

Surrey Council For Voluntary Youth Services

Supporting the Voluntary Youth Organisations of Surrey

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Dear Paul,

Surrey Sustainable Community Strategy

I am writing to respond formally to the consultation on the Draft Surrey Community Strategy.

The Draft Strategy was considered at a full meeting of our Trustees on 20 January.

The document follows a clear and consistent path towards the 2020 Vision that was first published in 2004, and is well founded in public consultation, and analysis. It is particularly valuable to have the sections on “how the public can help”.

A challenge to us in the voluntary sector might be to work through the document to identify and map how the voluntary, community and faith sector already contributes in each policy area, and identify the scope for further joint working, and ensuring complementary resourcing. You might want to think through whether this would be a valuable exercise from the viewpoint of the Surrey Strategic partnership.

The document makes a passing reference to the global economic crisis (page 5) but is otherwise a buoyant description of Surrey at present, and though challenging targets are set, the plan is described as ambitious and achievable.

However as the current recession worsens it must be questionable whether there is sufficient economic realism in the plan, even if its focus is on 2020. The impact of the recession is likely to colour the next 3 years at least and maybe longer. These are surely likely to be times of retrenchment at best, and recession at worst, where skills in managing decline, rather than growth will be needed.

So far as children and young people are concerned, and mindful of the recession, it seems probable that families will be under pressure, breakdown increase, and young people will suffer. The probable manifestations of this will be an increase in homelessness, and mental health and depression issues amongst young people. Recent studies by the Children’s Society and the Prince’s Trust have been consistent in suggesting that around 25 % of young people 16- 25 have depression occasionally or consistently, and this rises to 37 % of young people who are not in employment education or training (NEET). This could be an increasing and enduring problem that is not given sufficient prominence in the Plan.

There are already suggestions that young people as school leavers and university students will find it difficult to find jobs during a recession, and this too will need especial consideration in the plan.

There is much mention of the value of positive activities for young people, and yet there is no mention of the value of the “mainstream” voluntary sector providers of these activities like the uniformed organizations. Their contribution is particularly valuable to the “prevention” of young people becoming at risk, besides their core contribution of enabling young people to have fun and achieve. We know from internal discussions with uniformed organizations that the biggest impediment to their growth is a lack of adult volunteers – Surrey Scouts and Guides each have waiting list to join.

We suggest that the contribution of the voluntary sector to positive activities is noted and with a commitment to expansion, so that not only are the young people more rounded as a result, but also there is a recognition of the contribution of “positive activities for young people” to youth crime prevention, reducing first time entrants to the criminal justice system and to addressing obesity amongst young people.

As an aside it is pleasing to note that the next meeting of the Children and Young People’s Commissioning Partnership is to focus solely on Young People when Surrey CVYS will be making inputs on young people and homelessness and on mental health/ happiness issues.

Encouragement is given in the plan to adult volunteering and it is suggested this could be usefully targeted towards the uniformed organizations. However we know from our Members Survey in 2008 that there is a shortage of youth work leaders quite widely. A positive action would be to run youth work leader courses at NVQ level 2 and 3 and funding sought from partner organizations like the Learning and Skills Council to this end. We are examining this right now.

Overall my Trustees welcomed this long term strategy, subject to the comments above, but noted that actual service delivery needs to match the aspirations.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Abbott
Chief Executive

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