

AGENDA 9a, Enc v) Draft Report of the Detached Youth Work Liaison Meeting, held on 25TH September 2023, at 2:00pm at the YMCA, Ashington

PRESENT

Rob Cox (CEO YMCA), Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, Sarah Eden, Sgt Ian Lawson, CSO Philip Raisbeck

1. CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

It was AGREED that Rob Cox would chair the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were given for Cllr John Tully and Inspector Wayne Daniels, Sgt Paul Davis.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None.

4. DISPENSATIONS

None.

5. OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS HELD TO DATE

Rob initially reported that a Lead Youth Worker had left YMCA with their well wishes as she progresses her career at Northumberland College. With this loss and two further youth workers there have been some challenges, but recruitment is underway for youth workers, and a Youth and Community Projects Officer will start mid-November.

Delivery has been restructured to the following:

Mondays – 5:30 – 7:30pm – Creative centre-based session delivered jointly by YMCA/Mortal Fools
Tuesday detached session (funded by ATC) – no centre-based activity
Wednesday detached session (funded by ATC) – no centre-based activity
Thursday – 4:00 – 8:00pm Centre Youth Session
Friday – 4:00 – 8:00 pm Youth Café

The new delivery model ensures that the Council's contract to deliver detached is achieved, but it was asked whether this was at the loss of youth sessions in the Centre. Contract work (i.e. detached) has been prioritised whilst meeting the objectives of the organisation and other funders.

Over the duration of the project, a total of 36 detached sessions have been successfully delivered in Ashington. These sessions typically involve two members of the youth team, occasionally accompanied by a volunteer. The primary operational areas have centred around the Leisure Centre, McDonald's, and Asda, forming a central triangle within the town. In response to requests from partners or young people and based on information they provide; the team has also expanded its presence to other areas such as the woods and specific parts of Hirst Park.

The weather has an impact on the number of young people about and as it gets colder there will likely be fewer. As there are no sessions on in YMCA when detached is being delivered, there is the option to bring the YP engaged on detached, inside.

6. SESSION MONITORING INFORMATION

Since the project's initiation, the team has made 572 individual contacts with young people. It's important to note that these contacts may not all be unique, as there are instances of repeat engagements. Out of these, 298 contacts have been with boys and 225 with girls. The age range of the young people encountered during the sessions varies from as low as 7 years to 17 years, with the majority falling within the 12 to 15-year-old range.

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On average, each session has enabled meaningful conversations with 21 young people, comprising 12 boys and 9 girls. The youth team has observed that young people during these sessions are approachable and exhibit a level of trust, primarily due to their awareness of the YMCA's presence in the town, especially through youth sessions held at the YMCA centre.

It was discussed that the data collected at each session should be available so the Council can interpret the impact of detached youth work, in regards the numbers and the outcomes achieved.

7. OUTCOMES

Conversations with young people during detached sessions have generally been positive and constructive. The staff takes a careful and attentive approach to actively listening to the concerns, ideas, and stories shared by the young people. One recurring theme is the limited options for young people in the town outside of set YMCA days, which is a concern voiced by young people.

Additionally, discussions often revolve around school life and the activities young people have been involved in since their last interaction with the staff during detached sessions.

Over the sessions, several recurring themes and observations have emerged:

- **Variability in Engagement:** Sessions ranged from quiet to busy, influenced by factors such as weather conditions and school schedules.
- **Young People's Concerns:** Common concerns among young people include boredom, lack of open-access activities, and limited services available to them, leading to discussions about climbing on buildings and vandalism as boredom-driven ASB.
- **Desire for Anonymity:** In some sessions, young people were seen wearing balaclavas, explaining it as a trend and expressing a preference for anonymity due to perceived surveillance.
- **Outdoor Preference:** Many young people preferred outdoor activities, enjoying good weather. This influenced their receptiveness to signposting for indoor activities.
- **Community Conversations:** Engagements often involve discussions about school, local services, outreach work, funding, and community issues.
- **ASB and Accountability:** ASB incidents were occasionally mentioned, with some young people being banned from the YMCA. These discussions led to conversations about accountability and re-entry.
- **Transportation and Socialisation:** Reduced public transport fares led to gatherings of young people in central areas to socialise with peers from various towns and villages.
- **Staff Efforts:** Staff actively engaged with young people, addressing inappropriate behaviour, and providing signposting to relevant services and activities.
- **Weather Impact:** Weather conditions played a significant role in session dynamics, with quieter sessions during rainy weather and more active ones during pleasant conditions.

Cllr Grimshaw highlighted a discussion held recently regarding young people having a space of their own to hang out, a shelter or similar in a safe space, asking if this was ever brought forward by the young people themselves.

Rob explained that the location of young people gathering is very mobile and changes from day to day, even across towns now with low-cost bus travel, therefore he did not think having a set location, like a shelter would appeal. Some young people want to engage in activities, including accessing YMCA and some choose not to, but if they are gathering outside of a formal youth setting, the chances are the location will change constantly.

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The policing team reported that incidents of youth anti-social behaviour have been lower in those areas where they were prevalent, and where detached youth work is taking place.

As staffing numbers in the Neighbourhood Policing Team increase, it is expected that officers can visit YMCA to engage with young people and make a positive impact.

8. BARRIERS TO YOUTH WORK TAKING PLACE

The meeting discussed the need to move to closed sessions, where young people cannot simply come and go as they may have in the past. This is as a direct result of disruption and behaviour that can not be tolerated in the centre, as it impacts upon everyone.

In terms of detached sessions outside, the weather has an impact on the number of young people who are out and about.

9. TARGETED YOUTH WORK

Rob highlighted upcoming work with NE Youth to bring youth groups working in the region together. The new Youth and Community Projects Officer comes with a vast background, and it is expected that this will be a catalyst for new and exciting projects.

10. OTHER MATTERS

The importance of sensitivity and confidentiality in information sharing was discussed. The YMCA works hard to maintain a relationship of trust with young people, and this must be upheld as a priority.

11. DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

To be agreed.