

Cabinet – 23 March 2005

The development of Walsall's Youth Service in 2005

Portfolio: Councillor Gary Perry, Culture and Leisure

Service Area: Youth Service

Wards: All

Forward Plan: Yes

Summary of report

To inform the Cabinet of the proposed development of the Youth Service in the light of the recent Ofsted Inspection.

For Cabinet to approve the steps being taken by the Youth Service in response to the feedback from the Ofsted inspection of the service.

Walsall Youth Service was inspected by Ofsted during the week beginning 6th December 2004. Whilst the official report is still awaited, detailed feedback by the inspectors in early January has identified key areas for improvement.

This report details these areas and makes proposals on how the service can take the necessary steps to ensure that it meets the authority's requirements for the Youth Service to achieve excellent standards as soon as possible.

We are aware that Ofsted identified 6 areas in which the service needs to make further improvement and the actions which will be taken are detailed below.

Improve the quality of youth work practice and broaden the curriculum

The Youth Service will improve the skill base of youth work staff. This will include the recruitment of JNC qualified full time youth workers to develop high quality youth work in programmes across the borough. Part time youth workers will all be required to achieve the part time level of qualification within a specified time and training will be provided to enable them to do this.

Further training and support will be given to staff to enable them to deliver the Youth Service Curriculum and to develop further accreditation of youth work. A number of projects will be established to demonstrate high quality youth work practice. Current examples of good practice will also be shared with clubs and projects across the borough.

The Curriculum Document for the service has been launched and assistance will be given to youth clubs and projects to enable them to use all aspects of the curriculum in their work with young people.

Raise the standard of achievement of all young people

The Youth Service will take direct responsibility for ensuring that all young people are offered a challenging, exciting and educational experience when they are involved in youth work in the borough. This will include an increase in the opportunity to take part in accredited activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh and Youth Achievement Awards. An increase in the number of qualified, skilled and experienced youth workers will also allow the service to help young people raise their aspirations and expectations of the service. It will no longer be acceptable to provide poor quality activities or leisure activities without the development of youth work that enhances the level of skills for young people.

Increase the number of trained staff

The aim of the Youth Service is to have qualified and skilled full time workers taking the lead for youth work in all youth centres and major projects in the borough. This may include placing WMBC managed youth work staff in a Community Association or school environment. Youth Service funding will be used to increase the number of full time youth work staff.

All part time youth workers will be required to be qualified at the appropriate level. Training is being made available to all existing staff yet to achieve this and further training is also being given to new staff and volunteers. In service training is also being made available to help existing workers to keep their skills up to date.

Ensure resources and provision are directed to meeting service priorities, young people's needs and promoting inclusion and equality

A review of the current quality of youth work in the borough is taking place. Some work has already been done in redirecting resources to create new work and improve the quality of other clubs and projects. Some activities which do not meet the priorities of the Youth Service or the needs of young people will cease.

Young people are actively involved in decision making in the Youth Service through the Youth Opinions Unite project and other appropriate processes for engaging them. This will be developed further both through their contribution to the borough's strategic development and Local Neighbourhood Partnerships and also in the youth clubs and projects where they have not properly been involved.

The Youth Service sees inclusion and equality as major principles of all its work and is committed to embedding it in all its activities. This commitment will result in active intervention to support projects to become inclusive. Where necessary the service would consider operating programmes itself to ensure inclusivity.

The service will be establishing a consistent, transparent formula for funding youth work across the borough. The criteria underpinning this formula will be based on numbers of young people and levels of need.

Ensure all young people and workers are guaranteed a safe working environment

Some of the buildings currently used to deliver youth work are not of an appropriate standard. This will need to change quickly. A review of all the local authority Youth Service buildings is taking place and a programme of refurbishments will be developed. Whilst funding was included in the delegated budgets for repairs and refurbishment, there is evidence that these resources have not always been used appropriately. The Youth Service will actively engage in ensuring that all buildings used in the future will be fit for purpose and accessible to young people. If necessary the service will take the operation of some free standing youth clubs back under direct management in order to ensure that young people have appropriate access to them. We will be actively seeking to improve the quality of these buildings.

