

Review of Current Approach to Positive Activities

INTRODUCTION

Worcestershire County Council Cabinet resolved at its meeting of 17 July 2014 that the current approach to Positive Activities should be reviewed. The purpose of this review was to see whether the Council could ensure a sufficient local positive activities offer in accordance with its legal duties without any Council funding from 2016/17.

The initial part of the review commenced in December 2014 and involved working with existing Positive Activities providers. Local Children's Trusts (LTCs), Young People (715 young people responded to an online survey in addition to those spoken to directly) and partners to assess, develop solutions to sustain a local positive activities offer with a view to informing final decisions and allocations being made as part of the formal budget setting for 2016/17.

The work with providers involved a district by district review with all of the 19 providers of the 23 positive activity contracts being interviewed. The review involved collection of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

The review revealed a number of common themes. However, there is also considerable variation in the prospects of the various positive activities providers.

The common themes were that all providers:

- Use County Council income to directly provide positive activities;
- Are able to deliver more than just positive activities as result of county council funding supporting the core costs of key staff and premises
- Engage with vulnerable or at risk young people, many of whom do not access other provision
- Can evidence positive outcomes for the young they work through a variety of impact measurement tools, case studies and testimonials
- Have the value and impact of their provision recognised and valued by partner organisations (e.g. Police and schools)
- Offer value for money
- Have set up or participate in effective local partnerships;
- Would need to reduce or cease provision if County Council funding ceased;
- Have sought additional funding

The variation in prospects are that some providers will:

- close if County Council funding ceases;
- reduce their positive activities work;
- continue, but will cease offering positive activities;

CATEGORIES OF PROVIDER ORGANISATIONS

The review revealed that the characteristics of the provider organisations fall into a number of categories, they are either:

- New organisations established to deliver positive activities (small social enterprises often established by ex-county council Youth Service employees);
- Existing voluntary sector youth work organisations that extended their positive activities provision as a result of obtaining County Council funding (e.g. YMCA);
- Existing organisations that were involved in aspects of work with young people, diversifying into positive activities as a result of obtaining County Council funding (e.g. Core Assets, Autism West Midlands);
- Public sector organisations who have engaged in positive activities as a result of obtaining County Council funding and either provide direct delivery or deliver through consortia of small local providers. (e.g. some District Councils, and schools)

STAFFING OF COMMISSIONED WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Providers use their funding from the County Council to pay for face to face work with young people and some of the running costs to support it. How this is used varies from place to place dependent the level of funding provided. The numbers of volunteers involved is low and all providers indicated that recruitment and retention is difficult.

Only 4 of the 19 providers employ full time staff exclusively deployed to delivery of positive activities while 11 have full-time staff that are not exclusively involved in the delivery of positive activities. In the cases where there are full time staff, they will have managerial and development duties in their job descriptions. Those organisations without full time staff designate a part-time member of staff that primarily works directly with young people, but undertakes additional managerial or administrative responsibilities.

Most organisations make their provision using only part time staff. The number of staff and their working hours varies between providers, normally based on their level of funding. The difference in staffing structure between the various providers can be understood through five categories of employee. They have either:

1. Sessional staff working normally 7 hours a week or less on face to face work

2. A principal worker who is employed for in excess of 10 hours per week and often has administrative duties in addition to their face to face work; and / or
3. A principal worker who is employed for in excess of 10 hours per week and often has administrative duties in addition to their face to face work and is funded in part from income other than the County Council positive activities contract.
4. A principal worker who is full time who has administrative and development duties in addition to their face to face work; and /or
5. A principal worker who is full time who has administrative duties in addition to their face to face work, but who undertakes other non-positive activities work which is funded from income other than the County Council positive activities contract.

Some providers augment their positive activities funded work with staff funded from other sources and all involve volunteers or develop young people in leadership roles.

QUALIFIED STAFF

As mentioned above, one of the consequences of the positive activities contract is that providers have engaged or qualified youth workers. The review has found that these workers are unlikely be retained or engaged in positive activities by current providers if County Council funding is removed. They will not become volunteers and those where their employment is maintained will at best be transferred to other non-youth related jobs. The review discovered that the removal of County Council funding will mean the loss of professionally qualified youth workers as they are likely to seek paid youth sector employment elsewhere.

The review was told that amongst the effects of losing qualified workers will be the impact on work with challenging young people. The skill set and experience required to undertake work with vulnerable and challenging young people would be lost. This is particularly relevant as the message from LCTs, elected members, the Overview & Scrutiny process and young people is that the quality and consistency of the people delivering positive activities and their ability to build and maintain relationships with young people based on mutual respect and trust is pivotal to the positive impact of positive activities. 47% of the 715 young people responding to the online survey indicated that feeling able to speak to people they trust about things that affect or worry them is an important benefit of their accessing the commissioned positive activities provision.

