

7. Children and Young People

7. CHILD CARE and YOUTH PROVISION

One of the clear needs identified from the MCTI DAWN consultations, was for child care at nursery and junior age groups. This is particularly the case within Northam. A wrap around service had been provided but had been forced to close, for a variety of reasons not within their control.

This service provided care for infants and junior school pupils at St Georges and St Margaret's, before school in the morning and after school in the evening. This impacted on the ability of parents to take on full time employment.

Child Care – Background.

There are 398 children attending St Georges and St Margaret's, between the ages of 5 and 11 years, predominantly from Northam and Westward Ho! These wards of Devon county are identified in the County Plan as being most able to benefit from provision of children's care facilities which would not normally be provided by a primary school.

Appledore primary and St Mary's Orchard Hill are better served, in the former case with provision for 3 to 11 years from 8.30 to 5.45, and in the latter by its location close to the Sure Start Centre in Bideford.

In addition there are several care groups operating in and around Bideford, some in Westward Ho! and further afield in Instow. These groups do not generally operate 5 days a week however.

From discussions with the head teachers at St Georges and St Margaret's, we learned of the work which Devon County have already started, and their proposals for the Northam area. The steering group resolved to give these proposals their support and to do all that they can, to expedite their implementation. From this starting point, Devon County have established, with NTC, a steering committee which will push these proposals through, with a start up before the end of 2006.

7.1. Basic Plan

Devon county is committed to starting 26 new Children's Centres by 2010. The initial objective of these centres is the provision of support for the under fives.

This would provide

Early Education from 3 years.

Family Support and out reach to parents and carers.

Child and Family Health assistance.

The Northam Centre would be serviced from the Sure Start Centre in Bideford, and would come under the same management. This would have several operating advantages, in the sharing of staff and expertise and keeping overheads low.

To achieve this start date, and based on the experience of starting Bideford, the Centre would need to build on existing providers. For example the Snapdragon group already operate very effectively out of a portacabin in St Georges, and the Centre recognises what could be achieved by giving that group more resources to expand their operation and increase its range of services.

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7.2. Resources

A major resource requirement is for adequate space, for the provision of play areas, quiet areas, 'interview' rooms, a simple dining area and probably an area for the very young to sleep.

The current facility at Snapdragons is no way big enough for the volume and variety of activities proposed, and more permanent premises will be required. However, capital funding is not available from the County, and although a site might be possible on a small section of St Margaret's playing field, it would require raising capital from an as yet unidentified source and agreeing with the Diocese a site on that location. It is not thought that the idea is looked upon favourably by the school. An alternative solution would be to provide facilities at the new village hall or the Bridge Hall. This will be the starting point

7.3. Implementation

The steering group will establish the local need, and review possible premises.

Simultaneously, the Surestart management will start to work in partnership with local providers, from statutory, voluntary and the private sectors, and local parents, to establish the mechanisms by which the proposed services will be provided. There is a significant number of carers in the Northam area, and the preferred method of providing wraparound care would be to use this mechanism.

Youth Provision

Apart from the skate board group at Appledore, and several sports organisations, there does not appear to be one organisation actively engaging with young people in the Northam Town Council Area. Compare this with other areas of Torridge, where for example, in Torrington there are statutory and voluntary groups functioning on every day/night of the week.

One of the holding items in Northam itself is the lack of a suitable building for a group to meet, and it is to be hoped that the proposed purchase of the Bridge Hall by NTC will provide such a meeting place. Nevertheless, at present there is no mechanism to establish an organisation for young people.

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7.4. Proposals.

As with any organisation, if it is to be successful it needs to actively involve those it seeks to serve. NTC will set up a working group which will include young volunteers, to establish the type of organisation and facilities which will be acceptable to the local community.

To do this NTC will be able to draw on the experience of Devon County youth workers, and to be advised by the WINGS group from Bideford.

To progress this initiative three key elements are required

7.4.1. A regular place to meet

7.4.2. A group of interested Trustees to manage the project.

7.4.3. Assured and regular funding.

In particular some annual funding should be available from NTC, and an allowance from the precept allocated for this purpose. This is a departure from historical support activities within NTC, but is common in other Councils. The availability of a regular income from NTC would make application for grants more successful and help to concentrate aims and objectives of the group on youth welfare and support, and not totally on energy-sapping funding applications.



Action.

To invite volunteers to establish a group of trustees and a management organisation from all settlements within Northam and with the help of the County Youth service to prepare an implementation plan. Northam Town Council to initiate this action immediately.

Appendices .

Youth groups within Torridge

