

**Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)**

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

**Subject: Youth Activity Funding**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) considered a report on the Youth Activity Fund (YAF) and its application through the new Community Committees at its meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2014. At that time the Board endorsed a number of proposals, specifically:

- To ensure that youth panels are fully functioning and that there is increased representation of young people in decision-making, the 2.8 staff from the Youth Offer Team within Children's Services, responsible for engaging with children and young people, are integrated into the Communities Team with the Citizens & Communities Directorate.
- To establish a cross directorate steering group to oversee the work.
- That the sub-delegation scheme be amended to delegate responsibility for the Youth Activity Fund from the Director of Children's Services to the Assistant Chief Executive, Citizens & Communities. That a service level agreement is produced to clarify roles and responsibilities between staff in Children's Services and those in Citizens & Communities with regard to the provision youth activities and youth services.
- To establish and agree a timetable with members for commissioning and explore the potential for joint commissioning across the city (single application, contract and monitoring form) to manage multiple applications. Introduce a simplified grant process for grants under £500.
- That the business model for the provision of targeted youth services be reviewed to see if greater flexibility can be introduced to accommodate the ambitions of Community Committees in the provision of local youth services.

This report returns to those proposals and the original questions that members raised concerning the Youth Activity Fund and provides new performance information and details as to progress on the proposals.

In summary, much has been achieved with a growing number of activities being funded, more children and young people participating and a greater sense of local activities being funded to meet locally determined need. There has been positive engagement of children and young people in the decision making processes and qualitative assessments of the activities, by young people through 'mystery shopping' participation, have been overwhelmingly positive.

Nevertheless, there are improvements that can still be made and this report sets out where there are still difficulties and challenges. Youth Panels have not been a success across the city as a means of engaging children and young people in the decision making processes; there are criticisms of the monitoring required through the Breeze Culture Network; good practice is not being shared across teams as well as it might; the funding application process needs examination to see where it can be improved.

## **Recommendations**

That the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services):

- a) Note and discuss the information supplied in this report and appendices
- b) Recommend that the cross directorate steering group referred to in the report (para. 18) is convened by the new Chief Officer Communities to further improve and develop Community Committees funding and support of youth activities through:
  - A critical examination and dissemination of best practice with regard to the engagement of children and young people in the decision making processes of Community Committees on youth activity funding;
  - A review of the monitoring requirements of activity providers through the Breeze Culture Network and the insistence on Breeze cards; and
  - Simplifying the process and bringing the applications for Youth Activity Funding and Community Committee Wellbeing funding together.

## **Purpose of this report**

1. To provide Scrutiny Board (Children's & Families) with a summary of progress regarding the Youth Activity Fund with a focus, in particular, on the progress made since the endorsement of the Scrutiny Board's proposals from 18<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

## **Background information**

2. In May 2013 the delivery of the Youth Activity Fund for children and young people was delegated to Area Committees (now Community Committees). The task was to promote, commission and evaluate local opportunities for children and young people aged 8-17 years in line with the needs and priorities of the area with support from Children's Services. "Activity" is defined as play, sports, arts and cultural opportunities.
3. The budget for 2013/14 was £250,000, increased to £500,000 for 2014/15 and £500,000 again for 2015/16. Each Community Committee has an allocation based on population of young people, creating a variation of budget and a fair allocation to each committee. The delegated budget is 'ring fenced' to be spent on youth activities and to include the involvement of children and young people in the decision making process and shaping the needs of community activity.

## **Main issues**

4. The Scrutiny Board report on Youth Activity Funding in December 2014 was based around a number of questions, first raised by the Board in October 2014. The Scrutiny Board endorsed a set of proposals at the time and this report returns to those same questions and proposals and invites the Boards comments.

### **Is the Youth Activities Fund successful in providing a localised offer of a range of services, influenced by children and young people?**

5. The Community Committees have commissioned a varied programme of activities for all ages across the city. Each committee took into consideration feedback from children and young people, although the depth and quality of this conversation varied widely. The activities offer a range of play, sports, arts, cultural and youth activities, dependent on the views of children and young people in the areas and sometimes on the availability of providers.
6. In terms of outputs:
  - In 2013/14, **126 projects were funded and 9,166** children and young people participated. In 2014/15 **147 projects were funded and 18,705 children and young people participated** (see appendix 1 for a full breakdown of how the money was spent by Community Committee).
  - In 2015/16, **197 projects have been approved** - monitoring on numbers of children and young people is not yet available (see appendix 1 for progress across the Community Committees).
7. The Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2014 was concerned to see that children and young people were involved in the process of decision making about the use of the Youth Activity Fund and supported the integration of the Children's Services Youth Offer Team with the Communities Team to improve the

support for local engagement with children and young people. The Board made the following proposal:

*Proposal:*

*To ensure that youth panels are fully functioning and that there is increased representation of young people in decision-making, the 2.8 staff from the Youth Offer Team within Children's Services, responsible for engaging with children and young people, are integrated into the Communities Team with the Citizens & Communities Directorate.*

