2025/72 Youth Provision In Chard 18th July 2025
An Update from The Steering Group

Introduction
The Youth Provision Steering Group has spent the last 2 months meeting on a weekly basis with members of the group being involved in discussions in with other groups, including schools, churches, specialist service providers and members of the public.

A good understanding of where we are in terms of provision, how we got to this point, what the urgent options are for summer offerings and what a more permanent youth service offering may look like moving forward is being gained.

To date, the appointed members of the steering group have not been to visit existing provision in other towns, but we hope to go and look at projects as part of developing our recommended offering.

Working Together in Partnership – Local Authorities, Organisations and Providers
We have also taken the opportunity to meet and work with both Ilminster & Crewkerne representatives, and those representatives attended an exploratory meeting at Chard's Guildhall on Friday 4th July 2025 to discuss the possibility of a collaborative approach to Youth Provision in Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne.

We discussed the lack of youth provision in Chard and Ilminster, although Crewkerne have recently signed a contract with a youth provision provider. Although each town is unique, and will have different requirements, all three towns recognise that organising youth provision providers individually would likely be unachievable and not cost effective. A collaborative approach may be more attractive to any potential youth provision provider which could be funded by all three towns, and it may also assist with seeking grant funding from elsewhere.

Continuing Partnership Progress
We have the results of the youth survey, which was kindly undertaken by the Community Plan group on behalf of the Steering Group, and we will be using these comments and opinions along with future, on-going surveys to help monitor and shape a future service for Chard and beyond. We had an Open Meeting with providers and clubs last week which was very positive and showed that there was a real desire to move forward in a partnership approach with a new service including the potential for a community run building in whatever form and location that may be.

Councillor Baker has had some very positive meetings with Holyrood school regarding the Cradle to Career project that is currently running. They have had a very successful funding bid for three years and part of this grant is for youth work. The school has kindly agreed to fund a Youth Co-Ordinator to help run and shape a future youth service here in Chard. This is an amazing opportunity and would help the partnership to ensure that we build a service that is fit for purpose and sustainable for years to come.

Service Locations
The location (in terms of a building, outside environment or both) of proposed provision is still a matter for discussion and decision.

Positive news is that Councillor Baker and the Chief Executive & Town Clerk have had some very good conversations with both Somerset Council and Chard Area Youth Committee regarding the current youth club building. This Council is having a survey completed on the building this week and this will help inform decision making with regarding to the future of the building. Somerset Council has agreed in principle that this Council could take on an early entry agreement for the building if Chard Area Youth Club also agree to vacate the building on the same day. Somerset Council has also indicated that it may be possible for this Council to take on the building on a short-term agreement to give the partnership time to decide on future plans and that they may do this on a peppercorn agreement. The finer details in relation to matters such as liability and maintenance need to be discussed but, subject to the survey results, the situation may be more positive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Members are asked to approve continuing the involvement of Chard Town Council in this tripartite approach to enable the group to investigate possible solutions for future youth provision in all three towns, prior to reporting back to Full Council.

2) Subject to availability, to consider the building survey outcome and agree to seek community use of the building for the shorter-term.

3) Subject to agreement on the building survey outcome and potential for short-term use, Members are asked to agree that the Chief Executive & Town Clerk, on behalf of the Town Council, enters into a Gentleman's Agreement with Somerset Council based on early entry and with a view to taking on a short-term lease with a peppercorn rent and insurance costs. The initial period would give time to investigate a more formal agreement, should the Council wish to look at a longer-term route for community and youth provision.

4) Members are asked to agree to allow the Steering Group to help establish, participate and partner in a new "Youth Provision Group" to be formed to run the day-to-day matters and operate the building as a youth and community facility, including the liaison with any hirers, whilst Chard Town Council cover the day-to-day running costs and minor maintenance of the building from the "devolution fund". An officer of Chard Town Council to be one of the trustees / directors of this group and the group would invite trustees from youth organisations, schools and other interested parties. Numbers are yet to be decided, based on the requirements of such a group.

5) Subject to the Gentleman's Agreement being in place, Members authorise the Chief Executive & Town Clerk to work with the Steering Group and/or "Youth Provision

Group", as appropriate, and to secure the building and enter into contracts with the alarm, fire alarm, CCTV provider, utilities and service providers. Delegated authority should also be given to make minor repairs and review or change the security, locks and door entry system and similar matters to be funded from the devolution fund.

6) Members are asked to work with this newly formed group and to fund youth work from the balance of the Youth Provision budget of Chard Town Council, as previously budgeted.

7) Members are asked to make additional funding available to undertake any minor changes or signage that may be needed prior to the building being reopened, this to be funded from the "devolution fund".

David Bell
Chief Executive & Town Clerk

Councillor Jason Baker
Chair of the Youth Provision Steering Group