



Children & Young People's Select Committee

Report Title- An Update on Youth First

Date: An Update on Youth First

Key decision: No

Ward(s) affected: all

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Outline and recommendations

This report seeks to provide an update on Youth First. The Committee is asked to note the content of this report.

1. Summary

This paper provides CYP Select Committee an update on Youth First and specifically answers the questions posed by members which were received as:

1. An overview of provisions in your centres and the future of those provisions.
2. An update on the mix of targeted, centre-based and street-based work by Youth First;
3. Any challenges being faced by you in the provision of your services.
4. An update on recruitment and staffing.

To this end the paper first offers Members context and a brief history of Youth First during its first six years before then addressing each of the questions directly. The paper at the committee will see Val Davison Chair of Youth First and Mervyn Kaye CEO available for clarification.

2. A brief history of the Youth First concept and initial 6 years (2016 to 2022)

Pre 2016 two rounds of reductions to Lewisham's youth service budget totalled c.55% taking a budget of around £7.1m down to £3.2m across the six years. This occurred within a national context of over £1billion¹ removed from local authority funded youth service sector, something that has resulted in the closure of over 30 youth clubs in London alone.

The initial aim requested by LBL of Youth First (YF) was to protect the remaining youth service delivery whilst offering an additional 15% reduction in cost to LBL for the next three years 2016/17 to 2018/19. The 15% reduction was spread at 5% per year and totalled £342k in saving.

¹ NYA

Drawing to the end of this initial contract LBL and the wider youth sector were still experiencing financial challenges. Whilst LBL considered how to address these challenges they requested a 12-month extension to YF's contract for 2019/20, however with an immediate further reduction in value of £334k. This was a contract of £2.5m (taking the total saved for LBL to £676k over 4 years).

In 21/22 this was followed by a competitive tender process, won by YF, that further reduced the contract value to £1.25m and offered a 4+2 year contract. This new contract included within this reduced envelope a broadened ask of both open access youth work delivery and new targeted 121 and group work. Adventure Playgrounds (APGs) were removed from the contract and instead requested at a reduced level (of 2 sessions per week rather than the previous 5 sessions and without the need to maintain or manage sites) from Youth First for 9 months. This was to allow LBL time to develop their new play strategy.

These further reductions totalled a fall in investment in youth services of 57% over 6 years and combined with the broadened ask of targeted youth work delivery. The latter cost more to deliver per young person than open access. This level and speed of reduction and altered ask unfortunately meant it was impossible to continue to maintain delivery, especially universal open access, at the levels protected during 2016-2019. The effects of this reduction were however partly masked by the pandemic - in terms of what was legally and practically possible to be delivered - and by YF generating income from other sources, many of which were unavailable to LBL as a local authority. The latter included the furlough scheme and a competitive DCMS Covid grant won by YF.

Despite the reductions to delivery YF and Lewisham have still bucked the national trend for youth services by seeing a much slower rate of decline in delivery and seen the development of multiple new service areas funded outside of LBL's main contract.

Some of our successes over the initial 6 years include:

- 1. Set up a transparent and well governed organisation from scratch** and stepping out from the council, including TUPE'ing all staff, in 3 months between June and September 2016. We know of no step out nationally that achieved this level of pace. With the Cabinet Office's Mutual's team and multiple sector experts recommending that a step out should be incubated for 12 to 18 months, not least to allow the formation of a board and the support to staff to develop business plans. In the event this was not possible with the team meeting the challenge required by LBL of 3 months. This included achieving the statutory tasks of recruiting an independent board with members drawn from the local community, ensuring audit and reporting to the FCA and the more organisational necessity of developing an independent culture. In 2022 in order to most pragmatically achieve income generation and growth we transferred from a mutualised community benefit society to a Charitable incorporated organisation.
- 2. Delivered requested 15% cost reductions whilst growing delivery** both in terms of numbers attending LBL funded provision and the development in the borough of a range of new services outside of LBL CYP contracts. This has been achieved by a combination of efficiency and income generation. The former has included the lowering of overheads across back-office functions, reduced senior management and a drive for funding to be spent on the frontline, and lowered overall salary costs. The latter in part has been achieved from adjusted pension provisions for new staff.
- 3. Raised c.£3.2m outside of Lewisham's contract income** – this includes £675k of unrestricted rental and sales income and £2.5m of additional grant and donor income. In addition to this a further c.£200k of pro-bono support such as legal support outside of the massive incalculable value offered by our volunteer Board members. We submitted a further £10m of grant applications which were unsuccessful. This represents a 24%

