

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES**

Decision Made: 04 November 2011

#### **YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider Kent County Council's (KCC) proposed changes and reductions to youth provision within the borough, particularly the proposals to withdraw from two of its three youth centres, and to feedback to KCC the views of stakeholders, young people and residents.

##### **Decision Made**

1. That KCC is asked to re-consider its proposals for Maidstone regarding the reduction in the number of youth centres from three to one and the decrease in detached youth work.
2. That the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre rather than Infozone be identified as the "hub" for Maidstone if youth centre reductions are made.
3. That KCC ensure that Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is given the opportunity to jointly commission youth services in future, from voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

MBC acknowledges the challenging financial climate for all councils following the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010. The proposed changes to the youth service amount to an overall £900,000 funding reduction across Kent commencing in April 2012. However, MBC is concerned that cutting youth services at a time when youth unemployment is rising, will have a lasting and negative impact on Maidstone Borough's young people and communities. In addition, Maidstone has the second largest youth population in Kent and the proposed reductions will therefore have a disproportionately adverse impact on the borough's young people.

There is strong support from residents for increasing rather than reducing youth provision. MBC's Community Development Team has recently consulted young people, parents and other stakeholders on-line and at a number of youth events in the borough since August.

- There were 916 respondents with 81% currently users of a youth facility in the borough.
- 59% use youth centres to hang out/meet friends or to have fun and only 7% to get advice. Although the percentage for getting

advice is lower than expected, they do get information while having fun/meeting friends.

- When asked the question: 'KCC are proposing to withdraw from Shepway Youth and Community Centre and Lenham Youth Centre and operate from a hub at Infozone. Do you agree with this proposal?' 74% either 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the proposal, 6% either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', while the remaining 18% stated 'don't know'.
- When asked the question: 'Do you think you would use the proposed hub Infozone', 27% said they would, while 47% said they wouldn't.
- Asked about alternative uses for the buildings that KCC would be withdrawing from, 44% supported them being taken over by or sold to another youth organisation or charity.
- Nearly 90% of the respondents were under 18 years old.

These results are reflected in previous consultations that have informed other plans and strategies within the borough including the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for Maidstone Borough 2009-20:

- In the SCS, 43% of respondents listed 'Increase youth facilities and services' (p27 4.4.4) within their top three priorities, more than any other objective.
- 41% of respondents to the Place Survey identified activities for teenagers as 'most in need of improving', placing this priority only third behind road and pavement repairs and traffic congestion.
- 'Youth issues and ASB' were the highest priority (27%) for residents responding to PACT surveys carried out by the police in 2007/8.

The SCS also states (p40): 'During 2008 Maidstone had the fourth highest number/rate of entrants into the youth justice system of any district in Kent, and experienced a significant increase in numbers between 2007 and 2008. There are some areas which have significantly higher numbers of young offenders. High Street ward has the highest rates, followed by South and Park Wood wards. Park Wood and High Street had respectively the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of any wards in Kent of young people known to the Youth Offending Service (May 2007). Shepway North and Shepway South Wards also appear in the worst 10% of wards in Kent.'

These priorities are reflected in KCC's report 'Transforming Kent's Youth Service' Appendix 6<sup>1</sup> which states: 'The Draft Local Children's Trust Board Children and Young People's Plan 2011 - 2014 for Maidstone identifies the rate of teenage conception, the proportion of NEETs and the engagement of young offenders in suitable education and training as key issues under the theme of Adolescent Engagement.'

