

SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020

From 11.30 am – 1.34 pm in the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

Responsible Officer: Amanda Holyoak

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Present

Councillor Claire Wild (Chair)

Councillors Joyce Barrow, Karen Calder, Roger Evans, Hannah Fraser, Alan Mosley, Cecilia Motley and Dave Tremellen

55 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillors Peggy Mullock and Les Winwood. Councillors Paul Milner and William Parr substituted for them.

56 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

57 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

58 Member Question Time

There were no Member questions.

59 Call In: Youth Support

Members of the Committee had the following papers before them:

Youth Support Report to Cabinet 21 January

Reasons for call in of decision by the Group Leader on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group.

Members had also been circulated with representations from a member of the public, a Shropshire Councillor, Parish and Town Councils

All the above documents are available on the webpage for the meeting.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group referred to the reasons for the call in as set out in the papers before members of the Committee.

The Chair then asked the Director of Children's Services to address the Committee.

The Director set out the context within which a Member Task and Finish Group had been set up to review delivery of Youth Support, under the auspices of the Communities Overview Committee. The purpose of the Group had been to explore good practice and identify the need across Shropshire, and explore a way forward.

The Group had heard from a number of professionals and expert witnesses and developed a set of recommendations which were in line with the national direction of travel and a national review which had looked at provision of a response to increase in youth crime, exploitation and demands placed on children's social care, families and carers. The recommendations were designed to provide a response to more vulnerable children and young people, through provision of detached outreach workers who could go to where the exploiters were operating.

This would not result in removal of support from rural areas which had been raised as a concern but was about getting to and addressing the needs of young people vulnerable to criminals, meeting local needs appropriately, and sourcing resources from a wider base.

The Early Help Change Programme Manager referred to the national recommendations designed to address the rise in issues such as violence, exploitation, crime and cyber bullying through both open access and targeted provision. These issues all existed in Shropshire and a lack of co-ordination around provision of services had been identified. The Task and Finish Group had concluded that a dual approach through open access and targeted provision would be the best solution.

In response to questions from the Chair and Committee, officers explained that it had been found that

- There were good youth clubs throughout the county catering for young people and also vulnerable young people who were well supported in these settings
- However, many vulnerable young people did not attend youth clubs for a number of reasons
- A targeted outreach worker would be able to go appropriate areas and at the right times of the day
- The South of the county was particularly reliant on volunteers with limited funded provision in these areas
- Links with schools needed to be strengthened and intelligence shared with the police to protect children most at risk of exploitation
- County lines existed in most rural areas
- There was not a one size fits all solution – and the council needed to understand information provided by partners.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said that the response from children and young people already attending youth groups appeared to have been discounted by officers. This was because the consultation report stated that results were skewed by the fact that the majority of surveys for children and young people were completed as paper surveys within youth clubs.

In response, officers explained that the majority of consultation had happened with young people at youth clubs, who obviously valued what was on offer. It was more difficult to

gain responses to the consultation form those who did not attend. The consultation had been made available through TMBSS in an attempt to collect information from harder to reach children. Some of these respondents had loved open access provision, but others had expressed concerns around bullying, stress, anxiety, low mood and depression. A balance had to be achieved.

Some members of the Committee went on to comment:

- The benefits of outreach provision was not in question, but this should not be at the cost of open access provision;
- if youth clubs had to close there would eventually be an increased burden on targeted support;
- Co-ordination by Shropshire Council might be cumbersome and more onerous than was needed, particularly in areas such as Shrewsbury where provision was already in place and working well.

In response, officers agreed that some town and parish councils already did a very good job in delivering detached youth work, but co-ordination was fragmented and Shropshire Council was in a position to co-ordinate this throughout all market towns and rural areas. The issue was not just about provision in local areas but how the whole system worked together. Exchange of intelligence and information would allow target and focus exactly where it was needed at the right time.

A Member of the Committee, a member of Shrewsbury Town Council, said that the Town Council had disagreed with the proposals as it already worked closely and effectively with schools and fulfilled contracts directly with them. He expressed concern that if the small amount of funding received currently by the Town Council were removed, then it's capacity to deliver this work in schools would be challenged. Another Town Council member felt that universal application of a Youth Service provision would not be as effective as delegating funds for use in structures that already existed, rather than adding a potential layer of bureaucracy and risking duplication.

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services said it was intended that detached youth work would enable vulnerable children to be identified and diverted into diversionary activities, through building a relationship. He reiterated that this was not an attempt to end universal youth work but would facilitate understanding of what harder to reach young people might want to do, eg music based activities, and to encourage community ownership.

Richard Parkes, Shropshire Youth Association, addressed the Committee and observed that the term 'detached youth work' was not one he recognised but what it described took a long time to develop. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that building relationships was important but said that relationships had to be established, and that detached workers would need the same view of street life that those wishing to exploit children and young people had.

In response to a member question Mr Parkes described how a successful Lottery bid sum would be spent across Shropshire and set out what SYA provided for the current Council contract in the form of DBS checks and training towards national youth work qualifications.

Mr Parkes circulated a paper from SYA to Members and in response to a question from the Chair explained that the organisation did recognise the gaps in current provision, broadly supported the direction of travel, but did not want to see any detriment to universal services. He said that if it was possible to maintain current provision through other support, that SYA would fully support the proposals. He applauded the fact that an additional year of support had been provided to allow time for alternative support to be arranged but asked that if alternative support had not been found by 31 March 2021, then more time be provided rather than closing any provision.