success rate against a sector success average of 10%. We are also currently awaiting decisions on a further £850k of new applications including funding to support the development of education and employment and emotional wellbeing projects.

4. **Led, alongside Millwall and LBL the project and income generation required for refurbishment of Riverside youth club.** This is to a value of £1.2m with the refurb due to commence this March for a reopening in spring 2024.
5. **Built partnerships** in and around the borough to improve the delivery of youth work and maximise income coming into the borough. This includes delivering regional network meetings in the north and south of the borough, joint bids and development work with partners such as CAMHS, Albany, iThrive, EYA and others.
6. **Launched the new 121 targeted mentoring services.** YF funded all the associated training and development and recruitment required for this altered delivery. The new 121 service is now a highly successful offer detailed below.
7. **Developed a strong local, regional and nationally recognised brand.** This has not only aided young people and the community's understanding of Lewisham's youth work investment and how to access youth work but has also seen LBL receiving positive attention across local and national media. It has also seen Lewisham represented and lauded at a national level including at Parliament (APPG on youth work) and by national and regional bodies including CYP Now Awards and the National Youth Agency (NYA).
8. **Continued to find operating efficiencies to manage the impact of inflation.** This includes **increasing the direct salaries paid to staff** in line with, and indeed ahead of the Youth Service Sector including a 2020 restated alignment to JNC youth worker rates and a 2022 cost of living award reoccurring and backdated to 2021. In doing this we believe YF has not only offered increased value for money to LBL but avoided the stated concerns of some councillors during 2015 select committees that Youth First would be a "race to the bottom" for staff terms and conditions.
9. **Managed the LBL Youth estate and provided capital investment into LBL sites.** By using our own resources and raising funding, we have actively improved LBL's estate, including:
 - a. c.£50k of new and legally required safety features at adventure playgrounds which in turn allowed for continued insurance cover for adventure play in the borough.
 - b. Refurbished spaces at TNG and Bellingham Gateway to expand the available space including for partners such as Family Thrive.
 - c. Work with Albany during 2022's Borough of Culture and currently to refurbish Deptford APG. (ongoing)
 - d. Repainting of the externals of Riverside and Woodpecker Youth Clubs and internal areas of Bellingham Gateway and Honor Oak youth club.
 - e. Refit of a kitchen at Home Park APG
10. **Built up working capital** - as best practice for an organisation in the VCS. This has allowed YF to take on the costs of changing the service, especially those associated with meeting LBL's funding reductions from 2019 onwards. At the same time, we have ensured ongoing provision, protecting staff and LBL from any liabilities associated with reduction and offered investment into growing alternative income and new services. This working capital currently consists of:
 - a. Designated 3 to 4 months operating costs which ensures that in the event the organisation shuts it will do so without debts including to our staff.

- b. Restricted funds (including a sizeable amount being held for the development of Riverside)
- c. Unrestricted to use for enabling growth and income diversification outside of LBL's investment.

