



# Commissioning case study

Shropshire Council's youth locality commissioning model

# The headlines

- Shropshire Council has established an approach to locality commissioning which aims to deliver more effective outcomes for local communities by enabling community organisations to work collaboratively with public sector organisations.
- The previous model of commissioning youth activities centrally has been replaced by a new approach involving activities being locally commissioned by the network of local joint committees.
- The commissioning process has been able to draw on the local knowledge, networks, skills and experience of the existing community engagement team. The team has provided a vital link between Shropshire Council, the committees, community and voluntary sector providers and the local community.
- Shropshire Council participated in wave 2 of the Commissioning Academy.

‘ **The previous model of commissioning youth activities centrally has been replaced by a new approach involving activities being locally commissioned** ’

## What is the context?

Shropshire Council is a unitary authority that was created on 1 April 2009, replacing the former two-tier local government structure in the non-metropolitan county of Shropshire. The council’s immediate predecessor, Shropshire County Council, and five non-metropolitan district councils – Bridgnorth District Council, North Shropshire District Council, Oswestry Borough Council, Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council and South Shropshire District Council – were abolished in the reorganisation.

A network of local joint committees was established following the formation of Shropshire Council. They are legally constituted, decision-making committees of the council with a membership made up of representatives from each of the local town and parish councils within a specified geographic area, together with unitary councillors. There are 28 in Shropshire with eight covering the northern area and ten each covering the central and southern areas. Each committee meets four times a year and the meetings are open to the public.

The local joint committees have the following remit:

- to encourage public participation and engagement in the decision making of Shropshire Council;
- to scrutinise local service delivery, with the power to call members of the executive or senior managers to attend and explain decisions affecting the locality;
- to act as a decision maker with regard to the local delivery of a range of services and to prioritise resource allocation in their area;
- to determine expenditure of a delegated budget;
- to hold other public service providers to account by scrutinising their service delivery in the locality and requesting them to attend;
- to refer matters of concern regarding service delivery to the council’s scrutiny panels, or matters of policy to cabinet; and
- to act as a formal consultation mechanism for the council, over and above that taken with individual town and parish councils

In response to continued pressure on local authority funding and future demographic changes, such as an increasingly ageing population, Shropshire Council recognised a need to improve efficiencies and realise opportunities to do things differently.

In 2014 the council launched the ‘Commissioning for the future’ strategy which sets out how the council will move to its new role as a commissioning body and outlines the different commissioning models, including:

- strategic commissioning;
- joint or co-commissioning;
- locality commissioning;
- outcomes or service-based commissioning; and
- individual commissioning

The council has established an approach to locality commissioning with the aim of delivering more effective outcomes for local communities by enabling community organisations to work collaboratively with public sector organisations.

As a local authority, Shropshire Council has a duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, equality of access for all young people to the positive, preventative and early help they need to improve their wellbeing. The council must also take steps to gain the views of young people and to take these views into account in making decisions about services and activities for them. The council's strategic aim is to ensure that as many young people as possible can gain access to a wide range of activities after school, at weekends and in school holidays. The purpose of these activities is to support young people's wellbeing, development of personal and social education and preparation for adulthood.

In light of the continued pressures facing youth service budgets the council took a decision to adopt a locality approach and commission youth activities through the existing local joint committees.

Ann Hartley, Shropshire Council's Cabinet Member for Children's Services comments:

'Shropshire Council will no longer directly provide activities for young people as it does at the moment. Instead, our Local Joint Committees that represent the different parts of Shropshire will be given a budget and they will commission youth services for their areas from other providers.

Our aim is to ensure that as many young people as possible can continue to access a wide range of activities after school, at weekends and in school holidays.

Alongside this we will be developing youth activities in the areas of greatest need, focusing on their specific local needs and encouraging greater involvement of local young people and their communities.'

**From later this year youth services across Shropshire will be delivered in a different, but better, way – one that will give young people and local communities a much greater say about the services that are provided in their area.**

## What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

The council recognised that, to be effective, youth locality commissioning required strong local governance structures to enable partners to make decisions about how local assets and public money are best used in their areas. It undertook a review of the future role of local joint committees in supporting locality commissioning and took action to move them from a largely consultative forum with some grant management functions to boards that receive delegated funding and have a lead role in influencing service delivery and commissioning services to meet local needs.

The premise of the new locality commissioning model is that when community organisations work collaboratively with public sector organisations they can achieve more effective outcomes for their communities. They can learn from each other and by doing so develop partnerships which provide long-term mutual support and improve the sustainability of local service delivery.