The Head of Early Help, Partnerships and Commissioning reported that 11 Local Joint Committees had received youth funding support, and that the majority of conversations with town and parish councils had resulted in a positive response and many had committed to Youth Support from their 2020 – 2021 budgets. The proposal for a graduated implementation would give time to ensure that commitment could be found from other town and parish councils.

Members went on to discuss the status of Local Joint Committees and the Chair of the Communities Overview Committee reported that the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services was keen for LJC's to be absorbed into Place Plan areas. Although the constitution did reference LJC's, the majority no longer functioned and they could not be relied upon as a vehicle for provision of future funding.

The Director confirmed that where, for example, Ludlow, Wem and Bishop's Castle Town Councils had not precepted for youth provision for 2020 – 21, Shropshire Council would continue to provide support for them, and other local councils in the same position, for that period of time during which ongoing discussions regarding arrangements for the future could be held. It would be possible to double or even treble the amount of resource that could be spent on youth provision.

The Chair of the Communities Overview Committee who had Chaired the Task and Finish Group was asked to outline the work of the Group. She reported that the Group had met on six occasions and had taken evidence from a number of witnesses including SYA, West Mercia Police and an expert in Youth Services. She explained that the Group had found that:

- Dramatic budget cuts year on year had been experienced by the Council since the formation of the Unitary Authority and at the end of the day there was not enough money to do everything the Council would want to;
- New problems were facing communities, particularly those related to serious organised crime;
- Open access youth forums were very much valued by those that used them but there was a need to provide for those who were not comfortable accessing these;
- It was critical to divert children and young people from criminals who wished to exploit them and this would help avoid them entering the care or prison systems;

The Group's recommendations were not designed to be detrimental to open access services, but intended to build provision to run alongside it. The Group had been grateful for the attendance of the Portfolio Holder at meetings so that he could understand the way the group had developed its thinking.

The Chair reported that the Task and Finish Group had originally unanimously accepted the report but that three members had subsequently said that they had concerns, particularly in relation to the Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA).

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said that although he now understood the ESIIA to have fulfilled legal requirements, he considered that the document presented to Cabinet should have indicated who had made changes to it following the consultation and that a part 2 assessment should have been carried out.

The Chair asked the Rural and Equalities Specialist to comment on the ESIIA process. She said that she would usually recommend a second assessment following a consultation to demonstrate the evidence that had been collected and set out where it had come from. This would provide an additional opportunity to enable identification of any gaps. It was not too late to do this and a second one could be completed at this stage.

The Legal Services Manager (People), observed that from a legal perspective, the ESIIA presented to Cabinet could have made it clearer who had made amendments to it, but it was not unlawful, had not misled Cabinet and was adequate and efficient. He confirmed that it would be possible to update the document as a living document alongside progression of recommendations.

The Chair asked the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group whether he considered his issues set out in the call in had been covered. He felt that members of Parish and Town Councils and other members of the Task and Finish Group should be permitted to speak at the meeting. He said that the majority of young people were in favour of retaining open access youth groups and the decision should be sent back to Cabinet or to Council as more information should have been made available before the decision had been made.

The Chair said she felt that all the points raised in the call in document had been addressed and allowing other to speak would extend the meeting unnecessarily, particularly as the matter related to provision across the whole of the county and not just in certain town council areas.

A member said she hoped that attention would be given to the most effective way of working in order to implement a structure that would not be onerous and be of maximum benefit and avoid any duplication and time wasted in having to pass on information.

The Director said these concerns could be looked at but she was confident that the decisions made by Cabinet would result in enhancement, not duplication or wasted time. She reiterated that there needed to be a consistent approach from Shropshire Council across the county to avoid a postcode lottery. Vulnerable children and families were spread across the whole of Shropshire, both in rural and urban areas, and an infrastructure was needed that was flexible, and facilitate a network of providers in which to direct young people into diversionary activities to help them stay safe. It was about engaging with the whole system of public sector services which together could produce a much better range of support and interventions than was possible for a single organisation.

A proposal was made that the representatives in the audience from Town and Parish Council and individual members of the Task and Finish Group be allowed to address the Committee but this was lost on being put to the Committee.

The Chair asked Mr Parkes if SYA was in favour of the Cabinet proposals and he confirmed his support, saying he had been reassured by having heard that there would be continuation of funding to the end of March 2021. He confirmed that SYA would work with Town and Parish Councils as needed in the lead up to this point.

The Director reported that a meeting regarding financing youth clubs was due to follow the meeting and confirmed the Council had committed to fund current activities in those town and parish councils who had not yet agreed to fund their own provision between now and end of March 2021. She confirmed that she did not expect these clubs to close as a result of funding being withdrawn by Shropshire Council during this period. The Liberal Democrat Group Leader expressed concern about what might happen in April 2021 if alternative support could not be found.

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services emphasised that maintaining the status quo would expose many vulnerable children to county lines and that there was no desire to see open access provision damaged in any way. He understood concerns expressed around potential duplication and bureaucracy but was comfortable with the model and he thanked the Task and Finish Group and officers for the work.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group proposed that the meeting be adjourned in order to receive more information from Parish and Town Councils and individual members of the Task and Finish Group, but this was lost on being put to the vote.

The Chair felt that the points set out in the call in document had been addressed and it was

RESOLVED

To accept the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Roger Evans asked that it be recorded that he had voted against this resolution.

The meeting concluded at 1.34 pm

Signed (Chairman)

Date: