

Agenda item 3

For decision - Children and Young People's Projects officer action plan

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Summary

This paper provides an update of the work to date to better understand services for children and young people and proposes a series of actions for approval.

Background

Children's services have changed considerably over recent years and the primary reason for starting this work was to stem the increasing flow of children, young people and their families reaching crisis points, requiring higher level mental health, social care and other health services. The impact of austerity, pressures of social media, lack of extended family living nearby, disparate communities, play deprivation, inactivity and social isolation are all factors to take into consideration as we progress this work.

In March 2019 FTC agreed to recruit a Children and Young Peoples Project Officer to improve understanding of the services available to local children, young people and their families, and in order to work with partner organisations and communities to identify and fill gaps in provision.

This project has been match funded by Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council and, in May, Jess and Hannah were recruited on a part time, 18.5 hrs per week basis; together filling the full-time role.

In order to achieve the project ambitions the work has been divided into age groups with Hannah focusing on services for 0-5 year olds, Jess on services for 5 – 12 year olds and the age group of 12 – 18yr olds is currently held by all three members of the team. The project will extend to surrounding villages such as Norton St Philip, Rode and Beckington in due course.

Discussion

In the first few months our initial mapping and conversation based research has included visiting groups, taking part in activities and events, holding our own consultation events, meeting partner organisations and service or activity providers. We have devised and delivered engagement activities such as zombie litter picks and pumpkin 'give-aways' in order to meet families and have these conversations. During other events (Cheese Show, Apple Day, Walking Festival etc.) our focus has been on hearing what young people and their families have to say about their experiences of provision in Frome.

Looking outwards for a wider view, we have attended an international conference on Child Friendly Cities, visited youth projects in Bristol and considered national, regional and local play strategies in order to understand potential models of good practice.

Under 5s

Since October we have been mapping the services and groups that exist in Frome for families of young children. There are a large number of baby and toddler groups and opportunities for families to participate for free or at low cost, including baby groups, breastfeeding support, community toddler groups, toy library, singing sessions at the library. There are also other baby and toddler enrichment activities (such as music, art, gymnastics, signing, sensory) which are privately run and incur a joining fee. The health visiting team in Frome have made a commitment to continue to deliver the stay and play sessions attached to their baby clinics, previously run by the Get Set team.

We are not currently seeing any significant gaps in services for families with children under 5. We will, however, continue to monitor and assess emerging gaps if they arise over the coming year.

Access to information

There is a need to find ways of improving access to public information about the wide range of groups and services and to keeping it up to date. There are a number of information platforms used by local residents including Facebook, Frome Parents website, Frome Active (no longer current).

Community members themselves host a range of online aids including a baby directory and an online calendar of events have been developed by local parents.

FTC are refreshing the information and navigation on our own websites as we go through this mapping phase.

‘Assistance-before-crisis’ support

Whilst the full impact of the reduction in Get Set Level 2 services (supported by Family Support workers) may be felt in a few years, already those who work with families of young children have told us they are missing the support of courses such as parenting, behaviour and nutrition. The impact of the absence of early support is that there is a rise in the number of families reaching crisis and requiring more intensive support from other services.

In order to mitigate this impact, we propose to:

- Support Parent and Family Support Advisors, who work through the schools, and other practitioners to plan and deliver a ‘parenting’ course.
- Develop a scheme that supports struggling families by pairing them up with volunteer supporters (similar to the Home Start initiative in Bristol and South Glos).
- Establish Family Connector project which will include training to increase signposting to groups and businesses that cater to under 5s.

5-12 year olds

Summer holiday provision was the focus for kickstarting our research into this area, as Jess took up post at the beginning of August. All local summer holiday clubs were visited and discussions with practitioners and young people have fed into our report. We have had dialogues with many 'year round' sports, arts and special interest clubs and visited their services. The most direct piece of research so far has been the electronic middle school survey which we delivered in September. Nearly 500 students aged between 9 and 13 responded and some of the insights are included below.

We have split this area in to two categories; holiday activity and holiday childcare although we recognise that there overlaps between the two.

Holiday Activity

There are many activities, sports and clubs available to this age range during term time in Frome.

Children between 5 and 9yrs are well catered for with a large range of programs and activities, if parents are able to support their child to access the opportunities on offer, financially and practically.

However, many young people aged 9+ would like to participate in activities but feel there is little provision for them and their friends. We are looking at the feasibility of Play Rangers to provide free, universal, creative play activities for this age group in our parks and green spaces.

Nearly all clubs, societies and regular events take a break for 6 weeks or more between July and September leaving young people potentially vulnerable. To improve access to summer holiday activity, young people want more information about what's going on. This is mirrored in the request from parents with younger children and we will continue to update our websites accordingly.

We are working with sports and other clubs to increase the number of holiday activity sessions provided and to further promote existing camps and other holiday opportunities to get involved.

