents, but to also consider how to support and respond to the root causes of ASB.

**4.4.4** VAWG was a major theme identified by young people in the Youth Needs Assessment, and there were a significant number of responses relating to unwanted sexual attention in public settings. This terminology covers, but is not limited to, girls experiencing catcalling, inappropriate comments and unwanted physical contact. A Girlguiding report from 2021 states that 51% of 13-18 girls experience unwanted sexual comments in public, and a 1 in 3 girls have their first experience of unwanted attention between the ages of 11 and 13. The report summary is available [here](#). As a response to this the Youth Development Officer is developing a project proposal for a VAWG campaign.

#### **4.5 Work and skills: Youth positive employers and policies**

**4.5.1** Work is included as a theme in the YNA with a notable number of young people saying they do not see themselves living in the West as they believe there are a lack of viable employment opportunities that appeal to them. The Youth Development Officer has begun conversations with the Economic Development team. They have heard from businesses that they struggle to recruit young people.

**4.5.2** A potential response to this is working alongside these businesses to create opportunities that do attract young people, which may include a review of organisational culture, the level of educational attainment required for roles and their approach to recruitment and employee wellbeing. The Youth Development Officer is actively seeking out employers where this is working well.

**4.5.3** The Youth Development Officer is seeking out and promoting emerging training and development opportunities such as Drone City, a new social enterprise lead by a local youth leader, that promotes opportunities and training paths into new technologies such as AI, drones and STEM. Also exploring how WODC can support successful existing programmes, such as Aspires Employability programme in partnership with Midcounties Coop.

#### **4.6 Volunteering: Promoting taking part**

**4.6.1** Volunteering has been a common barrier being faced by many who currently deliver activities as well as those wishing to start. In recent years, the number of volunteers has dropped (although there are no exact figures available across the VCS) and recruitment and retainment of new volunteers is proving problematic for all. Some countywide provisions such as TOPAZ cannot deploy in West Oxfordshire unless volunteers can be found.

- 4.6.2** The Youth Development Worker will work with OCVA to explore responses to this. In Witney a volunteer fair is already being considered via the Witney Forum and a similar event was recently discussed at a meeting with the Chippy Creative networking group. Volunteer fairs are only one approach being considered.
- 4.6.3** The Youth Development Officer is also working with Economic Development to understand how businesses implement their Social Responsibility and look at creating a plan to engage with them further.
- 4.7 Youth Voice: Amplifying the voice of young people**
- 4.7.1** The YNA highlighted that young people wish to be heard more and for their words to lead to noticeable actions. The importance of youth voice is paramount in youth work theory and practice.
- 4.7.2** In conversations with those communities looking to develop new engagement, the Youth Development Officer is actively encouraging and offering methods of youth voice they can implement in their planning.
- 4.7.3** Young people are concerned about the Climate Emergency. Discussions with the Climate Team have begun. The proposal for a Youth Assembly originally brought forward by Cllr Pearson in 2023 is being further explored.
- 4.7.4** Youth councils have been formed in Witney and Charlbury through their local councils. The development of youth councils is being explored in North Leigh and Eynsham. The Youth Development Officer will continue to communicate regularly with councils at various stages of development to ensure a good understanding of progress and in order that support can be offered if required.

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 5.1** The proposals set out above are based on research and insights. As new insights emerge these will be considered carefully in the context of the current plan and new actions introduced where this is appropriate and manageable.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1** There are no financial implication arising from this report.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **8. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1** This report is for information only.

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 9.1** This report is for information only.

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

- 10.1** This report is for information only and young people are concerned about the Climate emergency and wish to see action taken. The hope is that further ways to engage young people in being active around tackling the Climate emergency can be explored with the help and guidance of the Climate team.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1** None.  
(END)