The review learned that current provision did, as planned engage young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods some of whom displayed behavioural problems and actual or potential for disengagement or low achievement at school. All of the provision was commissioned in areas of highest need in terms of anti-social behaviour and/or concentrations of young people at risk of being NEET. One positive activities provider said 70% of young people accessing their provision lived in local social housing (the value of this has been confirmed by partners such as Rooftop Housing).

The review found that several of the current providers attract members with learning disabilities who regard it as safe provision and for two providers the planned complementary use of small additional amounts of Children with Disabilities Short Breaks funding has been of great benefit to the personal and social development of the young people and is much valued by the young people and their parents and carers.

Volunteers

It has already been stated that the removal of County Council funding is likely to mean the loss of qualified youth workers. There has been an important link between them and volunteers. Most positive activities providers do have some volunteers. The number of volunteers involved with commissioned positive activities providers is limited, but qualified workers have been key to their recruitment and retention. The review revealed that although some volunteers contribute a substantial amount of time, they are generally involved for a single session or activity each week and reliability can be variable so that they cannot be fully relied upon to sustain continuity of provision.

The result of the departure of qualified workers is that experience and knowledge gained over many years about work with young people in Worcestershire will disappear and their potential to support other local volunteers and organisations with specialist knowledge and skills will be lost, with consequent potential impact on quality and safety.

FUNDING

The range of funding that commissioned providers receive ranges from a little over £6,000 per to £202,000 per annum. The providers use their funding for a variety of purposes related to the delivery of positive activities. The principal use of County Council funding is to pay staffing and premises costs. However, many also use it to purchase equipment, to fund activities and to cover some administration costs.

All providers have generated additional income to that received from the County Council. The amount varies as a proportion of the income they receive from the County Council for positive activities and is also related to the capacity of the organisations to spend time on fundraising and income generation activity.

One organisation generates five times the amount it receives from the County Council in income. However, this is exceptional and on average organisations only generate an additional 25% from other sources with a few still being entirely dependent on the council.

The range of funders includes:

- Big Lottery
- Children in Need
- County Councillor Divisional Funds
- Land fill levy
- Sport England
- District or Parish Council
- Comic Relief
- Registered Social Landlords
- Round Table / Rotary
- Generated by young people
- Charitable Foundations
- Businesses
- Donations.

Most generated income is in form of one-off funding, for specific and time limited projects, not for on-going revenue costs and is relatively modest in scale. The review revealed that in nearly all cases the income would not have been generated if staff funded through the County Council contract had not been in post. The review was told that if the County Council's funding is removed, the post of the person tasked with fundraising will disappear. There was little evidence of staff or trustees, not funded by the County Council being actively involved in generating funds.

All commissioned organisations use the County Council funding to meet staff costs and the review learned that it was difficult to obtain external funding to pay salaries. Few funders will meet salary costs and place restrictions on the level of support they offer for other management costs. It will be necessary for the County Council to consider its position with regard to supporting such core costs as they are fundamental to the sustainability of many organisations but do not translate entirely into direct delivery of activities, which can often be funded more easily through bids for project support.

Some groups have sought assistance from the County Council's Changing Futures Fund to obtain advice from a fundraiser or funding consultant. Providers report that these have had mixed results.

Half of the providers meet in their own buildings. These organisations can generate some income from room hire and whilst income is used to supplement County Council funding, it is not sufficient to sustain the organisation. The other providers use rented premises and have no such income generation potential.

PARTNERSHIP WORK

There is much evidence of the County Council's positive activities contracts generating work over and above directly funded and specifically commissioned provision. The providers have become engaged in a variety of other young people related activities in support of partner organisations where the particular approach and relationship skills that their staff have is identified as crucial to successful interventions with young people.

This has included work with:

- Early Help Providers
- Libraries
- Schools
- School nurses
- Police
- Housing providers
- Drugs and alcohol misuse organisations
- Stop smoking groups
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- Princes Trust.

This added value has been acknowledged, valued and relied upon by other agencies. The review has been told by representatives of some of these agencies that the loss of positive activities will affect the impact and opportunities for their work. Networks that focus on young people will lose a valuable component and the signposting that positive activities workers offer to young people will cease.

Heads and Deputy Heads from three secondary schools (Woodrush, Droitwich, RSA Academy Arrow Vale Redditch) contributed to the review, all stating the valuable impact positive activities had upon pupils, especially vulnerable, isolated and/or underachieving young people who faced problems in the classroom or at home and those reaching transition points.

In spite of other organisations and agencies that worked in partnership with positive activities acknowledging its benefits, the review found no prospects of partners identifying other funding sufficient to sustain the core costs of positive activities. Several stated they would be prepared to contribute towards specific activities or events in either cash or kind, but none offered longer term, significant nor sustained revenue funding.

