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Date 7 October 2011

Dear Sir

KENT YOUTH SERVICE REVIEW CONSULTATION

I am writing on behalf of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council with regard to Kent County Council's Consultation Paper "Kent Youth Service Transformation Plan", which proposes new methods of delivering Youth Services across the County within the Borough of Tonbridge & Malling.

The Council is strongly opposed to the proposals brought forward within the consultation document, which it feels will be damaging to the provision of services to young people within the Borough. The Council would request that the proposals are revisited by the County Council in liaison with Officers from the Borough Council.

With regard to the above general statement, the Council would wish to make a number of specific comments as follows:

- The loss of the Youth Centre at Samays would remove a much valued facility to young people, not only from within Snodland, but also within the surrounding area. Snodland is located in one of the main areas of deprivation within the Borough of Tonbridge & Malling and it is felt that the area does not have the relevant support networks in place to provide commissioning work from this facility. Whilst it has been suggested that the existing facilities at Samays are not adequate to provide all the services required by the new hub this could be corrected by careful and targeted investment in any areas of service provision identified as requiring improvement. In this respect, the Borough Council is aware of a £70,000 developer contribution held by the County Council from the nearby Holborough development, which could be used to upgrade the facilities at this location.
- The Council feels strongly that the proposals being brought forward have not been based on a local needs analysis to identify the range and depth of youth services needed in each locality. Rather, the proposals seem to be based on national statistics which cannot adequately reflect local circumstances and characteristics.

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Director of Planning, Transport & Leisure Services: Steve Humphrey MRTPI
Chief Leisure Officer: Robert Styles BA (Hons) DMS M IMSPA



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

- Moreover, the proposals do not reflect the current distribution of other youth services that should be influential in planning for the future. For example, within Tonbridge at the present time, there are a wide variety of voluntary organisations providing services to young people including St Stephens Church and the Teen & Twenty Club, both of which are in very close proximity to the proposed hub at Avebury Avenue. The Council feels that a more detailed audit of existing provision within Tonbridge should be progressed and a more integrated approach adopted in the pattern of youth service provision. We would be happy to assist the County Council in actioning this.
- It is felt that if the existing facility at Samays was retained and enhanced, the voluntary sector infrastructure already exists within Tonbridge to provide the commissioning services required by the County Council in its new model. The Council is also somewhat confused by the proposed location of the hub in South Tonbridge, when all previous liaison with the County Council indicated a wish for a facility to be located in North Tonbridge and, in particular, in the Trench Ward where the greatest level of deprivation exists. This again demonstrates the point that the proposals do not seem to reflect particular and specific local circumstances.
- In terms of the County Council's overall decision to reduce the Youth Service's budget by £1M this Council would suggest that as the service is already one of the lowest funded youth services within the country, it is not appropriate to take further monies away from the youth agenda. Providing services to children and young people is a key priority for this Council and the organisation feels that this aim and objective should also be a high priority for the County. Historically, the share of funding within the County to Tonbridge & Malling has been extremely low with the majority of monies being focussed on East rather than West Kent, despite clear pockets of deprivation that are known to exist.
- The Council is concerned about the nature of the consultation exercise, which is highlighted by the fact that organisations such as ourselves and Snodland Town Council were not consulted in advance. The Council is also concerned that a 'pilot' facility has already been established in Tonbridge within the Adult Education Centre within the consultation period, which would suggest that a decision may already have taken place. The Council would be interested to see the outcome of the pilot in Tonbridge and how successful this has been. The Council has been reassured by a recent letter from the County Council's Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities that the proposed changes can be amended in light of the outcome of local discussions, and a commitment of further discussions at a local level.
- There is concern with regard to the new model with respect to the transport links that exist within the Borough at the present time. The prospect of any significant number of young people travelling from surrounding villages to the new hub in Tonbridge is very remote, given existing public transport networks.

In overview, the Council feels that the proposals have been based on inaccurate data, inadequate consultation and a model is being imposed on the Borough which does not reflect either the unique nature of Tonbridge & Malling, or indeed the current provision of services by local organisations. It is felt that assumptions have been made with a lack of real evidence and the Council would strongly encourage Kent County Council to rethink its proposals and bring forward a new approach based on close liaison with Officers from the Borough Council.

Yours faithfully

Signed by Robert Styles, 07.10.2011

Robert Styles
Chief Leisure Officer