

Youth Services in Bradford on Avon

Rejuvenation and refocus

Cllr. D. Newton, Bradford on Avon Town Council

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Introduction

Bradford on Avon is almost the only town in Wiltshire to have retained a Youth Centre and level of publicly funded youth services, following the decision by Wiltshire Council to withdraw the majority of funding for Youth Services in 2014, with the centre formally reopening under a five lease to the Town Council in early 2015.

The Youth and Community Centre has since been the base for the Bradford on Avon Youth Club, with the former funded by the Town Council and the latter by the Col. William Llewellyn Palmer Trust (now transferred to Town Council control).

The Youth Club has, since 2016, encountered considerable challenges. Run by a management committee that has now ceased to exist, Youth Action Wiltshire (YAW) have stated that they will only continue to provide volunteers to the Club for one further year, to allow the Town Council time to reconstitute a management committee and find further local volunteers.

The aim of this strategy paper is to propose a significant rethinking of Youth Services in Bradford on Avon: to provide children and young people in the town with an innovative service, based on people and provision, and one which will provide them with the means to have an effective voice in its future—and develop their voice in the civil society of the town itself.

Current status

The Youth Club itself currently serves up to 20 young people in any one session, although the number is more usually in single figures. It is staffed by one YAW youth worker, and a volunteer helper who is undertaking qualifications as a youth worker.

Councillors were made aware in June 2017 that there was a range of issues in respect of the Youth Club provision at the Youth and Community Centre: concerns flagged variously over the following months have ranged from anti-social behaviour, sexualised behaviour, and substance misuse, including several occasions where the Police were called or threatened to be called by YAW due to a risk of harm to young people attending the service, or property.

Anecdotally, several of the regular attendees are believed to be from outside of the Town, including those whose behaviour has caused issues, and, as a club, the behaviour has been characterised as a

clique or 'gang', with reports from others in the community that other young people are either afraid to participate in the club, or their parents do not wish them to do so.

Several meetings have been held and four Councillors have attended the Youth Club on several occasions, with one raising safeguarding concerns. Cumulatively, these discussions led to a Youth Services strategy meeting on August 10th 2017 consisting of:

- Bradford on Avon Town Councillors (DN, DT, JP);
- Bradford on Avon Town Council employees (SB and SH);
- Youth Action Wiltshire (Manager and Youth Club Volunteer);
- BOA Community Church representatives;
- Wiltshire Council Local Youth Network Local Youth Facilitator (ED).

During this meeting, a history of the provision was recapitulated, and a brief audit of other provision in the town was undertaken (informally). The clear outcome from that meeting is that there is no strategic plan for youth services—while St Laurence School was providing a part-time Youth Worker through a local church, and further limited provision provided by one church and one café in the town, no overarching planning or co-ordination was undertaken.

Youth Action Wiltshire also noted that they were willing to continue running the provision for a further 12-months on the basis that a management committee was re-formed. Councillors took the view that, instead, a subset of the Community and Recreation Committee, including non-Councillor members (yet to be confirmed) would be likely to form a steering committee for Youth Services more generally.

As it stands, the Youth Club itself is not sustainable, nor is it desirable that it continues in its current form. Given this is the primary purpose of the building, it calls into question the purpose of retaining the building. The current budget for the building and youth club comes in at around £15,000 per year (variable depending on other bookings), including a £10,000 grant from the CWLPEC. This money is currently not delivering best value or good outcomes for the young people involved, those who could be served by better provision, or the wider town.

Additionally, the Centre lease runs until 2020, meaning that a clear plan, both for subsequent service provision, and use of the site, needs to be considered now in order to provide a level of service continuity and, if possible, improvement.

However, there continues to be an identified need for youth services in the town. The question is therefore one of how best to provide reinvigorated and better youth provision.

Establishing a need

Intuitively, the town needs Youth Provision. The previous Town Council administration took the decision to save the Youth and Community Centre for good reasons, if without a strong plan for service delivery.

While it is true that many young people in the town access other types of provision—sport or music for example—many others do not, or would welcome other types of support. A safe environment for young people outside of home or statutory provision is both welcome and necessary, helping with risk factors around health and well-being, self-image and confidence.

In the longer-term, treating children and young people as part of the town’s society is a way of ensuring that they feel like valued members of that society—and that they participate in other aspects of the town’s life.

On the other side, as a Town Council we are getting an increasing number of reports of anti-social behaviour, much of which is ascribed to young people—providing alternative activities is a way of starting to address that. Further, youth provision can include detached work, away from a particular venue, where workers approach and work with young people at risk from, or at risk of perpetrating anti-social behaviour. This could also include targeted work with referrals from other agencies, including schools and youth justice—a model that was common up until 2010.

