

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, I'm Fred Cotterill, the now outgoing Member of Youth Parliament.

I am speaking on behalf of young people across Bath & North East Somerset, to express my dissatisfaction with the cabinet's plans for the Youth Service over the next two financial years, and the way in which this information has been obscured from public view. Although I accept that some cuts must be made, it is clear that the cabinet is not considering the broader effects that weakening the Youth Service will have. Moreover, I am aware that it is not only hidden cuts that the cabinet has planned, but a complete end to universal youth provision in B&NES.

In the report distributed at the Overview & Scrutiny panel on the 25th January, it is stated that the Youth Service is going to undergo a "redesign" to deliver a service "focused upon delivery to vulnerable individuals, groups and areas as identified by assessed need". However, throughout the entire section regarding this proposal, no mention is made of any direct cuts to the budget.

The reality is that almost half of the participation budget is being slashed. £19,000 in funding to groups like DAFBY is to be withdrawn in the upcoming financial year. Why the cabinet believes that it can choose to not only remove funding for young people, without so much as trying to involve us in the decision making process, but also hide the immediate cuts, is beyond me. After already suffering 30% cuts in 2005, any further reductions to the Youth Service's budget threatens to remove its ability to provide for young people. I find it bewildering how the council expects cuts to cause anti-social behaviour to go down, and democratic involvement to go up.

Furthermore, the upcoming financial year is not the only time that the Youth Service faces cuts. Within the next two years, the Member for Children's Services has made it clear that the Youth Service will be "tendered out" – a nice way of saying privatised. Young people's futures are not marketable goods. Schools are not commercialised, so why is it acceptable for the Youth Service to be? Surely, it provides a key aspect of social education, and so cannot be left to the vagaries of the market. It is a move based on purely financial reasoning. What makes it worse is that the council has not even looked into alternative areas to make cuts, or items that would be better suited to involving commercial interest.

In assuming cuts to a vital service are somehow a good way to reduce overall costs, the budget is missing two key points. Firstly, that these reductions will

come free of charge, as it were. Universal youth provision and the involvement of young people in decision making are key aspects in building social cohesion – where everyone has an interest in seeing a positive outcome, input will obviously be better.

Remove one of the few areas available for young people to have an active say in, and you remove from many the opportunity to play a positive role in their communities.

Take away the role model of youth workers, who, unlike teachers, talk to young people outside of the classroom, and another bulwark against the stream of advertising and consumerism young people are subjected to is washed away.

Eliminate the safe spaces young people desperately need and suddenly we're all back on the streets at night, scaring old ladies and filling up the letters pages of tabloids. Council youth centres are somewhere young people can access information and help on so many things – drugs, sex, bullying, abuse. They're off the streets and away from trouble.

Ask yourselves not if whether cutting away the Youth Service until it dies makes financial sense, but whether it makes social sense. At the end of the day, everyone in B&NES will be living with the consequences of badly thought out cuts. I hate to make this point, but that includes the people who vote for you. It's the general election soon, and when people ask what your party is doing locally to deal with anti-social behaviour, your answers will be...what, exactly?

I am sure that you, as a representative of your constituents, would not wish to see provisions for young people in your ward removed. Only looking at this through the warped lens of finance would give the impression that further reducing participation in B&NES would be a worthwhile sacrifice. Therefore I, and thousands of other young people in the area, ask for you to reconsider both the coming cuts and the proposed redesign.

Thanks to a few greedy individuals, wider society is going to suffer over the next few years. I think we can all agree that it is everyone's job, but elected representatives especially, to ensure that these cuts are made intelligently and with due consideration for their effects.

Thankyou.