

1. Introduction

The services offered by Bracknell Forest Youth Service are undergoing a full review in light of budget changes and the need to ensure the services deliver value for money and improved outcomes for young people.

The proposal for modernisation of the Youth Service is create a greater match between the needs of young people and the services to which they have access. These proposals for the modernisation of the Youth Service are designed to ensure it is fully integrated into Bracknell Forest Early Intervention Strategy. As part of preparing budgets for the Youth Service for 2012 – 2013 a proposed reduction in funding of £251,000 is being considered (to assist with the overall budget reduction required across the Council).

The Full Equality Impact Assessment Report reviews the impact of the budget reduction proposals that form part of the review of the Youth Service on those groups protected by the Equality Act 2010. The key groups affected have been identified as young people, disabled young people, young people from different ethnic groups, young women as a cohort and young men as a cohort.

The report shows that a significant amount of consultation with young people has been undertaken regarding the potential future design of the Youth Service. The wider public has been consulted with regarding the proposals to close three youth centres, reduce the number of FTE equivalent qualified Youth Workers and realign budgets. These consultations have suggested particular concerns about the impacts of these proposals on young people and their communities. This report outlines the measures that the Council can take to mitigate these should the Executive agree to implement the proposals.

2. Background

Bracknell Forest Council needed to find savings of nearly £6m for the financial year 2012/13. The need to review what services the Youth Service can offer in light of a more focused approach to intervening early with young people who are facing difficulties or who are particularly vulnerable coincides with, and is in part informed by, the need to identify potential savings. The Youth Service has identified potential savings of £251,000 as part of the Youth Service modernisation process.

The proposals for the review of Youth Service provision is to achieve a closer match between the needs of young people and the services to which they have access. The proposals are required to ensure that the Council is investing scarce resources in those services and activities that can be shown to impact positively on the lives of young people. The Council is working with a reduced budget and a redirection of that budget to focus on early intervention and prevention. The proposals lay out a shift in investment; the closure of three youth centres and the reduction of one FTE qualified youth worker post for consultation. The reduction in budget may impact on the number of youth centre sites that are operated: Bracknell Forest Council currently support activities on eight main sites – this proposal will reduce to five main sites. There is also a proposed reduction in funding for activities – Youth Opportunities Fund to be reduced by 78%; reduction in the Youth Service Sexual Health Budget of 6% and reduction in funding for positive activities by 54%. A summary of the scope and intent is outlined below:

Closure of three Youth Centres

The following Youth Centres are proposed for closure:

North Ascot Youth Centre

This centre serves the North Ascot area.

The number of young people receiving services from this centre in the period March 2011 – Feb 2012 = 381 (315 male: 66 female)

Whitegrove Youth Centre

This centre serves the Warfield area

The number of young people receiving services from this centre in the period March 2011 – Feb 2012 =86 (38 male: 48 female)

Edgbarrow Youth Centre

This centre serves the Crowthorne area.

The number of young people receiving services from this centre in the period March 2011 – Feb 2012 = 187 (54 male: 133 female)

The Youth Centres aim to provide a place for young people to go to that is safe, warm and welcoming and can be engaged in professionally led youth work (informal social education). The centres operate projects, including youth clubs and, in the case of North Ascot and Edgbarrow Youth Centres, targeted courses (skills for babysitting, for example). In addition the North Ascot Youth Centre hosts a Duke of Edinburgh Award group.

The centres also act as a base for street based interventions, providing staff with a place to operate from as well as a point for young people to be referred to when they are encountered on the streets of the local area.

Reduction in Youth Opportunities Funding – 78% reduction

The Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) was initially a separate funding stream from central government. Accompanied by the Youth Capital Fund (YCF), together the aim was to provide young people with access to funds to start new projects and enable participation of young people in new opportunities. The funds have been managed by the Youth Service with grant applications being considered by the Youth Council. The Youth Capital Fund has not been operational for some time and, with the removal of the ring fencing of such funds by the current government, a decision was made by the Council to retain some element of Youth Opportunity Fund monies in the Youth Services core budget.

