

## Proposal for the Youth Service Contract.

### Report of the Head of Communities

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Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

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#### 1) Recommendation

- a. Cabinet approves the modification of the service contract for Youth Services by extending the current term by 1 year to cover the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.
- b. Cabinet delegates authority for any ancillary matters relating to this contract modification to the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality and Director of Public Health & Communities.

#### 2) Introduction

##### Statutory Duty

The Council currently contracts with DYS-Space to deliver Youth Services across the County from 8 Youth Hubs in line with the Statutory Duty. Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to, as far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people to a sufficient quantity of 'youth services,' namely:

- a sufficient quantity of educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities and
- a sufficient quantity of recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities

Both types of activities, and related facilities, must be for the improvement of young people's well-being. Well-being, as defined in the act, relates to:

- physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution made by young people to society
- social and economic well-being

## **Devon Youth Service**

The Devon service specification details the following areas of delivery:

- Open access youth sessions at the 8 Youth Hub buildings around the County.
- Targeted 1-2-1 and group work with those young people referred
- Management of the Community Youth Group grant fund (£100k element of contract)
- Digital Hub where young people wherever they are in the County can access online activities and access to support
- Detached Youth work through street-based delivery outside of the Youth Hub building
- Education Support – contract provides for access by schools to purchase on-site support to young people in education and Chances, a fixed term intervention aimed at prevention of permanent exclusion based in Dawlish.
- S106 funded support for Young People in the new Town developments at Cranbrook and Sherford.

The Youth Service was delivered in-house until February 2017 at which time it was spun-out to a newly created staff-run mutual DYS-Space on an initial term of 3 years through a procurement restricted to mutuals in accordance with Regulation 77 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. In 2019 the contract went through a fully competitive tender process (Regulation 77 could not be engaged a second time) and DYS-Space were awarded a 5-year contract ending on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. The contract value in 2024-25 financial year is £2.1million.

During the preparation of a tender for re-procurement, and in discussion with colleagues across the Council, in 2025 it became increasingly apparent that a more joined up approach to support for young people would be beneficial going forward to maximise the outcomes, through the range of services that the Council provides. Specifically, those services, currently undergoing change and transformation include:

- Early Help
- Family Hubs
- Support for Young People impacted by Domestic and Sexual Abuse
- Education inclusion services and AP provision
- Adolescent & Substance Mis-use Support (Y-Smart)

However there are varying levels and certainty and clarity about the specific position in each area of change to commit to a single tendering process for all related services. We will work to develop a partnering agreement that ties into the development of the family hubs and will also form part of the annual service delivery plan for the 1-year extension period.

## **National context**

Across the country the number of qualified Youth Workers has reduced over the last 10 years, with the National Youth Agency stating that since 2019 Local Authorities have reduced spending on Youth Services by 70%.

UK Government direction of travel has pledged to deliver the Young Futures Hubs programme, aiming to “intervene earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime, creating a new network of hubs reaching every community.” These hubs will have youth workers, mental health support workers, and careers advisers on hand to support young people’s mental health and avoid them being drawn into crime. This brings together a number of important and interlinked aspects of many young people’s lives: violence and crime, mental health and employability.”

The Government has pledged that the hubs will be boosted by new youth workers to operate in Pupil Referral Units and hospital accident and emergency departments who can be based out of the hubs, to offer young people a pathway out of violence.

In addition, pledges for Community mental health hubs for all young people have been made.

Given the national unrest this summer, Government is considering a ‘Recovery’ programme for some communities and young people specifically, with youth work recognised as a significant preventative tool, which has been underfunded nationally.

Devon has so far, remained committed to supporting its Young People through qualified youth work practice and is well placed to meet future demands. At this stage, proposals for its Youth Service should remain flexible and agile in order to capitalise on national opportunities, policy and funding anticipated in the months and years ahead.

### **3) Proposal**

To deliver a more integrated Youth offer across Devon it is proposed to extend the existing contract with DYS-Space beyond the current term by 1 year through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, and work with the provider reviewing options for buildings and community grant fund.

The Proposal would create a period of stability whilst we work closer with the transformation programmes, Family Hub development and internal and external partners to develop an integrated youth work specification over the next 8 months.

