

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-053-2015/16
Date of meeting: 03 December 2015



Committee: Overview and Scrutiny
Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Youth Engagement Task and Finish Review
Responsible Officer: Julie Chandler (01992 564214)
Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/ Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Council retains and continues to support and develop the Youth Council in terms of wider youth engagement;
- (2) That the Youth Council be afforded the opportunity to present a report/update twice a year to all Members of Council through a suitable meeting;
- (3) That the Youth Council acts as a consultee for stakeholder presentations at Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- (4) That the current operational budget for the Youth Council be maintained at £12,000 per annum;
- (5) That Cabinet considers a request for Continuing Services Budget (CSB) Growth of £8,000 per annum, for an enabling fund that the Youth Council can access for projects to be agreed by the Neighbourhoods & Communities Select Committee;
- (6) That the Council pursues the devolvement of the budget and responsibilities for Youth Provision from Essex County Council to the District Council; and
- (7) That Cabinet considers a request for Continuing Services Budget (CSB) Growth of £25,000 per annum, for targeted work by Community Services and Safety and not at the detriment of the current service.

Executive Summary:

As part of the Council's budget saving process in 2014/15, the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee requested that officers undertake a review of the most effective use of the Council's budget related to youth engagement.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services submitted a proposal to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to establish a Task & Finish Review Panel to undertake this work. This was agreed and the review was undertaken between April and September 2015.

This report provides an overview of the findings of the panel and a set of recommendations that have been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Reason for decision:

The recommendations in this report were agreed by the Youth Engagement Task and Finish Panel and subsequently Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in order to retain and expand the services provided by Epping Forest Youth Council and the Council's Community Services Department.

Options considered and rejected:

None.

Report:

1. The Youth Engagement Task and Finish Review Panel was Chaired by Cllr S Murray Supported by Cllr Mohindra, as Vice Chair. Other Panel members included Cllrs C. Roberts, B. Surtees, K. Adams, R. Butler, S. Neville, B. Surtees, A. Patel, Cllr Mrs Kane and two members from the Youth Council; Jaymey McIvor and Matthew Tinker.

2. The scope of the review included detailed analysis across a range of work undertaken by the Youth Council, Community Services and Safety, and Essex County Council. This took the form of presentations on each area of work and was supported by feedback and case studies.

3. The Youth Councillors that were part of the panel gave a presentation on the work and successes of the current Youth Council and achievements of their predecessors over the previous seven years. This included details of a Youth Conference at the Civic offices, with 90 pupils from years 7, 8, 9 and 10 representing ten secondary schools from in and around the District. At this event, it had been identified that a priority issue for young people was bullying, and in response, the Youth Council had developed their own campaign called '#URNot Alone'. They had promoted this by providing advice in school assemblies and had provided pupils with a USB memory stick wristband promoting the campaign. The scheme had been so well received and successful that the Youth Council had been awarded the prestigious County-wide High Sheriff of Essex's Shield and £1000 towards the project.

4. Other work presented by the Youth Councillors included volunteering, developing social media contacts (7200 views on twitter during the anti-bullying campaign) and significant success in securing external funding during the last six years, which amounted to £28,000.

5. The Panel were very impressed with the work and commitment of the Epping Forest Youth Council and the level of communication with their peer group, which extended across their school community and the local area where they live. The Panel suggested that greater emphasis could be placed on promotion of the Youth Council within the Council itself, to ensure that senior Members were aware and understood the valuable contribution that they made locally. They also agreed that the Youth Council represented excellent value for money as currently funded by the Council, and noted that, the EFYC budget and associated costs had not increased since EFYC began in 2008; that EFYC had generated the equivalent of 39% of its running costs in external funding and that Youth Councillors themselves had independently applied for and secured external funding for EFYC.

