

**Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Public Initiatives
Panel meeting on 27 November 2019**

43. Presentation on Youth Zone sports and social centres

Councillor Jowers (by reason of being a member of Essex County Council) declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (5).

A presentation on the setting up and running of Youth Zones was given by Jamie Masraff, Director of Operation for OnSide Youth Zones, and Gavin Evans, Chief Executive of Barking and Dagenham Youth Zone. The background of the charity OnSide and its work in founding Youth Zones was given, from the movement to provide new facilities for the Bolton Lads and Girls Club in partnership with local communities private and business donors, then moving on to the setting up of the OnSide charity to assist the set-up and running of Youth Zones across the UK. The new Lads and Girls Club was open for 40 hours each week, offering a greater number of sports and activities and had increased the amenity for young people and positively affected the whole area. This had led to the movement and charity which sought to emulate this success in other parts of the Country.

£140m of investment into existing Youth Zone schemes had already been secured by OnSide, which had allowed the building of new, dedicated facilities for each Youth Zone, tailored to match the needs and wishes expressed by local young people and giving them a sense of pride and excitement in their new building, in contrast to the often tired-looking facilities which they replaced.

The Panel were told that Youth Zones incorporated sports facilities, fitness and gym facilities, and offered art, dance, climbing, study, training and kitchen-related activities. The approach to setting up Zones had been designed to include existing youth service providers, groups and clubs, in order to ensure each Zone supported them, rather than being in competition with them. An example of this was given to show that Youth Zones often provided basic introductory lessons and experience to young people and were then able to refer them on to more specialist and expert clubs and organisations so as to further develop their skills. Talks were held with these organisations before, during and after the setting up of each Youth Zone to identify any issues and ensure that the new facility compliments existing ones.

All Youth Zones had been recording 100 or more individual users every evening, with activities and opportunities split into the age ranges of 8-12 and 13-19, with specific activities for young people with more complex learning needs, in addition to support for these young people to join in with the more general activities and sport.

Young People were given a further sense of ownership and investment by being charged a nominal fee of £5 annual membership, and 50p entry fee per day. For

those who are not able to pay this, there are schemes to allow for free entry in cases of hardship. Statistics on each Youth Zone are collected and monitored using the Salesforce Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software. As well as allowing patterns of use to be analysed, this had also been used to show the Youth Zones' positive effects on their service users e.g. a recorded 89% of responding users stating that using the Youth Zone had increased their self-confidence, and statistics that showed that an increase in regular exercise and activity had, for the majority of service users, improved their academic performance (80%) and personal lives/relationships (90%). Likewise, statistics gathered had shown reductions in antisocial behaviour in their local areas by 30-77%, and on average by 50% over all areas in which Youth Zones had been set up.

The Panel were advised that, although Youth Zones were not the cheapest option available, they did represent very good value for money. Zones can either be full-sized, or slightly smaller, to suit the local area, and the approximate relative capital and revenue costs were given, alongside the breakdown of funding expectations between the local authority, OnSide, private-sector investment and the members of the Youth Zone. OnSide committed to sourcing the funding from local businesses and individual philanthropists/donors, commonly seeking 30-40 significant donors who committed to provide funding over three years. The Panel were informed that many such donors who had been found maintained their funding even after their three-year commitments had concluded.

The Panel were advised by Jamie Masraff that a large Youth Zone would be to scale with the population size of Colchester, and it would be expected that a membership of around 4,000 young people would be built up as an initial membership.

A high-level explanation was given as to how business funding was sourced, including through showing the overall positive impact that Youth Zones had created in their areas, and the reasons why they led to a marked decrease in antisocial behaviour and crime, and an increase in the pride and attainment of local young people. This culminated with the playing of a promotional video to showcase the work done by Youth Zones.

Following the presentation, the 'Have Your Say' section of this item was held.

Councillor Dave Harris attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Panel to offer his support and backing for the creation of a Colchester Youth Zone. He provided background information on the loss of local youth activity and sport provision, including the Thomas Lord Audley (TLA) Youth Club, amongst others. Councillor Harris explained that, in his ward, the provision of a Friday-night youth club, run by DBS-checked volunteers, had produced a reduction in antisocial behaviour, and he backed an approach to ensure that any Youth Zone project worked with existing groups to increase facilities and opportunities for all young people.

Bryan Burrough, formerly High Sheriff of Essex, addressed the Panel pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He explained that he had been involved with Youth Zones as a founding patron of the Dagenham Youth Zone. He fully supported the founding of a Youth Zone in Colchester, as being the right

location for such a facility. The model was now proven as a successful one and, whilst the securing of funding was always hard work, it was achievable, especially via the private sector.

Mr Burrough informed the Panel that, as an example, the Chorley Youth Zone had the backing of both the local borough council, and Lancashire County Council.

