

Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel

**Agenda
Item No.**

6 January 2015

6

Petition: Bloxwich Community Partnership – against cuts to funding for the voluntary sector

Ward(s)

Portfolios: Councillor K Hussain, Community, Leisure and Culture
Councillor B Cassidy, Children’s Services and education

Executive Summary:

A petition has been received from Bloxwich Community Partnership regarding proposed budget savings. The proposed savings refer to youth activities, luncheon club and community development. This report provides a response to the petition. The petition refers to:

- Budget Proposal 31 – Changes to the delivery of youth work
- Budget Proposal 51 – Reduced funding to community associations

Reason for Scrutiny:

A petition has been received, with over 500 signatures, which requires it to be presented to the relevant Scrutiny and Performance Panel and for a response to be given by either the Chief Executive, Executive Directors, Assistant Directors or Heads of Service. The Portfolio Holder may also be required to attend.

Recommendations:

That:

1. The Panel note the response provided to the petition

Background Papers:

The Petition received from Bloxwich Community Partnership

Resource and Legal Considerations:

If the proposed multiple budget savings are agreed, there is a possibility that some council owned buildings may no longer be used by their current occupants and would therefore become the full responsibility of the Council who would resume responsibility for maintenance of the buildings. I.

All legal and procurement procedures will be followed in relation to any related contract/commissioning variations.

Citizen Impact:

With regards to the proposed building management savings, there may be some impact in terms of the building opening hours and maintenance.

With regards to the proposed youth support services savings, see equality impact assessment for this proposal and main body of the report for further details.

Environmental Impact:

None.

Performance Management:

None.

Equality Implications:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? Yes

For the budget proposal, ref 51, community development proposed saving, this will impact each organisation. Current feedback from Community Associations is that they will attempt to manage the saving although this will require additional 'good will' from staff and volunteers so there is potential for some impact to the community.

For budget proposal ref 31 'changes to delivery of Youth Work', it is anticipated that there will be some 'possible adverse impact' related to the potential loss of support and activities for young people including those with disabilities, young women at risk of teenage pregnancy and a potentially disproportionate impact on black, minority ethnic young people. There may also be an adverse impact on measures to reduce anti-social behaviour. An action plan is in place to mitigate any adverse impact, which includes the intention to undertake a 'root and branch' review of the Youth Support Service Targeted Youth Work offer including:

- What we deliver, where, for how long, at what cost and with what impact
- How we ensure the appropriate focusing of resources on the areas and young people of greatest need

Consultation:

For the community association proposed saving, a focus group was held on 20 November 2014 with the community association centre managers invited to put forward their comments. A separate meeting was held with the Bloxwich Community Partnership's Chief Executive Officer, as the officer responsible for finance and building management, on 19 November 2014 to discuss any potential impact.

A wide range of consultations have taken place with young people including a


young people budget conference held on 6th November. A range of focus groups (including attendance by the Head of Youth Support Service) and meetings with young people, the Council leader and Children's Services Cabinet Member. Over 3,000 young people contributed to the 1st stage of the corporate budget consultation process.

Discussion also took place with all commissioned providers who were given an opportunity to comment on the proposed reductions

A full overview of the consultation activity and subsequent response is included in the body of the reports.


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1. Report

1.1 A petition has been received in response to two of the proposed budget savings:

- Budget Proposal 31 – Changes to the delivery of youth work
- Budget Proposal 51 – Reduced funding to community associations

1.2 The focus of the petition relates to youth activities (youth clubs, outreach and holiday activities), luncheon club and community development (building management, sports and activity classes).

1.3 A letter, from Bloxwich Community Partnership, was received on 29 October 2014, setting out some of the concerns regarding the proposed budget savings.

2. Budget Proposal 31 – Changes to the delivery of targeted youth work

2.1 The information below relates to the proposed budget reductions within the Youth Support Services, specifically for the Targeted Youth Work Area.

2.2 The Targeted Youth Work budget proposal is referred as Ref: 31 in the budget consultation booklet and states;

Ref: 31	Changes to delivery of youth work	
Reduce the numbers of youth workers; youth clubs and youth work. We will increase the targeting of resources on the areas of greatest need and deprivation. We will prioritise detached youth work (working where young people meet for example in parks, or on the street) and the use of our mobile youth vehicles. This approach will allow us the flexibility to continue to respond to reports of youth related ASB.		
2015/16 (£490,000)	2016/17 (£580,000)	Total (£1,070,000)

2.3 The current value of the contract for Bloxwich Community Partnership (BCP) is £135,747 with a reduction proposed of £62,747 from the 1st April.

