

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/077/2007-08.

Date of meeting: 12 November 2007.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Young People.

Subject: Epping Forest District Youth Council.

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Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470).

Recommendations:

- (1) That the principle of establishing the Epping Forest Youth Council be supported, including;**
 - (a) using the Youth Council as a means of consultation on Council services;**
 - (b) access to elected Members of the District Council;**
 - (c) the provision of support to the Youth Council in terms of dedicated officer resource to assist with seeking nominations for candidates, and supporting the administrative, training and development needs of the Youth Council; and**
 - (d) the allocation of resources to meet the operational costs and expenses associated with the Youth Council;**
- (2) That, in order to facilitate the initial induction and training period, a revenue DDF supplementary estimate in the sum of £5,000 for 2007/08 be recommended to the Council for approval; and**
- (3) That, as part of the review arising from the Senior Management Review, the scope for containing the resource implications of establishing a fully effective and operational Youth Council for the District in the longer term be considered by the Deputy Chief Executive and reported further to the Cabinet as necessary.**

Background to Proposals:

1. Essex County Council introduced the Essex Youth Assembly (EYA) in 2003, to provide a vehicle for young people across Essex to articulate their views and concerns regarding service provision on a County level. The EYA consists of representatives aged 13 - 19 from 12 Essex Districts that are nominated and elected through an official local election process.
2. Epping Forest representation on the EYA has previously been supported by Essex County Council Youth Service, but in the last 3 years reduced resources have prevented an official election process from taking place, this resulting in young people being nominated on a good will basis from year to year.
3. With the decision by Members to re-instate the Young Persons Officer post in December 2006, an opportunity arose to formally institute an Epping Forest Youth Council, to act on behalf of all young people in the District and to represent the District on the Essex Youth Assembly.

4. In June this year, a local stakeholder briefing was held in the Council Chamber to present the District Youth Council proposal, which involved the Leader and Deputy Leader of Council; Leisure Portfolio Holder; Chief Executive; Local Strategic Partnership Chair (Epping Forest College Principal), and Leisure, Democratic and Public Relations Officers, who presented the proposal to local secondary school Head teachers and School Council staff. In addition, presentations were given by representatives from Essex Youth Assembly and Harlow Youth Council.

5. The proposal to establish a Youth Council in the District was very well received by all stakeholders, and the schools and college agreed to support a Youth Council nomination and election process.

Proposed Youth Council – Actions of Officers to Date:

6. An Officer Working Group has been established to oversee the establishment of an Epping Forest Youth Council. Their work has researched the operation of other District and Borough Youth Councils and, brings forward ideas for the future operation of such a group based upon best practice from other authorities. However, there are some unique local circumstances that will need to be addressed as part of the process. These include but not exhaustively:

(a) how to include representation from young people living but not schooled within the District;

(b) how the Council's current policies and procedures might require review to facilitate the Youth Council participation and inclusion; and

(c) how long term Council support is provided and assured.

7. Officers have already formulated proposals for seeking nominations to the Youth Council utilising the College and Local Secondary Schools. A nomination pack has been designed and was widely circulated and publicised during Local Democracy Week providing a link to the national curriculum for the schools. This pack seeks nominations from the District's young people both in and out of education.

8. In terms of an election process, stakeholders have agreed that Epping Forest College and all secondary schools in the District (including Independent and Faith schools) will be allocated two Youth Council places for pupils aged 13 – 17 years of age. The Councils' Young Person's Officer will facilitate the Schools and the College in holding their own elections during early December. This support will include providing election equipment to the schools during their election periods. It is proposed that Council staff will then collect ballot boxes, with a count taking place at the Civic Offices. The results will then be announced at Full Council in December.

9. In addition to the above, 5 further Youth Councillor positions will be available for young people that live, but do not go to school in the area. It is intended that these will be advertised locally through the press; youth groups and local Parishes, and nominations will be assessed and selected by the Youth Council at its' first meeting in January.

Induction and Training:

10. An essential element to the establishment of the Youth Council will be to provide appropriate induction and training, and it is proposed that this will commence in January/February 2008 and will be an ongoing process. It is proposed to provide courses developed 'in house', such as: Dealing with the Media; Public Speaking; Minute Taking and Chairing Meetings, and that Officers, Members and the Essex Youth Assembly and Essex Youth Service will be involved in this.

11. Once established, it is envisaged that the role of the Youth Council will be to:
 - (a) Act as 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;
 - (b) Act as 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;
 - (c) Enable young people to comment on and become involved in the Council's decision-making and service delivery processes;
 - (d) Provide 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);
 - (e) Act as a body to seek and secure funding to support youth initiatives in the District; and
 - (f) Provide a District-wide forum for discussion and consultation with Town and Parish Youth bodies.
12. One of the first tasks for the Youth Council will be agree a way of working with the Council. This will include a constitution. Key to the success of the project will be the commitment of the Council to the process, their support and involvement.
13. It is proposed that formal meetings of the Youth Council will be held at the Civic Offices in a cycle in line with the main Council meetings. Whilst it is for the Youth Council to determine its structure, it is envisaged that they may wish to appoint Youth Council Portfolio Holders; establish Committees and Panels and attend the Council's main committees. Agenda and minutes will be published on the COMS system and meetings would be webcast (subject to parental permission and controls) thus opening up the work of the Youth Council to a wider audience and inspection.
14. Key to the success of the Youth Council is access to Cabinet members (in particular the Leisure Portfolio Holder), Service Directors (or their representatives) and wider external partners at Youth Council meetings. Members will be aware of the how the success of the Harlow Youth Council is very much as a result of the Council embracing the views and aspirations of young people within a realistic resource context.