The government’s emerging agenda around Youth Hubs to support mental health, employment is still to be defined, and our response would have better platform to build from if any additional government investment in the future is made.

In the longer term we are keen to partner with Town & Parish Councils to further develop emerging open access work and funding opportunities going forward to strengthen the delivery of open access sessions with qualified youth work in priority areas of the County led by the provider.

We will develop and agree a 1-year delivery plan that moves towards a more integrated commissioning and delivery model working with colleagues in Public Health and Childrens Services to focus on:

- Public Health adolescent substance misuse support programmes

- Early Help team to define referral access pathways and prioritisation of support for young people in need of early support
- Family Hubs team to work through options for open access and targeted support for young people ensuring that the offer is available where it is most needed utilising common assets
- Working with SEND and AP commissioning to develop business case for youth work interventions and access to positive activities for young people with SEND or at risk of exclusion from school, one of the key elements of future family hub provision.

#### **4) Options / Alternatives**

##### **a) Procure new contract in line with current service specification**

The process to procure a new contract in line with current service specification with some minor amendments would comply with procurement legislation. The new contract would be for a similar term of 5 years. However, with any longer-term contract there is also the danger of the Councils needs and aspirations can be restricted by contractual relationships that provide delays to transformation of the service that we would like to see.

It can also be more difficult over time to include additional elements of delivery such as support for young people and substance misuse at any point in the future.

##### **b) Bring Youth Services and TUPE of staff in-house for direct delivery by DCC**

The specific delivery model of public service mutual pioneered by the provider and the Council has served young people and the Council well by offering considerable value for money, in part through the alternative funding and contracts available to the provider given their charitable status. An internal model would be more expensive. The charity is an important part of the local infrastructure supporting young people in Devon.

Bringing the service and staff in house is not recommended at this time. TUPE'd Staff would become eligible for LGPS rights. However this should be reviewed in the future depending on the outcome of alignment with other services and more prescriptive funding and direction from Government.

##### **c) Stop service**

The Government's emerging strategies regarding future investment in Youth Hubs targeting support for employment, mental health and crime alongside support for young people would suggest additional capacity and intervention will be required from professional youth work provision. Stopping the service would detrimentally affect current young people who access all the services and impact the Council's ability to respond to future government priorities. This is further outlined within the published impact assessment for the current contract.

## **5) Consultation and Engagement**

Consultation with young people accessing youth services in Devon was held in February 2024. The results of this engagement have been included in the updated Impact Assessment.

## **6) Strategic Plan**

This proposal aligns with the vision and priorities in the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 and has the potential to enable delivery of aspects of the Council's principles around good governance, decision making and partnership. This proposal will specifically support the aims to:

- Be ambitious for our Children and Young People
- Continue to support our vibrant community and voluntary sector

## **7) Financial Considerations**

The Council's revenue budget for Youth Service for the current year is £2.1million. The 12-month extension will be under the same financial terms as the current agreement and the funding for the extended period will be considered through the normal budget setting process.

## **8) Legal Considerations**

The lawful implications of this proposal, including compliance with the *Public Contracts Regulations 2015*, have been considered and taken into account in the preparation of this report.

## **9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

There are no specific Environmental impact considerations

## **10) Equality Considerations**

In progressing this proposal, an Impact Assessment used for the original procurement has been published on the Council's website and will be provided to Cabinet Members. Any changes that effect the delivery of the service during the period of the proposed extension will require a new Impact Assessment.

The report considers the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty that requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding in relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation).

The signing of this agreement could in turn lead to significant positive impacts for all citizens through better sharing of information and insight and joint working to tackle specific issues, particularly those impacting people from groups with protected characteristics.

Members will need to consider the attached Impact Assessment for the purposes of this item.

## **11) Risk Management Considerations**

No significant risks identified.

## **12) Summary**

The proposal to extend the contract for youth services for 12 months will enable the development of a more integrated and targeted approach aligned to improving outcomes for our young people.

**Simon Kitchen,**  
Head of Communities

**Steve Brown,**  
Director for Public Health and Communities

**Electoral Divisions:** All

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality  
**Councillor Roger Croad**

## **Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers**

Nil

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