

Agenda Item No: 5



Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Youth Engagement Provision in the Borough

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. To note the content of the report
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Date of O&S meeting: Tuesday 27 March 2018

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Chilton

Relevant Portfolio(s): Culture

Summary: This report explains the current youth engagement work of the Borough Council and services provided by key partners particularly Kent County Council Early Help and Preventative Services. It explains the current delivery picture focusing on local youth centres and outreach work, as Members have requested. Key challenges going forward are also highlighted to ensure young people have appropriate access to advice, guidance and positive activity outside the formal education structure.

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Report Title: Youth Engagement Provision in the Borough of Ashford

Introduction and Background

1. This paper provides information requested by Members concerning the current provision for youth engagement at local centres and through outreach services around the borough. It focuses on dedicated youth centres and outreach services currently supported by the Council and those directly provided and commissioned by Kent County Council Early Help and Preventative Services across the borough. However, it is acknowledged that there are many organisations including schools, parish councils, Tenterden Town Council, leisure clubs and trusts, the Police and the voluntary and uniformed sector that provide out of school sessions and activities, as well as safe spaces for young people to socialize and get advice and guidance.
2. Young people are recognised as being between 8 to 19 years of age and up to 24 for those with learning disabilities. They require a range of different services and places to support and encourage them as they mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. Some young people will require specific help to enable them to reconnect with society and improve their lives. Thus youth engagement is varied and complex and requires a workforce with a mix of specialist training and skills to respond appropriately to young people's needs.
3. The mechanisms for supporting young people have had to keep pace with the changing, different and emerging problems faced by young people at a time when resources to deliver are challenging. Working in partnership with the various networks including the What Matters Youth Forum, which has over 50 member organisations helps the sector share knowledge and agree best practice. Other partnerships including the YAG (Youth Advisory Group), Local Children's Partnership Group and Community Safety Partnership, all provide support to ensure delivery adapts and grows particularly when there is a concern for young people's health and life choices.

Funding Context

4. Members will be aware of the Council's Community Service Grants (part of the Single Grants Gateway) that has prioritised youth development work over the last 4 years. The projects commissioned and monitored under this funding scheme are explained below and £41,750 of Council investment per annum has been allocated to youth projects. This includes Ashford Volunteer Centre's 'Can Do Crew' project to support NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people and provide work and educational opportunities. In this current financial year 77 young people have attended the course.

5. The 2018/19 budget, recently approved by the Council, sustains this investment to allow youth organisations to work with officers and develop their programmes given the needs of current and potential participants.
6. Member grants, as well as capital and revenue grants awarded by the Council have also been helpful in supporting youth projects that aim to extend and improve spaces to support new members and 'open access' activities. Similarly, section 106 contributions have successfully created new facilities that benefit youth engagement and positive activity, particularly around sport.
7. The Council also supports delivery organisations with advice and networking opportunities as well as providing spaces free of rent and covering major maintenance costs such as at Sk8side and House in the Stour Centre.
8. A new five year commissioning cycle began in September 2016 following a procurement exercise managed by Kent County Council. KCC and the Council agreed the best use of the money available.
9. Local Community Interest Company, Sk8side, was awarded the contract for Ashford, receiving £96,000 per year to deliver across the borough.
10. Kent County Council has provided in Appendix A, an overview of youth provision available in the borough of Ashford. This includes provision that is directly or commissioned by Kent County Council Early Help and Preventative Services and picks up on some of the key activity and development to date of this offer.

Local Delivery Structure

11. Sk8side CIC is commissioned by Kent County Council as mentioned above and deliver a range of services across the borough. They are based at the Sk8side Youth Centre and provide a daily drop in (Tuesday to Saturday) for all to relax in the centre, access refreshments, play games and access the youth workers on issues relating to their lives. They theme weeks to provide advice on subjects such as sexual health, alcohol and self-harm and engage members in discussions, exercises and workshops.
12. In addition they have structured sessions on four evenings a week incorporating the skate/bmx/scooter project; a girls group; MotoV8 meetings (Ashford based motorbike project) and DJ workshop on a Friday evening. They also run the AQA Unit Award Scheme whereby young people can gain accreditation for various activities.
13. As part of a partnership with Kent County Council, the Borough Council provides a lease for Sk8side CIC to occupy the building at the rear of the Stour Centre for the period of their commissioned work. The building undertook major repair (new roof and redecoration) last year to ensure it is fit for purpose.