The review included schools with a current relationship to positive activities provision being asked directly whether they would use Pupil Premium to fund positive activities. These schools said they would not use Pupil Premium because it was already fully committed in school budgets. Furthermore, they felt that there would be difficulty in proving a direct link between allocating Pupil Premium funds to positive activities and raising attainment and that consequently school governors would refuse to give it their approval.

ALTERNATIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

There is a vast array of voluntary and independent youth organisations in Worcestershire.

There are 88 voluntary sector youth organisations across Worcestershire not in receipt of County Council funding and in membership Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (now known as Young Solutions).

In addition, there are 1,300 sports organisations and clubs in Herefordshire and Worcestershire (ref. Hereford and Worcestershire Sports Partnership) and nearly 6000 young people attend scouts and guides across the two counties (ref. Herefordshire and Worcestershire Scout Association)

The online survey of young people using commissioned positive activities provision revealed that 47% of the 715 responding did not access any other activities outside of school, an indication that the provision has been reaching significant numbers of those in its planned target group. 39% said that they attend some kind of sports activity, 10% were involved in Arts, music or drama and 7% did attend a uniformed organisation.

The impact of the loss of funding upon young people is likely to vary. In some localities the effect will be to remove all positive activities provision as there are no alternatives to the commissioned provision available to the targeted groups (e.g. Stourport and the Walshes estate, Droitwich and the Westlands estate). Elsewhere, provision will be significantly reduced, but some work will be maintained or refocused towards more targeted and specific work with groups of young people or the less vulnerable and disadvantaged (and also more able to pay for access).

The loss of County Council funding will have a noticeable impact on provision of positive activities in the city of Worcester. Whilst there are a range of other organisations making provision for young people in the city, the commissioned provision is focused on the areas of highest need and this would significantly reduce or cease. The provider, Worcester Community Trust, is heavily dependent on County Council funding to underpin its core youth and community staffing.

SAFEGUARDING

The review has confirmed that safeguarding is a primary consideration for positive activities providers. A safeguarding audit of commissioned positive activities providers carried out by Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (WCVYS) revealed that all providers have key staff with the required level of training and of the 120 paid and volunteer staff identified in responses, 72% had a safeguarding qualification and of these 10% had a higher, group 3 qualification.

There are well established links with the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board and low cost training for positive activities providers is available and widely promoted.

The review has already revealed that the removal of County Council funding would lead to the loss of qualified and experienced youth workers and with this their capacity to contribute to safeguarding practice and knowledge.

INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Additional to the funding of direct provision of positive activities the County Council has also contracted Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (WCVYS) to provide infrastructure support. WCVYS provides those that deliver positive activities with a range of support services. These include:

- Safeguarding checks;
- Safeguarding policy advice and audits;
- Programme of training including a Level 2 youth work qualification; (see Appendix * for full training programme and analysis of take up)
- Information – newsletters, weekly e-bulletins, website;
- Regular support visits (156 visits since July 2013);
- Network / Provider Forum events for provider organisations;
- General advice and guidance

Priorities for this support are directed, reviewed and agreed by the Commissioning Manager and monitored quarterly.

WCYVS also provides a range of services to 88 other youth organisations that are not in receipt of County Council funding and maintains regular contact with these. Many of them rely on WCVYS for a range of services and support that allow them to continue to operate.

The review has learned that WCVYS would be capable of continuing without County Council support, but would have to significantly narrow the scope and level of its work.

As the direct resourcing of provision by the County Council reduces, the need for reliable, responsive and accessible support that is specific and tuned to the youth sector remains and increases in its importance.

Using the resources already available, it is planned to establish a body of online resources and training as a legacy of the County Council's investment in positive activities that will be available to the whole sector regardless of the future level of funding.

CONTEXT : STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

Statutory guidance issued in June 2012 by the Secretary of State for Education under Section 507B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 relates to the duty of local authorities to secure services and activities for young people aged 13 to 19, and those with learning difficulties to age 24, to improve their well-being, as defined in subsection 13.