2.4 The total Youth Support Service saving required by 1st April 2016 is £2,370,000 from a current budget of £4,922,850. The budget reduction across the Youth Support Service will lead to a net loss of up to 47 posts (if we include staff who will be TUPE'd into the Council on 1st April from Prospects and a re-design requirement for the Youth Justice Service to respond to on-going Youth Justice Board grant reductions).

2.5 The contract to BCP was awarded as part of the Targeted Youth Work commissioning process held in 2012/13 and implemented in April 2013.

2.6 As the letter to the Leader of the Council identifies this is for the 'delivery of youth clubs, outreach and holiday provisions at Blakenall Community Centre and Electric Palace'.

2.7 The petition letter also stated that the propose cuts will see a reduction in the **Youth Budget** from £135,747 to £73,000 this will force a significant decrease in youth activity in the area, one identified as being in need of services. We have

reviewed the impact of cuts and have tried to protect our centre based provision at both sites. The revised programme will reflect a reduced number of weeks for youth clubs and a small reduction in number of weekly sessions, no holiday provision, no musical theatre and music programmes run by Forest CA and a major reduction in outreach provision working in partnership with the Police and WHG. Jobs of local people are at risk, the total number of youth staff will need to decrease in line with the revised programme. I would ask for comparisons to be made between youth delivery within the voluntary sector and direct provisions provided by the Council and ask which £1 for £1 offers the best value for money delivers its outcomes and provides best for its communities?

2.8 The Youth Support Service has engaged in a range of consultation meetings including individual and group meeting with the third sector providers (including the Community Association). This has taken place alongside the corporate consultation process due to reduction in Youth Justice Grant.

2.9 The information below brings together the detail headlines of this overall consultation feedback and the required reduction in the Youth Justice Service.

Summary of feedback from: Budget Booklet Survey

Fully Support	Support with concerns/amendments	Do not support	Base number
10 (7%)	6 (4%)	129 (89%)	145 (100%)

[89 users, 56 never used/not stated (100%)]

Budget Booklet Survey results tell us: the majority of respondents do not support this proposal. Most respondents say they use the service, where usage is stated. The profile of this respondent cohort includes 68% (98) aged under 25; there were no obvious differences in response across protected equality characteristics. Seven respondents declared a disability with the vast majority of those not supporting the proposal; based on concerns around having nowhere to go, it being a positive activity and a place to stay out of trouble though not raising any specific disability issues caused by the proposal.

Overall for those who aren't in support of the proposal; a mixture of users and non users, most indicate how much they value the youth service. That attending youth clubs gives young people a safe place to go, helps young people to socialise with their peers, keeps them out of trouble and looks after the vulnerable. That they connect the potential for more young people on the street causing issues with potential impact on levels of ASB. Partners say:

“Youth are already a concern in today’s society, with drink, drugs, crime and under age pregnancy. Closing the last few places left for the youth would increase all of previous issues as well as pregnancy in teens. This would then mean a potential increase in the number of youths out of work and claiming benefits.”

“We currently pick up a huge number of issues that stem from outside of normal school hours. With a reduction in youth provision I am concerned that this will escalate further.”

For respondents who supported the proposal fully or with concerns/amendments, comments on impacts are limited; where provided they say the proposal has no impact, some reiterate how important the service is. With support for outreach seen as a favourable option and comments about community provision, affordability and service costs.

“.. My younger brothers both enjoy contact with funded youth workers and clubs. Increased

focus on outreach would be good however as it reaches people other than the self-selecting group willing to go to youth clubs.”

“Community provision seems to work better.”

Common suggestions for alternatives to the saving are:

- Keep the youth centres that are cheaper to run and get external providers to run these and others cheaper.
- Charge more for the service to support current service levels.
- Reduce the service by delivering for fewer days a week or merge nearby centres.
- Make the saving elsewhere i.e. by closing more libraries and community centres and divert savings for youth services.

“Perhaps a higher entrance charge could be introduced - the current 20p fee is hardly worth collecting.”

Additional quantitative research e.g. online and paper surveys

No additional quantitative research completed.

Other feedback gathered by services e.g. focus groups, meetings, interviews, any dialogue, letters, emails etc

The clear message from children young people is that they want to see the Youth Support Services supported.

“Our area is not the best, its suffers with lots of crime and high unemployment, why are you make it difficult for us, can’t you make changes in other areas”

A Budget Consultation Conference, organised by young people from the Youth Support Services Reference Group, saw the attendance of 122 children and young people who discussed the proposals and asked questions of officers, the Leader and Portfolio Holder. Clear messages from young people on the proposed reductions are as follows:

- That closing youth provision could result in increased Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour
- Children and Young People could have poorer outcomes including emotional and physical health.

