

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING - Thursday, 21st September 2023

Motion for Time Limited Debate – Youth Services

Proposer: Dr Lauren Sullivan

Seconder: Alister Brady

Background information provided by the Labour Group:

The National Youth Agency (NYA) (the national governing body for youth work in England) defines the key purpose of youth work as: 'Enabling young people to develop **holistically**, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational **development**, while also enabling them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to **reach their potential**'.¹

With the increasing number of youth mental health referrals in Kent, the rise in the number of young people refusing to attend school, the increasing rates of young people involved in criminal activity and in anti-social behaviour, the wider impacts of reducing the level of Youth Service provision, both in-house and commissioned, over the past ten years has taken its toll on Young People in Kent.

Last year, UK Youth (a national youth work charity), in collaboration with Frontier Economics, published a report entitled *Untapped: The Economic Value of Youth Work*.² The report highlights the important role the youth work sector plays in delivering wider societal benefits, including improved health outcomes, increased employment and education, and a reduction in crime. The report demonstrates that by investing in youth work it will save the taxpayer billions over the long-term, with every pound invested in the youth sector yielding a saving of between £3.20 - £6.40 (which according to the government's benchmarks, represents a 'high' or 'very high' return on investment).

Kent County Council have a statutory duty to provide leisure provision and youth service for young people in Kent and in Kent there has been over many years a reduction in universal, preventative and open access Youth Work activity. While some posts in house have been retained, the work, duties and roles staff undertake have changed to more akin to early help and social work roles that are targeted in nature rather than universal, therefore removing the truly preventive nature of youth work. These changes do not reflect core youth work principles and values. This trend looks set to continue with the proposed closures of Youth Centres and the proposal to stop funding the Commissioned Youth Contracts when they expire next year.

This is not the time to start making further cuts to youth services – young people in Kent are having to overcome a series of difficult challenges, including the lingering impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, mental health struggles, the cost-of-living crisis and increasing barriers to sustained employability. The young people of Kent need our support and they need high-quality youth services – and as the UK Youth report highlights, so do we as society.

Motion:

¹ 'What is Youth Work?', National Youth Agency – accessible here: <https://www.nya.org.uk/what-is-youth-work/>.

² *Untapped, The Economic Value of Youth Work* – accessible here: <https://www.ukyouth.org/2022/11/ground-breaking-uk-youth-report-aims-to-realise-untapped-potential-of-youth-work/>.

The County Council resolves to:

- Recognise and support the pivotal role the youth sector plays in delivering wider societal benefits, both nationally and in Kent;
- Recognise that the young people of Kent are experiencing a number of challenges and that access to high-quality youth provision will help them to overcome these types of challenges;
- Recommend the removal of the needless back office commissioning and monitoring costs to youth work provision as being surplus to requirements and add this as a saving;
- Recommend that the Executive continue funding youth services in the districts and Boroughs of Kent after the commissioned service contracts expire next year by identifying alternative savings up to the value of the proposed cut of £913,000. For example, the necessary savings could be achieved by (not exhaustive list):
 - Removing Deputy Cabinet Members (-£167,200)
 - Reducing the number of Cabinet Members in the GET Directorate to two Cabinet Members (-£65,862)
 - Abolishing market premia payments for senior staff graded KR13 and above (-£219,300)
 - Restructuring Senior Management to adopt a Chief Executive Model without Corporate Directors (-£259,400) and a reduction in the associated support staff (-£212,500).
- Recommend that all frontline revenue monies preserved via the above arrangement are reinvested in each and every District and Borough as in-house youth provision, thereby retaining the existing youth work offer by expanding their youth work teams.
- Recommend that the Executive do not propose any further cuts to youth services as part of setting a balanced budget for 2024/25, recognising that these should be a spending priority for the Council; and
- Recommend that the Executive move away from short-termism around youth service spending and consider, where possible, investing more heavily in preventative youth services over the medium-term, recognising the economic value and return on investment that this will generate, as well as the future savings offered through reduced demand for high needs / crisis intervention services in KCC and the wider public sector.