

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2008, at 6.30 pm  
In the Council Chamber at The Council House, Dudley

**PRESENT: -**

Councillor K Finch (Vice Chairman – in the Chair)  
Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Mrs Aston, Cotterill, Mrs Coulter, Davis, A Finch, J  
Martin and Mrs Roberts.

**OFFICERS:**

The Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (as Area Liaison  
Officer), The Interim Director of Children's Services, The Head of Youth  
Services and the Lead Officer for Targeted and Curriculum Services (Both  
Directorate of Children's Services) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and  
Property)

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

4 members of the public.

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46                    **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of  
Councillors J D Davies, J R Davies, Sparks, Waltho and Ms While-Cooper;  
Mrs Edwards and Ms Little.

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47                    **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of  
Conduct, were made by any member in respect of any item to be  
considered at the meeting.

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48                    **CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED RESTRUCTURING OF THE  
YOUTH SERVICE IN DUDLEY**

Further to the decision of the Committee, at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup>  
November, 2008, to hold a special meeting for the purpose of consulting on

the Youth Service, in the light of its recent consultation on new ways of working. A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted summarising the manner in which it was proposed the service would be reshaped and which invited comments on the detail of planning and the delivery of the services to young people over the coming two years for consideration in the consultation process.

In introducing the report, the Interim Director of Children's Services explained the new structure, which would provide for youth provision to be divided in to two main areas: Universal and Targeted Services. She then defined the detail of the respective areas and the consultation arrangements made.

There then followed discussion and a question and answer session on the report and consultation paper, in which the comments received and responses given included the following:

- That an equality impact assessment should be undertaken before the restructured service is delivered.

In response, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (without portfolio) indicated that an equality impact assessment would be undertaken when the plan was finalised. This would include a risk assessment and action plan.

- In response to a comment that the consultation document stated that the service had already been restructured, a member asked whether an Equality Impact Assessment had been undertaken in preparation for restructuring. In response, the Assistant Director confirmed that the impact of the change to the staffing structure to remove the middle management tier had been taken into account.
- In response to a question on whether additional staff would be necessary in order to implement the restructuring, the Assistant Director indicated that, initially, the service would be delivered by way of the staffing structure indicated in the consultation document. Should any adaptations be necessary, these would be accommodated within existing resources.
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director confirmed that, while there had been difficulties previously, few vacancies now existed within the Youth Service.
- In relation to provision within the Dudley Wood and Saltwells Area, the Head of the Youth Service stated that youth clubs would be situated at existing Youth Centres and, in locations where there were no Youth Centres, provision would be met through detached Youth Workers or by way of partnerships with other agencies, including the voluntary sector.

- In response to reservations expressed by a member representing the Castle and Priory Ward on the ability of the Youth Service to improve standards without additional staff being appointed, the Assistant Director referred to the problems the service had faced in recent years where the service had suffered owing to a significant number of vacancies that had existed and had proved difficult to fill. Under the proposed new structure, however, recruitment to senior level posts had been completed and recruitment to operational posts in townships was currently being undertaken, with the directorate being optimistic that these would be filled. After completion of the draft Youth Service Plan, it was proposed that discussions would be held within wards before the final document was published with a view to determining the needs within particular areas. The structure would be as stated within the draft Plan. Feedback from young people, the agencies involved in youth provision and Council members would be utilised in determining the nature of service delivery at the point of contact. Thereafter, it was proposed that the service would be delivered in accordance with the Plan for a twelve month period, during which monitoring would take place, and after twelve months provision would be reviewed and discussed and deficiencies attended to in the light of feedback.
- In response to a question on whether the budget for the restructured youth service could be guaranteed, the Assistant Director indicated that, in the current economic climate, no such guarantee could be given but confirmed there were currently no proposals and nor was there a wish to reduce any financial resources in this area of Children's Services. She pointed out, however, that the allocation of overall Council resources was not within the gift of the Directorate of Children's Services.
- In response to a particular issue regarding the staffing of youth provision in the St James's ward, the Assistant Director confirmed that the issue of long term absence was being looked at and would be addressed. One remedy which would receive particular consideration would be to provide a pool of youth workers who could be called on to attend at a particular youth centre in a case of long term absence and this was a solution that might be applicable to the St James's ward.
- In response to a question on the manner in which consultation with young people was carried out, it was indicated that this was undertaken via Black Country Connexions who had been asked to contact at least 2% of the youth population in the 13 – 19 age group, with an equivalent number in each township being canvassed.

