

Overview and Scrutiny Youth Engagement Task & Finish Review

Final Report and Recommendations

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.

The review was undertaken between April and September 2015 and this report provides an overview of the findings of the panel and a set of recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The members of the Youth Engagement Task & Finish Panel were as follows;

Members (up to May '15): S. Murray, G. Mohindra, C. Roberts, B. Surtees, K. Adams, R. Butler

Members (after May '15): S. Murray, G. Mohindra, C. Roberts, S. Neville, B. Surtees A. Patel

Other Members: Mrs H Kane, J McIvor (Youth Councillor), M Tinker (Youth Councillor)

Officers: J Chandler (Assistant Director Community Services and Safety), G Wallis (Community, Health & Wellbeing Manager and R Perrin (Democratic Services Assistant).

Report:

1. The first meeting of the panel was held on April 20th 2015 and the Assistant Director Community Services & Safety opened the meeting and requested nominations for the role of Chairman. Councillor S Murray was nominated and accepted the role of Chairman and Councillor G Mohindra was nominated and accepted the role as Vice Chairman of the Panel.
2. The Assistant Director Community Services & Safety presented an initial scoping report and draft terms of reference for the group, as attached as Appendix 1. The terms of reference were adopted with slight amendments and the panel agreed a schedule of work, to conclude with a final report being submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th October 2015.
3. The first area of work undertaken by the panel focussed on the Epping Forest Youth Council. M Tinker and J McIvor gave a presentation on the work and successes of the current Youth Council 2014-16 and achievements of their predecessors over the previous seven years. This included details of work that had been undertaken over the last year, including the staging 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 Epping Forest 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' and had delivered advice in schools assemblies and 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. A very wide range of other initiatives had also been undertaken by the Youth Councillors during their time in office and this had built on the successes of previous years. This 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 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 other Members were aware and understood the valuable contribution that they made locally. They also felt that there was evidence of the need for additional and specific project work to be carried out by the Youth Council.
6. The Panel agreed that the Youth Council represented excellent value for money as currently funded by the Council and due to the external funding that they secured, and noted the following comments in particular;
 - 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 the Youth Councillors themselves had independently applied for and secured external funding for EFYC
7. Further research was commissioned by the Panel in relation to the activities of the Youth Council and this included comparisons to other local authority Youth Council functions in the local area and further afield, including St Albans and London. The Panel concluded from the findings of these studies, that Epping Forest Youth Council was more extensive and impressive in its work and that the operation of EFYC was excellent in comparison to other Youth Councils represented at the UK Youth Parliament.
8. This conclusion was further endorsed by feedback from local schools and other statutory and non-statutory partners, some examples of which are detailed below;

"The Epping Forest Youth Council has been a shining example across Essex and is frequently referred to positively". Vicky Young, West Senior Community Based Commissioner, Essex County Council.

"This is a good thing- it raises awareness of the wider community and the process of representative democracy". Davenant Foundation School, Loughton.

"We have and will always support the Epping Forest Youth Council as it works alongside what we do and builds the young people to look at the community in a whole different way. It is well organised and well managed". Roding Valley High School.

"Maintaining a Youth Council in the area is vital if we are to encourage young people to take part in the democratic process". "Our councillors report back to our school

council and have given presentations in assemblies. The role of EFYC is known by all members of the school community". Braeside School, Buckhurst Hill.

"It gives young people the opportunity to be involved and have their voice heard. It teaches them very important life skills and contributes to their personal development". St. John's School, Epping.

"Voluntary Action Epping Forest Carers project has worked with the Youth Council on several intergenerational project activities and each one has been a great success". J Foile Chief Officer VAEF.

"We have been working in partnership with EFYC for the last four years delivering practical conservation projects on the Forest. These sessions are invaluable to us for a number of reasons, including; to forge links with an often difficult to reach section of the community and allowing the young people to act as champions for Forest as they pass on information to their peers". City of London.

"We value their support and assistance when we need to engage with our young people". Loughton Town Council.

