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**Agenda Item:** Youth Services

**Meeting Date:** Monday, 26 January 2026

**Contact Officer:** Deputy Town Clerk

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The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on youth services funded by the Town Council in 2026/27, together with services delivered by other authorities and/or stakeholders.

### Background

As part of the budget-setting process, the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee recommended that the Youth Services Grant scheme be launched earlier in the year to align with the start of the fiscal year in April 2026 (Minute F694, 24 November).

At the meeting held on 15 September 2025, it was recommended that authority be delegated for the creation of a new Service Level Agreement for The Station Detached Youth, delivered by the Bright Futures charity (Minute SC531 refers).

At this Committee's previous meeting, it was agreed the matter of Youth Club provision would be included as an item for discussion at this meeting (Minute SC656 refers).

### Current Situation

#### Youth Services Grant 2026–27

In deciding whether to bring forward the scheme the Council must take account of the pre-election period which, while primarily affecting District Council elections, begins around 25 March (dependent on when the notice of election is published). To meet the above recommendation, it is proposed that the scheme opens in mid-March and remains open until after the elections on 7 May 2026. Assessment and decision-making can then take place ahead of ratification at a Council meeting scheduled before the end of June.

Members are also invited to indicate whether they wish to propose any changes to the grant criteria or to the process by which the grant is awarded (criteria attached at **Appendix A**).

Please note that the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee retains final authority over grant awards.

## **The Station Detached Youth**

The Chair, Leader, Chair of Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments, and the Deputy Town Clerk met with a representative from Bright Futures on 4 December 2025.

During the meeting, discussion focused on performance metrics, indoor youth provision, and the services currently being delivered. A multi-year funding request and annual inflationary increases were also acknowledged. An updated draft Service Level Agreement has since been issued to Bright Futures for review and comment, ahead of being presented to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting on 2 February for initial consideration.

February half-term BREAK sessions are scheduled to take place at the 1863 Café Bar from 17–20 February 2026.

## **Witney Youth Club Provision**

At the previous meeting, Members discussed the closure of Base 33 in 2017, following 15 years of operation, and noted that the gap in youth club provision created by its closure had yet to be fully addressed.

The Committee should note the existing February and October half-term arrangements with The Station for youth café provision, alongside the redevelopment of the Courtside Hub and other forthcoming initiatives, which may help to address this gap. The issue has also been raised with stakeholders through Thames Valley Police Operation Just discussions; however, at present, Town Council officers are not aware of any confirmed Youth Clubs in Witney.

## **West Oxfordshire Youth Partnership**

The inaugural meeting of this initiative, currently administered by West Oxfordshire District Council, was held on Friday 16 January.

The meeting included presentations outlining the group's priorities, feedback from Oxfordshire Youth on their Youth Voice Project, and an overview of the Local Youth Transformation Project. The latter was led by the National Youth Agency and related to a Department for Culture, Media & Sport Local Youth Transformation Pilot, with Oxfordshire selected as one of twelve pathfinder authorities testing approaches to delivering a local youth offer that meets young people's needs while supporting government priorities.

Presentation slides from the meeting have been circulated to Committee members separately for information.

The Youth Development Officer at West Oxfordshire District Council has indicated a willingness to attend a future meeting but is unable to attend on this occasion.

## **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.

## **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 budget for the Youth Services Grant in 2026-27 is £20,000 (4169/408)\*

*\*Proposed.* The Council's 2026-27 budget has not yet been agreed at the time of writing.

## **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider,

1. The timing of opening the Youth Services Grant for applications
2. The criteria for the Youth Services Grant
3. Any further action in relation to Youth Club provision
4. To note the updates concerning The Station & West Oxfordshire Youth Partnership.