

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

21 September 2023

Youth Provision and Area Youth Board Funding Task Group – Draft Report

Purpose of the report

1. To present the findings and recommendations from the task group review of Wiltshire's delivery of youth provision through the Area Board community-led model.

Background

2. The Children's Select Committee proposed the setting up of the task group to review how the youth grants were being used and whether they provided a consistent offer for young people across the 18 Area Boards. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed the Youth Provision and Area Board youth funding task group on 17 March 2020. The task group was put on hold because of Covid but remained on the Forward Work Plan and initiated in April 2023.

Terms of reference

3. Wiltshire Council has taken a community-led approach to meeting its statutory duty to youth provision. Each Area Board has a responsibility to support youth activities in their area through partnership working with local organisations, supported by a youth grant system. The remit of the task group was to review:
 - a) How the Council utilises the Area Board youth funding.
 - b) How the Council assures itself that it is meeting its duties with regards to youth service provision.
 - c) How the Council ensures that young people are aware of what youth provision is on offer.

The committee had further aspirations for the Task Group, which were,

- To identify best practice to better deliver youth work within the budget the Council has.
- To explore the smartest way of using the Area Board Youth Funding.
- To reinforce consistency across the 18 area boards in terms of allocating youth funding and confirming that the eligibility criteria reviewed last year remains fit for purpose and can be applied appropriately.

Methodology

4. The task group comprised the following membership:

Cllr Jo Trigg (Chair)
Cllr Helen Belcher
Cllr Jack Oatley
Cllr Mark Verbinnen
Cllr Iain Wallis

5. The task group met on seven occasions:

26 April 2023	Scoping meeting
17 May 2023	Meeting with officers, cabinet member and portfolio holder to review how the Council utilises Area Board youth funding.
7 June 2023	Meeting with officers and portfolio holder to review how the Council assures itself that it's meeting its duties with regards to youth service provision.
8 June 2023	Meeting with Youth Partnership – providers of youth services in the county.
28 June 2023	Meeting with officers and portfolio holder to review how the Council ensures that young people are aware of what youth provision is on offer.
5 July 2023	Attended Youth Council to talk to members about the involvement of young people in decision-making, barriers to participation in activities and preferences for finding out about local activities.
26 July 2023	Meeting of task group to review findings and agree report and recommendations.

Evidence

Meeting the statutory duties with regards to youth provision

6. Section 507B of the Education Act 1996, (amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006) requires that every local authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure for qualifying young persons* in the authority's area access to sufficient educational and recreational activities** (also referred to as positive leisure-time activities) which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities.

**Qualifying young person's" are those aged 13-19, and up to 24 for young people with a learning difficulty.*

***Sufficient educational leisure-time activities" and "sufficient facilities for such activities" must include those which are for the improvement of young people's personal and social development.*

7. The duty for local authorities is broad. The Council sought legal advice (Appendix B) to provide reassurance that the framework outlined in the Area Board Youth Engagement Strategy (Appendix A) would meet the statutory duties on youth provision.
8. There is an expectation that councils will involve young people. According to the 2012 statutory guidance, 'local authorities must take steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions about services and activities for them'.
9. Councils are required to take the strategic lead for coordinating the overall local youth offer of all available youth work and activities for young people. Effective partnerships should also be developed with other providers and community partners to plan and deliver activities. The National Youth Agency (NYA) states *'local authorities need to ensure that planning is not undertaken in isolation from other agencies and services to ensure access, resources and accountability for shared outcomes and collective impact for young people by bringing together public, private, voluntary and community sectors to secure youth services.'*
10. There is no requirement on local authorities to report on how they are meeting the statutory duties on youth provision. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) recommends that local authorities seek advice from the National Youth Agency (NYA) on good practice in youth provision. The Council has been in contact informally with the NYA and is aware of the possibility of inviting the NYA to carry out an audit.
11. The Council does not currently carry out a formal self-assessment on youth provision in the county and whether it is meeting the needs of young people. Officers reported activity over the past 12 months has increased the focus on youth activities, to ensure going forward there is a cohesive approach to services for young people. Officers also link in external providers of youth services partnership, to improve awareness of Council thinking and initiatives relating to young people.

Future Statutory Guidance

12. Following a consultation in 2019, the DCMS advises it will be publishing new guidance for Local Authorities in 2023 but this will be 'an update to the guidance only', all Councils will retain their current statutory duty to provide 'sufficient youth services.'