Members of the Youth Support Services Reference Group, consisting of 14 young people, who represent approximately 10,000 children and young people, who have used the Youth Support Services in the last 12 months have held meetings and undertaken group activities which resulted in the following key messages:

- a view that the future generations of Walsall may be disadvantaged socially, economically and emotionally in the long term
- reductions may have a knock on effect to other services, more young people might become vulnerable and needing the support – short term gain could be damaging future generations.

Partners & stakeholders, including the Community and Voluntary Sector organisations, shared concerns on the level of reductions and felt that those in deprived areas could suffer the most. With some areas having some real challenges which they felt could accelerate if youth work provision ceases e.g. potential increase in youth crime, and worsening of community cohesion.

Other themes that have emerged from conversations with children and young people and adults are:

- Closure of youth work provision may result in young people hanging out on the streets and causing a nuisance.
- The proposals may lead to weaker relationships between the third sector and the local authority because of the view that the Council may not value its contribution as highly as before
- The collective impact of various budget reductions on communities may see the loss of longstanding community organisations and expertise which are well embedded in, and responsive to, the local community

85 of the children and young people who responded commented on the potential impact that service reductions would have on their lives. Many said that the Youth Support Service provides valuable opportunities for them to engage with peers take part in positive activities and gain individual support and guidance. Young people also commented that for many this is the only opportunity that they have to engage and express themselves.

“It’s the only opportunity I get to meet my peers and chill out with other like minded young people, it’s great to learn new skills and get help and support for my future or when I’m down”

“I’m young and this is my future, we already have limited opportunities, so why take away what is left”

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations have also expressed concerns including:

- That there could be a negative impact, in particular in areas where provision that was once available for children and young people is removed
- There are fears that crime, and the numbers of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) may increase, due to the reduced opportunities
- There could be a loss of expertise as well as provision from the voluntary and community sector because experienced workers will be made redundant
- The cuts to youth work could impact on the wider community e.g. anti-social behaviour.
- Valuable community buildings could close as third sector providers may be unable to continue to operate with the reduce levels in funding.

“...it [the proposals] may directly impact on the front line delivery, jobs and services..... £1 in the voluntary sector goes further than £1 in the council.”

The November 2014 ‘Youth of Walsall’ Survey of 3,482 young people aged 10-19 years found that:

- Just under half (46%) do not feel there is enough things for young people to do in their local area; interestingly these people tend to be the same who are less happy overall with where they live.
- A number of summer activities, most of which were free and the remainder heavily subsidised, by partnership funding, were provided by youth workers for children and young people, with 37% claiming to have taken part in these. Those who were involved regard the experience positively, with many claiming that they had fun (83%), enjoying being out of the house (45%) and made new/different friends (37%).

“It’s hard when you don’t have the money to pay for activities, the youth club is a place where

I can have some fun without having a financial impact on my family”

- 2.10 The Council are currently reviewing the consultation responses from the corporate consultation process, as are the leadership of the Youth Support Service.
- 2.11 The Youth Support Service will undertake a ‘root and branch’ review of its Targeted Youth Work in January 2015, which will consider:
- What we deliver, where, for how long, at what cost and with what impact
 - How we ensure the appropriate focusing of resources on the areas and young people of greatest need
- 2.12 The third sector continues to be valued by Youth Support Services and is fully expected to have a key place within the new model for the delivery of Targeted Youth Work going forward.

3. Budget Proposal 51 – Reduced funding to community associations

Ref: 51	Reduced funding to Community Associations	
Reduction in the amount of money given to Community Associations. This would mean the reduction of budgets in Community Associations based in council owned buildings.		
	2015/16 (£80,000)	2016/17 (£100,000)
	Total (£180,000)	

- 3.1 For year 1, the proposal relates to the building management grant to eight community associations (CA). This funding not only covers caretaking, to open and close buildings, but also covers health and safety matters (e.g. security, water testing, and fire risk compliance), maintenance and cleaning. Some of the organisations operate from multiple sites, which are Council owned buildings, including Bloxwich Community Partnership.
- 3.2 The organisations run a number of activities including, job clubs, luncheon clubs, sports, youth clubs, nurseries, parenting clubs, healthy lifestyle activities, advice and guidance from partner agencies. Other Council services operate from some of the CAs including youth services and libraries. The CAs has invested in the buildings from income received from the activities they deliver, for example, purchase of equipment, decorating, and maintenance.
- 3.3 For Bloxwich Community Partnership, activities include luncheon club, day care centre, social events, charity fund raising, charity shop, youth club, outreach, bistro, gym, IT.
- 3.4 Although there will be some impact with the proposed saving of the building management, it is the overall impact of multiple budget savings that will have a detrimental effect on the ability for the centre to continue to operate, resulting in loss of considerable income and buildings potentially being closed. If any

building does close, this will result in them becoming the responsibility of the Council for maintenance and security.

