

Public Participation

New operating model for open access youth service (review of positive leisure-time activities for young people)

**Question from Rosie Spencer Russell & Responses from
Councillor Laura Mayes, Cabinet member for Children's Services**

Question

*At the first consultation, in Trowbridge on the 10th of February, I specifically made a point of asking whether there would be youth services available locally until the new campus is accessible. Jane Scott herself responded to this by stating that the current youth service will definitely be available until alternatives are ready. We have video evidence to confirm this point. It has now been made clear to us that you intend to close the current youth services by the end of September. This statement is clearly contradicting the earlier assurance. The campus is not scheduled to be complete until at least the end of 2015. How do you propose to uphold the promise you have made to young people, to keep youth services open, when the campus will not be completed until many months after youth services close?

*At both the consultation in Trowbridge and the area board meeting on the 13th of March, we as young people made it clear that the one aspect of the youth service we did not want to be changed was the presence of professional, paid youth workers. The option you have chosen states there will only be one worker per area and these roles will not be youth workers. You have said that you wanted young people involved in these decisions; however you have ignored the feedback from both us and the area board. Why have you decided to implement this option when we, the young people were meant to be involved; but everything we have requested has not been taken into account?

In the surveys you made available to the young people and other members of the public there was no 'other' option, how do you suppose that anyone would be happy with decisions you have implemented when you tried your very hardest to not give us the opportunity to offer our own suggestions?

Have you considered the emotional damage that may occur to the young people; not as a whole but on an individual level to those who use these youth services currently when they are removed? If so how do propose compensate this damage without the presence youth workers and the current model of youth service that exists today?

The areas currently used for youth centres allow young musicians the space to rehearse, with equipment for a very cheap price as little as one pound a session. With the campus not due to be open until late 2015 at the earliest, and the current youth centres being closed/moved where do you propose that these young people can further their musical talents in an environment as cheap and as encouraging as the places such as Grosvenor House?

Response

Ms Russell has raised a number of issues regarding the proposals to Cabinet including the provision of services to young people, the need for professionally trained staff, the use of buildings as youth centres, and the special need for young musicians to rehearse.

Although the proposal presented to Cabinet does not propose that the current service should remain unchanged, the recommendations are designed to ensure that all young people will have access to a varied and innovative range of activities, shaped by them and their communities. Each area will have a well trained and named community youth officer to co-ordinate and facilitate these services. Each area board will have a budget to spend on youth services that will be guided by a new body to be called a Local Youth Network in which young people will have a leading voice.

In addition to the community youth officers, a number of specialist youth workers will ensure that those who are vulnerable will also get the right help when they need it to enable them to tackle problems before they reach crisis point, meaning they are more likely to achieve positive outcomes.

These proposals reflect the results of the recent consultation in which a community-led model was the most popular option with young people. It also responds to the fact that young people said they valued contact with a named professional person and wanted access to a wider range of activities. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to meet all the wishes of those who responded to the consultation but I believe the proposals are a fair compromise.

With regard to youth centres, the Full Council Amendment agreed on 25 February requires an audit of all properties which have been used to deliver youth work in order to yield some savings in advance of any campuses being established which can be put into the wider youth work budget. This and other measures have reduced the savings required from the overall youth budget by £250,000. The amendment modified the position that the council had previously taken, to which Jane Scott had referred in her comments earlier in February.

The audit is likely to result in some buildings closing in some areas where the cost of running them is disproportionate. Where this occurs, the council is committed to

ensuring that viable and local alternative premises can be used. This alternative might be in other council buildings or could involve community or voluntary sector facilities. In any event, the council is committed to open communication in each area to ensure that key stakeholders, including young people, are fully engaged with the issues.

It is too soon to know if Grosvenor House might be recommended for closure before Base Connection moves into the new Salisbury Campus. If such a recommendation is made, the area board may chose to retain the building using the funds available to it. Alternatively, other premises may become available in the area so that important youth activities can continue.