

Devon County Council Youth Centres OUTLINE PROPOSAL

Summary of Our Intentions

(based on our Statement of Community Interest)

In our SCI we set out our intentions for all youth centres we have expressed an interest in, namely:

- Phoenix Centre (Wonford, Exeter)
- Knight Club (Beacon Heath, Exeter)
- Westside Centre (St Thomas/Cowick, Exeter)
- South Molton Youth Resource Centre
- We have also more recently expressed our interest in the Sidmouth Youth Centre.

Our proposal is very different to the current DCC service in that under our management the Centres will focus on the whole community, whilst retaining an emphasis on serving young people.

We will re-brand these as YMCA Centres (with an appropriate local name for each), with YMCA Exeter taking responsibility for the management of the centres. Our intention is that, run professionally and efficiently with maximum involvement of the local community, each centre will generate a surplus which will then be used to enable YMCA Exeter to deliver youth work in each location.

We are deliberately not going to call these centres Youth Centres (or anything similar) because this naming by definition makes people who do not see themselves as being youth feel excluded. We want the whole community, regardless of age, to feel that these are their centres.

Similarly we will not call them Community Centres, Community Hubs, or anything similar as such terms immediately generate ideas and images in people's minds based on previous experiences, both positive and negative, of buildings bearing these titles. Instead, by using the name "YMCA Centre", each centre can take on its own character, usage, and feel appropriate to the local community, not constrained by concepts that may be tired, age-restrictive or based on its previous use. However in all cases we wish to see a range of uses that will directly benefit young people.

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

SUPPORT & ADVICE

ACCOMMODATION

FAMILY WORK

HEALTH & WELLBEING

TRAINING & EDUCATION

We will encourage a wide range of individuals and organisations to use the YMCA Centres. Some of these will be existing groups currently using the respective centres, but we particularly plan to attract activities such as:

- Services for older people, such as lunch clubs and drop-in services
- Services for children and young parents, such as parent and toddler groups, parenting classes, etc.
- Activities for young people, such as performing arts groups, clubs and other activity-based sessions
- Provision for faith groups
- Services for people with physical, learning and/or mental disabilities
- Specialist groups for those with difficulties related to alcohol, substance misuse, gambling, etc.
- Adult learning providers
- "Surgeries" for local councillors, police, advice services, etc.
- Job Clubs, whether run by ourselves or partner agencies
- Fitness activities such as aerobics, Pilates, dance, etc.
- Family Film Nights and community fun days
- Depending on the layout of the building, we may also make some office space available to appropriate partner agencies as co-locating "anchor tenants". Obviously this will not be possible in the smaller centres without a number of smaller rooms.

Many of these services will be delivered by other organisations or individuals (whether on a voluntary or a paid-for basis), but YMCA Exeter will also seek to find ways to meet local needs directly where there are no obvious local providers.

We will particularly wish to encourage provision of services that benefit young people in the evenings and at weekends. Any surplus generated will be used for YMCA to deliver youth services at the centre.

Current Status

Due to the delays in deciding which Centres would remain open under Devon Youth Service, we have not been able to begin any detailed discussions until September 2014.

Devon County Council officers have been extremely helpful in providing the information needed to develop a business plan, and I would like to record my sincere thanks for their assistance, including that of officers facing redundancy. Nevertheless, this is a very complex project involving significant long-term liabilities and risks, and it is essential that as a Charity we carry out all due diligence. Indeed this is our legal obligation under charity legislation.

At this time we are still gathering key information, including:

- Building condition surveys
- Asbestos reports
- A full understanding of community needs (to this end we are holding Open Public Meetings in each locality, the first one having taken place at Westside on 16 September)
- A full understanding of the numbers and characteristics of young people historically attending each of the Devon Youth Centres
- A full understanding of running costs, including likely maintenance liabilities
- A full understanding of which community groups and partner agencies will be interested in using each centre.
- A full inventory of fixtures, fittings and other resources which will be left in the centres for ourselves.

It should be noted that Isca Church has also submitted a SCI for the Knight Club. From our knowledge of, and discussions with, Isca leaders, we know them to be fully committed to the local community, with a proven history of community engagement. We are very open to working closely with Isca to develop a joint delivery model, to supporting them in taking over this asset, or to receiving their support for our plans. Ultimately our desire is that the best outcome for the community is achieved, and this is more important than our desire as YMCA to extend our influence.

Developing a robust business model that considers all the risks and opportunities is a huge piece of work that has to be completed at the same time as sustaining existing YMCA Exeter services. We are making significant progress, but much work still needs to be done to put together a robust business plan which will be acceptable to YMCA Exeter trustees.

Whilst our initial analysis suggests that these centres have the potential to generate a surplus to cross-subsidise youth provision in each location, we anticipate that after we take on the responsibility for these centres it will take a

minimum of two years for us to develop an effective business. As with all business start-ups, we anticipate making a deficit in these first two years, and so it is essential that we have adequate “pump-priming” funding from DCC, ECC, and other funders (to be identified) to cover these initial losses. Without this funding in place, it is extremely doubtful that YMCA trustees will be willing for the charity to carry this financial risk.

We need time to identify other potential funders to ensure this transfer of community assets delivers the most effective outcome for local communities. Our experience is that a minimum of 6 months are needed to identify potential funders, develop a convincing funding application, and receive the funds requested.

Interim Youth Provision

At the request of relevant DCC Members and Officers, we are also working on an interim plan to deliver two sessions per week in each of the Exeter centres. The format for this will be one junior and one senior session, each of 2-2½ hours, to be held on the same night in each centre. This is the most cost-effective delivery model, and one which has proven to be effective in South Molton .

The cost of delivering this service for 46 weeks over a 12 month period will be in the order of £35,500 total, including the following:

- Staff costs (two qualified youth workers per session)
- Additional staff and management time to ensure we have adequate capacity both to manage the project well, to deal with inevitable safeguarding issues and to provide one-to-one support as needed
- Volunteer recruitment, vetting and support
- All office costs including office provision, supplies, phones, photocopying, etc.
- Staff travel costs
- Staff and volunteer training
- Youthwork materials
- Central service support (Senior Management, Finance, Insurance, etc.)

Final Remarks

YMCA Exeter is fully committed to doing all we can to save these valuable assets for the benefit of local communities, and particularly young people. We are expending considerable resource in developing our plans for each of the centres we have expressed an interest in, and will continue to do so. We must warn, however, that as a charity we cannot by law undertake a venture of this nature unless our trustees are satisfied that the risks to the organisation are acceptable.

I also wish to express my concern that monies earmarked by DCC for "Community Infrastructure Support" are not used to deliver the kind of interim provision outlined above in order to save political embarrassment, only for lack of "pump priming" finance to render long-term community and youth provision in these centres no longer financially sustainable. This would be a tragic misuse of funds for short term benefit to the detriment of young people and local communities for a generation.

Peter Stephenson

Chief Executive