

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee – 7 June 2011

Call in, by Councillors Prior-Sankey and Mrs Smith, of a decision made by Executive Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris in connection with the Youth Initiative Fund.

The Executive Councillor's decision was published in the Weekly Bulletin on 28 April 2011 was as follows:

“£10,800 from the Youth Initiative Budget should be allocated to meet the cost of three further voyages by the Sailing Gaffe “Tectona” during 2011. The dates of the voyages are 28 May to 1 June, 23-27 July and 22-26 October 2011”.

The Executive Councillor's decision has now been called in by Councillors Prior-Sankey and Mrs Smith for the following reasons:

1. It is totally unacceptable that decisions are being taken without due regard to the scrutiny process and that decisions are being implemented before the Call-In time has passed. Because of the timing of the May trip, I am calling in the second and third trips because I would not want to withdraw the offer of the trip to those who are now anticipating their voyage;
2. What evidence do we have that spending more than 1/3 of the annual budget for Youth Initiatives on 60 young people to have a sailing trip, when there are more than 5000 young people in the 11-16 age group in Taunton Deane, is the best use of the funds available;
3. What criteria are used for selecting young people for the trips? We are told the Police, Schools, Youth Offending Team & the Cadet Units select those who would benefit for the trips but we do not have details of this process, nor is there any evidence of whether these young people live in the unparished area or not, for the purposes of tracking the expenditure in the fund;
4. What have been the outcomes from the previous trips in terms of changing young people 'on the edge'. How many of those who partook either failed on the expedition or continued their pattern of behaviour from previously, after the trip. How many had a trip that changed their life forever? For the trips to succeed for all participants, is there a 'best mix' of young people who should be on each trip?

Once the Community Scrutiny Committee has heard the full debate on this matter, it will have two options open to it:

- (1) To decide to take no further action** – in which case the decision of the Executive Councillor of 28 April 2011 will stand; or

(2) To support the challenge and refer the decision for further consideration (stating the grounds for justifying that request) – where the matter will be considered again by the Executive Councillor .

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Present: Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Bishop, Denington, Mrs Floyd, Ms Lisgo, Morrell, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Slattery, Swaine, Watson, Ms Webber and A Wedderkopp

Officers: James Barrah (Community Services Manager), Nick Bryant (Strategy Lead), Donna Durham (Democratic Support Manager), Simon Lewis (Strategy and Corporate Manager), Roger Mitchinson (Strategy Lead), Martha Prangnell (Community Development Officer), Ann Rhodes (Strategy Officer), Scott Weetch (Community Development Lead), Ralph Willoughby-Foster (Planning Policy Advisor) and Joy Wislade (Strategic Director)

Also present: Councillors Mrs Adkins, Brooks, Coles, Edwards, Farbahi, A Govier, R Lees, Meikle, Mrs Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Tooze, Mrs Warmington and Williams
Jeannie Lillywhite, Assistant Head, Court Fields Community School
John Snell, Youth Liaison Group

(The meeting commenced at 6.15pm)

40. Call-In – Youth Initiative Fund

As the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership, Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris had agreed to allocate £10,800 from the Youth Initiative Budget to meet the cost of three further voyages by the Sailing Gaffe 'Tectona' during 2011. The Vice-Chairman asked Councillors Prior-Sankey and Mrs Smith to explain their reasons for the Call-In which were as follows:

1. It was totally unacceptable that decisions were being taken without due regard to the scrutiny process and that decisions were being implemented before the Call-In time has passed. Because of the timing of the May trip, only the second and third trips were being called in to avoid withdrawing the offer of the first trip and disappointing those who were anticipating their voyage;
2. Why should more than a third of the annual budget for Youth Initiatives be spent on 60 young people to have a sailing trip, when there were more than 5000 young people in the 11-16 age group in Taunton Deane;
3. What criteria were used for selecting young people for the trips? They had been told the Police, Schools, Youth Offending Team and the Cadet Units selected those who would benefit for the trips but details of this process were not available, nor was there any evidence of whether these young people lived in the unparished area or not, for the purposes of tracking the expenditure in the fund;

4. What had been the outcomes from the previous trips in terms of changing young people 'on the edge'. How many of those who partook either failed on the expedition or continued their pattern of behaviour from previously, after the trip. How many had a trip that changed their life forever? For the trips to succeed for all participants, was there a 'best mix' of young people who should go on each trip?