Recommendations

1. More, not less

The purpose of this paper is therefore not to argue for the closure of youth provision in the town; quite the opposite. An effective youth service is at the heart of both engaging young people in the civil society of the town, and reducing the risks of anti-social behaviour as a preventative service.

An initial meeting has been held with one potential provider, Action for Children, that agreed to provide indicative costings for a small youth provision, taking account of the circumstances outlined.

	2018-19
Staffing	£29,115
Other staffing costs	£3,490
Premises	£581
Equipment	£2,137
Communication	£790
Service User Activity	£2,000
Payments to Partners	£-
Support costs	£4,235
Total	£42,348

This is clearly a substantial uplift on the current planned spend. However, it is also a step-change in the level of provision, and one that will provide a substantial service and indication of intent.

The scope of the provision could also be significantly enhanced: we know that Bradford on Avon attracts young people from the surrounding towns and villages. Approaching other parish and community councils, in particular Holt and Winsley, and the local Area Board to offer elements of a youth service in those locations too.

In addition, grant-funding could be sought from elsewhere, and commissioning a service from Action for Children or another youth services provider in the Charity sector would bring with it the opportunity to supplement through local fundraising and an existing supporter network.

Recommendation: The Town Council should issue a Request For Proposals from service providers to design and operate a youth service in the town and surrounding area, and seek to work with

the Area Board and other local Parish Councils to fund that service. This will be conducted in line with BOATC procurement policies.

The service specification should include:

- Staffing of up to 3 part-time staff;
- Targeted (referred) youth work;
- Detached youth-work;
- Planned and open-access youth provision in a variety of locations;
- Strategic engagement and co-ordination with other providers and activities in the area, including sports and arts groups to maximise the community input into the service;
- Design and delivery of participation services to enable and embed citizenship and community engagement at a young age;
- Open to all children from age 10-16 (Year 6–Year 11) within the defined area, to include age-appropriate activities for each age-group;
- Appropriate policies and insurances.

2. Living and working

In addition to providing a Youth Service, providing young people with meaningful opportunities within the town is critical to their feeling part of society and engaging with it. The idea that a young person can work and live independently in the town is, at present, not anywhere close to the reality for the great majority.

Our aspiration must be that young people can live in the town, outside of their family home, and that they can earn enough to enable them to do so. The reality is that this will not be achieved if left to the market.

The Town Council can provide leadership by example, in ensuring that Apprenticeship opportunities are created across a variety of areas, including tourism, events, retail and town management, and that our Apprentices are paid a living wage. It should also engage with the larger employers in the Town to encourage similar opportunities, leading to permanent work where possible.

On housing, we should acquire and redevelop a site or sites, and create an appropriate legal vehicle to allow affordable rental accommodation to be maintained in the town in the long-term, specifically aimed at 18-30 year olds who have been raised and educated in the town (within the non-private sector). This should take account of existing and potential future assets in use by or available to the Town Council.

Recommendation:

The Town Council should:

- Identify and acquire an appropriate site or sites in the town;
- Identify or establish an appropriate legal vehicle to undertake and own the redevelopment, perhaps including community co-operative element;
- Develop a limited number of dwellings on the site, considered as a mix of 1 and 2-bed properties, probably apartments, including parking and shared amenity space;
- In addition, retain community space on the ground floor for use by youth workers and other local groups;
- Leases on the apartments would be limited to young people between 18-30 who have completed the majority of their secondary schooling in state-school provision while residing in the town, to enable them to maintain employment in the local area. Leases would run until the age of 30 (or until a significant breach occurs);

- **The site and properties should be owned by a social enterprise that is not housing association, to ensure that the property remains available for future use (i.e. is not subject to the Right to Buy)—in essence a private, philanthropic body.**

An outline viability of this proposal is currently being prepared and will need to be considered carefully. But there are plenty of examples of successful community-built housing schemes across the country that are delivering similar opportunities, and from which we can take our cue.

If we can get this right, it may set a template for further interventions to help our young people stay in the community, instead of being forced to move away simply because they can't afford to stay. And implicit in our considerations is the expectation that the development should make a contribution to the revenue costs of our proposed new youth service provision. Of course, all of this must be caveated with the need to work within existing regulations and within strong and prudential financial limits.

Moving forward

As a Town Council these linked proposals will mark a major and innovative change in youth provision in the town—and make us one of the few public authorities seeking to put our young people at the very centre of our policy-making.

They are also a starting point.

Further steps should include establishment of a Youth Council, building on the participation services funded under Section 1, to enable young people to take an active role in decision making, and embed the habit of engagement.

If Section 2 proves successful, an expansion of that model into other areas transferring into BOATC control should be considered—potentially on a blended lease or purchase model.

We have the chance to take a huge and exciting step in this area—to start to build for the future.