



Review of Youth Provision in Bracknell Forest

**Report by a Working Group of the
Lifelong Learning and Children's Services
Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Three Special Messages:

To those many young people who volunteer and are active members of their community, congratulations and thank you.

To the many adult volunteers who give their time freely to organise and run voluntary organisations that young people can join and enjoy, thank you for your commitment and we hope others will be encouraged to join you.

To the reader, the Working Group would like to draw your attention to young people's desire and enthusiasm to become involved in activities and volunteering.

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Bracknell Forest Youth Forum: Laura (chairman), Andy, Chlöe, Gemma, Katie, Michael, Sean, Shaun and Sian.

Brakenhale School Council: Jo Manisier (Teacher) and School Council Pupils: Jordan, Rowena, Vinnie, Laura, Karen, Daniel, Darren, Charlotte, Samuel, Charlotte, Daryl, Rebecca, Daniel and Michael.

Sandhurst School Council: Mr Eddy (Teacher) and School Council Pupils: Hayley, Michaela, Hannah, Kelly, Pauline, James, Chlöe, David, Sally, Jess, Lara and Felix.

The following officers from Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC), South Hill Park and Thames Valley Police:

Richard Beaumont	Head of Performance & Scrutiny, Chief Executive's Office, BFBC
Darren Berry	Senior Youth Worker (Young People's Engagement), BFBC
Andrea Carr	Policy Officer (Scrutiny), Chief Executive's Office, BFBC
Mark Devon	Assistant Director of Environment & Leisure (Leisure Services), BFBC
Tony Eccleston	Director of Education, Children's Services and Libraries, BFBC
Sheila Ogden	Youth Services Manager, Education, Children's Services & Libraries, BFBC
Chris Vaal	Leisure Development Manager, Environment & Leisure, BFBC
Gail Babb	Education Development Officer, South Hill Park
Graham Thorne	Sergeant, Thames Valley Police

The Working Group's conclusions have also been informed by other's research work including:

Children & Young Peoples Needs Analysis – Cordis Bright for BFBC

"Tell Us" consultations – BFBC

Youth Service Plan – BFBC

"Freedom's Orphans" – Institute of Public Policy Research, available at: www.ippr.org.uk

"A National Framework for Youth Action & Engagement" – Russell Commission, available at: www.russellcommission.org.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Working Group was established by the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel at its meeting held on 21 June 2006. In considering its future work programme and priorities with particular regard to the Children and Young People's Plan, the Panel agreed to set up a working group consisting of Councillors Beadsley, Miss Haydon and Osborne and Mr Dempsey (Parent Governor Representative).
- 1.2 The Panel suggested that the Working Group give consideration to two of the priorities identified in the Plan:
 - (i) Children and young people engage in positive community and voluntary activities.
 - (ii) Children and young people have a range of choices of things to do and places to go.
- 1.3 Following its initial meeting to scope the review, the Working Group interviewed various officers of the Council and one from South Hill Park (included in the list of acknowledgements above) with expertise in the fields of education, youth work and leisure provision together with an officer of Thames Valley Police with knowledge of youth behaviour in the Borough. As the Working Group felt that the review would not be complete without speaking to young people about available provision for them and their activities, it met with the local Youth Forum and school councils of Brakenhale and Sandhurst Secondary Schools.
- 1.4 The purpose of the review, within the general context of the Children and Young People's Plan, was aimed at investigating arrangements for youth provision in Bracknell Forest and considering the impact young people can make on the community through their activities.
- 1.5 The Working Group's key objectives were:
 - To investigate youth activities in Bracknell Forest, considering what is currently available in the Borough and what might be provided or promoted in future;
 - To consider the contribution young people make to the community and society e.g. through voluntary or community activities;
 - To consider how such activities might assist in improving the image and perception of young people in Bracknell Forest.
- 1.6 The scope of the review has been to undertake a Borough-wide audit of activities open to youths between the ages of 11 and 17 years, about 6,500 young people in Bracknell Forest, seek views from young people on the range and level of activities available and identify gaps and barriers to participation.
- 1.7 Excluded from the scope of the review were the Council's Youth Services and individual and home based activities. Care was taken not to falsely raise young people's expectations.