The Youth Opportunity Fund has been accessed by a variety of organizations through out its life time. These have included Youth Service groups, local scout groups as well as groups of vulnerable young people (such as the Children and Social Care looked after children's group 'Silsip').

The proposed reduction to the Youth Opportunity Fund would result in the funds remaining being used to support work for vulnerable or at risk young people only.

Sexual Health Budget – 6% reduction

The Teenage Pregnancy budget is used to fund work that in turns helps young people make informed choices regarding their sexual health practices. This includes direct delivery, in partnership with school nurses and local GPs, or Young People's Health Clinics at various locations across the borough. Two part time staff are funded to help deliver these and other targeted work with young people needing sexual health advice. In addition the monies fund a young parents group and other health interventions (such as smoking cessation) targeted at groups of young people.

The proposed reduction would have no effect on delivery of services. The main result would be to cease providing schools with sexual health resources.

Positive Activities for Young People fund – 54% reduction

The Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) fund was previously a separate grant made available through central government. With the removal of the ring fencing of such grants a decision was made to retain this element of funding within the Youth Service's core budget. The fund has been used for targeting interventions for vulnerable and other 'at risk' groups. It differs from the Youth Opportunity Fund in that it is not accessed as a grant by young people. Instead funds are spent on projects set up by the Youth Service that will either support cohorts of young people, or provide activities that vulnerable or at risk young people can access (such as the summer activities programmes).

The proposed reduction in funding would require the Youth Service to more carefully target the funds for work with vulnerable or at risk young people, reducing wider schemes (such as the summer activities programmes) that have previously benefited from these funds.

Reduction of 1 FTE equivalent qualified youth worker post

Each of the qualified youth work staff work full time for the authority. They have completed a professional course resulting in a qualification recognised by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) as of a professional standard.

The proposed reduction would result in a vacant post being deleted. This, in turn, would inform the further review of the Youth Service staffing structure and roles.

3. Methodology and Sources of Data

The information gathered to ascertain the impact of these proposals has come from a number of sources. The Youth Service's management information system (QES) has been used to identify the profile of young people using the youth centres proposed for closure. This data, along with the Youth Service program and 'Youth Offer', also informed the initial Equalities Screening Record Form which was completed in November 2011.

In identifying areas for the review of the Youth Service to give thought to, the results of independent surveys of young people were also considered. Over 700 young people from one school took part in a survey over the summer of 2011 that was used to devise a larger scale consultation programme. Throughout October and November 4500 young people took part in a survey to record their participation in positive activities, the sources of guidance they use, their preferred sources of information, their volunteer work and their involvement in electing representatives for school councils and/or the Youth Council. Over 400 young people took part in focus groups which explored in more detail their hopes and aspirations, what they wanted from 'out of school services'; and, the barriers they faced to getting involved in activities.

In order to further explore the potential impact of the proposals an additional 12 week consultation process was conducted utilising QA Research. This involved an open access on-line consultation document and a public meeting to explore the proposals. The results of this exercise have now been reported. Please see the section on consultation and engagement for further information.

4. Assessment of Impact on Equality strands

The following protected characteristics have been identified as being potentially affected by the proposals:

Disability

The provision of targeted programmes for young people with special needs will be increased and improved. Through the “Just- get us involved” consultation (December 2011) young people with disabilities have specifically asked to be involved in a wider range of programmes, take part in award schemes at advanced levels and be supported in travelling to participate in mainstream groups.

The reduction in staff and the number of centres may increase the barriers to participation for people with learning difficulties and disability – further to travel, fewer staff to support their work. This will be taken into account when considering alternative suppliers of youth services throughout the borough. Attention will be given to how proposed services can respond to the needs of young people with disabilities within the cohort the proposed service is to cater for.

Racial Equality

The provision of targeted programmes for young people from minority ethnic communities will continue and will increase in scale and impact. With the exception of the Nepali community, two thirds of whom are located in Sandhurst and south of the borough, other groups are dispersed evenly across Bracknell Forest. The Youth Service will ensure that they are given the opportunity to participate in programmes and activities and that their voice is heard on the Youth Council.

