
Agenda Item: Youth Services

Meeting Date: Monday, 18 November 2024

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on Youth Services being funded by the Town Council in 2024/25 and to consider any amendments for the 2025/26 budget.

Background

The principle Local Authority for providing a Youth Services offer in Oxfordshire is the County Council. Following cuts to youth support funding several years ago, local groups met and gaps in youth provision for Witney were identified. The Town Council set aside £30,000 in 2020/21 to help support these groups and encourage new ones to come forward by way of a youth services grant. This amount was raised to £40,000 in 2022/23 but for 2024/25 was allocated towards specific services The Station, Home Start Oxford and APCAM with no grant fund offered.

The Youth Services Grant aim was as follows,

‘Witney Town Council, in consultation with local groups, organisations and individuals has identified that there are gaps in youth provision of varying ages and vulnerabilities within the town. There is a clear need for the young people of Witney and their parents to identify what is currently available in order to seek the help they need, encourage a wider range of opportunities for them and to provide excellent support to young people, helping them to live fulfilling lives.

The Town Council supports the desires of young people for enhancing and increasing places to go and things to do, supports young people’s access to activities they are interested in, maintains play provision and encourages the voice of youth in the decisions that affect them through the work of the Witney Youth Council.

To realise these objectives further, Witney Town Council has established a Youth Funding Grant.’

Town Council officers met with West Oxfordshire District Council’s new Youth Development Officer on 6th November 2024 and understands there is still a gap in services for young people across the District.

There are several national reports online which refer to underfunding of youth services over many years and the Committee has previously discussed the merits of ring-fencing funds for specific service providers. At the meeting held on 15th July 2024 the Committee resolved that it would like to increase the Council's spending on youth (minute SC390 refers).

In addition, comments in the most recent Resident's Satisfaction Survey stated more was needed for young people and teenagers.

Current Situation

Youth Services Budget 2025/26

Following the above recommendation, the proposed funding for Youth Services in 2025/26 is as follows:

The Station Detached Youth Service	£29,000* (new budget line)
Home Start Witney	£10,000 (new budget line)
Witney Youth Services Grant Fund	£40,000 (additional budget)

*Figure taken from business plan. No update has been provided at the time of writing this report. A meeting with Bright Futures (who run The Station) is planned ahead of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting to confirm requirements.

At the last meeting, a verbal report was provided from APCAM outlining the success of summer holiday drop-in sessions at the Corn Exchange and the Committee asked if costings for extending this service could be explored. At the time of writing, actual costs have not been provided but for 2025/26 budgetary purposes, based on 2024 costs they are likely to be in the region of £180 per session resulting in the following costs.

For all school holidays (14-16 weeks)	£2,500-3,000 approx.
Weekly	£9,500 approx.
Monthly	£2,250 approx.
Monthly & School holidays	£5,000 approx.

It would be difficult to accommodate all these sessions in the Corn Exchange and if they were, it could result in the need for additional staffing (if in the evening). The sessions would result in a loss of income for the halls so this would need to be covered by subsidised letting at £70 per session.

Other Matters

Youth Café

Officers have also looked at an initial cost of running a Youth Café in the Corn Exchange 1863 café bar.

The pressing need for a safe meeting space for young people has been raised by new Youth Council members, The Station, TVP Neighbourhood policing team and via the results of the West Oxfordshire District Council Youth Needs Assessment Survey. Basic costs are:

4 hours x 1 Café staff Member	Weekly	approx. £3,100
4 hours x 1 Café staff Member	Monthly	approx. £750

There is currently no regular slot where this could occur weekly without interruption by other hire. It could result in a loss of hire for other areas of the building.

There would be much more to explore if the Council wanted to pursue this idea. It would have to be in conjunction with The Station who would need someone in attendance the whole time for safeguarding purposes – this would have to be in addition to the detached youth work funded by the Council.

Gaming VR/Day

The Committee should also note the success of the 50th Anniversary Young Person's gaming/VR day held in August. The cost of the day ran to which was funded from the 50th anniversary fund and Town Hall Charity grant – the town council budget will not be in place in 2025/26 so if the event were to be held again, additional funding or external funding would need to be sought.

Funding Youth Services helps realise the following Town Council Strategic Objectives:

An engaged and supported community – actively seek engagement with all residents and work with others to enable them to lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;

A forward-looking Town Council – represent residents and businesses on key strategic issues facing the town;

An empowered community – encourage collaboration for the overall success of the town through the facilitation and championing of change programmes and initiatives;

A respectful community – promote inclusivity and always treat people fairly and with respect regardless of race or racial group, sex or sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or disability.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – Access to well-funded, quality services can help mitigate the effects of social inequality. Ensuring that resources are directed toward the communities and individuals who need them most is a crucial step toward improving outcomes for young people, fostering social mobility, and promoting a more just and equal society.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct impact from the contents of this report.
- c) Crime & Disorder –By offering young people the tools, opportunities, and support they need to thrive, youth services reduce the likelihood that they will engage in criminal behaviour, contribute to social disorder, or face long-term negative outcomes. These

services not only benefit individuals but also promote the well-being and safety of entire communities.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct impact from the contents of this report.

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.

- Town and Parish Councils have no statutory duty to provide youth services. There is a reputational risk residents will see further funding as additional taxation. This needs to be balanced against the social value to the community.
- These are large sums of money so it is critical that funding is allocated strategically, managed with transparency, and coupled with ongoing evaluation and adaptation to ensure the services provided are effective, inclusive, and sustainable.
- The original youth funding grant was regularly oversubscribed and organisations have struggled with funding since.
- Facilitating a Youth Café in the Corn Exchange comes with at moderate risk – from safeguarding, security and the precedent and expectation of a sustained service indefinitely.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Investment in youth services can reduce the risk of negative outcomes, such as involvement in crime, substance abuse, or mental health crises. By offering structured activities and support systems, these programs help prevent young people from falling into harmful behaviours and provide alternatives to risky or destructive paths.

Funding youth services is a critical investment in the future of individuals and communities. It creates long-term social value by addressing the needs of young people, promoting positive development, reducing social inequalities, and fostering a more resilient and cohesive society. The benefits are far-reaching, influencing everything from personal well-being and mental health to economic stability and societal growth.

Financial implications

- The full implications can be seen in the contents of the report.
- Re-introducing the youth services funding grant would be an additional budget – up to £40,000
- Funding APCAM drop-in sessions in Witney – £2,250 - £9,500 for the cost of commissioning the service, plus subsidised hire of the Gallery Room
- Facilitating a Youth Café at the Corn Exchange - £750 - £3,100

- Funding a young person's gaming day in 2025 cost £3,000 (£1,500 was provided by the Witney Town Hall Charity). There may be a small grant available from WODC for the gaming day if it were to be a joint venture
- In total, the implications listed above, if agreeable would result in an increase in youth services to an annual sum of approximately £95,000, or approximately 5% of the Council's precept (2024/25).

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and recommend to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee,

1. The level of Town Council spending on Youth Services in 2025/26, including:
 - Increasing the Youth Services Budget by £40,000 to re-introduce a Youth Services funding grant;
 - Ring-fencing £29,000 and £10,000 for The Station Detached Youth Project and Home Start Oxford respectively;
 - Whether the Council should budget for further APCAM mental health drop-in sessions throughout the year, or during school holidays, or at all;
 - Whether the Council should budget towards a Youth Café in the Corn Exchange;
 - Whether the Council should budget towards a further Young Persons Gaming Day during the summer.
2. To note the Council has the General Power of Competence which allows it to fund for the above.