8. The Youth Offer Team has successfully been integrated into the Communities Team providing the support required to help develop the voice and influence of children and young people in the decisions concerning the funding of youth activities by Community Committees. However, the functioning and appropriateness of Youth Panels as the means by which children and young people can exercise influence and represent their local areas has been patchy. In most cases the membership of Youth Panels is low and/or attendance sporadic and whilst the contributions from those participating have been valuable they could not be viewed as representative.
9. In response, the Community Committees have developed other means of securing the views and influence of children and young people, each area developing engagement opportunities that work for them and most often building on activity that is already established, e.g. through school councils, at Breeze events and through other existing youth forums. Some Community Committees have worked successfully with their school clusters and collaborated on engagement activity others have sponsored workshop events with young people.
10. An example of good practice: INW and ONW hold an annual consultation event with young people across all schools in the area bringing them together for a day. This includes exploring young people's views of their area (good and bad), a questions and answer session with local elected members led by young people and setting priorities for activity in their area through the youth activities fund. Another example: Outer South carry out consultation at their Summer Breeze events to inform and set priorities for the youth activities fund the following year. The Outer South local clusters and youth service work with their youth matters and cluster council groups to consult on applications for the YAF.
11. A full evaluation is currently being undertaken by the Advanced Youth Service Practitioner to identify best practice and to support work with the school clusters.

**Is the delivery and quality of the service offer consistently good across the localities and how is this performance monitored, reported and good practice shared?**

12. As outlined in the report made to the Board in December 2014 the delivery model is based on a level of consultation and understanding of the views of children and young people in the area. An open application is placed on the Breeze Culture Network (BCN) for providers, who may wish to deliver activities. Applications are then submitted by activity providers. These applications are presented for discussion by Communities Team officers to local elected members through a variety of mechanisms, including:

- Children & Young People's Sub Groups;
  - Full Community Committee meetings;
  - Working groups of Members.
13. Approved projects are notified and issued with a Project Delivery Statement and Funding Agreement. Organisations are required to register with the Breeze Cultural Network and demonstrate they have the appropriate policies and procedures in place, by doing so, the authority can be more confident regarding the well-being and safeguarding of children and young people.
  14. It is a requirement that all projects are promoted on the Breeze Culture Network (BCN), that all monitoring data must be logged online through Breeze and that those participating in activities are logged through their Breeze card. This has come under widespread criticism, particularly from smaller providers who have found the processes associated with Breeze placing too great an administrative burden on them. There have been difficulties with the Breeze monitoring software that have added to the frustrations articulated by activity providers but even with software glitches ironed out many providers say the process is off putting and onerous. Indeed several organisations have decided not to apply for YAF funding because of the difficulties they have experienced in the past.
  15. Accountability for the allocation of activity funds sits with the Community Committees supported by the Communities Team who co-ordinate the commissioning/grant application process.
  16. Appendix 1 identifies the quantitative data being collected and the distribution of activities across the areas. Qualitative data measures have been taken through a programme of peer inspections - 'mystery shopper' visits. The peer inspection report from last October demonstrates overwhelmingly that children and young people rate highly and value the activities inspected. The full report is provided as appendix 2.
  17. In December 2014, the Board made the following proposal:  
*Proposal:*  
*Establish a cross directorate steering group to oversee the work associated with the Youth Activity Fund.*
  18. A steering group was established and terms of reference agreed (see appendix 3) but the work of the group has stalled and it is proposed that it re-groups under the newly appointed Chief Officer Communities, Shaid Mahmood, and focuses on these three key areas for development:
    - A critical examination and dissemination of best practice with regard to the **engagement** of children and young people in the decision making processes of Community Committees on youth activity funding;
    - A review of the **monitoring requirements** of activity providers through the Breeze Culture Network and the insistence on Breeze cards; and
    - Simplifying the process and bringing the **applications** for Youth Activity Funding and Community Committee Wellbeing funding together.

### **Is the localised determination of Youth Activities Fund improving service?**

19. There is now a wider programme of activities available with more activities and more participants. Whilst there are criticisms over the effectiveness of Youth Panels and improvements are required in places with regard to the engagement of children and young people, nevertheless, it is clear that the programmes of activity are indeed locally determined and sensitive to the needs of the locality. The appendices demonstrate the range of activities, the spending and the perceived quality of the local provision.
20. Being more local means that Community Committees, particularly where they have a sub-group with YAF responsibilities, can work with other agencies to strengthen the positive activity to prevent anti social behaviour and tackle other social issues, encouraging youths to take pride in their area. Relevant sub-groups have ensured that children and young people play a role in influencing the Youth Activity Fund, that the funding is targeted locally and, if necessary, meet informally with activity providers to clarify issues thereby helping in the assessment of applications and in making quicker decisions. The role of the Community Committee Children's Champions has been central to the improvements reported on the local determination of the YAF and continues to play an important role in reporting to their Community Committee, linking with Children's Services and relevant Executive Board members.
21. At the Scrutiny Board's meeting in December 2014 it was reported that there was some confusion concerning roles and responsibilities between Children's Services staff and the staff in the Communities Team. As a consequence, the Board endorsed the following proposal:

#### **Proposal:**

*That the sub-delegation scheme be amended to delegate responsibility for the Youth Activity Fund from the Director of Children's Services to the Assistant Chief Executive, Citizens & Communities. That a service level agreement is produced to clarify roles and responsibilities between staff in Children's Services and those in Citizens & Communities with regard to the provision youth activities and youth services.*

22. It can be reported that the sub-delegation scheme has been amended as proposed.
23. With the integration of the Youth Offer Team in to the Communities Team and with the sub-delegation scheme now amended it was felt unnecessary to produce a service level agreement between Children's Services and Citizens and Communities.