- The importance of providers of youth services, other than the Council, to attend relevant preparatory meetings and to be invited to contribute on framework issues was emphasised, in response to which the Assistant Director indicated her agreement and stated also that she would be happy to talk to voluntary organisations about the practicalities of delivery. She confirmed further that she would be meeting relevant agencies to discuss the implementation of the Plan.
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director confirmed that the Youth Service would be available to assist schools in engaging disaffected young people in the age group 13 – 19 with a view to supporting them but emphasised it was the school's, rather than the Youth Service, to make the initial approach. Opportunity for schools to engage the Youth Service to offer complementary work was available and interest had been expressed by some Head Teachers.
- In relation to financial aspects regarding courses provided to schools, the Head of the Youth Service confirmed that there were certain courses provided to schools e.g. outdoor pursuits, which were not free at the point of delivery and for which schools might be asked to contribute financially.
- Difficulties encountered regarding the opening of the Meadow Road Youth Club, and the main reasons therefor were raised by one member, in response to which the Assistant Director agreed to speak to the member outside the meeting. Briefly, however, the Council was aware of the problems and was working with the various agencies involved to alleviate the situation.
- In response to a request for the number of respondents to the survey to be provided by Ward, the Assistant Director regretted that this information could not be provided, since this had not been requested provided for in the brief submitted to Black Country Connexions.
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director confirmed that the construction of new youth clubs could not be provided for within existing resources but that the over arching theme within partnership working was that Council properties and facilities within the voluntary sector and other partners could be utilised for service delivery or sessional work.
- In relation to the Universal offer, a question was asked on whether any work had been undertaken to monitor consistency in the quality of service offered by differing hubs. In response, the Assistant Director indicated that the service was endeavouring to provide a mixture of facilities which would not necessarily be reflected in the accommodation offered but in relation to which the detached youth worker would have a key role ensuring that all activities required were deliverable. In the long term, while building provision would be looked at, an alternative course would be for particular activities to be available at different hubs.

- In response to a question on the manner in which young people were to be made aware of the facilities available from the Youth Service, the Assistant Director referred to the availability of the Youth Service website, which stated the facilities on offer.
- In reply to a question on transport arrangements for young people to attend venues, the Assistant Director confirmed that transport arrangements were under discussion with bus companies and others. Young people would be able to access hubs in areas other than their own. Publicity in respect of the facilities available and the transport arrangements were being considered, including the use of schools, school councils and school notice boards.
- In response to a question on how the offer would translate to wards and the management and delivery arrangements that would pertain, the Assistant Director indicated the intention of the Plan to conduct targeted work in a more structured manner than hitherto, confirmed the intention to keep the issue under review, and outlined the monitoring arrangements that were proposed. In this connection, she agreed to ensure that a bulletin and update would be issued after six months summarising the view of the Directorate on what had worked well and what had not. In the meantime, the Local Authority would welcome immediate feedback from members should they not be satisfied with a particular aspect of service delivery.
- A member of the public raised the issue of particular provision being made in the plan for black and minority ethnic (BME) young people in the 13 – 19 year age group. The Assistant Director for Early Years, Youth and Education Services confirmed that provision for BME had been increased substantially under the Plan and highlighted the partnership with the Asian Womens' Centre .
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director confirmed that a young person wishing to attend a youth club or hub outside the area in which he lived was welcome to do so. Equally, should a particular activity or course be provided for at a particular hub, but not at another, a young person would be able to access the facility at the point of delivery.
- On the issue being raised by a Ward Member, the Assistant Director agreed to follow up the issue of the provision of a BMX track at Dudley Wood.