9. Several members of the Panel added to the endorsements listed, through their own experience of the Youth Council and their work in local communities. This included examples given of work undertaken with elderly residents of Buckhurst Hill and with Youth Plus, Ongar, which is a voluntary sector group for young people with additional needs.

Recommendations of the Panel in relation to the Epping Forest Youth Council:

- i) **That the Council retains and continues to support and develop the Youth Council;**
 - ii) **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;**
 - iii) **That the Youth Council acts as a consultee for stakeholder and presentations at Overview and Scrutiny Committees;**
 - iv) **That the current operational budget for the Youth Council be maintained at £12,000 per annum; and,**
 - v) **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee makes a bid to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee 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 and Select Committee.**
10. The second phase of work undertaken by the Panel focussed on the youth engagement work undertaken by the Council's Community Services and Safety teams and the work of Essex County Council.
 11. The Assistant Director Community Services & Safety presented an overview of the work delivered for young people. She explained that whilst some of the work can be considered youth engagement in its truest sense as it involves in-depth and targeted

work with ongoing feedback and review, other work is provided on a more informal basis for larger numbers of young people.

12. The Assistant Director explained that work with young people forms only a small part of the work undertaken by Community Services and Safety, as the remit of the service area covers peoples of all ages from birth to very elderly. Therefore, it would be very hard to disaggregate the budget specifically allocated to this work. It was also noted that much of the work undertaken by the service is funded externally through competitive funding processes and that because of the level of success in acquiring external funding, over £750,000 revenue funding had been secured in the last five years to prop up the budget resources available. In addition, several million pounds had been secured towards capital projects during this time.
13. The young engagement work undertaken by Community Services mainly focussed on super output areas of the district; specific groups of young people in communities and young people referred by schools as needing additional support, advice and guidance. This included football sessions in Waltham Abbey which attracted over 80 young people to each session, projects with young people with additional needs and in-school delivery of programmes focussing on issues such as self-harm, substance misuse and improving behaviour and attitudes.
14. Examples were given of the impact of this work on young people and one of the cases highlighted, involved a 17 year old young lad who had gone along to a football session at Town Mead in Waltham Abbey. He had demonstrated very challenging behaviour and had caused serious problems for the coaches, resulting in him being excluded from the session. The following week he had turned up to the session and sat outside the football pitch and had been quiet. The head coach had gone to speak to him and found out that his dad had left his family home and the young lad was not coping with the situation. He had also dropped out of school and was regularly staying out all night without telling his mum. The coach managed to convince him that he needed to go home and sort things out and went with him to speak to his mum. The result of this intervention was that the young lad went back into school and was allowed to attend the football sessions again. He had since gone on to be signed for a local league football team and was doing very well.
15. The panel were advised that local schools were very grateful for the targeted work undertaken with their pupils on the basis of 6 – 8 week programmes of work, 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.
16. Over the previous three years, Community Services had been successful in securing around £150,000 towards provision of an Inclusion Project for children and young people with additional needs. This had proved to be extremely successful and gratefully received by local families. The project had enabled the Council to understand the barriers that prevent families from accessing local services and a strong parent/carer forum had been set up which would help the project be sustainable in the future.
17. The Assistant Director went on to talk about the more informal provision for young people and this included a wide range of activities from mountain biking, to dance and museum activities. All of these activities focussed on development of young people's skills and confidence, as well as improving their general health and wellbeing.

18. The Panel were additionally told about two other very high profile initiatives provided by Community Services and Safety which take place on an annual basis and involve statutory and voluntary sector partners. These being Crucial Crew and Reality Roadshow.

19. Crucial Crew was a high impact health and safety initiative delivered to all Year 6 (10yrs) pupils in primary schools in the district. Due to the excellent reputation of Crucial Crew the Council was also receiving requests from schools from other areas such as Brentwood to allow their children to access the service. Crucial Crew was organised each year, over a period of two weeks at the same venue and participants spent a half day taking part in a range of scenarios which include internet safety, drugs and alcohol awareness, road safety and anti-bullying. In addition, in the last two years, new sessions on healthy relationships had been introduced to the programme due to the high incidences of Domestic Abuse in the district. This session helped children to understand what a healthy family life should be like.