Ongoing Support to the Youth Council:

15. Whilst the Council's Young Persons' Officer has a clear remit to be an advocate for young people and encourage their engagement in the Democratic Process, this is only one aspect of his wider role, which includes the provision of advice to local groups working with young people and liaison with Town and Parish Councils on Youth Development issues. The Young Persons' Officer also currently represents the Council on a Sub Group of the Children and Young Peoples' Strategic Partnership, as well as undertaking a key role in the organisation of the Council's Summer Fest programme for young people.
16. To date it has been possible, with assistance from Officers in Democratic Services, to undertake the consultation and planning phases of the development of the Youth Council within existing resources. Indeed the Council's Returning Officer has agreed to assist in facilitating elections to the Youth Council and to provide relevant training of Youth Council Members, in conjunction with Essex Youth Service. However, once formally established, in order to operate effectively, the Youth Council will need an ongoing level of dedicated support in the following areas:
 - (a) organisation of meeting venues and transport arrangements;

- (b) note or minute taking and support with administration and management of meetings;
- (c) organisation of ongoing training and development for the Youth Council Members;
- (d) future support to schools and colleges with regard to election process;
- (e) assistance with publicising the work of the Youth Council;
- (f) assistance in communicating key policy and service issues to the Youth Council for consultation and reporting outcomes;
- (g) support to meetings of District and Youth Council Members; and
- (h) budgetary Control of Youth Council funds and expenses.

17. It is estimated that in order to provide the appropriate level of assistance, a part-time, 18 hour per week, Youth Council Support Officer post will be required. Although, subject to Job Evaluation, it is envisaged that this post would be at a level of Grade 4, in line with the Committee Assistants' posts, currently within Democratic Services.

18. In addition, in order to ensure that Youth Councillors are able to participate fully and that cost is not a barrier, provision should be made for travelling expenses and that adequate resources are made available for training and development.

19. If the District Council is truly committed to the future success of the Youth Council, it will clearly need to show Young People that they are taken seriously and their opinions valued. The provision of an appropriate level of professional and financial support would demonstrate this commitment.

20. As the proposed elections, induction and training will take place before the end of the financial year, officers are seeking a supplementary DDF amount in the sum of £5000. This will cover provision of a team - building event for all (approx. 22) Youth Council members; travel expenses for 7 meetings from January to March and part time temporary administrative support of 18 hours per week, December 2007 to March 31 2008.

21. For the longer term, support issues will be addressed by the Deputy Chief Executive in his service restructuring review, arising from the Senior Management Review. The Deputy Chief Executive will be seeking to contain the additional costs of the Youth Council, within the review if feasible, however, if this does not prove possible a further report will need to be presented seeking new provision.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

22. 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 LAA Children and Young People block 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 establishment of a District Youth Council will therefore fulfil both the Councils' and LAA requirements.

Other Options for Action:

23. The Council could seek to engage with Young People in a different way. However, this approach could not be seen as successful in the longer term or as effective as a formal forum such as a Youth Council. This approach is tried and tested in other authorities. Targeted schemes tend not to reach across all areas of the District or across other difficult to reach groups. The proposals for further representation from those not in schooling in the

District are designed to accommodate giving a voice to these types of young people via school, youth groups or community.

Consultation Undertaken:

24. Consultation has been undertaken with all local secondary schools, Epping Forest College, the Local Strategic Partnership, Essex County Council Youth Services, other local authorities in Essex and Hertfordshire and Essex Youth Assembly.

Resource Implications:

Budget Provision: Supplementary DDF amount in the sum of £5000. Longer term funding subject to further report.

Youth Council Support Officer: 18 hours per week @ Grade 4 = £9689.24 inc. on costs. Estimated expenses for young people: attendance at 12 x monthly Council meetings = £3960.00; attendance at various main Council/other committees (estimated at 1.5 per month each Councillor) = £5940.00; training and development for Youth Council per annum = £2000.00. Total = £11900.00 per annum.

Grand Total = £21589 (admin support @ 18 hours per week).

Personnel: Within 2007-08 budgetary provisions – further reports will be made as necessary.

Land: Nil.

Council Plan 2006-10/BVPP Reference: Council Plan Reference: A Safe Community Action SC3 – Provide ...training opportunities for Young People to encourage positive lifestyles. VPP reference 2007/08 - page 30 Leisure Services – Leisure and Cultural Services.

Relevant Statutory Powers: Local Government Act 2000 Community Wellbeing.

Background Papers: None.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: The Youth Council will be made up from Young People aged between 13 and 19. Officers have ensured that Child Protection issues are fully addressed as part of the process.

Key Decision Reference (if required): Not a key decision.