Securing access to sufficient services and activities

The Government does not prescribe which services and activities for young people local authorities should fund or deliver or to what level. Councils are expected to take the strategic lead on work with young people; the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector; health and wellbeing boards; schools and colleges; and agencies including health and Police to:

- Understand the needs of local young people, particularly the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, taking full account of equality and diversity issues;
- Enable parents and communities to meet young people's needs wherever possible, and engage businesses and other employers to contribute funding and expertise to help enhance and sustain local provision;

It is the duty of the local authority to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, equality of access for all young people to the positive, preventative and early help they need to improve their well-being. This includes youth work and any other services and activities that:

- Connect young people with their communities, enabling them to belong and contribute to society, including through volunteering, and supporting them to have a voice in decisions which affect their lives;
- Offer young people opportunities in safe environments to take part in a wide range of sports, arts, music and other activities, through which they can develop a strong sense of belonging, socialise safely with their peers, enjoy social mixing, experience spending time with older people, and develop relationships with adults they trust;
- Support the personal and social development of young people through which they build the capabilities they need for learning, work, and the transition to adulthood – communication, confidence and agency, creativity, managing feelings, planning and problem solving, relationships and leadership, and resilience and determination;
- Improve young people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- Help those young people at risk of dropping out of learning or not achieving their full potential to engage and attain in education or training; and
- Raise young people's aspirations, build their resilience, and inform their decisions – and thereby reducing teenage pregnancy, risky behaviours such as substance misuse, and involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour (as reflected in the Outcomes Framework underpinning the current commissioning of positive activities included in the appendices).

Clearly it is not the sole role or responsibility of positive activities provision to deliver all that is required and the particular contribution that providers can make due to their reach, relationships, skills and locations in communities needs to be assessed and designed with regard, for example, to the wider Prevention and Intervention strategy and delivery with partners of Early Help, Troubled Families, Health, Police, Community Safety and other services.

In judging what is reasonably practicable a local authority can take into account its resources, capabilities and other priorities, as well as that of its partners in the private and third sector. By doing so, the authority will be able to provide a rationale for its decision making, if challenged.

When deciding about its future support for positive activities it is necessary for the County Council to be clear and be able to demonstrate that it is meeting its statutory obligations in taking this strategic lead and the rationale for its decision making.

Involving young people

Local authorities are required to take steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions about services and activities for them, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They should establish and maintain structured arrangements for doing so. To inform continuous improvement, these arrangements should enable young people to inspect and/or report at least annually on the quality and accessibility of provision. As appropriate they should also be involved actively in service design, delivery and governance. Young people should receive the support they need to participate, ensuring representation of the full diversity of local young people, and those who may not otherwise have a voice.

Worcestershire has a vibrant and well respected range of engagement opportunities for young people, including those for whom it is a corporate parent. This is supported by the Participation & Engagement team that is funded separately from the positive activities provision by the County Council. Groups and individuals such as the Youth Cabinet, Who Cares, We Care, Speak Out and UK Youth Parliament members regularly and actively engage in decision making and have regular contact with elected members at county and local levels. Young people were also involved alongside local county councillors in all commissioning decisions regarding current provision.

A full version of the relevant Statutory Guidance is included in the appendices.

CONCLUSIONS

The principal findings of the review from interviews with providers are:

- Five providers of positive activities will close leaving at least five areas of the county without significant positive activities provision for the most challenging young people; (including Droitwich, Stourport and Malvern)
- Up to twelve providers of positive activities will reduce or cease to offer provision;
- Up to five will reduce their provision to its former level;

- Worcester City will be particularly affected with up to six local positive programmes closing, mostly in disadvantaged parts of the city;
- There is a significant risk of loss of qualified and experienced youth workers;
- Schools are unlikely to provide pupil premium to fund positive activities;
- It is unlikely that organisations will be able to secure sufficient alternative funding to fully replace positive activities funding from the County Council;
- There is unlikely to be a sufficient workforce of volunteers to replace all staff employed by positive activities providers;
- There is a wide range of alternative activities for young people, but it is unlikely that many of the young people currently engaged in commissioned positive activities will attend or sustain use of these opportunities due to motivational, behavioural and economic factors.
- It is unlikely that alternative activities will attract vulnerable or challenging young people or whether the providers of these possess the capacity, skills and experience to make provision for this group;
- There will be a potential impact on safeguarding capacity through loss of qualified staff and safe locations for young people to meet;
- A reduced level of infrastructure support will continue but would have to be re-specified to ensure maximum support and impact to the voluntary youth sector in priority areas such as training, safeguarding and capacity building.

The review concludes that a variety of "things to do and places to go" does exist that can assist the Council in ensuring a sufficient local positive activities offer in accordance with its statutory obligations without any Council funding at all.

However, the definition in statutory guidance is open to considerable interpretation and it is likely some significant gaps in provision, particularly for more disengaged and vulnerable young people would result. It is possible that the Council could act in accordance with its statutory obligations if it did not remove Council funding entirely, but further reduced it from 2016/17 and focused on supporting the current provision and future sustainability of those organisations reaching those more vulnerable and disengaged young people in communities of higher need and/or where other provision that they are likely to access is not available.

Author:

Paul Finnemore: Commissioning Manager: Young People

Assisted in the review by :

Phil Street, Cat Illingworth, Andy Gynn

Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Services
(Infrastructure support organisation)

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Appendices



Summary YP Pos
Acts Survey report_fi



statutory guidance
on la youth provision