

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-053-2008/09
Date of meeting: 10 November 2008



Portfolio: Leisure and Young People.
Subject: Epping Forest Youth Council – Future Funding.
Responsible Officer: Julie Chandler (01992 564214).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Cabinet note the successful establishment of the Epping Forest Youth Council and the range of initiatives undertaken over the last 9 months; and**
- (2) That the Cabinet support a CSB growth bid of £12,000 per annum, as part of the budget process 2009/10 to provide revenue funding for the ongoing provision of the Youth Council.**

Executive Summary:

Epping Forest Youth Council has successfully developed over the last 9 months, as a valuable resource to the Council. The 17 Youth Councillors, who are aged between 13 and 17 years, have undertaken a wide range of training and development to support them in their roles and have each taken specific responsibility for a portfolio or area of business.

In the last few months, with the support of Officers, the Youth Council has implemented the largest consultation exercise ever undertaken by the Council, with in excess of 900 young people responding to an on - line and paper survey. The survey identifies local issues that are important to young people and will culminate in the Big Youth Debate, which is being held in November and will involve several very high profile individuals, including MP's and heads of Police, Primary Care Trust and Children's Services.

The Youth Council has also been successful in securing external funding from: West Essex Area Forum (WEAF); The Youth Capital Fund CYPSP and The Jack Petchey Foundation, which totals in excess of £9,500. WEAF funding of £5,500 has been earmarked for local youth project work, which is available to youth groups to apply for, through a bidding process. CYPSP funding of £2200 has been put towards the costs of staging the Big Debate, and the remainder funding has been allocated to provision of uniform, marketing and youth office equipment.

In the previous report submitted to Cabinet in November 2007, it was agreed that the Deputy Chief Executive would report back to cabinet, on the resource implications of establishing a fully effective and operational Youth Council for the District in the longer term.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council encourages people to take part in discussion and debate on services, particularly those who may be traditionally excluded from decision - making processes. In addition, the Essex Local Area Agreement sets out how Local Authorities will aim to improve the lives of children and young people, and this includes through providing opportunities for them to articulate their concerns and ideas about how, and what services are provided for them locally. The District Youth Council therefore fulfils both the Councils' and LAA requirements through providing the following:

- A specific point of contact enabling the Council to engage with young people and to seek their views or opinions on a range of local issues and the services they use;
- An advisory body to the Council, formally responding to consultation exercises relating to specific issues concerning young people in the District, or other matters on which consultation is important for the development of services
- A vehicle to enable young people to comment on and become involved in the Council's decision making and service delivery processes;
- A forum for young people to seek to influence the Council's Policies and decisions that affect them (key to this is direct political access); and
- A body to seek and secure funding to support youth initiatives in the District.

Other Options for Action:

(i) A decision not to fund the operation of the Youth Council and to continue with allocation of costs to the Youth Strategy Budget. This will however, result in a lack of service provision for young people in the district.

(ii) The overheads of operating the Youth Council mainly relate to the provision of transport for the Youth Councillors to attend meetings, with a much smaller percentage allocated to the costs of externally provided training and development. Therefore, there is limited scope for reduction of costs.

Report:

1. The Council agreed to establish a Youth Council for the District in June 2007, following a successful stakeholder meeting, where local secondary schools and Epping Forest College agreed to support a Youth Council nomination and election process.

2. It was agreed that Epping Forest College and all secondary schools in the district (including Independent and Faith schools) would be allocated two Youth Council places for pupils aged 13 – 18 years of age and that a further five places would be available to young people that live, but do not go to school in the District.

3. In Autumn 2007, local schools held elections for the Youth Council and the additional five places available were advertised through the local press, youth groups and Parish Councils. All Essex County Council schools were successful in appointing youth councillor representatives and the required number of self - nominated representatives were realised. This resulted in 20 young people being invited to join Members and Officers in an official Youth Council launch event held in January 2008.

4. In November 2007, Cabinet agreed to support the introduction of Epping Forest Youth Council, in terms of providing access to Cabinet members (in particular the Leisure Portfolio Holder) and Service Directors (or their representatives) at Youth Council meetings. And as part of the Senior Management Re-structure, it was agreed to allocate funding for a Part-time Youth Council Administrator to work alongside the Young Person's Officer, on the basis of 18

hrs per week. It was also agreed that following a period of review, the Deputy Chief Executive would report back to cabinet, on the resource implications of establishing a fully effective and operational Youth Council for the District in the longer term. To date the costs have been met by the existing Youth Strategy budget, but this is not sustainable in the longer term, as it will severely curtail practical initiatives for young people to be delivered.

5. An Officer Working Group was established in January 2008 to oversee the establishment of the Youth Council, consisting of representatives from Community Development, Research and Democratic Services and Public Relations. Led by the Council's Young Person's Officer, who has provided day-to-day direction and support to Youth Councillors, this group has assisted with the provision of induction and training to the Youth Council since their inaugural meeting in February this year.

6. Since its introduction, the Youth Council has held regular monthly meetings at the Civic Offices in a cycle in line with the main Council meetings, and sub group and portfolio meetings in between these. Agendas and minutes are published on the COMS system and some meetings have been webcast, thus opening up the work of the Youth Council to a wider audience and inspection.

7. Within the first few meetings, the Youth Council agreed on five key priorities for their work: Leisure Activities for Young People; Safety and Social Issues; Transport; Environment and Stereotypes of Young People. These topics formed the basis of the Young People's Survey and will be the focus of discussion at the Big Debate, which will be attended by around 200 young people and 25 representatives from the Council and local organisations in the District.

8. Officers, local partners and stakeholders have been very impressed with the commitment and ability of the Youth Council and fully support their Key priorities. It is anticipated that the Big Debate will set the framework for Youth Council work in the medium term.

Resource Implications:

Total revenue costs of £12,000 per annum. This to cover expenses for: transport to and from Youth Council meetings (twice per month + sub group meetings) £6000; training £1500; themed project work £1500; elections & promotions £2500 and team building £500.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Officers are currently drawing up a schedule of governance arrangements relating to the Youth Council. However, all financial control for the Youth Council Budget will be through the Young Person's Officer and Community Development Officer.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

'Safety and Social Issues' is one of the five key priorities of the Youth Council. As part of the Big Debate, young people have been asked to comment on a range of issues linked to this, including whether they have been a victim of crime and whether they feel safe where they go in the District. It is anticipated that the findings of the big Debate will enable the District Safer Communities Partnership and local Police to help young people feel safer in their own communities and elsewhere in the district, through addressing key safety issues.

Consultation Undertaken:

Significant consultation was undertaken with local partners and stakeholders prior to the Youth Council being established and Youth Councillors are now undertaking varied consultation with their peers, as their core work.

Background Papers:

None.

Impact Assessments:

None.