Ensure that management activities result in raised standards

The expectation on the local authority is that it “has a duty to ensure the provision of a sufficient Youth Service” (Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services). It is Government policy to ensure that the standard of youth work throughout the country is improved. This duty is taken seriously by the Youth Service in the borough and will therefore need to be undertaken by the service through qualified and experienced youth work managers and staff.

This will ensure that there is a consistency of service delivery across the borough responsive to the requirements of high quality youth work and also the needs and issues of young people. It will also enable standards to be raised to ensure that young people are given the level of service that they deserve.

A new system for recording and measuring outcomes will be introduced to improve the quality of the youth work offered.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet approves the actions being taken in response to the Ofsted inspection findings.

Resource and legal considerations

All the costs of the new development will be contained within the budget of the Youth Service. The provision of a sufficient Youth Service is a statutory requirement of local authorities under Section 508 of the Education Act 1996, with additional powers in the Education Act 2000. Under the requirements of Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services each local authority is expected to ‘provide the strategic leadership for the whole Youth Service’. It is also a government requirement that youth work, as defined by the report, is delivered by all local authorities.

Citizen impact

Youth work is a process of social education designed to improve the quality of young people's lives. It provides opportunities for young people to take part in a range of activities which contribute to the development of citizenship skills by involving them in decision making. Good quality youth work enables young people to learn new skills, take on new challenges and contribute to their wider communities. The new developments will improve the quality of the service for all young people in Walsall. This is supported by Youth Opinions Unite (YOU) in Walsall. YOU has made it very clear that young people feel strongly that money allocated for youth work should be spent on young people. It has asked the Council to update it on progress as the improvements take place.

Community safety

Good quality youth work provides challenges and opportunities for young people to make positive use of their leisure time and thus contributes to improved community safety.

Environmental impact

No specific environmental impact has been identified.

Performance and risk management issues

The report details measures that will be taken to improve the performance of the Youth Service in providing a high quality service. The Ofsted Inspection noted that whilst some actions have been instituted to improve the quality of youth work in Walsall, further work needs to be done to achieve a satisfactory standard for the service. The risk is that if the proposed actions are not completed, the Youth Service will fail the re-inspection.

Equality implications

The improvement in the range and quality of youth work in Walsall will make the service more accessible to all young people in the borough. Additional work will be developed with young people with disabilities and other groups identified by Ofsted as being not well served under current arrangements.

Consultation

Young people were involved as 'peer inspectors' in the Ofsted Inspection. Consultation has been undertaken with young people over the funding for the Youth Service and the development of youth work in Walsall.

Further consultation with young people through the Youth Opinions Unite project is planned on a regular basis throughout 2005.

Consultation will also take place with partner organisations that wish to continue delivering youth work in partnership with the local authority Youth Service and have the commitment, capacity and skills to do so.

Vision 2008

3. Ensure all people are safe and secure:

The Youth Service will provide high quality youth work which will give opportunities to young people to engage in positive activities both making them safer and reducing the dangers of them becoming involved in anti-social activities.

5. Make Walsall a healthy and caring place:

The Youth Service provides a range of health-based activities, which encourage a healthier lifestyle amongst young people as part of its curriculum,

7. Make it easier to access local services:

The Youth Service is committed to equality of access to its services for all young people. The move to an increased direct management of services will result in an increased provision of high quality services for all young people in the borough.

9. Listen to what local people want:

Participation in decision-making by young people is a major principle of the Youth Service. Through Youth Opinions Unite and other local means young people are able to contribute to the planning, decision-making and delivery of the service.

10. Transform Walsall into an excellent local authority:

The proposed service development is intended to make the changes necessary to ensure that the Youth Service passes its Ofsted re-inspection and continues to improve towards excellence.

Background papers

Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Scrutiny and Performance Panel Report
15th April 2004.

Community Organisation, Leisure and Culture Scrutiny and Performance Panel Report
27th October 2004.

Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services – published by DfES

Contact officer

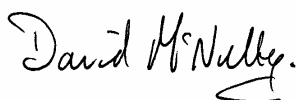
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Signed:



Executive Director: David McNulty

Date: 14.3.2005

Signed:



Portfolio holder: Councillor Garry Perry

Date: 14.3.2005