6. Further research was commissioned by the Panel which included comparisons to other local authority Youth Council functions in the local area and further afield. The Panel concluded from these studies, that Epping Forest Youth Council was more impressive in its work than these others and that the operation of EFYC was excellent, in comparison to other Youth Councils represented at the UK Youth Parliament. This conclusion was further endorsed by feedback from local schools and other statutory and non-statutory partners.

7. The second phase of work focussed on youth engagement work undertaken by the Council's Community Services and Safety teams and the work of Essex County Council which has a statutory responsibility for provision of Youth Services.

8. Community Services officers provided an overview of the work delivered for young people and this included general activities and youth engagement per se. The panel heard that over £750,000 external revenue funding had been generated by Community Services in the last five years, to develop specific programmes of work for target groups. Much of this work focussed on super output areas of the district; young people with additional needs and young people referred by schools as needing support, advice and guidance. This included football sessions in Waltham Abbey and Limes Farm, an inclusion project and in-school programmes on issues such as self-harm, substance misuse and positive behaviour and attitudes. These particular sessions had been very well received by schools as they had seen marked differences in behaviours and attitudes in school. They had also reported that issues of self-harm had reduced and participants were showing improved confidence and self-esteem.

9. The panel also heard about the Council's Crucial Crew and Reality Roadshow initiatives, which provide personal safety and wellbeing advice to children and young people. Delivered to every child in Year 6 and Year 9 respectively, that go to school in the district, these programmes provide important advice and guidance for young people around internet safety, drugs and alcohol awareness, road safety, bullying and healthy relationships. The latter being added in the last couple of years, due to the high level of known domestic abuse in the district.

10. The Task & Finish Review Panel were impressed with the breadth and extent of the work undertaken by the Council's Community Services and Safety Teams and felt that the targeted work that had been delivered was excellent. They agreed that this work should be continued and potentially developed in conjunction with local Parish and Town Councils, in order to address key local issues and hence, agreed recommendation vii) in this report.

11. Officers from Essex County Council (ECC) were invited to present to the panel on work being delivered in the district for young people and were disappointed to hear that no face to face youth work is now undertaken anywhere in Essex, due to severe budget cuts over the last few years. It was also noted that the current provision by ECC for the Epping Forest District was 1.5 FTE staff and that the remit of the service had been changed to 'Community Capacity Building' and support for the voluntary sector to deliver initiatives.

12. The panel were concerned that this new remit for Youth Work staff had already resulted in duplication of work in the district, with the Council having its own Community Engagement officers. They also felt that some of the work described by the County Council representatives was not aligned to key areas of priority. This led them to reaching a consensus, that the District Council would be best placed to understand the local issues and needs of young people, and that devolvement of Essex County Council's remaining resources for young people to EFDC, would enable an improved service to be delivered across the district.

13. The final and detailed report of the Youth Engagement Task & Finish Panel was presented to Overview and Scrutiny at its' meeting on 20th October and agreement was reached on the suggested recommendations of the report.

14. This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval to the recommendations made by the panel.

Resource implications:

This report recommends to Cabinet two items of CSB growth: 1) That an additional £8,000 is made available each year for the Youth Council to deliver projects as agreed through the Neighbourhoods and Communities Select Committee and 2) That an additional £25,000

budget is made available for Community Services, to undertake targeted work with young people identified with self-esteem and confidence issues and those displaying anti-social and other negative behaviours.

Consultation undertaken:

A wide range of consultation was undertaken as part of the Youth Engagement Task & Finish Review, including with local secondary schools, Essex County Council and public and voluntary sector partners.

Legal Implications:

None.

Background papers:

Agenda and minutes from the Task & Finish Review; consultation and questionnaire papers from local schools and public and voluntary sector partners.

Safer, Cleaner & Greener Implications:

The recommendations from the Task & Finish Review, seek agreement from the Council to increase investment in local young people, including to provide targeted work with young people at risk of anti-social behaviour and youth nuisance and those at risk of self-harm.

Risk Management:

None.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

This report contains recommendations that may impact positively on the seven equality protected characteristics, including young people with additional needs.