

GB/DK
13 June, 2007

Councillor R C Edger, OBE
3 Turner Place
College Town
Sandhurst
GU47 0FW

Dear Cllr Edger

Review of Youth Service Provision in Bracknell Forest

I would like to thank the Lifelong Learning and Scrutiny Committee for the Review of Youth Provision forwarded to me by Michael Sargeant on 1 May 2007. I have now had the opportunity to consider the report and to discuss its findings with officers.

I recognise the hard work that has gone into the production of the report and the sensitive way in which the issue was addressed. I welcome the report and its findings not least because it represents an excellent example of engagement with young people in terms of ascertaining their views.

The 'good news' section, section 2 is pleasing: it recognises the qualities that young people in the Borough have as well as the commitment of large numbers of adults to working alongside them, sometimes as part of their paid employment but frequently in a voluntary capacity. It also demonstrates that there are actually quite a lot of activities available for them to get involved in.

The report has obviously unearthed a number of issues which need to be considered. I propose to address each in turn:

Encouraging more volunteer opportunities for this age group

This section contains a positive suggestion and a way in which local councils can demonstrate an aspect of community leadership. I have asked officers in the youth service to take a lead in seeing how we might bring this about.

Enabling young people to find volunteer opportunities

I am pleased to say that we now have one of the suggested vehicles for doing this. The *Xpresionz* website, launched at the BAFTA awards in March is just the sort of website that I believe the report advocates. Young people are actively engaged in the development of *Xpresionz* with the support of members of the Youth Service. This is exactly the kind of use that it can be put to. I have been assured by officers that the Connexions Service is also actively engaged in promoting volunteering opportunities and I am aware that there is a tremendous amount that goes on in schools. We will look at ways in which schools can be more actively involved in promoting a wider range of opportunities.

Building the confidence to try volunteering

Agreed. We need to spread the expertise and experience that we have more widely. Many of the programmes that are mentioned already take place in Bracknell Forest but I agree that they may not be widespread. You know that I have a personal interest in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and am particularly pleased with the increase in uptake that has occurred this year.

Knowing what is available

The Youth Service has recently completed an audit of 'things to do and places to go'. The intention is that this will be placed on *Xpresionz*, which will be able to hold the information but is currently without an events calendar. This is under development and will be an important addition to the site. Part of the requirement for developing the 'things to do and places to go' aspect of the Youth Matters Green Paper is that a number of different ways of communicating with young people are developed. We need to have made substantial progress with this by April 2008 and things are happening now.

Adult volunteers to support youth volunteering and activities

The suggestions here need consideration. There are resource implications that flow from some of the suggestions that are made. The Youth Service will always be willing to provide advice and there are a number of voluntary organisations that provide such support for affiliated groups.

Access costs and transport

Some of the suggestions under this recommendation will be considered as part of the 'things to do and places to go' developments and some of them are already in place. I am aware that transport availability and cost remains an issue for many young people. The suggestion in the report about the use of the e+ card is helpful and would certainly be a way of addressing the cost of transport. Availability may prove more challenging.

The Town Centre

There is already involvement with the Youth Forum over the development of facilities for young people within the new town centre. There have been a number of productive sessions where young people's views have been raised and there is a lot of support for the view that we should be considering the interests of this section of our community in terms of what is being planned.

I trust that the above provides the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with an indication of where the Youth Service is responding to the issues raised in a helpful and thorough report.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Dr G M Barnard
Executive Member for Children's Services