

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 18 September 2023

Title: Youth Services

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

Background

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Town Council's youth services work within Witney and the allocation of its £40,000 budget towards these over the summer and in the future.

Following the cessation of Got2B CIC and a pressing need for action over the summer holidays, at the previous meeting of the Committee on 17th July, it was agreed under minute no. SC391:

1. That, a grant of £1,200 be budgeted for APCAM to provide 5 weekly young people mental health drop-in sessions in the Corn Exchange and,
2. That, no Youth Services Grant Award Scheme is launched for 2023/24 and,
3. That, the above funds be made available to support Witney detached youth work for the Bright Futures project and that officers finalise its implementation.

Current Situation

1. Summer Holiday's Update

The Town Council hosted several meetings with local stakeholders and groups to help advertise events. A brief update from the summer offerings can be seen below following a review:

Published Activities List

The Communications & Community Engagement Officer amalgamated summer activities during the holidays, provided by WODC and other groups onto one understandable publication. This was shared on town council platforms, with TVP, and other local groups.

Due to the short notice, the publication did not reach everywhere it could have and contained chargeable, rather than free/low-cost activities. It was therefore not necessarily benefiting the young people previously targeted by Got2B's detached youth work and the events on offer were not captivating enough for them to engage. Since publication, it became apparent other events were being offered by those not reached in the initial youth services meeting, such as at Windrush Place.

The Council may like to consider the success of this venture and how it would like the town council to proceed for future school holidays.

APCAM Mental Health Drop-in Sessions

Sessions were held every Tuesday, 12-4pm in the Corn Exchange Green Rooms/Main Hall.

Feedback from APCAM stated,

- There was less attendance than initially hoped, but this did pick up as people became aware they were there. The sessions were beginning to gain traction over the last 2-3 weeks of the holiday. Some were referred to the 1:1 Carterton sessions on the closure of the Witney service.
- The space in the Corn Exchange wasn't the most inviting and welcoming but was all that was available via the town council at the last minute.
- Any service needs momentum and consistency if it is to be successful.

Conclusion:

- Witney would benefit from an evening mental health drop-in session like the ones held in Carterton. This could be twice a month, possibly on a Tuesday, 7-9pm. It would be particularly beneficial for parents.
- An enhanced or better venue would be needed, possibly not a town council building.
- School holiday sessions do not offer the momentum/consistency needed, except perhaps the summer holidays – advance notice would need to be given for communications.
- Funding for any further service would be required.

Oxfordshire County Council Detached Youth Work Sessions

Detached youth workers were in Witney twice a week, Tuesday and Thursday between 4-7pm every week during the summer holidays.

Feedback from Oxfordshire County Council Youth Service stated,

- The sessions were centred around the town centre & the Leys, they did not go into outer areas of the town. They did not have the resource to continue after 7/8pm
- The Youth workers were slightly disappointed with the number of young people they were able to engage with but still managed to speak with approx. 10-15 people, aged 12-16 at each session during the first half of the holidays. This reduced to 5-6 in the second half.
- It was a difficult narrative; the young people had nothing to do, with some going into Oxford for entertainment.
- The officers worked collaboratively with the police, who shared intel with them during the holidays.

Conclusion:

- The County Council is not planning on continuing any further detached youth work in Witney at the present time.
- They would be happy to provide information and work collaboratively with any new youth service in Witney.

Councillors R Smith and L Cherry attended the review meeting and thanked both for their assistance over the summer on behalf of the town council.

2. Detached Youth Work Beyond the Summer Holidays

Concerns around young people aged 16+ and drug use/dealing in Witney were raised at the review meeting and with the County Council having no resource to continue with detached youth work in Witney, there is a gap in provision.

Bright Futures

The Council is desirous of filling this gap and has supported the proposal of Bright Futures providing a detached youth service in the town to the approximate sum of £28,000.

Due to the amount to provide by way of grant funding, a draft Service Level Agreement, to satisfy the Council's audit and legal obligations, has been drawn up for discussion. The final document needing agreement and ratification by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee & Full Council.

There is no further update at the time of writing but a date in October for the start of the service has been mooted. Officers will provide a verbal update at the meeting if appropriate.

Home-Start Oxford

The Town Council has provided Home-Start Oxford with funding from the Youth Services Grant since 2020-21. This year a significant amount of the youth services budget has been allocated to the detached youth work/Bright Futures project resulting in no Youth Services Grant Awards.

An update on the work of Home-Start, their plans for the forthcoming year and request for funding is attached as **Appendix A** to this report. Members are asked to consider the request.

3. Youth Council

Due to resourcing and timing, an initial meeting of the task and finish group established to develop the framework of the Council has not yet met. Officers hope to hold this during the next cycle of meetings with the launch scheduled for early 2024.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Financial implications

- The Youth Services budget for 2022/23 was £40,000 (4169/408)
- £2,400 of this was provided to a forest school project on town council land
- £1,200 of this was provided to APCAM for summer holiday mental health drop-in sessions for young people/parents
- Approximately £28,000 of this has been earmarked towards the Bright Futures detached youth services project.
- There is approximately £8,400 remaining on budget line 4169/408 after the above deductions.

- The balance of the discretionary grants budget (4100/407) is £18,000 with 6 months of the financial year left.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Whether the town council should continue to highlight school holiday youth service activities,
2. Whether to recommend that the Council explores funding further young person mental health drop-in sessions with APCAM – this could be evenings, summer holidays or both,
3. The funding request from Home-Start Oxford and recommend to Council accordingly,
4. Note the updates from Oxfordshire County Council, APCAM, on Bright Futures and the Youth Council.