MBC is concerned that cutting youth services in Shepway and Lenham may exacerbate anti-social behaviour by young people, youth unemployment and teenage conceptions, undermining the ability to achieve key shared priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/KYS%20Transformation%20Consultation%20Full%20Document.pdf>

When reviewing the approach that KCC took to scoring the current youth centre provision as set out in its Frequently Asked Questions paper<sup>2</sup> (p6), the difference in the scores was minimal with Infozone scoring 69 and Shepway 67. In other parts of Kent a score of 67 would have been sufficient to be chosen as a hub. Further, it is felt that the scoring failed to take account of a number of advantages that the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre has over Infozone not least that it is the only significant youth facility on the estate. According to information provided by KCC, Shepway also has slightly lower running costs £88,500 compared to Infozone £92,600. It is also felt that the 'availability and quality of youth work space' at Shepway is greater than at Infozone. There is also greater security of tenure with Shepway as the facility is owned by MBC whereas Infozone has been earmarked for disposal by KCC - albeit that disposal may not take place for a while during the current property recession. The facilities at Shepway that aren't available at Infozone include:

- a substantial sports hall;
- an outdoor multi-use games area/ball court;
- access to open space including football pitches;
- substantial free off-street car parking;
- as well as youth club facilities that are at least equal in scope and size to those offered at Infozone.

Further, while MBC would rather KCC maintain both facilities, on balance it feels that there is already significant alternative and improving provision within the town centre where Infozone is based. It is felt that the commissioning budget could be better utilised in the town centre to enhance existing provision and detached youth work. These facilities include:

- Switch Youth Café;
- Connexions;
- Porchlight (homeless charity);
- VSU (volunteering agency for young people) at the Howard de Walden Centre, Blewett Street;
- A range of commercial and not-for profit outlets catering for young people including a multi-plex cinema, coffee shops, bowling alley, recording studio/rehearsal rooms, theatre and youth theatre.

KCC's proposals also include a commitment to retain a street based/detached youth work team in Maidstone Borough. While this is a reduction from the current two teams (rural and urban), the council will continue to support the work of this team and support the proposal to have a Community Youth Tutor – possibly based at the Senacre Skills and Community Centre – encouraging young people from the neighbouring deprived areas to access this centre with its focus on skills and training.

It should be noted that a petition has been submitted to MBC by 421 residents from Shepway stating: 'We the undersigned petition the council

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<sup>2</sup> [https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/Kent%20Youth%20Service%20Transformation\\_FAQ.pdf](https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/Kent%20Youth%20Service%20Transformation_FAQ.pdf)

to re-consider its proposal to withdraw services to the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre, Maidstone. This facility is vital to the youth of the area and it is envisaged withdrawal would lead to increased anti-social behaviour.'

While the formal closing date for the submission is 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011, KCC have said that they will give an extension until 4<sup>th</sup> November to allow for our decision making process to take its course.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

The council acknowledges that as it owns the Manor, Shepway Youth and Community Centre, it may be possible, to commission a third party provider to continue to run and even expand the centre potentially utilising some of the proposed KCC commissioning budget. However, this is not considered to be the best use of the reduced resources available for Maidstone borough.

There is concern that KCC's proposed commissioning budget of £1.2 million will not be allocated appropriately across the Kent districts. Maidstone Borough has the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest population of young people of any district in Kent which does not even represent 1/12<sup>th</sup> of the total budget (12 Kent Districts). It is anticipated that the commissioning budget is likely to be in the region of £80-90,000. There is also concern that commissioning budgets will be vulnerable to future cuts as local authority budgets are further squeezed. Positively KCC officers have stated that their ideal commissioning framework is that youth services will be commissioned with a minimum three year Service Level Agreement as commissioning on an annually renewable contract/SLA will not give third party providers the security to enable them to employ staff, seek grants or provide certainty to users and local communities. This intention has not yet however been confirmed.

### **Background Papers**

The Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough 2009 to 2020.

Transforming Kent's Youth Service, a Vision for the Future, KCC, August 2011 <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/kent-youth-service/KYS%20Transformation%20Consultation%20Full%20Document.pdf>

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| <p>The Cabinet Member determined his decision was urgent because the closing date for submission of the KCC's Consultation is 04 November 2011. In accordance with Paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules of the Constitution, the Mayor, in consultation with the head of Paid Service and the Chairman of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, agreed that the decision was reasonable in all the circumstances and should be treated as a matter of urgency and not be subject to call-in.</p> |
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