13. The National Youth Agency (NYA) advises that the new DCMS guidance will be much more explicit about the steps and actions councils should consider when developing its youth provision offer.
14. According to NYA, the expectation in the guidance is that each Council will undertake 1) a needs analysis, mapping existing provision as a baseline. The next step would be 2) to publish an annual plan which states the gaps between the needs and current provision and the steps the council will take to meet the needs of 13–19-year-olds and young people with learning disabilities up to the age of 24.

Area Boards youth grants – identifying need

15. The Area Board Youth Engagement Strategy sets out how Area Boards should develop their youth funding investment approach. It details three key mechanisms to enable Area Boards to understand the needs of young people, which are listed below.
 - A local youth working group in each of the 18 community areas. These are not necessarily led by the Area Board, but they must be key partners. Ideally, they support the Area Boards to create strong community links to inform their priorities.
 - A ‘positive activities’ needs assessment. This is undertaken through an online youth survey every 2 years to identify the kind of activities young people would like to see in their area.
 - At least one direct engagement event with young people per annum per area board.
16. Officers provided a breakdown of youth focused activity by area board from the last two years, 2021-2023 (Appendix C).
17. The breakdown showed that ten area boards work with Local Youth Networks (LYNs), in some areas these are called youth forums. Two area boards work with partner led LYNs or forums. Six area boards are operating without a LYN or Youth Forum.
18. The last youth survey, carried out in 2021, had 4874 responses in total. Responses varied from none in two areas to 575 being the largest response. Schools have a pivotal role in engaging young people to complete the survey, so where area boards don’t have an effective partnership with local secondary schools, they will struggle to get a good response to the survey. Most would have too small a response to be able to rely on the survey results alone to inform the priorities for young people in their area.

19. Area boards have adopted different approaches to delivering a direct engagement event. An effective approach has been to hold LYN meetings in schools. There are plans in several areas to hold youth themed area board meetings in 2023. Some areas have commissioned outreach projects to engage with young people in their area.
20. Innovative approaches highlighted by officers, included Malmesbury Area Board's effective partnership working, leading to joint projects with partners and strong links with the school supporting school-based engagement with young people. Salisbury Area Board has a roving youth panel and is focused on identifying gaps in provision. It is working with a wide range of partners including Salisbury City Council.
21. When making comparisons between the area boards, the task group recognised the variances in the profiles of area boards and the different challenges they face in meeting their remit to support youth provision.
22. As stated above, the community-led model depends on the Area Board having effective communication and partnerships with the local communities and providers. This presents a particular challenge in areas where these community resources are limited.
23. One response to this challenge has been the Rural Outreach Project where five Area Boards agreed to procure a youth provider to deliver engagement and activities for young people across their community areas. They all faced similar circumstances with limited existing community-led activities and young people isolated with little or no access to transport. As well as providing direct delivery the project aims to have a longer lasting impact and is tasked to strengthen links with rural communities and identify potential future provision.
24. Some Area Boards continue to face these challenges. They may struggle to engage with local partners such as schools or lack experience in community capacity building. Furthermore, they may not see it as their role to proactively develop provision for young people. The Strategic Engagement and Partnership Managers have a key role in supporting Area Boards to maintain community links and kick start projects to fill a gap in provision.

Area Board Youth Grants – Distribution of Funding

25. The current annual budget for Area Board Youth Funding is approximately £350,000 which is divided proportionately (with more populated areas receiving larger grants) between the 18 Area Boards to distribute as grants.
26. The Council publishes an annual summary of how this money is invested in the county. In 2021/22, for example, £326,955 was awarded to 122 projects. The

average grant was £2680 and the total value of the projects (i.e., including matched funding) totalled £766,169.