11. **Funded the cost of downsizing required from the reduction in LBL youth service spend 2019/20 to 20/21.** This includes covering full redundancy costs including to several staff with high-cost redundancy due to long careers at LBL before TUPE'ing to YF.
12. **Altered and continued delivery and gained income from outside LBL during the Pandemic.** YF quickly varied our offer to meet the needs of young people including online and bubble working and collaborating with partners to secure food support to families. We also avoided redundancies by accessing income inaccessible to LBL such as furlough grants.
13. **Adapted delivery to support communities in times of crisis.**
14. **Developed a new strategy to sustain youth work delivery in Lewisham for the future.**

3. YF Strategy 2022 to 2025

In 2021, to sustain and grow delivery for young people and communities in Lewisham and to continue to support LBL's own strategic aims, YF, developed and published a new strategy. This reframes the organisation's vision and purpose away from the initial aim of simply protecting what existed pre 2016 to the task of delivering more sustainable youth work for Lewisham, work that specifically focuses on where youth and play work best supports LBL and the LSP's strategic priorities and the corresponding needs within our communities. The full strategy is available online here: www.youthfirst.org.uk/youth-first-strategy . A hard copy will also be provided for members at the Select Committee.

Within the strategy the new vision for YF is:

“by 2032, we will be a leading organisation with strong youth, youth worker and community voice that offers young people access to exemplar youth work that guides them to live safe and happy childhoods and thrive into adulthood.”

This will be achieved through our redefined purpose to:

“use the power of our youth work to guide young people to develop their ambition and achieve their potential whatever their background or circumstances.”

This is built on three strategic pillars:

1. Deliver **activities with demonstrated outcomes**,
2. Seek **sustainability**
3. Look after our **people** – employees and volunteers.

All underpinned by five foundational principles to:

1. seek equality of outcomes for young people
2. have a strong understanding of young people and seek to facilitate Youth Voice in their communities.
3. provide safe spaces and activities and safeguarding including early intervention.
4. actively pursue partnerships and collaboration to increase the impact and maximise efficiency of our work.

5. have robust governance from an experienced Board to be transparent and ensure best use of public and charitable funds.

Based on an understanding of Lewisham young people's priority needs and in line with the strategic goals of strategic partners, we are now focusing our delivery of open access and targeted youth work and our growth capacity specifically to support - food poverty, emotional wellbeing, education and employment, and safety.

The rest of this paper seeks to answer questions posed by the committee in the context of this new strategy.

“An overview of provisions in your centres and the future of those provisions”

In 2021/22 Youth First has provided services in Lewisham to 2,127 individual young people with a footfall of 26,834. This is across open access youth clubs, APGs and targeted delivery. These participants are 76% BME and split 62:38: recognising as male:female .

Open Access

At present we deliver from 5 youth clubs: Honor Oak, Bellingham Gateway, TNG, Woodpecker and Deptford APG. (The latter is in lieu of Riverside which is currently being refurbished and due to reopen in Spring 2024). Each of these sites currently delivers 3 LBL funded youth club sessions per week. Summary of the programme at each site is available on our website and promoted through a strong social media presence.

The informal and universal nature of our provision and the relationships which youth workers build with young people allow early intervention especially for vulnerable children and young people who often do not engage with other services. The ability for them to engage voluntarily on their own terms and in a relaxed and unthreatening environment enables us to identify unmet needs, empower young people and families to help themselves and refer on to our other services as appropriate. This is aided by ensuring our teams work within a trauma informed approach and with training and understanding of contextual safeguarding. Our reach and expertise have been instrumental on several occasions to avoid the escalation of issues for both individuals and the wider community.

Within all directly delivered sessions the content of delivery and impact we achieve are developed in consultation with young people who attend. This is a mix of planned and more spontaneous delivery. Youth workers work to the NYA curriculum and utilise the nationally recommended planning tool (NAOMI) to ensure delivery supports young people to enjoy themselves whilst gaining new skills. Activities include:

- Access to a wide range of indoor and outdoor sporting, indoor games including computer games, board games, cards etc
- A wide range of arts-based activities – drawing, painting, jewellery making, t-shirt printing.
- All settings provide food or snacks of some kind, where possible involving young people in planning and preparation. We are where possible also trying to give families food to take home through donations we receive from local businesses and partnerships with Gails Bakery, Felix project, Fair Share and Legendary Community Club (LCC).
- All settings have regular external providers providing a wide range of activities including music, dance, pottery, film/video, as well as formal tuition/homework clubs to support children's formal education.

