

Councillors Briefing Note

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Service : *Children's Services*

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Members briefing – Review of positive leisure-time activities for young people

Introduction

A report, which considered current open access youth services and activities, was reviewed by cabinet last week (21 January). The report set out options for ensuring sustainable provision for the future which reflects the modern lives and needs of young people while encouraging more of them to access activities within their local communities. Cabinet members agreed to a wide ranging public consultation on the options and specifically requested that young people have the opportunity to have their say. The consultation will start with council youth service staff this week (Friday 31 January), followed by a full consultation process throughout February.

As the report set out options which could impact on staff it was discussed as an exempt paper and in keeping with human resource guidelines the content of the cabinet report was intended to be shared at the members briefing scheduled for next Tuesday (4 February) on the rise of the full council meeting and following the meeting with staff who are potentially affected (31 January). However, yesterday (Tuesday 28 January) the union UNITE (regionally) issued an unexpected press release that contained exempt information and did not set out the context or options that will form the consultation. Given the media interest we thought it would be helpful to provide a briefing note ahead of next week.

Why does the service need a review?

As a local authority, Wiltshire Council has a statutory duty to secure for young people aged 13-19^[1] access to sufficient positive leisure-time activities to improve their well-being. For more than ten years, Wiltshire Council, and the former county and district councils, met this requirement through the provision of an open access development service for young people. The youth work team of the Integrated Youth Service currently operates across the county, offering a mix of centre and street-based youth work with an annual budget of £1.3m.

In the ten years since the service was first established the lives of young people have changed considerably. The rapid expansion of home entertainment, the growth in the number of commercial leisure providers, and the launch of smart technology combined with the phenomenon of social networking means young people are growing up in changing social environments and living very different lives. The council recognises that it needs to

^[1] Up to age 24 for young people with a learning difficulty.
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respond to these changes and consider the most appropriate approach to meet young people's needs. Feedback from prior consultation with young people reveals that;

- They want to have a greater influence about services which affect them;
- They value sport and leisure based activities;
- They want positive leisure-time activities to be decided locally; and
- They want community campuses to include suitable space for them.

At present, approximately 8 percent of the 13-19 population access the council's youth work provision.^[2] Many young people are likely to be engaged in a vast array of other activities offered by voluntary, community and private sector providers. Based on this the council needs to reflect on the future provision of positive leisure-time activities – recognising the valuable contribution of the voluntary and community sector – as well as considering how it positively engages with young people given the change in their lifestyles.

The council also recognises the need to consider changes to government youth policy. In 2012, the Department for Education set out a new approach called Positive for Youth, which included updated statutory guidance on services and activities to improve young people's well-being. Local authorities were reminded of their responsibility to continue to support young people, especially those who are more vulnerable, to engage positively in their communities and make a successful transition to adulthood. The government also defined a new role for councils to shift their role to be an enabler of services, rather than a direct provider, with an enhanced role for the voluntary and community sector.

This approach aligns with the principles of the Localism Act, which shifts power and control from local authorities and public sector providers into the hands of local communities and individuals. This also reflects the council's vision; to create stronger and more resilient communities by encouraging and supporting local communities to do more for themselves and, as a consequence, become less reliant on decreasing public sector resources.

Since becoming a unitary council in 2009, Wiltshire Council has adopted a radical and forward thinking approach to delivering its vision and services. A major programme of transformation will deliver significant savings and improved public services through the development of 18 community campuses. The campuses, designed by communities, will provide the services they want and need, in a location they consider best for their community and run by communities. The campuses will provide modern, sustainable, fit for purpose facilities, offering co-located services including libraries, leisure, police, health and community services. The first campus will open in Corsham in June 2014. The campuses offer new opportunities for local communities, including the younger generation, to participate and get involved in a range of services, activities and local decisions that affect them.

The council also needs to manage unprecedented financial challenges by balancing the growing demand for services against the reduction in funding from central government. This will mean the need to make decisions to reduce spending over the next four years (£120 million). In February 2013, the council agreed to reduce spending across the Integrated Youth Service by £250,000 per annum, based on the changes as highlighted above. It is proposed to reduce spending in next year's budget (2014/15) in the youth service by £500,000 per annum. The budget will be considered by full council on 25 February.

Next steps

Cabinet members agreed to progress with a full consultation process on all four options that were proposed in the report. All members stressed the importance that young people, staff and other key partners and stakeholders are consulted. A provisional recommendation to

^[2] Represents 3585 individuals covering the period 01/04/2013 to 30/09/2013.
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develop a community led approach was discussed but no decision will be made on a future option until consultation has taken place on all four options.

The four options are;

1. **Retain the current in-house service but reduce the value** – a number of options would be considered to make the required savings and deliver a service that meets the needs of young people in local community areas.
2. **Outsource the service** - this option would involve developing a new service specification for the provision of positive leisure-time activities; shaped by key stakeholders, including young people based on the resources available.
3. **Encourage and support staff to form a Public Service Mutual (PSM)** - A mutual can deliver a public service involving a high degree of employee control. It can operate for profit, not for profit, charity, social enterprise and community interest company.
4. **Develop a community led approach** - empower communities via community area boards, with funding from the council, to develop and make available positive leisure-time youth activities within their local area.

Option 4 - the community led approach includes a proposal to increase resource to strengthen local safeguarding arrangements by providing more early help to the most vulnerable young people.

The council takes its Public Sector Equality Duty seriously and will continue to assess the equality issues and impacts of each of the options as part of the decision making process. Plans for consultation are detailed within the cabinet report and alternative proposals will be welcomed during the process.

A briefing for members will be held following full council on Tuesday 4 February, and the full report will be published on the council's website on Monday 3 February.

Briefing ends.

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