

# **Comments from Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Positive Activities for Young People**

## **Purpose of the Scrutiny**

1. Positive Activities focus on providing young people with 'things to do and places to go'. The County Council has a duty, set out in statutory guidance, to secure a local offer that is sufficient to meet local needs and improve young people's well-being and personal and social development.
2. In July 2014, Cabinet agreed that the Council's current approach to Positive Activities should be reviewed to see whether the Council could ensure sufficient local offer (in accordance with its legal duties) without any Council funding of service delivery from 2016-17. As part of the review process, the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel was asked to comment about the future direction of Positive Activities for Young People.

## **Background to the Scrutiny**

3. In November 2011, as part of the BOLD Programme, Cabinet took the decision to de-commission Worcestershire County Council Youth Service and re-commission externally provided Positive Activities. It was agreed that the new Positive Activities provision would focus on reaching those young people who were (or were at risk of becoming) not in education, employment or training (NEET) or involved in anti-social behaviour. It was also agreed that the commissioning of these new Positive Activities would be led by local elected members and that provision would be targeted in geographical areas with a high prevalence of these issues and/or of vulnerable or disadvantaged young people.
4. On 17 July 2014 Cabinet agreed that the Council's approach to commissioning Positive Activities should be reviewed and that the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be engaged throughout the review. To ensure stability of provision during the review, contracts with commissioned organisations originally awarded with an end date of 31 March 2015 were extended to 31 March 2016. A decision on the Council's position with regard to future funding and service models from April 2016 will be made by Cabinet in July 2015.
5. The Scrutiny Panel considered the potential impact on commissioned services of the proposal to remove all County Council funding from Positive Activities from 2016-17.

## **Comments/Findings**

6. The Panel's discussions with commissioned providers revealed that at least 6 organisations thought that they would not be able to survive without County Council funding and others expected to have to diversify their provision.
7. The providers made the point that a major advantage of the funding from the County Council was that it was not ring-fenced and could be used as the organisations deemed necessary. In the main, it was used for the essentials, e.g. running costs such as building rental and staff costs, to enable the provision to be offered. Without this funding some providers would be unable to exist. In contrast, many of the grants and other sources of funding available to providers were ring-fenced and time-specific giving the provider much less flexibility. Although other

sources of funding may be available, small organisations would find it very complex and time consuming to apply for these grants.

8. The providers felt that there was a uniqueness about the Positive Activities funding which enabled organisations to offer a holistic care package to young people as and when required and in the direction required by the young person.
9. We heard that, as Positive Activities provision was focussed on young people NEET or involved in anti-social behaviour, this was addressing anti-social behaviour in areas of the County where it was needed most. Cabinet was told in July 2014 that ward level data from the Police indicated significantly reduced levels of reported anti-social behaviour in areas where commissioned Positive Activities were provided.<sup>1</sup> This was confirmed to the Panel by a West Mercia Police Officer from the Youth Engagement Team (South Worcestershire), who stressed the importance of being able to sign-post young people to these diversionary activities. The Panel was told that the young people who accessed this provision did not access other types of provision, such as uniform groups; they are young people from hard to reach groups.
10. The Panel thought that it was important that all partners worked together to support a service that added value to society. Without such a service there may be a drain on the funding of many of the County's other support services. However, the impact the withdrawal of funding would have on other services is difficult to quantify in exact terms.
11. The Panel also felt that the services of volunteers were key to the success of the provision, supported by professional qualified youth workers who were invaluable in achieving better outcomes for the hard to reach young people. It is important to note that, at the moment, the County is in the privileged position of having a legacy of qualified youth workers who had previously been employed by the County Council; these would diminish over time.
12. The Panel talked to the Manager of WCVYS and he was keen to dispel 4 myths about the provision:
  - There was plenty of provision to take up the slack;
  - Organisations could raise their own funding;
  - Pupil premium would fill the funding gap; and
  - There was an army of volunteers to step into the gap.
13. Local Members have been essential in commissioning services to date and in the current review of the Council's approach to Positive Activities. Members' local knowledge is useful in assessing local need, something which links to the principles of Act Local and Local Member engagement. Any future changes in direction should retain this link with Local Members.
14. Discussions with young people at a meeting of the Youth Cabinet revealed a range of views on current provision. After the meeting, the representatives also undertook informal consultation with young people in their areas. Although some young people found their youth club boring and not good value for money and others were not aware of current provision, others felt they would be greatly affected if the service was cut. In particular, concern was expressed about the effect on young people's safety if they had no youth club to attend, and about the impact on young people with special needs and the homeless.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Cabinet Report 17 July 2014

## Conclusion

15. Although Members are fully aware of the Council's financial situation and the need to save money wherever possible, the Panel is concerned that if these proposals go ahead, a number of providers will no longer be sustainable and some extremely valuable work will be lost. The added value of these services is hard to quantify but without them the cost to the Council and wider society may be far more than the £1million that will be saved. Consequently, the Panel would wish to ask Cabinet to reconsider its plans to remove all County Council funding from Positive Activities provision.
16. However, if the budget reduction were to go ahead, the Panel would wish to be further reassured that a strategy will be put in place to ensure the sustainability of the current providers in the longer term. This should include an ongoing evaluation of the impact of any reduced provision on levels of anti-social behaviour.
17. The Panel would wish to look again at Positive Activities in due course to be updated on the impact of any agreed changes.

## Methodology

Date of Meeting	
11 September 2014	Panel Meeting with Head of Service (Early Help) and the Commissioning Manager (Young People)
20 January 2015	Panel Meeting with representatives from Positive Activities provider organisations
18 March 2015	Representatives from the Panel met with the Youth Cabinet

May 2015