

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON YOUTH PROVISION

Proposed new model Circulated with September meeting papers.

That a new model of youth work is implemented that incorporates, both

- a) universal, open access groups (open to all, not restricted by appointments or invitations e.g. youth club sessions);
- b) targeted support (addressing particular issues) through outreach or detached youth work (meeting young people in the community where they gather together and spend time).

Draft Town Council Response – for consideration

Wem Town Council currently has a very well run youth club in the town which operates from Wem Youth Centre. This Club currently receives £6500 per year from Shropshire Council (via LJC funding) which enables it to employ a youth worker to open one night a week and work with the older children from the Town.

The Town Council currently provides financial support to the youth club to enable it to open another night of the week to run youth sessions for the younger children.

Both these sessions are oversubscribed and there is a need to find funds to open on a third night so that sessions can be run for the young people transferring from Junior to Senior sessions. The Youth Club is heavily reliant on volunteers and the management committee have worked incredibly hard to build up a very strong volunteer base to enable these sessions to run.

The current Youth Worker has built up the trust of several young people who have been excluded from school and are currently without any other support to encourage them to attend sessions and support from the club. The club has also run several bespoke projects with the help of the local community that have addressed local needs as they have been identified. These have included running free breakfast clubs in the school holidays, working with Wem Food Hub and local café owners to teach young people how to make healthy meals.

The proposals in the consultation are very worrying as they contain so little detail about how the changes will affect the everyday running of the club. The Town Council is particularly concerned about the financial information in the consultation document. The Town Council's response is based on information provided following a one to one meeting with a Council Officer to discuss the proposals where we were informed that in order to fund this new model Shropshire Council would be required to cut its financial contribution to existing youth provision in the town which currently equates to £6500 per year as well as financial cuts to its support to Shropshire Youth Association.

Outlined overleaf is the Town Council's response to the areas of work that the proposed model will include:

More emphasis placed on working with the most vulnerable young people and addressing issues of concern within communities.

The Town Council recognises and welcomes the need for more support for the most vulnerable but is concerned that the proposals seem to dismiss the invaluable early intervention work carried out by Youth Clubs already. Wem Youth Club currently provides the most vulnerable in the community from the age of 9 with a safe place to visit and a trained impartial youth worker to talk to. If Shropshire Council stops providing funding to the Youth Club to fund the proposed new model, then it is the Town Council's opinion this would most probably cause of Wem Youth Club to close.

The closure of the club could result in significantly more vulnerable young people who are currently supported by the youth club seeking support from Shropshire Council and there will be zero cost savings to the Unitary Authority as there will be increased demand on other services. It is anticipated that there will also be an increased burden placed on the local police team and the Town Council as if young people have no safe space to access in the town they will be more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour and will become more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and drug use.

Likewise issues of concern raised by the local community are currently already addressed at a local level and there is no need to place more emphasis on this.

Youth workers employed to cover an area of Shropshire so they can get to know their communities. It is suggested that a team of 6 workers would be required.

The Town Council has serious concerns about this proposal and is dismayed that Shropshire Council has not been transparent in this process by providing information on exactly how they plan to fund the appointment of these new youth workers. If as indicated this is to be through the withdrawal of existing financial support to Youth Clubs then the Town Council is totally opposed to the proposals. Wem already has a youth worker who understands the issues affecting young people living in Wem and over the last 3 years has gained the trust of some of the most difficult young people in the Town and gained the respect of the wider community. The Town Council does not consider there is any need to replace this worker with a generic youth worker who will not be able to provide anywhere near the quality of provision currently provided due to the wide geographical area that they will be covering. There is no detail in the proposals of where these workers are to be located, what they will do, what qualifications they will hold and whether there will be a specific time allocation given to Wem. For this to be a meaningful consultation Shropshire Council should reconsult and provide information on exactly how these posts are to be funded.

Development of a stronger locality approach where there is more influence and support provided by town councils (and clusters of parish councils).

The Town Council already provides financial support to the Youth Club and we have worked jointly on several projects in recent years. A Town Councillor sits on the Management Committee and the Town Council and receives regular updates on the work of the Youth Club therefore a strong locality approach has already been developed in the town.

Development of new local networks where youth workers link to schools/colleges, voluntary sector groups and organisations, town and parish councils etc

The Town Council has no objections to this proposal although it should be noted that there are already strong links between the Town Council and the youth club.

Development of stronger referral networks between youth workers and specialist providers such as mental health workers, school nurses etc

The Town Council has no objections to this proposal but would require clarification as to how this would work in practice.

Following meetings with held officers from Children's Services, although it is not stated in the consultation document the Town Council has been led to believe that in order to deliver the proposed new model of youth service that there is also a plan to cut funding currently received by Shropshire Youth Association (SYA).

SYA plays a key role in the provision of training and services to youth clubs across the county and before any decision is made to cut the funding to this organisation the Town Council would like to request clarification on the following

- Who will carry out volunteer DBS checks?
- Who will carry out training including volunteer recruitment, young leader, youth work and safeguarding courses?
- Who will provide support on policies and procedures for new and existing clubs?
- Who will provide support to write funding applications?
- Who will represent Shropshire Youth clubs on a strategic level on a county, regional and national basis?
- Who will co-ordinate the loaning of equipment to supplement club resources?

Shropshire Council should ensure that it will be able to provide these services in house before any cuts are made to SYA.

To conclude, the Town Council is of the opinion that this consultation is misleading as so much vital detail has not been provided. If the Town Council had not had the benefit of a one to one meeting with Shropshire Council officers the Town Council would have been unaware that this new model is not designed to enhance the existing provision but could result in its closure. In the interests of transparency it is hoped that meetings have also been held with every youth club across the county who could be affected financially by this new proposal.

The Council is concerned about the impact any cuts resulting from the introduction of this new model will have on the existing youth provision in the county. These proposals completely fail to recognise the years of volunteer hours that have gone into the establishment of successful youth clubs across the county. There is now a real fear that all the work and goodwill will now be undermined resulting in the young people in market towns becoming more isolated and vulnerable than ever.

Wem Town Council therefore urge you to reconsult on these proposals and provide full financial information on how the new model is to be implemented and how it will impact on existing provision.