The Panel members were advised that a visit to an existing Youth Zone would convince them of the worth and positive effects of such schemes.

Councillor Mike Hogg attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel to state his positive views regarding such a potential addition to local youth service provision.

Councillor Hogg informed the Panel of the work which was ongoing to provide activities for young people at the Oak Tree Centre, with around £1.5m having been spent on this over the course of its 30-years in operation. Councillor Hogg stressed that young people wanted their own facilities, which they help to design and purpose, rather than to be sharing those which primarily catered to the activities of adult groups. The financial implications could be daunting, but ground-up investment and ongoing funding was required in order to help reduce antisocial and criminal behaviour.

Councillor Adam Fox attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel. Councillor Fox stated that young people had in recent years been deprived of services and that the many youth clubs in Colchester were usually reliant on well-meaning volunteers rather than paid professional staff members. There were limits to the work which could be done by volunteers.

The building of new, purpose-built facilities could expand horizons, be a positive influence and provide a professional staff to support and encourage service users. It was hoped that Essex County Council (ECC) would want to take a leading role in such provision.

Councillor Fox highlighted the importance of location and accessibility, including the need to ensure accessibility for those who could not afford any nominal fee charged for using the facilities. A key concern raised was the need to ensure longevity of funding from philanthropic sources and to ensure that any such project would proceed in mindfulness of the expected new garden communities and areas of significant development in the Borough.

Gavin Evans explained that during the approval and design phases for the Barking and Dagenham Youth Zone, youth engagement workers went to local schools and youth groups to collect the views and wishes of young people and to ensure that the Youth Zone's layout, branding and recruitment matched the demand in the area for activities. Young people were given ownership of the process, although wider communities were also involved. Jamie Masraff and Gavin Evans confirmed that an integral part of the process of setting up a Youth Zone was to ensure that young people and wider communities are fully involved in the process.

Addressing concerns regarding potential displacement of existing youth organisations, Mr. Masraff explained that OnSide worked hard to avoid this. The charity had commissioned a study of the effects of Youth Zones on existing groups, carried out by the Alliance Manchester Business School, with the results showing that the opening of a Youth Zone actually increasing the numbers attending existing clubs, with an increase in the total number of young people engaging with them for the first time.

Gavin Evans agreed that the support of volunteers was a necessity, with the Barking and Dagenham Youth Zone currently able to call on the services of 61 volunteers and looking to increase this to over 100. The Panel was informed that Youth Zones gave support to volunteers and helped to dispel the worries of potential volunteers, thus increasing the number of first-time volunteers coming forward.

Councillor Mike Lilley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety, attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel to voice his support for Youth Zones. A visit to the Croydon Youth Zone, with officers from CBC, had showcased the wide range of activities, sports and learning opportunities.

Councillor Lilley highlighted the positive effects on public safety, which had been shown to stem from the use of Youth Zones. County lines/drug-supplying gangs were active in Colchester, and Councillor Lilley posited that such gangs preyed on bored and unengaged young people, and that it was important that any facility provided be in a location that was in accessible 'neutral' territory, avoiding any inter-school frictions, and where the site would not disadvantage one community or area in comparison to others, regarding access. Councillor Lilley explained that the Croydon Youth Zone had proactively engaged to reduce rivalry between local groups and build links between the pupils of different rival schools and posited that ECC support would be vital for a Colchester Youth Zone to emulate this and to draw in funding.

Councillor Mark Cory, Leader of the Council, attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel. He informed the Panel that he had enjoyed his visit to the Barking and Dagenham Youth Zone and was of the view that such a facility would be a great opportunity to bring additional activities and support services together to add to what was already existent in the Borough. The fact that no Youth Zone had failed was given as evidence that the schemes were sustainable, and the Leader explained that potential funding pots would be examined, that the Council would lead with seeking and providing investment, but that ECC backing and involvement would be sought. Options for potentially providing a public transport subsidy for service users would be looked for, along with any appropriate examples of where comparable areas had engaged upon a Youth Zone or similar scheme and had confronted travel difficulties for service users.

Jamie Masraff informed the Panel that a survey had been conducted in Blackburn to gather travel statistics for the Youth Zone. Some young people had been found to travel for over an hour to reach the premises, and that many users paid for public transport but that the cost was sometimes prohibitive. Youth Zones sought solutions to this issue and options included set pick-ups by minibuses, 'walking' buses for nearby areas or working with social housing providers to provide transport. A

member of the Panel drew its attention to the now-discontinued mobile youth club which had operated in the rural parts of the Borough. This had attracted some young people from considerable distances and showed that young people are prepared to travel, if the activities offered are good enough.