1.8 Specific questions addressed by the review have been:

- What do young people think is positive community activity?
- Why, how and where do they become involved?
- What stops them becoming involved in such activities?
- Are there the opportunities for more young people to be involved and how can they be encouraged to become involved?
- What are the local choices of things to do and places to go?
- How do young people react to them? Do they have ready access to them?

2. Good News

- 2.1 The Working Group met super young people and noticed their good social skills, their ability to communicate, their enthusiasm and their readiness to do their best to help. Many were already doing interesting things, volunteering to support charities and helping in the local community.
- 2.2 Members were told by the police that the young people who cause trouble are a very small proportion of this age group, less than 1%, but too often it is only these young people we notice.
- 2.3 It was found that young people do volunteer to help the community but often in ways adults do not notice:
- Helping younger pupils at school or in a neighbouring primary school;
 - Helping younger siblings;
 - Taking responsibility at school e.g. helping in the school library;
 - Supporting clubs, organisations and events organised through school;
 - Organising and supporting charity events through school;
 - Helping with junior sections of youth organisations, e.g. Cubs, Rainbows, Brownies etc.;
 - Helping at a youth club for young people with learning difficulties;
 - Volunteering in charity shops; and
 - Informally helping neighbours, friends and relations e.g. shopping, baby sitting, dog walking, pet care, gardening etc.
- 2.4 There are many adult volunteers giving their time and doing an excellent job running voluntary organisations and sports clubs that cater for young people but we need to encourage more people to join them.
- 2.5 The audit showed that in Bracknell Forest there are many things for young people to do.
- 2.6 The Working Group were reminded that Bracknell Forest Borough Council has an important role in providing infrastructure for voluntary activity e.g. sports pitches, community centres.
- 2.7 Members met good youth workers helping young people in Bracknell Forest.

3. Problems to Overcome

“Positive community and voluntary activities”:

- 3.1 Most voluntary organisations that are not youth organisations do not encourage young volunteers, particularly in this age group, for example most community centres exclude them.
- 3.2 The majority of volunteering opportunities appear to be accessed by membership of another organisation such as school, church, youth club, scouts, Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- 3.3 It is difficult for young people to identify or find volunteering opportunities:
 - “They aren’t advertised at school.”
 - “Could we have a school volunteer club?”
- 3.4 Young people told the Working Group that community involvement and volunteering require:
 - understanding of what it means and what opportunities there might be;
 - the example of family or friends;
 - encouragement from adults or friends;
 - an introduction to opportunities, ideally with a friend; and
 - confidence and people skills.
- 3.5 Adults can easily discourage volunteering:
 - “If older people are always grumbling about us it doesn’t make us want to help.”

“Things to do and places to go”:

- 3.6 Many activities for young people need adult volunteers to supervise and organise them. Some activities are for adults only or only available to accompanied children.
- 3.7 The obstacles to participation include finding out about activities, their location, transport and the cost. Some organisations and venues are felt by young people to be unwelcoming – “we get the feeling we make the place look untidy” – or require them to be accompanied by adults or restrict their access in other ways at popular times.
- 3.8 New child protection requirements have been suggested as a barrier to involving young people or having a junior section of a club e.g. art, jewellery making, photography. Insurance was also suggested as an obstacle.
- 3.9 The audit of activities (Appendix 1) showed:
 - Many activities are widely available;

- Others, particularly those requiring capital investment, in both public and private sectors require transport links for many young people to use them;
- Information about activities is scattered about and can be hard to find;
- The Youth Service supports youth centres or Duke of Edinburgh work in Edgbarrow, Sandhurst, Wellington, Ranelagh and College Hall schools but not Brakenhale, Garth Hill or Easthampstead (under discussion); and
- Membership fees or large initial payments can prevent young people trying things.

3.10 The cost of activities is not just the entrance fee, “it’s the whole package including getting there and getting home, maybe by taxi”.

3.11 Some activities need a lot of money up front e.g. courses £170, or annual membership fees, and therefore are only accessible with parental backing and a good family income.

3.12 “There is nothing in the town centre; will the new town centre have things for us?” “Could there be a no-alcohol club for young people? Or a youth café?”