27. The annual summary doesn't illustrate the disparity in funding in different areas, with some Area Boards fully committing their budget while others are not spending their allocated budget. An underspend of £105,479 in the 2022/23 financial year was noted by the task group. One significant factor given for the underspend was the level of engagement undertaken by an Area Board. Area Boards with no LYN, or equivalent group, tend to allocate less funding for youth activities as evidenced in the Area Board Youth Data (Appendix C). In addition, different boards had different interpretations of funding criteria and some Area Boards are stricter in applying it.
28. The task group queried whether investment in youth activities needed to be restricted to the age-range of statutory duty, 13-19 years (or up to 25 years for projects involving young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability). Informally, most Area Boards do apply some discretion and approve applications for funding for activities that would include a younger age group if most beneficiaries fell within the statutory age-range.
29. Proposals from officers and the executive were considered regarding diverting some of the funding currently allocated to youth grants to a younger age range or to resource a post dedicated to identifying opportunities for external funding and partnership bids, although it was thought there may be existing resources to cover this role.
30. The task group queried whether there could be more value in having greater flexibility in funding arrangements, for example, allowing larger organisations to bid for larger amounts and possibly to allow bids that cover core costs as well as one-off project costs. In response, it was confirmed that work had started to meet the needs of providers covering much of the provision in their community area and/or delivering activities over more than one community area. A Grant Assessment Panel had been introduced in 2022 to consider application for covering a third grant (the current guidelines state a maximum of 2 grants per organisation per financial year) or for work across multiple areas.
31. While the Council is cautious of having some providers dominate funding, some consideration had already been given to amending guidance and funding criteria to give Area Boards autonomy to continue funding activity the board views to be useful.
32. The task group has observed that the catchment area for providers does not always fall within the Council's defined community areas, which could prove a barrier for making an application.

Area Board Youth Grants – Measuring Impact

33. There is a framework in place to measure; the volume of funding; the leverage on funding investments; outcomes as fed back through the annual grant funding survey of grant recipients; youth working group meetings; and the number of youth engagements delivered.
34. The Council can record and analyse the profile of beneficiaries to assess the extent to which they are representative of the general population.
35. The Council recorded that 9,345 young people took part in activities funded by Area Boards in 2021/22. Grant recipients were asked to report 'the number of individual young people who took part or benefitted from the outcome of your project.'
36. While data is available to analyse the activities funded by the Area Board, the task group questioned the data available to assess whether Area Boards were meeting need and understanding the gaps in provision. The response was that Area Boards need to rely on data obtained through their work with partners which could be both quantitative and qualitative.

Area Board Youth Grants – Feedback from Stakeholders

37. In 2020, Wiltshire Community Foundation (WCF) developed the Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Work Network, as they recognised there was a gap in connectivity across Wiltshire's youth sector.
38. What began as an informal network offering peer support and information sharing has developed into an effective partnership, that provides a co-ordinated framework for professional development and collaboration. As well as regular meetings for members, the group advocate for the sector, carry out research and support a network of youth providers big and small. The partnership is ambitious and wants to develop quality standards and be a voice for the sector. The Wiltshire Youth Partnership is developing national links and is working collaboratively with the Young People's Foundation on capacity building.
39. The task group met with 9 members of the youth partnership, all representatives were from organisations who were providing activities for young people and many of whom had experience of applying for funding from area boards and, in the case of Youth Action Wiltshire, supported small, volunteer-led groups who were looking for funding.
40. Providers fed back that the current system helped local groups and had been instrumental in supporting some youth clubs to start and develop. It works well when organisations build good relations with elected members who appreciate and support the work of their charity. In return, it also helps elected members to understand what is happening in their area. It can underpin the work of an organisation when there is little funding available for open access youth work.

41. Members of the partnership felt that there were definite areas for improvement with the current system. Key issues were a) only being able to apply for 2 Area Board grants; b) needing to go to multiple Area Boards when projects crossed Area Board 'boundaries'; c) funding being available for projects but not running costs; d) smaller groups having limited resources to engage with the Area Boards and secure match funding.
42. Suggested improvements from network members included the introduction of a tiered grant system, which would maintain the existing project grants for small, local organisations and then add a tier for larger organisations, covering bigger areas and delivering a substantial proportion of youth provision in their area.
43. The partnership suggested a further tier of funding, alongside the Council taking a more strategic role. If the Council invested in infrastructure, for example in training and development of the youth sector, it would support the partnership to develop a coherent voice for the youth sector in the county. This would enable them to make effective consortium bids for youth funding in Wiltshire that are currently being missed.
44. Partnership members welcomed the increase in collaboration between the Council and providers. They wanted support and recognition rather than direction. As providers, they are the ones working directly with young people, and they do not want 'a council resource to tell us what the priorities are.'
45. They would welcome more flexibility to allow funds to be diverted to areas where funding was needed. At a time of funding shortage and increasing need, it was frustrating for them to learn that there was an underspend in the youth budget.