Holiday Childcare

Holiday clubs and play schemes are run locally and successfully here in Frome and provide childcare for children and young people aged 5 – 12 years old at a cost similar to most other parts of the UK. However, through the survey we conducted we found that:

- Only 16% of Middle school aged children (9 – 13) attended a formal childcare play scheme over the summer holiday. This mirrors what was seen when visiting groups and chatting to practitioners.
- Many children in this age group were looked after by a grandparent (51%) or cared for by other family members and friends but only for a short amount of time.

- It is uncertain how many children in this age group are left unsupervised for long periods of time over the school holidays.

More research is required around the provision of holiday childcare and further recommendations will be discussed with Town Matters in due course.

Provision for SEND group

The biggest gap in Summer holiday provision for 5-12 year olds is services for children with additional needs. There is no regular play scheme in Frome or surrounding villages that caters specifically for disabled children and young people (although organisations such as Nova sports, offer brilliant activity days they are only a handful and if personal care is required parents and guardians have to stay). There are approximately 235 children with additional needs in the BA11 postcode, who are travelling significant distances to access appropriate provision. There is currently a low uptake for places at 'accessible' provision, which can cater for disabled children.

To address this gap, we are supporting a group of active parents from Critchill School who are looking at ways to use the school as a venue for such specialised provision. We are exploring how we can facilitate play and specialist training for people who work with children and young people in a range of settings, over the coming year.

Playing Out

Many children wanted to play out on their street (70%) but felt that the number and speed of cars restricted this. 'Playing Out' is an initiative that started in Bristol, which involves residents applying for regular road closures on their street to enable free movement safe from passing traffic. The appeal is for children to use the whole street to play. For 5-12yrs, in particular, we anticipate 'playing out' will have a positive impact on their mental and physical health. Importantly, it also brings grown-ups out of their front doors to engage with each other and provides opportunities for communities to become more connected and more able to support each other, especially across age groups.

We are working with Avon and Somerset Police, Somerset County Highways department and Mendip District Council to trial 'Playing Out' in Frome with a view to creating a simple straightforward street closure process. One street has committed to being part of this trial and we are working with them to ensure its success.

If successful, we hope to roll out "playing out" to other streets. Initially, we plan to host an information session for other interested streets in 2020.

12 – 18 year olds

There has been particular concern about supporting young people aged 12 – 14yrs in Frome in recent years. Practitioners, community groups and other organisations have also identified this cohort as a key area of focus. We held a consultation event at the skate park in the Mary Baily playing field aided by a fire pit, slack line, amp and music and we talked with young people in this age group who told us more about their desire for increased activity. Our next

steps continue to engage with these young people, especially of Year 8 and 9 age, their families and their schools to develop our understanding of what the gaps are more specifically.

We have trialled a detached youth project, where youth workers engage with young people on streets and in open spaces in the town, initially funded by FTC and subsequently by Live West Housing association. The success of the trial has formed the basis of a successful bid to the Violence Reduction Unit to deliver a series of projects to engage young people at risk of becoming involved in antisocial behaviour. The £10k project will be coordinated by FTC and delivered by a number of local partner organisations.

In future we will:

- Deliver the VRU funded youth project (Violence Reduction Unit – aimed at young people at risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour)
- Commission the People’s Budget winner from Spring 2020 onwards. £10,000 to be spent on a detached youth work project.
- Deliver Make it Happen (youth conference in March for Year 8s of Frome)

Training Programme (across ages)

In order to nurture a thick network of people and organisations that support children and young people; families, neighbourhoods, schools and nurseries, community groups, agencies, services, we aim to cascade relevant knowledge from professionals to the community.

We are proposing a year-round topic-based training programme, fitting in with the schools RSHE programme. Each term will focus on a different topic (to be confirmed after liaising with schools and agencies) such as drug use/active lifestyles. Within that term and around that topic there will be a seminar for practitioners and organisations, community training opportunities, school curriculum links and community activities.

Conclusion

The following table provides a summary of the actions planned for the coming year which will form the basis of the 2020/21 work program in this area.

Identified need	Proposed Actions
‘Assistance-before-crisis’ support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family volunteering scheme • Community training • ‘Parenting’ courses
Access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update FTC web information
Improved access to sport and active play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing Out • Play Rangers • Delivery of play training in Frome
Access to play provision for children with additional needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new targeted play provision • Specialist training

Access to play provision for low income families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play Rangers • Promotion of sports and other clubs and groups
Increase in awareness, knowledge and skills to support and signposting by the whole community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Training Scheme • Signposting training • Family Connector initiative
Improved provision and activities for the 13 – 18 year old group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of VRU project • Procurement of PB Youth Project • Delivery of Make it happen conference

Recommendation

Approve the action table above.