In addition, we have partnerships and additional income which increases usage of sites for the benefit of local communities including:

- A walking bus based at our youth clubs at Honor Oak and Bellingham.
- “Carnival Routes” a carnival project involving a range of activities including textiles, music and dance based at Woodpecker YC. This ended in 2022.
- Deptford Covid Recovery programme a programme of sports and leisure activities in Deptford.
- Continued provision of Lewisham Holiday Activities & Food programme
- Music studio and production at Woodpecker in partnership with Alchemy
- Enabling access to sites by other partners including
 - Kelvingrove & Eliot Bank Children & Family Centre, TNG, Tue/Wed
 - Talk About Art - hosted at DUMPS – an arrangement handed over to LBL in 2020.
 - Albany Theatre/Love2Dance, TNG, Sat
 - Legendary Community Club Food Bank, TNG Tue-Fri (free of charge)
 - Sarah’s Alternative Fitness, TNG, Mon
 - James Ross Hunter Youth Support CIC, TNG, monthly and annual fundraiser
 - LBL Family Thrive at TNG Mon-Fri (free of charge)
 - 8th Lewisham South Scout Group, Bellingham, Tue/Wed
 - Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance, Bellingham, Mon
 - Dynamite Dance Team, Woodpecker Youth Club/Deptford, Sat
 - Local community faith use

In addition to our normal service delivery, we have regularly supported local communities during emergencies. Examples have included:

- Dropping food parcels for families in need
- Supporting communities to avoid the escalation of youth violence including via arranged mediation and continual liaison with the police, schools and other statutory partners.
- Supporting communities and families post loss of life incidents including outreach in the community, supporting parents and children including providing informal counselling to children (with the support of LBL Ed Pysc teams and CAMHS), and establishing the youth club as a safe space during the crisis to promote social harmony.
- Supporting families fleeing violence
- Supporting children’s registration and engagement with local schools and arranging resits of GCSEs.

We are working with the Centre for Youth Impact, NYA and partners such as VIBE in Knowsley and Space in Devon to **develop a new impact measurement methodology**, specifically one which can evidence impact in open access youth work settings. The lack of a clear impact measurement system is a long-standing challenge for the youth sector. We are proud to be on the cutting edge of this meeting this challenge alongside these national partners and are piloting work which we hope will aid our ability to focus resources, support young people to see their own success whilst giving Lewisham something to proudly contribute to the broader youth work sector.

Adventure Playgrounds

At LBL’s request these were removed from Youth First’s main contract in 2021. Since then, we have been supporting LBL via three short term contract extensions. These requested that we deliver 2 sessions per week at each site, with LBL taking back the management of the estate and usage outside of these times. This has held provision whilst officers developed the Play strategy and move to a retendering process. This contract initially request delivery at Ladywell, Dumps, Honor Oak and Home Park with the agreement that YF would only be paid for the sessions we deliver. Ladywell has however had multiple estate challenges that made it unusable. Given this Commissioners have requested that the most recent extension, which takes us to October 2023, only occurs at the other three sites for a total of 6 sessions per

week. Despite the contractual agreement only to deliver the funded 2 sessions YF were permitted to deliver HAF at sites over various holidays.

During this continued contract extension period YF has continued to deliver whilst meeting the challenge these short term and small contracts create in terms of staff morale, retention and recruitment and income generation. With the APG contract taking away YF's ability to generate income or offer partnerships at sites and putting continuity of provision at risk especially due to the challenges of only being able to offer staff at most a guarantee of 9-month contracts for only a maximum of 18 hours per week. In the broader context of a sector struggling with recruitment generally this has seen YF struggle to recruit and retain frontline play staff and stretched other staff as we attempt to ensure sessions run with the correct ratios and adequately experience staff.