Gender Equality

The closure of three centres and the reduction of 1 x FTE qualified youth worker will require a review of all programmes, including the various targeted programmes for young women and for young men. These work with approx 60 individuals across the borough each year. The redirection of resources will be based on assessment of need and priority.

The reduction of spending on sexual health work is not anticipated to have a negative impact in this area, as expenditure on resources for schools represents funds additional to core school budgets.

The Youth Service will continue to have a focus on meeting the specific needs of young men and young women. This will include the provision of targeted programmes for single sex groups where a need is clearly established.

Sexual Orientation

Freeways, a group for young people exploring their sexual identity has ceased. Those attending the group had gained what they needed and have moved onto other activities.

Current centre users do not include a significant number of young people who have advised staff of a minority sexual orientation.

The needs of this group will be kept under review and new programmes and services commissioned where needed. Youth Centres continue to provide access to advice, guidance and counselling for a wide range of issues including sexuality, relationships and sexual health.

Gender Reassignment

None of the youth centres specialise in work based upon gender re-assignment. Current centre users do not include a significant number of young people who have advised of gender re-assignment issues. No youth work staff specialise in work based upon gender re-assignment.

Age Equality

The proposals would disproportionately affect young people in the borough.

Localities where it is proposed that youth centres are withdrawn would experience a withdrawal of local authority building based youth work in those areas. However the Council will work to reduce the impact of the closure of these centres, including working with community and third sector partners to ensure quality alternative provision.

There may be an increase in reports of anti-social behaviour associated with young people in these areas.

Reduction in the number of qualified youth work staff will reduce the availability of qualified youth workers to develop and deliver projects to young people, including vulnerable young people. The reduction of one full-time equivalent qualified youth worker from a team of ten will require a revised configuration and deployment of staff to implement the modernised service.

A reduction in the Youth Opportunity Fund will result in young people having fewer opportunities to access funding for new opportunities

The reduction of spending on sexual health work is not anticipated to have a negative impact in this area, as expenditure on resources for schools represents funds additional to core school budgets.

The reduction of funds available from the Positive Activities for Young People budget will result in those working with vulnerable or otherwise at risk young people having fewer opportunities to access funds for bespoke positive activity interventions.

Reduction in staff, venues and funding streams will require redesign of service to meet the needs of priority groups.

The review of the Youth Service will lead to a reduction in the number of sites where open access programmes are offered but a significant expansion in the times when services and

activities are available. Currently, youth centres offer age specific youth club sessions for two hours on one or two evenings a week. The review of the Youth Service will see a broader range of programmes available seven days a week from after school to late evening.

The review of youth service provision will impact positively on the life chances and outcomes for young people in targeted groups. More broadly, young people told us that they are well served by the wealth of leisure and recreation providers in the Bracknell Forest and across the region.

Nationally and locally, the priority will be to build capacity in the voluntary and community sector to provide positive activities for young people. There are currently discussions in progress with Faith groups to extend their provision in the Crowthorne area. Similar discussions will take place with community groups in Whitegrove and North Ascot to extend provision where needed.

Funding for Youth Services is now integrated into the Early Intervention Grant. Previous funding streams including Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) and The Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) ceased in 2010. Bracknell Forest maintained these budget lines in 2010-11 and will reduce the level of funding available under these headings in 2012-13.

In 2009 – 2010 a total of 28 separate groups received funding from the Youth Opportunity Fund. This equated to £61,400 of funding for new opportunities. 5 groups of vulnerable young people were amongst these, receiving a total of £10,800. In 2010 – 2011 24 separate groups received funding totalling £49,000. 6 groups of vulnerable young people were amongst these, receiving £16,300 of funding.

Religion and belief

None of the youth centres specialise in work based upon specific religions or beliefs. Current centre users do not include a significant number of young people who have advised of particular religions or beliefs. No youth work staff specialise in work based upon religion or belief.