14. Ashford Skate Park (next to Sk8side) is also maintained by the Borough Council and it too has been refurbished to ensure equipment is safe and meets user's needs. Sk8side CIC provides significant support to the users of the park. They run a skate project in the centre including a skate store which offers opportunities for young people to volunteer. They also run an annual skate competition and were planning to reintroduce the Summer Jam this year after a gap of a couple of years. This involves members getting involved in a variety of ways - performing, organising, publicity, sound engineering, fundraising stalls etc.
15. 'House' is an open access space (opened in 2012) located within the Stour Centre. It is run by Uprising and delivers a range of programmes including training for young people disadvantaged and NEET, to help and support them on gaining confidence, skills, qualifications and possible work and educational opportunities. It collaborates with Sk8side to compliment opening hours and sessions to support young people throughout the week. The Council supports Uprising with a Community Services Grant (£24,750) for House and Hang 10. In this current financial year, 274 different young people have accessed the services provided in House. In this financial year 762 young people have accessed Hang 10 services.
16. Hang 10 is an outreach service, set up by the Council in 2012 which has been further developed by Uprising over the last two years. The team travels around the urban areas dealing with 'hotspot' areas (where young people are gathering), collaborating closely with the Community Safety Unit (the operational arm of the Community Safety Partnership). They encourage and sign post young people into local positive activities and spaces as well as their own garden and landscaping project involving young people that is funded by Housing.
17. The Stanhope Community Hub, has established itself during the last two years particularly supported by Moat Housing. This has provided further positive impacts in the local area of Stanhope with regular open access provision alongside specialist programmes. There is a suggestion that the building can be extended further to allow additional sessions delivered by Uprising.
18. The Waterside Youth Space, built in 2009 with S106 funding, is located adjacent to the Swan Centre in South Willesborough and is a part of the KCC children's services managed building, under a lease with the Council. The Salvation Army deliver the 'Bridge' project from here and provides a range of activities and learning for local young people, many of which come from disadvantaged backgrounds.
19. The Borough Council provides support if and when required to Tenterden Town Council on the operation of the 'youth' club at Highbury Halls. For example, officers have provided guidance on the proposals to regenerate the current building and possible expansion in the Town. Tenterden Town Council are looking at future provision of youth services and are engaging with youth providers on the way forward.

Challenges and Work Going Forward

20. The challenges for the future include; maintaining the standard of delivery by youth leaders and practitioners, the recruitment and training of volunteers by those groups and finally the resourcing provided. For example, the facility at Waterside struggles to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of volunteers to deliver services. As noted in para 20, funding will be required to expand the current building in Stanhope operated by Uprising. Doing so would enable them to expand the services they deliver and achieve a more secure future.
21. It is extremely disappointing that Sk8side CIC do not feel they are able to deliver the KCC contract to the end of the five year term. Officers of the Borough Council are very keen to continue provision from the Sk8side Youth Centre and would wish KCC to continue support from this location.

Conclusion

22. In addition to the services and facilities detailed in this report, there are further spaces coming on stream in the near future such as Repton Connects and Finberry Community Centre. Although they are not dedicated youth spaces they will provide focal points within their local communities where services can be delivered for and with young people.
23. Over many years the voluntary sector has provided dedicated services in the area of youth engagement from town and village centres and for outreach provision. In the main, and given professional support with some challenging youth issues, they are still well placed to deliver both 'open access' and programmes for disadvantaged young people. In order to continue with their good work, the voluntary sector will require ongoing support with recruitment, retaining staff and volunteers, training opportunities and financial support to maintain and enhance the delivery of services which Kent County Council provides.

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