“The future of provision”

APGs

We are very excited by the results of the play strategy and the forthcoming tender process and the potential to provide a more forward focused and longer-term plan for adventure play which deals with some of the above challenges. To maximise the chance of success for any future work YF recommend that LBL offer 5 or more years in any tender. This would allow a much greater chance of success in terms of achieving investment and staff stability.

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Although we were requested by LBL Commissioners to look for options for £200k of savings focused on open access and as such presented options to commissioners that included the likely closure of one or two sites, we have, as of 7/3/20 been informed that there will not now be any savings required. The delivery will therefore remain for now as above with the continued effort to increase partner use of sites and projects funded from sources other than LBL.

YF's Board remains however keen to protect provision for LBL against any need for future savings whilst also seeking to continue to grow income outside of LBL and therefore offer longer-term sustainability for youth provision in the borough. We are keen to avoid redundancies as this not only sees the loss of vital and currently hard to find staff but in losing continuity of relationships and associated trust and impact with young people and communities. Moreover, redundancy cost results in an even higher deficit for YF.

As such we have an ongoing focus on finding further efficiencies across our management structure and back-office costs and ongoing efforts to bring in income and partnerships outside of LBL. Noting that the cost reduction already delivered over the first 6 years (detailed above) means finding further efficiency in management and back-office costs is an increasing challenge, one that is carried in the context of other challenges listed below.

YF invest c.£100k per annum in income generation and work across grant/trust and contract income, traditional fundraising including from High-Net-Worth Individuals and venue hire support. Changes to the team over the last 12 to 18 months have started to see green shoots (see pipeline info below) but we always knew that this needed a couple of years especially post COVID and in the current financial climate. Across a longer term we believe there is potential for efficiencies including those that could be enabled through the harmonisation of terms and conditions.

“An update on the mix of targeted, centre-based and street-based work by Youth First”

Youth First has always been a mix of different youth work delivery and this ensures that the brand itself can be leveraged with young people and communities to ensure that young people gain access to the support they need as early as possible, even where this is simply the opportunity to develop new skills and safely enjoy their youth. To this end we added Street based provision, funded initially directly by YF and then through a successful Children in need bid in 2018 and most recently relaunched this delivery via NCIL funding. We also continue to ensure strong partnerships with others both statutory and non-statutory partners. This partnership approach and the interplay between types of delivery forms a core of our current strategy.

YF managers and youth workers ensure continued partnerships with other services including Family Thrive and other statutory services. This includes attendance at a range of regular local meetings both strategic and delivery focused including: Lewisham thrive board, Lewisham's thrive project group, Family Hub project group and associated development meetings, the Lewisham Strategic Partnership, Safer Neighbourhood Board as a nominated board member and with attendance at public meetings, the Concern Hub, VRT, Social care meetings, YJS, MET – Community Engagement Team meetings, The Young Mayor and Advisors and various local neighbourhood meetings such as the Bellingham community forum and school based meetings. These all require capacity from YF outside of the delivery of youth but are vital in ensuring that we remain a core part of the wider CYP ecosystem and that our early help and safeguarding are as effective as possible.

121 Delivery

As part of our most recent LBL main contract we are delivering a 121-youth work offer. This has a capacity for c.36 young people at any one time. Although only in its first year, with initial development delayed due to COVID, the service is already thriving and supporting Lewisham children, young people, and families in several very positive ways. This is possible in part because of the way the 121 service sits within the wider youth service ecosystem and because we make strong partnerships with others. As such youth workers have access to and are able to introduce young people to new activities, skills, and interests by working closely with young people from the point they are at and increasing their confidence and self-esteem to enable them to access other services. This also increases self-worth, so they feel able to have their own hopes and dreams where they feel listened to, supported, and not judged. Ultimately equipping them with the ability to communicate more effectively and express their needs, wants and rights.