Area Boards and Youth services provided by the Council

46. The task group wanted to understand the connection between the services provided to young people by the Council and the remit of Area Boards to support youth provision in their areas.
47. Presentations were received from Young People's Services (including Youth Justice, Stronger Families and Emerald Child Exploitation), the Post-16 Participation Team, providing support around employment and training and the Families and Children Transformation (FACT) project.
48. The focus of Council directly delivered services for young people is targeted rather than a universal offer, this is facilitated via the Area Board model. The teams responsible for targeted work with young people, work with community partners and value being able to refer young people to community youth provision.

49. The experience of the Council teams was that the presence of community-based youth providers was variable across geographic gaps.
50. While some community partners were well known within the Council, there was uncertainty about where to find information or advice about community organisations working with young people. This lack of clarity around who to approach for information could be partly explained by a staff restructure and role change from Community Engagement Managers to the introduction of the Strategic Engagement and Partnership Managers.

Communication with Area Boards in the delivery of Council services for young people

51. Some of the Council services for young people had made a connection with an Area Board. There was an example of targeted work to reduce anti-social behaviour delivered in-house and in liaison with the Area Board in Devizes.
52. This project was more of an exception than standard practice and there may be the potential for Council teams to engage more with Area Boards and use them as a resource. They have strong connections with town and parish councils as well as community organisations and their support could be used to resolve community issues.

Meeting the Duty to ensure young people are aware of the provision on offer.

53. In the community-led model, it is seen as a responsibility of the Area Boards to make sure that young people are informed of activities and opportunities through their local youth networks (or equivalent), via youth providers and via schools.
54. The task group reflected that there is a weakness to the approach of relying on Area Boards to disseminate information to young people when some Area Boards do not have good community links. As stated previously there are currently areas where there is not an established network, which may reduce awareness or take-up of youth activities in those areas.
55. Centrally, the Council uses the following communication methods; social media, a resident newsletter which people can sign up to receive, schools' newsletters and the website. These are not really aimed at promoting individual activities but could increase general awareness of the Area Board funding.
56. It was acknowledged that consideration needed to be given to different age groups when promoting activities for young people. It was likely that schools, parents, and carers would be sources of information for young people up to 16. For the 16–19-year-old group, with the exception of targeted communication on employment or training, there was no specific approach being taken.

57. According to statutory guidance, local authorities have a responsibility to 'publicise effectively to young people and their families the overall local offer of all services and activities available to young people locally'. The NYA adds further detail, 'to fulfil the statutory duty all local authorities should produce a clear index of current open access provisions across local authority, voluntary, community and private sector providers.' While there is a published local offer for young people with SEND, there is currently no central source of information on general youth provision in Wiltshire.
58. The task group were interested to learn about the work being undertaken by FACT to create a webpage for families. It is a subsite on an existing website, Wiltshire Together [Wiltshire Together - Wiltshire Together](#) . Its development has been informed with input from the FACT community forum and consultation with families who have been very clear that they want a single platform. Information is going to be migrated to the new platform so that it will be extensively populated at launch. As many community partners already use Wiltshire Together, there is potential for promoting activities through this route.
59. The task group understood the logic of having a dedicated website, noting that it is not easy to find information on the main Council website. There were some doubts, however, about the public awareness of Wiltshire Together. They were assured that work was planned to ensure a high level of awareness. Oxford Brooks are supporting the project and adopting an agile approach of Test, Trial and Learn.

Feedback from the Youth Council

60. The task group attended a Youth Council meeting and carried out a live survey with Youth Council members to get their feedback on the promotion of activities, young people's involvement in deciding what happens in their area and barriers to involvement.
61. The Youth Council members present fed back that they predominantly gained information about activities, groups, and events at school (5 responses), also parents (2), friends (2) and social media (1) with Instagram seeming to be the most popular choice.
62. The majority (7 of 9) had not been asked what they would like in their area. If they were to be involved their preference would be by survey (6), although a young person only forum was a possibility (3), nobody opted for attending a public meeting. Youth Council members fed back experience of providers going to schools, which they thought was a good idea with a caution that providers shouldn't assume that the information would cascade from older pupils to younger ones. One participant had experienced attending an Area Board and felt that evening meetings with predominantly adults attending would not be appealing to young people.

