

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

ACTIVITIES FOR TEENAGERS IN WEST BERKSHIRE

MINUTES

Monday 10th January 2012

Present: Councillors: Sheila Ellison (Chairman), Gwen Mason, Peter Argyle, Tim Metcalfe and Ieuan Tuck.

Others: David Lowe (Policy and Scrutiny Manager), Jo Naylor, Val Houldey, Sarah Ward.

Apologies: Alan Macro

1. Minutes of 12th December 2011

Task Group minutes for 12th December were approved by the task group.

2. Matters arising and update on actions

There were no matters arising from previous meetings.

3. Parish planning: what communities want

Jo Naylor, supported by Sarah Ward, gave a presentation that opened by showing that of the 63 communities in the District, 47 (75%) had parish plans in place. Preparation for the plans involved extensive consultation with the community and informed the picture of local need. The plan development process encouraged the collection of the view of young people and experience showed that there were common issues across communities and also between young and older people.

The drawing up of Mortimer parish plan had included a consultation in the primary school and focus groups in the secondary. Both the questionnaire and the medium through which it was completed were decided by young people themselves.

It was important that once sought, the views of young people were followed through into action.

65% of plans that have been drawn up to include the views of young people suggested that facilities or activities were lacking in the District. Within this figure, 47% of plans highlighted the need for a youth club and 42% indicated that recreational areas or playgrounds – both popular with young people – needed improvement, although this latter figure might not now reflect the work that had been undertaken through the Playbuilder scheme.

Updates given on 3 of the plans that were already 5 years old showed that the communities concerned were still trying to set up community groups and youth

clubs. The Yattenden parish plan 'refresh' articulated the need for extended youth club opening hours.

Communities frequently focussed on physical assets rather than the people required and the ongoing support that they might need to run activities from them. In most cases the buildings existed but the obstacle preventing the setting up and extension of these clubs appeared to be an absence of volunteers. Before asking for bricks and mortar, communities might be better served by asking what support or mentoring could be provided. BACYP ran training sessions for volunteers (over 3 Saturdays) and operated an 'Empowering young people's projects' grant programme. Members were of the view that training and support were key to the successful operation of clubs, although no data was available to assess the effectiveness of the training delivered.

Adults appeared to be reluctant to give open ended commitments and turnover in volunteers had an effect on provision. The requirement for volunteers to have CRB checks was seen as being a barrier.

Youth clubs provided an informal environment not available to structured activities such as Scouting. Youth clubs were also used in some cases as the meeting point for groups undertaking physical activities.

Young people have a demand for sporting facilities. The sorts of physical facilities that were included in parish plans included:

- tennis courts (9%)
- skate parks (15%)
- goal posts (6%)
- more cycle routes/BMX tracks (9%)

Some of these facilities, for example the tennis courts, could be multi-use but the location and positioning of them could cause and had caused local friction. Cycle routes require approved access to land.

The presentation by Young People in Chieveley for a skate park had led to adults helping them to secure the required funding.

6% of communities expressed the need for better promotion or finance of existing facilities (ie making use of village halls for activities). 1 plan included a request for a swimming pool.

The ambition to establish a youth council or other forum and to improve consultation with young people was mentioned in 35% of the plans. The 'social' clubs most mentioned were for film (35%), drama (31%), craft (15%), dancing (8%) and computer activities (8%). The set up of clubs for rugby, tennis and football were also mentioned. A network of community cinemas had been established but these were, with the exception of Thatcham, not exclusively for young people.

Accessibility to facilities and activities was highlighted by communities as being a significant issue, the two primary aspects of the problem being how young people

got to the activities or how the activities were taken to them.

West Berkshire Council provided £44k of funding each year for the achievement of actions in parish plans and there was also a small amount of money available through the 'vibrant villages'. There was no funding explicitly for the provision of facilities or activities for young people.

Money was also becoming available through the Armed Forces Community Covenant Fund and bids had been submitted for facilities in Hermitage and Burghfield.

4. Schools

Val Houldey opened by stating that schools provided a positive influence on young people outside normal teaching hours through the use of after school clubs and other activities. That they were able to do so was down to the quality of very committed school staff and despite the cessation of extended schools funding.

Although provision was not universal, schools continued to operate those activities they valued the most and there was a growth in the number of after school clubs, often in those areas of most need.

At her own school, The Downs, after school clubs were run by Teaching Assistants on three nights per week. The sessions ran until 1700 and parents were not charged. Funding for transport was a major challenge for the school but the £15k - £20k per annum outlay was considered a necessary and worthwhile outlay. The minibuses were also used for other activities. The funding came from the Pupil Premium, a revenue stream for the support of low-income families.

The Teaching Assistants were paid for their time and it was believed that if payments were to cease then so would the clubs. Members of the Parent/Teacher Association were reluctant to contribute to the running of the club as they frequently had work commitments. The school worked in partnership with BACYP which provided access to constructive activities such as 'splash' and cooking.

The scheme had seen improvements in the social skills of participants and it allowed those who had otherwise had difficulty to make friends, a key factor in helping young people to do better at school.

Schools were likely to welcome applications by community groups to make more use of school facilities and there was scope for closer working between each of the parties.

5. Future meeting dates and actions agreed

It was agreed that the group would meet again on Tuesday 7 February to agree its recommendations.