This is well evidenced via the use with all young people of the 'Outcomes star' impact measurement system. This allows Practitioners and young people to jointly assess impact against outcome areas of: Interests and Activities, Hopes and Dreams, Health and Well-being, Education and Work, Communication and Choices and Behaviour. They then agree where the young people sit on the 'journey of change,' which includes 5 levels from 'Stuck' to 'Enjoying and Achieving.' To date our assessment of "Distance travelled" shows 80% of all cases see movement in level across 3 or more outcome areas. In addition, feedback from parents, carers, young people and professionals has been very positive and the same professionals have made numerous referrals.

A third of referrals to this service come, as requested by LBL, directly from Family Thrive however the service is also very well-known beyond this with other referrals being received from sources including schools, the Youth Justice Team, CAHMS, GPs and self-referrals. The need for the service is large and there is already a waiting list of around 45 young people with over 100 referrals received in year. We are working to reduce the waiting list through the recruitment of new staff, including female staff who were missing from the team for much of the year and the addition of staff beyond those funded by LBL.

During the first year there has been much learning in conjunction with commissioners including: a better understanding around the high needs of young people and families being referred and how this causes the average need for support to be 18 weeks rather than the 12 weeks initially predicted by LBL and a subsequent lower throughput due to this. These more challenging referrals also take more time than originally estimated to build rapport and trust with. We are also seeing referrals from some agencies such as MASH often without full consent which in turn means young people do not immediately engage and which then takes up additional capacity. We are working with partners to improve these referrals.

Due to the higher needs of young people referred to the service, there has also been a higher demand on the Operations manager and triaging of cases as often referrals, such as EHA, family or systemic therapy and MASH are needed and completed whilst young people are on our waiting list to prevent needs for escalating. Often times, young people are also introduced and engaged into our open access youth clubs and adventure playgrounds as a means for support in the interim before allocating to a mentor.

“Any challenges being faced by you in the provision of your services?”

From our inception Youth First supported LBL to weather ongoing challenges in the funding and delivery of youth and play services in the borough. This however now sees major challenges, in part noted above, around funding including the challenge of an economy of scale both in terms of spend across direct and indirect costs but also the total level of delivery and how as this reduces it becomes harder to achieve buy in from young people, communities and staff. We continue to address these issues including via:

- 1. Supporting issues for young people and our communities** –our new strategy is designed to focus our delivery and growth on meeting the most pressing needs of young people in Lewisham, ie those relating to food poverty, safety, education and employment and emotional wellbeing and hence are focusing our efforts on these. This is from the perspective that all young people are aided by having safe spaces and trusted adults to voluntarily form professional relationships. As such we continue to ensure that we deliver from a base of professional and high-quality youth work with staff trained in a trauma informed approach and contextual safeguarding. On the ground meeting these challenges for young people is challenged mostly by the reduced amount of delivery in terms of days which has resulted from the pace of contract reductions over the last 2 years, ongoing recruitment and retention challenges which are in line with issues seen across the youth sector but can result in inconsistent local teams (see below) and the need for ever more income to grow delivery to keep pace with growing populations and growing results of societal economic challenges.
- 2. Continuing to deliver to Lewisham at a cost below the actual running cost** – Given the ongoing annual reduction of LBL funding and to protect services in Lewisham YF have since 2021 managed an annual forecast deficit. In 2023/24 this stands at a forecast £174k before any further potential reductions to LBL contract income.
- 3. Delivering and seeking growth and diversification outside of LBL in the context of a continually highly challenged sector and risks posed to LBL’s own commitment.** YF has always supported LBL with reducing spend and this includes requested options for reductions in the last few months. However, it requires sizeable amounts of management capacity to work up options and calculate the impact of reduced funding. This combines with already relatively short contract and lease commitments, the continual risk to agreed investment, the difficulties emanating from the condition of the LBL estate to create a specific challenge in encouraging outside investment. This includes an inability to sign long term rental agreements and to encourage HNWIs to commit serious funding to the borough. Despite this we have recently started to see several green shoots regarding the

latter. LBL could greatly assist by working with YF on 5 or even 10-year plans which would ideally include long site leases, as we have agreed for Riverside.