3.5 Activities provided by the CAs provide social activities, such as luncheon clubs, which enables elderly and vulnerable residents to meet and socialise, prevent isolation and promote health and well-being.

3.7 For year two proposals, it is not yet confirmed which funding this relates to.

3.8 In the letter to The Leader, reference is made to other community development funding, including:

- £10,000 – Luncheon Club to provide a subsidised hot meal provision

Adult Social Care has confirmed that this funding will remain in place for the next financial year.

- £4,000 – Community Development Sustainability Funding
- £6,000 – Community Development New Initiatives Funding
- £785 – Community Development New Initiatives Funding

This funding is not affected in the next financial year.

3.9 The information below details the feedback received to date regarding this proposal:

Ref: 51		Reduced funding to Community Associations	
Reduction in the amount of money given to Community Associations. This would mean the reduction of budgets in Community Associations based in council owned buildings.			
2015/16 (£80,000)	2016/17 (£100,000)	Total (£180,000)	
Summary of feedback from:			
Budget Booklet Survey			
Fully Support	Support with concerns/amendments	Do not support	Base number
8 (14%)	9 (16%)	39 (70%)	56 (100%)
[32 users (57%), 24 never used/not stated (43%)]			
Budget Booklet Survey results tell us; the majority of respondents do not support this proposal. For those not supporting the proposal they see an impact on them as a volunteer and also that the benefits gained through CAs for a small amount of investment are far greater than the saving creates. Also that the centres are multifaceted and offer beneficial services to a number of different groups. It is clear that the majority of people in favour of retaining the service are users and employees.			
<i>“...Community Associations deliver far wider and greater benefit to the local communities this saving seems small compared to its benefits.”</i>			
Of those supporting the proposal fully or with amendments, few state any direct impact on			

them though some have a view that reduction seems small and impact limited as long as what funding remains '*is enough*' or that Community Associations should be '*self-funded*'.

Suggestions for alternatives to the saving are:

- More use of volunteers and greater involvement from charities.
- Being more self-sufficient; income generation e.g. service users contribute towards service costs, membership fees, funding through sponsorship.
- Phasing in the reductions to allow for CAs to adapt.

43% of respondents are young people (under 25), and all of them are male. 92% of these respondents do not support the proposal, with 4% each for support fully and support with amendments. Of this group 14 have a disability with all but one not supporting the proposal. There is no discernible difference in opinion when viewing responses by ethnicity.

Additional quantitative research e.g. online and paper surveys

No additional quantitative research completed.

Other feedback gathered by services e.g. focus groups, meetings, interviews, any dialogue, letters, emails etc

A focus group was attended by a number of Community Association (CA) managers, Individual meetings with the managers at the CA venue were also held.

For year 1, the proposal is around the building management funding granted to eight organisations. This funding not only covers caretaking, to open and close buildings, but also covers health and safety matters (e.g., water testing, fire), maintenance and cleaning. Some of the organisations operate from multiple sites, which are Council owned buildings. The organisations run a number of activities including, job clubs, luncheon clubs, sports, youth clubs, nurseries, parenting clubs, healthy lifestyle activities, advice and guidance from partner agencies. Other Council services operate from some of the CAs including youth services and libraries. The CAs have invested in the buildings from income from the activities they deliver, for example, purchase of equipment, decorating, maintenance.

Although there will be some impact with the proposed saving of the building management, it is the overall impact of multiple budget savings that CAs feel will have a detrimental effect on the ability for the centres to continue to operate. These include reduction in youth services, removal of libraries from within buildings and reduction in social care budgets. This could result in some organisations losing considerable income and buildings being closed. If buildings do close, this would result in them becoming the responsibility of the Council for their maintenance and security.

Activities provided by the CAs provide social activities, such as luncheon clubs, which enables elderly and vulnerable residents to meet and socialise and prevent isolation and promote health and well-being.

Youth clubs provide activities for the young people in the areas, if this is lost or reduced, this could result in increased anti-social behaviour, which will impact on partners' resources, e.g., Police.

Where libraries are within buildings, there will still be utility costs to the organisations, which are high cost.

For year two proposals, it is not yet confirmed which funding this relates to. Discussions have been had with other organisations that receive community development funding, for example, Citizens Advice Bureau, Walsall Voluntary Action and Relate. In addition discussions have been held with other community organisations that do not receive the building management funding. There will be differing levels of impact on organisations, depending on the level of funding they currently receive.