Pregnancy and maternity

None of the specified youth centres specialise in work based upon pregnancy or maternity. Current centre users of the specified youth centres do not include a significant number of young people who have advised of pregnancy or maternity issues. No youth work staff specialise in work based upon pregnancy or maternity. Where projects undertake targeted work with young women around this issue it is anticipated services can continue.

Marriage and civil partnership

None of the youth centres specialise in work based upon marriage or civil partnership. Current centre users do not include a significant number of young people who have advised of marriage or civil partnership issues. No youth work staff specialise in work based upon marriage or civil partnerships.

5. Consultation & Engagement

Two main consultation processes have been engaged to inform the review of the Youth Service. The first “Just – get us involved!” (December 2011) was a consultation in which 4,500 young people took part regarding their engagement in positive activities. Undertaken by the company Concentra this also asked young people about their involvement with the Youth Service itself, other providers and where young people preferred to access information and advice. As well as a paper based and on-line questionnaire, focus groups were consulted.

Amongst the reports conclusions were:

- Young people are involved in a wide range of activities and events through a wealth of settings, including schools, youth centres and other clubs.
- Young people want a greater range of sporting activities to be available, and to have greater access to arts based activities.
- Those who report engaging with youth clubs (18% of respondents) highly value the service they receive from them.
- Confidence, peer approval, social acceptability and ‘fear of failure’ are significant barriers hindering young people’s participation in activities.
- The quality of the provision is a key contributor to young people’s willingness to engage with particular provision.
- Accessibility, cost and transport issues also play a major part in young people being able to access provision, particularly for those in at-risk groups. Young people with special educational needs want support so that they can participate in a wider range of activities.

The second consultation between December 21st and March 16th, undertaken by QA Research, delivered a consultation based upon the proposed closure of particular youth centres and the reduction in the number of FTE qualified youth work staff. 173 people from across the community responded through either an open access on-line questionnaire or attendance at a consultation event that was hosted in the town centre area. 46% of respondents were aged under 20 years, and an almost equal split between males and females.

The conclusions of this research included:

- Support for the closure of the youth centres was very low.
- Support for a reduction in the number of full time qualified youth work staff was very low.
- Respondents to both the online survey and the qualitative research were easily able to highlight the benefits of services for young people, indicating that they offer a safe, informal atmosphere for young people to meet and socialise and that they provide structured opportunities for young people to volunteer and enhance their life skills.

- Almost all of the respondents to the online survey or a member of their family had used youth services in the last 12 months and two-thirds had used one of the centres scheduled for closure, clearly suggesting that respondents would be personally affected by the closures. This, in part at least, is likely to explain the fact that support for the proposed closures was very low, despite the fact that when asked to choose centres to close both Whitegrove and Edgbarrow were the two centres chosen most often.
- There was a strong sense that Youth Services provide opportunities for young people to be occupied and that as a result, antisocial behaviour and crime are reduced. As a result, it was felt that any reduction in these services would be likely to lead to increases in these types of problems and that any cost-savings from closing centres, for example, would very probably be spent on tackling these problems by other services such as the police.
- It is notable that the proposal to support voluntary and community groups to expand their services for young people in those areas where Youth Centres have closed had a mixed impact on attitudes towards the proposed closure of the three centres. In fact, these proposals had more impact on making respondents less likely to support closure than on making them more likely to support it, although for the many they would make no difference.
- There was a strong feeling amongst respondents that resources should be focussed on providing services for all young people, regardless of their background. This was driven by the recognition that a mix of young people in a Youth Centre can be very beneficial to all parties as, for example, those doing well at school can act as role models for other young people not doing so well. In addition, half of respondents felt unable to select an age group towards which resources should be focussed by the council, although it was felt by most that young people aged 14-15 should be the focus, as they are an especially impressionable group.

6. Publication of Equality Impact Assessment

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 aims to make public authorities more transparent, accountable and increase public debate and involvement. Under the Act the Council makes available to the public a vast amount of information via its Publication Scheme. All completed EIA screening forms are published and available to the public on a quarterly basis. The EIA's are published to <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/your-council/yc-community-cohesion/yc-equality-impact-assessments.htm> .