### **Is the localised determination of Youth Activities Fund saving money?**

24. All applications are assessed by ward members and relevant Community Committee sub-groups for value for money. In a number of cases, the Communities Team have been able to negotiate project costs down and increase the number of projects the Community Committees have been able to fund. The monies allocated are detailed in Appendix 1. There is evidence that Community Committees have used the YAF to jointly fund activities with school clusters, the Housing Advisory Panels and others.

25. It is noteworthy that many of the Community Committees have augmented the spending on youth activities through use of their Wellbeing funds. Appendix 4 sets out the spending profile by Community Committees on youth activities and shows that over the last two years £234,543 has been spent using the Wellbeing Fund on top of the YAF allocation. Smaller groups in particular, have reported that they find the YAF application and monitoring processes onerous (see para.14 above) and have, instead, applied for funding from the Community Committees WBF where the application and decision making processes are quicker and easier. Whilst wanting to ensure that children and young people maintain an influence over spending on youth activities it is time to simplify the process and bring the applications for Youth Activity Funding and Community Committee Wellbeing funding together, as proposed in para.18 and the recommendations of this report.

26. In December 2014, the Scrutiny Board made the following proposal:

*Proposal:*

*To establish and agree a timetable with members for commissioning and explore the potential for joint commissioning across the city (single application, contract and monitoring form) to manage multiple applications. Introduce a simplified grant process for grants under £500.*

27. Standardised paperwork and administration of applications has been introduced. Each area has its own slightly bespoke arrangements and decision making processes in place and it is felt that a centralised system could lose the value of local discussion, ownership and brokerage. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring what further efficiencies can be achieved and that is why it is proposed that the steering group re-groups to tackle the issues set out in paragraph 18 above.

**Clarity on whether the Youth Activities Fund can be used to commission more targeted youth services?**

28. There was a lack of clarity around spending Youth Activities Fund on 'Targeted Youth Work' by youth workers employed by Children's Services when the Scrutiny Board considered YAF in December 2014 and the Board sought flexibility over YAF spend according to local need. It proposed:

*Proposal:*

*That the business model for the provision of targeted youth services be reviewed to see if greater flexibility can be introduced to accommodate the ambitions of Community Committees in the provision of local youth services.*

29. Whilst the YAF is designed primarily for the funding of universal youth activities the proposed flexibility has been introduced successfully and Community Committees have funded more targeted provision where this has been determined to be necessary by the committee.

## **Corporate Considerations**

### **Consultation and Engagement**

30. Young people's engagement is demonstrated throughout the process and is referenced in response to the questions raised. Children and young people have been involved in the decision making process of when, where and what type of activity will benefit their community. They are also involved in the evaluation of all Activity fund applications and making recommendations to Community Committees. Combined with Community Committee member's knowledge and experience of their localities this results' in an effective way of securing successful programmes of activities for children and young people.

### **Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

31. Funding and delivery is proportionate across the city. Each Community Committee considers the equality implications of decisions and considers the delivery of events and activity to ensure a broad variety of activity across the community supporting equality, diversity, community cohesion and integration.

### **Council policies and City Priorities**

32. The delivery of the youth activity fund supports the Children and Young Peoples Plan with a particular focus on children and young people having fun growing up and who are active citizens who feel they have voice and influence.

### **Resources and value for money**

33. The Youth Activity Fund budget for 2015/16 is £500,000 for the Community Committees. Community Committee allocations are based on populations of children and young people age 8-17 years across the city. Details of spend is set out in the appendices.

### **Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

34. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **Risk Management**

35. There are no significant risk management issues arising from this report.

### **Reccommendations**

36. That the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services):
  - c) Note and discuss the information supplied in this report and appendices
  - d) Recommend that the cross directorate steering group referred to in the report (para. 18) is convened by the new Chief Officer Communities to further improve and develop Community Committees funding and support of youth activities through:



- A critical examination and dissemination of best practice with regard to the engagement of children and young people in the decision making processes of Community Committees on youth activity funding;
- A review of the monitoring requirements of activity providers through the Breeze Culture Network and the insistence on Breeze cards; and
- Simplifying the process and bringing the applications for Youth Activity Funding and Community Committee Wellbeing funding together.

### **Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

37 None

### **Appendices**

1. 2014/15 and 2015/16 performance data
2. Summer Peer Inspections of Youth Activity Fund Activities 2015
3. Youth Activity Fund Steering Group Terms of Reference
4. Youth activity spending profile 2014/15 and 2015/16

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.