- On the issue of an equality impact assessment being raised further, and on a request by the member raising the issue to be provided with a copy, the Assistant Director confirmed again that the impact on equality issues had been considered in the drawing up of the proposed new structure and that the Directorate was satisfied that no specific sector had been disadvantaged under the proposals. She also confirmed that, having taken into account ethnic minority implications, the Directorate had seen no reason to change its outlook on the restructuring proposals. The Assistant Director confirmed further that ethnic equality implications had been taken into account in advertising for posts.
- A view was expressed by one member that young people local to a particular area would not be prepared to travel to other areas for youth facilities. The same member expressed doubts on the effectiveness of the detached youth worker facility.
- The same member expressed his consideration that consultation had not been wide enough, expressing the view that Police Community Safety Officers should have been consulted, had they not been so, and also St Thomas's Network. He expressed the view further that consultation should have been undertaken with young people in schools, rather than with Head Teachers. In response, the Assistant Director reiterated the consultation arrangements that had been made and stated that consultation on the Youth Service restructuring had been wider than that usually conducted by the Council. The Directorate was currently working with schools with a view to feedback being utilised in the delivery of youth provision.
- A member questioned the reason why the Central Dudley Area had been allocated fewer youth workers than had the Brierley Hill Area.
- In response to a comment that some of the most challenging Wards in the Borough were situated in the Central Dudley Ward, the Assistant Director confirmed that the Directorate was working to fill current vacancies in the Youth Service. Details regarding service delivery would result from feedback from consultation. The Assistant Director undertook to present the Youth Service Delivery Plan for the Central Dudley Area to the Central Dudley area Committee before the plan was activated on 1st April, 2009.
- In response to a question from the Chairman, the representative of the Police in attendance confirmed the commitment of the Police to partnership working with a view to improving the situation for young people and that meetings had been set up which the Police had had to postpone. These meetings had been rearranged.
- A representative of young people advocated that an elected member should attend at meetings of youth bodies concerning youth issues.

- The consideration was expressed that the number of youth workers for Central Dudley should at least equate to those allocated to Brierley Hill, given the number of deprived areas in central Dudley. The Assistant Director indicated that the part time Youth Worker would be likely to be targeting greater time to Central Dudley than for Brierley Hill.
- In response to a question on the provision to be made for carers, the Assistant Director explained placements made for children in Local Authority care and the different arrangements made for them to socialise and confirmed that support under the Plan in relation to youth service provision would be made. She then discussed the different ways in which this would be achieved, which would involve contact through newsletters and foster care agendas, as well as other machineries. The Assistant Director confirmed further that facilities on offer would be published and made known.
- In relation to the “Be Healthy” Agenda, the point was made by a member that many young people would appreciate access to health clubs but that the cost was too expensive. The representative for the Police indicated that the Police were working with the PCT and Leisure Centres with a view to partnership arrangements being organized to enable young people to use gymnasium facilities at certain times of the day at a reasonable cost.
- A question was asked on the manner in which the Youth Service would engage with Pupil Referral Units. In response, the Assistant Director referred to the role of the Manager of the Pupil Referral Unit in drawing up a programme for the young person which would not duplicate provision made for the pupil in his mainstream school.
- In response to a question on consultation, the Assistant Director confirmed that she would be happy for colleges to feed back.
- In relation to a question on sex education, the Assistant Director drew attention to the provisions in the targeted Youth Service proposals with particular regard to those in relation to teenage pregnancies.

#### RESOLVED

That the comments made and the responses given, as recorded above, be received and referred for consideration in the consultation process.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

CHAIRMAN