4. **Continuing to develop new delivery** - In the last 12 months, we have outside of the main contract seen the relaunch of Street based provision (developed by YF and previously funded by CIN), added MOPAC funded schools-based delivery, created partnerships and funding of c.£30k to feed young people during open access sessions, increased the amount of 121 support offered and brought in capital investment to Deptford APG.
5. **Covering the cost of Inflation** - LBL do not include inflation within contracts and as such in addition to agreed reductions YF has also managed the realities of inflation during all 6 years of our existence. This has been particularly challenging since 2021 with inflation at around 10%. In 2022/23 alone this has meant additional value of £120k to LBL on the delivery of the main contract. With inflation continuing, especially around key program costs such as food and the broader cost of living challenges for staff, this remains a key challenge.
6. **Ensuring continued improvements to workforce quality** – this has been a focus of YF especially in terms of health and safety, safeguarding and early intervention. We have to date massively improved training and development. We have funded at no cost to LBL the roll out of expensive high quality NEEBOSH and IOSH qualifications in health and safety and industry leading standards on safeguarding training, policies, and procedures – backed by support from NSPCC, NYA and London Youth. This has not only improved safety and early intervention but also ensures youth services, not least adventure play, in the borough could continue to be insured and therefore delivered, at a time when this became a national challenge for providers. Moving forward YF will always seek to maintain high delivery standards and look for ongoing improvement, despite ongoing cost and recruitment pressures. (see below re specific recruitment challenges).
7. **Estate challenges in practice and in terms of investment** – The youth estate in the borough was a challenge pre stepping out and this continues across many of LBL’s sites. Many of the sites, especially the APGs require significant capital investment and there has been regular occasions where provision has to be paused due to safety issues. When this occurs it can have a detrimental effect to youth participation which then requires additional capacity to rebuild confidence. Similarly, it has been hard to attract partners, including those who may offer provision and/or rental income. This is especially apparent at Honor Oak youth club where the site is urgently in need of investment. We are grateful that LBL have recently begun some much-welcomed investment in Bellingham particularly and we have found for LBL short term investment for work at Bellingham and TNG and a long-term solution for Riverside - which reached the point where it was no longer safe to work from

“An update on recruitment and staffing”

YF continues to reduce vacancy rates and maintain safe staffing levels in YCs and APGs despite ongoing challenges in terms of recruitment and retention, especially for frontline staff.

This challenge has been amplified by the effect of recent reductions to delivery, the nature of shorter-term funding and the subsequent contracts we can then offer staff both in terms of the number of hours and the length of contracts. In addition, a lack of staff at any one time can then affect the morale and retention of other staff.

These are however challenges faced across the sector and not specific to Lewisham or Youth

First. Indeed, in many ways LBL has been far stronger in its commitment to youth service and the partnership with YF than elsewhere and we remain grateful for this relationship.

We continue to seek the best means to address challenges, and this has included benchmarking our frontline salaries against the market ensuring we remain above the sector average. We are currently looking at what other benefits and perks we can offer staff and are recruiting for a new volunteer and apprentice coordinator. The latter will allow us to better recruit and deploy volunteers who whilst not used to replace professional youth workers will be an amazing additional capacity and aid us in growing new local youth workers for the future.

4. Financial implications

4.1. None.

5. Legal implications

5.1. None.

6. Equalities implications

6.1. None.

7. Report author and contact

7.1. Mervyn Kaye - CEO Youth First. Mervyn.kaye@youthfirst.org.uk