7. Conclusions

The proposals presented in section 2 of this report form part of a full review of the Youth Service and are designed to contribute towards creating a service that is able to respond more fully to the needs of vulnerable and at risk young people. A redesign of the service, in light of new financial constraints, the need to more clearly demonstrated impact and value for money, and a need to invest funds in way that offer services for those most in need, will result in a new Service Plan for 2012 – 2014.

The consultations indicate that there is resistance to the closure of Youth Centres in certain locations, notably the North Ascot and Edgbarrow youth centres with only a small resistance

to the closure of the Whitegrove. There is evidence of a fear that anti-social behaviour from young people in these areas will follow any closure of youth clubs.

Should the Executive choose to close the centres as proposed the Youth Service will mitigate against the realisation of these concerns through supporting the third sector to provide youth focused activities of high quality within a safe and welcoming environment. This will also include enabling access for at-risk young people, including those with disabilities. It is envisaged that this will be achieved through the provision of bespoke training and development opportunities for the third sector, as well as through an invitation to develop and take part in on going quality assurance processes. The Youth Service will also review (with young people) its Street Work project in light of any closures, gaps in service provision, or anti-social behaviour that may arise. The Street Work project utilises youth workers on the streets (rather than building based work) to engage with young people. It is through this project that the Youth Service bus is utilised.

The QA consultation also indicates a resistance on the part of young people to travel to a youth provision. However, the “Just - get us involved” consultation indicated that young people were prepared to travel to the town centre area for what is perceived to be high quality facilities. The Council will be conducting a feasibility study for the proposed development of a town centre youth provision of significant quality in terms of facilities and services offered. This would aim to satisfy those already willing to travel for such provision, as well as acting as a hub of best practice for other provision commissioned across the borough.

Consultation indicates a resistance to the deletion of a FTE equivalent qualified Youth Worker post. The Service has identified a post which has been vacant for several months as being suitable for such deletion, with potential impact being mitigated against within a full review of the Youth Service staffing roles and structure.

Consultation indicates that there is a belief that open access services should be made available to a cross section of young people, regardless of vulnerability. Current national and local priorities are to utilise youth work skills and resources to contribute significantly to the Early Intervention Strategy, aiming to help those young people most in need and at greatest risk. The Youth Service already works with a variety of third sector providers, developing and supporting provision of open access youth projects in a range of settings across the borough. This work will continue and, should the Executive decide to agree to implement the proposals laid out for consultation, would be further developed and include a greater focus on working with local providers to find additional sources of income. Through this approach, suitable access to open access youth provision should follow.

8. Monitoring Arrangements

Monitoring the ongoing situation against our equalities ambitions is of crucial importance. In the case of this proposal being agreed by the Executive the following monitoring and evaluation procedures will be adopted.

Continue with current monitoring and report processes – including regular quarterly reports to full council as well as ad-hoc reports as requested.

We will continue to engage with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group and the Community Safety team to monitor anti-social behaviour levels associated with young people. The regular Cadis reports will be scrutinised, with particular reference to those areas where youth centre closures are currently proposed.

Proposals around the town centre development will be informed in part through the monitoring and review of existing town centre provision. Currently the Youth Service engages with the community group Head Space who provide a once a week open access 'drop-in' youth club. This, along with street based work in the town centre over the spring and summer periods, will provide data on usage of the area by young people, their hopes and needs. We would also anticipate the Kerith Church, a major provider of youth activities on a Friday evening, helping us with such work.

The Youth Service will review (with young people) its Street Work project in light of any closures, gaps in service provision, or anti-social behaviour that may arise. The Street Work project utilises youth workers on the streets (rather than building based work) to engage with young people. It is through this project that the Youth Service bus is utilised. Management information from this project will aide monitoring of the impact of adopting these proposals.

In order to monitor the response of the third sector to the proposal to increase their contribution to the provision of youth services across the borough a development plan will be created by the Youth Service with these partners. This will aim to enhance and accelerate such work, and include the aim of identifying additional sources of income for delivery.