63. When considering barriers to involvement, anxiety (5) was the most significant obstacle, with cost (2) and travel (2) also having some impact.
64. The task group welcomed the honest feedback from participants. They concluded that Area Boards needed to involve young people in the design of events and consultations if they were to involve young people effectively in Area Board decision-making.

Conclusions

65. The strength of the Area Board led approach to youth provision is that it allows for creativity in developing local solutions to issues. The weakness is that it does not guarantee consistency. While most Area Boards are working with community partners, others are not. The impact of this variance is an inconsistent offer for young people across the county.
66. The lack of a requirement from central government to monitor and measure the delivery of the Council's statutory duty means that there is no robust system for recording, analysing and gap analysis in relation to the delivery of youth provision under the Act. This makes it hard to determine how well the duties are being met and where any gaps in provision may lay.
67. A change in approach to allocating the Area Board youth funding budget is needed to ensure that money allocated for youth activities is spent effectively to make the best use of limited resources.
68. The Council devolved delivery of youth provision to the voluntary and charity sector. While the task group has focused largely on the youth provision supported through Area Board grants, the task group recognises this provision does not illustrate fully the youth provision being delivered in Wiltshire.
69. The Area Board youth grants have a short term, project based and localised focus. There is external pressure for the Council to consider taking a wider view of youth provision. One expectation in the statutory duty is for local authorities to take a strategic lead and the new guidance is likely to consolidate this expectation by outlining a process and structure for councils to take this forward. Youth service providers too are asking for a longer term, strategic approach from the Council to provide a sustainable future for the provision of youth services.
70. There is a range of services being delivered by different departments to support the needs of young people. There has been a shift within the Council to take a more collaborative approach and to extend that partnership working to external stakeholders. However, there is no one single team or individual with oversight and tasked to ensure that the Council is meeting its responsibility. The Council's

services are targeted rather than focussed on communication of a Wiltshire-wide offer to young people.

71. There is scope for further integration between the youth work being provided in the community and supported by Area Boards and the targeted provision for young people delivered directly by the Council. There were examples of officers working closely with Area Boards on issues relevant to their area and it might benefit Area Boards and officers if this could become standard practice.
72. Young People's voices are not always being heard when funding impacting young people is being decided.

Recommendations

73. The task group proposes the following recommendations for endorsement and response from the Cabinet Members for Communities and Area Boards and Children and Education:
 1. **The Council develops an overarching youth strategy to bring together youth provision from within the Council with Area Boards, youth providers and external agencies. A 'product owner' could be used who is not responsible for delivery but could be responsible for co-ordinating the different strands of activity, connecting back to the strategy.**
 2. **The Council sets out a timeframe to meet the incoming statutory guidance to local authorities. It should ensure, with the support of stakeholders, that the needs of young people and current provision is mapped and an annual plan for young people in Wiltshire is developed. In doing so, it may want to seek guidance from the NYA on developing this approach. There would be benefits too in learning from the FACT project in developing a single source of information.**
 3. **The proposal by the youth partnership to develop a tiered system for youth grants should be considered, as it complements the work already being piloted by the grant assessment panel to allow for differences in provider capacity and geographic cover.**
 4. **The criteria for Area Board youth grants is amended to remove the requirement for organisations to apply for funding for a 'new' project and allow for repeat funding of ongoing projects that are meeting the needs of young people effectively.**
 5. **The requirement to promote funded activities should sit with the grant holder who is more likely to have stronger local communication networks than the Council does.**

6. **Consideration should be given to funding or part funding the development and infrastructure of Wiltshire's youth sector, through the youth partnership. This would be an investment with longer term aims of supporting the development of this sector and increasing the likelihood of drawing down external funding for the county.**
 7. **Area Boards need to be actively encouraged to work with a LYN, Youth Forum, or partner-led multi-agency group, perhaps identifying an elected member for each Area Board to take the lead in setting up or maintaining community involvement in the provision of youth activities.**
 8. **Explore with the Youth Council how to best support the Area Boards in ensuring the voice of young people is represented in decision-making.**
 9. **Explore how to facilitate increased engagement between officers delivering services for young people and Area Boards when community issues have been identified.**
-

Cllr Jo Trigg, Chair of the Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding Task Group

Report author: Julie Bielby, Senior Scrutiny Officer, julie.bielby@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices

- A. Area Board Youth Engagement Strategy**
- B. Legal Advice Summary s507b**
- C. Area Board Youth Data 2021-23**