A Panel member gave further information on the St Anne's Youth Club, which had started with under ten members and now numbered around 55, run by a volunteer group which fluctuated from eight to twelve members. A variety of activities were held on Friday evenings, both sporting and social. The Club had worked to instil a feeling of ownership in those attending, which minimised the incidence of vandalism and antisocial behaviour. Older members of the Club have, on occasion, been provided with training on how to run volunteer-led youth groups and have then returned as youth leaders. Some funding had been sourced from local groups and firms, showing the possibility for this in the area.

A Panel member noted the extremely positive and supportive comments which had been received from those councillors who had visited existent Youth Zones, even from members who had been sceptical prior to their visit. The need to gain funding and involvement was again stressed, including from ECC, the Police and from local businesses and donors. The member of the Panel counselled that the Council should not be prescriptive in the types of firms approached for funding, and that all offers of funding should be considered at length. Questions were then put to the guest speakers, seeking information as to where the relevant local authorities had sourced funding to meet the capital and revenue expenditure on the Youth Zones in their areas, and as to what work was done to ensure that Youth Zones encouraged equality and catered for different demographics within their user groups.

Jamie Masraff explained that Youth Zones must be for all and were specifically designed to promote equality and diversity. Examples included the installation of sensory zones and quiet areas, and the provision of activities to ensure inclusion of those service users with additional needs, who made up around 10% of users of Youth Zones. The gender split of users was 55% boys, 45% girls, and efforts were being made to improve the offer to be more attractive to girls.

Addressing comments about accessibility, Jamie Masraff agreed that location was crucial for long-term success, and explained that OnSide required any proposed site to be able to show accessibility, such as good bus links and pedestrian access, be prominent, to show pride is taken in the building, and be in 'neutral' territory, avoiding places where some potential service users may not have been able to go in safety.

It was confirmed to the Panel that Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding had helped to fund Youth Zones. Other local authorities have reallocated existing funds or reserves to their Youth Zones or increased prudential borrowing.

The Panel discussed the capital and revenue funding which would be required, potential sources of funds, including external sources and the possible sale of existing but unused/underused properties such as the Town House [West Stockwell Street, Colchester], and to potential sites which would allow access to young people from across the Borough. A member of the Panel suggested allocating funding from the New Homes Bonus to Youth Zones, rather than to projects such as North Essex

Garden Communities.

It was stressed that consideration must be given to the benefits and positive impacts to be gained over the extended lifetime of a Youth Zone, including in health, social cohesion and reducing antisocial behaviour. The benefits and related savings could be seen to outweigh the costs over the course of the schemes' operation, although the ensuring of sufficient revenue funding after the first three years would be vital. A Panel member recommended that advice should be sought from any Youth Zone project where the lead authority was a district or borough council [a lower-tier local authority].

Jamie Masraff explained that Youth Zones had not relied upon investment from the police or NHS but have seen partnership where county and district councils have combined funding to projects. Some specific project work has been funded by the NHS or Police, but this is on a small scale, for specific purposes. The Chorley Youth Zone was given as an example of partnership, where Chorley Borough Council had led on the project and its funding but had brought Lancashire County Council on board to support and part-fund the Youth Zone. Panel members underlined the necessity of confirming ECC's support and funding and requested that the Cabinet perform a 'deep-dive' forensic examination of the potential for meeting ongoing revenue and capital costs and consult in order to establish whether there is sufficient interest in the provision of a local Youth Zone.

Lucie Breadman, Assistant Director, Communities, gave an overview of the general feasibility study into youth service provision that the Council had commissioned. She informed the Panel that she had discussed this study and future possibilities with colleagues from ECC. The study was noted as being conducted independently and would seek quantifiable information and evidence.

Gavin Evans summarised the main points that had been presented and invited all members to visit a Youth Zone, re-emphasising the importance of such schemes in raising, aspiration, hopes, health and skills. The Panel was in agreement that a Youth Zone would greatly benefit the Borough, but that it would be imperative that ongoing funding was identified and partnership with ECC secured. The Panel made a tripartite recommendation to be considered by the Cabinet alongside the results of the ongoing independent feasibility study relating to youth service provision in the Borough. The recommendation made is as follows:

RECOMMENDATION to CABINET: - That, in light of the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel's support for the potential provision of a Colchester Youth Zone, the Cabinet:

- (a) Conducts a forensic 'deep-dive' examination of potential funding for a Colchester Youth Zone, to ensure sustainability of both capital and revenue funding;
- (b) Examines options for partnership working on a Colchester Youth Zone, with priority given to securing the partnership and support of Essex County Council;
- (c) Assesses the potential impacts that a Colchester Youth Zone would have within the Borough, including impacts on reducing antisocial and criminal behaviour, improving health, skills and life opportunities for young people and long-term benefits for the wider communities of the Borough.