At the end of each day, all children would take part in an interactive quiz, which identified the level of their understanding of the issues and they were provided with a handbook to take away, which gives further details about each of the topics.

The feedback that was received from participants and their schools was extremely positive and it was understood that the important messages of Crucial Crew stay with anyone that has participated in it for years to come. This was confirmed by the Youth Councillors on the review panel.

All of the scenarios were provided by statutory and non-statutory partners, generally free of charge and the only cost to the Council was for the venue hire for the two week period.

20. Reality Roadshow was described as the secondary school version of Crucial Crew aimed at young people in Year 9 (13/14 yrs) and was delivered in the schools during curriculum time. This programme tended to be much 'harder hitting' than Crucial Crew and usually started with a powerful theatre performance based around bullying and peer pressure. The scenarios that the young people attended were very explicit and therefore, the impact on participants was actually seen in their expressions whilst attending each of the sessions.

Reality Roadshow also involved the support of statutory and voluntary sector partners and was seen as an excellent initiative to raise awareness of the real dangers of drug taking and alcohol abuse, as well as issues of sexual health and healthy relationships. In these particular sessions, issues of domestic abuse were talked about more openly, and included advice on what young people should expect in their own relationships.

The main costs associated with Reality Roadshow related to the theatre production which was paid for by the schools and some of the voluntary sector sessions.

21. The Task & Finish Review Panel were very 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 in particular, was excellent. They felt that it would be very beneficial for this work to be extended even further in conjunction with the local Parish and Town Councils, in order to address key local issues.

22. The Assistant Director Community Services and Safety advised the Panel that the core budgets of the service area were very limited for this type of work, as previously,

the targeted work with young people was undertaken by the Essex County Council (ECC) as part of their statutory duty for provision of Youth Services. However, in recent years there had been significant cuts to the Youth Services delivery across the whole of Essex and this had resulted in EFDC needing to cover the gaps in provision. It was noted that the current provision by ECC for the Epping Forest District was 1.5 FTE staff and that there was no longer any face to face delivery of Youth Services and that the remit of the service had been changed to 'Community Commissioning' and support for the voluntary sector to deliver initiatives.

23. This change in focus by ECC had caused issue for the Council, as there was an apparent lack of communication with key colleagues who were already undertaking a similar role in the district.
24. A representative of ECC was therefore invited to attend the Panel to give a presentation about the new role of Youth/Community Commissioners and work undertaken within the district.
25. E Nkwelle from ECC presented to the Panel about the work he had undertaken locally to identify priority issues for young people and community profiles. This raised significant concern amongst Panel members, who felt that they did not receive appropriate responses to the many questions they had raised. The Panel were additionally concerned about the evident lack of delivery of actual 'face to face' Youth Services in the district and questioned the impact of the commissioned work that was undertaken. The panel were very unimpressed with ECC's contribution to the review process and felt that communication with the Council and young people themselves was very poor. There was also a lack of clear outcomes and impact.
26. This led to the Panel agreeing that the services provided by ECC could be put to better use by the District Council, as it was in a better position to know where there were gaps in provision and hence, where investment was required.
27. The Panel asked Officers what the pressing issues of young people in the District currently were and whether extra funding would help with targeted work. J Chandler advised that these included substance misuse and particularly alcohol and legal highs, sexual exploitation (online) and self-harming and these were of major concern. Work to address these issues would require experienced and qualified staff.

Recommendations of the Panel in regard to future delivery of youth provision by Community Services and Safety:

- i) **That the Council pursues the devolvement of the budget and responsibilities for Youth Provision from Essex County Council to the District Council; and,**
- ii) **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee makes a bid to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee 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.**