4. Other Information Gained

- 4.1 Young people in this age group “hang out”; it is part of learning independence. Good “hang outs” are sufficiently well lit to feel safe, far enough from houses not to cause disturbance and not under obvious adult supervision.
- 4.2 The Institute of Public Policy Research report had some interesting observations:
- Social skills are increasingly important for success;
 - Better off parents can purchase activities that enhance children’s social skills;
 - Better off children are more likely to attend constructive, organised or educational activities; and
 - British children spend more time with their peers and less time with adults and parents than young people in culturally similar countries.
- 4.3 Although the Russell Report on youth volunteering addresses the 16-25’s age group it makes recommendations relevant to our enquiries, including:
1. “Campaigns should promote awareness of volunteering...”, including, “Exposure to volunteering messages within the education system pre-16 as well as in secondary schools, sixth form..... to ensure all students have the opportunity to volunteer.”
 4. “It should be common-place for young people to volunteer whilst they are at school, college or in higher education. All education institutions should have a volunteering ethos.”

5. Overcoming the Problems

Encouraging more volunteer opportunities for this age group.

- 5.1 The Councils should set the example by looking at their own activities and find volunteering opportunities for young people in environment, care, events etc. They should publicise the need and responsibility of organisations to bring on the “next generation” and encourage them to identify opportunities for young people to become involved in suitable voluntary organisations. They can ask those they fund and others to do this.

Enabling young people to find volunteer opportunities.

- 5.2 There are volunteering web-sites for adults and older young people, e.g. Millennium Volunteers, Community Service Volunteers etc. but nothing we can find for young people in the 13 to 16/17 age group. Currently those that find opportunities do so through friends and family. The young people’s suggestion is that volunteering opportunities should be advertised in school and information on a youth web-site would be a good way to publicise opportunities.

Building the confidence to try volunteering.

- 5.3 For young people who are not encouraged or introduced to volunteering by their home and family this encouragement comes from school, church and youth service. The extended schools initiative should be used to introduce young people to youth service activities that support Youth Achievement Awards, Youth Arts Awards, Duke of Edinburgh programmes and volunteering opportunities. The skills needed to achieve this are available in the Youth Service, South Hill Park, voluntary sector and some non-teaching school staff.

Knowing what is available.

- 5.4 The Working Group looked for a young people’s web-site that identified “things to do and places to go” for young people. There are national sites, pieces of information on a variety of local sites, e.g. sports clubs’ sites, some links through the clubs information on the Council web-site but it appears that there is no site that brings together things for young people to do.
- 5.5 It is suggested that the Council promotes a web-site that highlights things to do for young people that will be easily found. It should range, as our audit did over all sectors, so maybe commercial sector advertising or sponsorship could support this activity.

Adult volunteers to support youth volunteering and activities.

- 5.6 Publicity, recruitment and training are things to which the Council could contribute. The training, support and Criminal Record Bureau checks are an aspect of this for all voluntary youth workers, not just those connected with the Youth Service. It could be a vehicle for supporting the development of “youth places” in existing organisations and overcoming concerns about bringing in younger members and child protection requirements. The Council could also facilitate insurance information and arrangements.

Access costs & transport.

- 5.7 We noted that one access obstacle is paying a sizeable bill up-front; would it be feasible to pay in several instalments rather than requiring the full cost at the outset? The Council could be promoting free taster sessions, both at its own facilities and with other providers. The Working Group thinks that the net cost of providing membership of Bracknell Forest Borough Council facilities for all children resident in the Borough for free or for a nominal fee may not be great. (Preliminary investigation suggests that an initial loss of income in the order of £55k may result but this could possibly be off set by increased usage and associated income generation.) If this could be introduced it would mean that all young people would have access at member prices not just those whose parents purchase membership for them.
- 5.8 It is difficult to suggest solutions to the cost and availability of transport but if the e+ card is developed for transport applications it could open a way to reduced fares for young people up to age 16 or in full-time education.

The town centre.

- 5.9 The young people's comments are a timely reminder that as the new town centre is being developed consideration is given to how this age group will have a positive place in it.
- "There is nothing in the town centre; will the new town centre have things for us?"
 - "Could there be a no-alcohol club for young people? Or a youth café?"

The Working Group has not had time to take this further but recommend that the Council's Town Centre regeneration team seek the views of the Youth Forum on what would be appropriate and work to deliver facilities for young people in the new town centre.

Much of the town centre is not being replaced and the opportunity to deliver something sooner should be taken if it arises.