Councillor Govier had an interest in provision for the youth and had been invited to join the Youth Liaison Group. The Youth Liaison Group discussed youth issues and oversaw youth initiatives from Taunton Deane Borough Council, Somerset County Council and volunteer groups. He felt that Councillor Meikle had been a powerful advocate for young people and the Youth Liaison Group performed a useful role. He also felt that the Youth Liaison Group should be more formally recognised.

John Snell had been a Police Commander in Taunton and had been frustrated by the lack of provision for young people, particularly in Halcon and Priorswood. The target group for the sailing trips were those who were not offending, but tended to be a problem to the Police. With a background in youth offenders, he had been keen to provide something for this cohort.

Jeannie Lillywhite, Deputy Head of Court Fields Community School gave a short presentation on a recent trip that had been undertaken by pupils from Court Fields School. The young people who took part had been selected as they would not normally have had an opportunity like this. The Police, Youth Leaders and Schools identified participants and the results were that the youngsters were more able to fit into society.

Councillor Meikle explained that no improper decisions had been made in advance and the funding of Tectona, was unspent funds from the Youth Initiative Budget in 2010/2011. The youngsters who experienced these trips needed supporting and changes in social behaviour were seen subsequently.

Councillor Prior-Sankey stated that she was not questioning the value of the Tectona trips, but there had been an apparent failure of selection. A robust selection process was needed and consideration given as to whether these trips made the best use of the Youth Initiative Fund.

The report that the Community Development Lead had submitted referred to a previous trip that had to be cut short due to the behaviour of the young people and suggested measures agreed to prevent a repeat performance had not been carried out. Councillor Prior-Sankey referred to an email she had received from Sergeant Andy Murphy regarding a review that had been suggested into the selection process, but no progress had been made. The Community Development Lead was only able to report on the trips funded by the Council and reported that as far as he was aware, no multi-agency work had taken place regarding the latest trip.

Councillor Prior-Sankey asked when officers had received a request for a decision form to be completed. The decision had been advertised in the Weekly Bulletin on 28 April 2011 and the first trip had been arranged for May

2011, so there had been no opportunity for scrutiny of the first trip. The Community Development Lead reported that the decision form would have been completed promptly after it had been requested.

During the discussion of this item, Members made the following comments:

- Formal status should be given to the Youth Liaison Group;
- £300 for a lifetime opportunity was money well spent;
- There were children from across Taunton who lived outside of the deprived areas, who could benefit from these trips;
- The trips were successful and the youths were unrecognisable on their return and integrated into society;
- Preparatory work needed to be done with youngsters to ensure that they were engaged in the process and were unlikely to 'drop out' of the trips at a late stage.

The Executive Councillor responsible for the Youth Initiative Budget stated that consultation on the selection process was needed.

The Chairman stated that the role and status of the Youth Liaison Group needed to be considered, along with the selection process and the benefits that the trips had resulted in. The Community Development Lead reported that an evaluation of last year's funds was being undertaken and the results would be available towards the end of June.

Resolved that the decision be referred back to the Executive Councillor for Community Leadership for further consideration for the following reasons:

- The 'lead in' time for the proposed first voyage meant that the decision could not be properly scrutinised;
- There was a lack of preparation of youngsters before the trips;
- There was a lack of information on the outcomes of individuals;
- Consideration needed to be given to future trips of Tectona and a better process of distribution of the Youth Initiative Fund; and
- There was a need to formalise the Youth Liaison Group.