The council has also carried out development work to agree the level of funding allocated to each of the committees for the purpose of commissioning youth activities. This exercise has involved detailed analysis of key data sources in order to map out the different levels of need across the 28 committees. The measures used to inform the funding allocation process for each committee include:

- the number of 10 to 19 year olds;
- the number of 10 to 19 year olds with a learning disability;
- the number of 10 to 19 year olds living in a deprived area;
- the number of 10 to 17-year-old offenders;
- the number of 10 to 19 year olds with poor school attendance;
- the number of referrals to social care for 10 to 17 year olds;
- the occurrence of antisocial behaviour for 10 to 19 year olds;
- the percentage of obesity among 10 to 11 year olds; and
- population density / extent of urbanised area (rurality)



The outcome of this funding allocation exercise was largely consistent with the council's previous allocation of resources at a locality level. However the purpose of the locality commissioning process was to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and cost in the procurement process and as a result to protect front-line budgets as much as possible and maintain local youth provision.

The key steps to establishing the youth locality commissioning model are:

1. governance and decision making;
2. needs analysis – the data, existing activity, existing consultation and priorities, other considerations;
3. engaging (and consulting) with young people, the public and providers;
4. setting out commissioning intentions (and consulting on these);
5. procuring providers / activities;
6. contracting; and
7. evaluating

Shropshire Council has secured separate funding to ensure that the existing five specialist youth groups (for example children with disabilities or additional needs) are maintained. These will be commissioned separately from the youth locality commissioning in 2016/2017.

## Who are the key partners?

The model of youth locality commissioning requires the committees to identify need in their local area and actively engage the local community, local providers and young people to develop activities as part of an innovative co-production approach. The process has been able to draw on existing youth partnerships in place in the majority of towns and parish councils across Shropshire.

The committees are supported by the council's existing community enablement team who are based within the community and play a vital role in the locality commissioning model by assisting the development of local priorities based on effective community consultation and by helping town and parish councils to draw up local plans. The community enablement team also have a role in supporting the development and delivery of community-led projects which can also help to secure external grant funding to match the youth service funding allocated to committees by Shropshire Council.

## What has been the impact?

The new arrangements are due to go live from 1 April 2015 and it is therefore too early to assess the impact of the new commissioning approach. The anticipated impacts are:

- delivering financial savings by removing a tier of youth service staff within Shropshire Council and streamlining procurement processes. This is projected to deliver a 50 per cent saving on existing youth service costs;
- empowering the committees and ensuring that local youth provision is able to meet local needs;
- providing the local community with a stronger role in influencing and shaping local provision and delivering a stronger fit with local needs; and
- providing a model for locality commissioning that can potentially be used for other services such as public health, community safety and public realm improvements

All of Shropshire Council's youth buildings are on the community asset transfer register and there has been considerable interest from organisations who want to take them on. It is envisaged that the locality commissioning model may facilitate the asset transfer process by providing a potential source of revenue for organisations with an interest in continuing to deliver youth activities from existing buildings.

**“ The outcome of this process will be that the youth services delivered across the county are those that young people and local communities want. ”**

Ann Hartley, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Shropshire Council

## What have been the key elements of success?

Key success factors in the development of the youth locality commissioning model include:

- effective communication and partnership working between council officers and elected members – the council is supported by a talented network of councillors who have championed the locality commissioning model at a local level;
- the commissioning process has been able to draw on the local knowledge, networks, skills and experience of the community engagement team, which has provided a vital link between Shropshire Council, the committees, community and voluntary sector providers and the local community;
- the process of allocating resources across the committees has been transparent and clearly communicated to partners; and
- the youth locality commissioning model sits within a broader commissioning strategy launched by the council and represents a new model of delivering services and not simply an exercise in cutting costs

## What has been learnt?

The move towards locality commissioning has generated a number of challenges. The existing youth service staff have been central in supporting the transition to the locality commissioning model which is replacing their service. As such it has been necessary and appropriate to retain an understanding of the pressures facing the youth service team and to adopt a sensitive and compassionate approach.

It is important to ensure that all elected members are briefed consistently regardless of which political party they are affiliated to. Council officers have a role in ensuring that elected members that are not part of the cabinet committee and/or a member of the controlling party have full and accurate information about the new commissioning arrangements, in particular given that they are represented on the local joint committees.

It has been important to ensure that the move towards a locality commissioning model does not generate inequalities of access or provision for specific groups. Shropshire Council has separated the process of commissioning universal youth activities from youth services targeted at specialist groups.

Adopting a successful model of locality commissioning is reliant on having strong and accountable local governance structures that are effective in engaging local partners and the local community. Given the potential variation in the strength of local decision-making structures it may be necessary to deliver a programme of training and support to maintain quality standards and ensure consistency of approach in the commissioning process.

## Who can I contact?

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## Other information

Further detail on local joint committees across Shropshire can be accessed at <https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/Mglistcommittees.aspx?bcr=1>