



# Whatever, yeah?

Local councils and youth provision

Supported by the Commission for Rural Communities

### **Commision for Rural Communities**

The Commission for Rural Communities acts as the advocate for England's rural communities, as an expert adviser to the government, and as a watchdog to ensure that government actions, policies and programmes recognise and respond effectively to rural needs, with a particular focus on disadvantage. It has three key functions:

- Rural advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- Expert advisor: giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others;
- Independent watchdog: monitoring, reporting on and seeking to mainstream rural into the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

### **National Association of Local Councils**

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the national representative body for 10,000 local councils throughout England and Wales. In all, there are over 100,000 community, parish and town councillors throughout England and Wales. These councillors, who serve electorates ranging from small rural communities to major cities, are all independently elected. The councils have powers to raise their own funds through council tax. Local councils provide employment for over 25,000 staff while their annual expenditure exceeds £500m. Together, they can be identified as one of the nation's single most influential grouping of grassroots opinion formers. Over 15 million people live in communities served by local councils nationally – this represents up to 30% of the population. Over 200 new local councils have been created since 1997.

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## **Introduction**

Throughout England, parish, town, community and neighbourhood councils (local councils) work towards improving community well-being and providing better services at a local level. They are the tier of local government closest to the people. The term 'local councils' refers to parish, town, community, neighbourhood and village councils and not principal authorities – the district, borough, unitary or county council tier of local government.

Local councils represent the local community, deliver services to meet local needs and strive to improve the quality of life in the local area. They provide, maintain or contribute to a great many different services. These services include, leisure facilities, allotments, car parks, local illuminations, litter bins, community centres, community safety schemes, parks and open spaces, community transport schemes, crime reduction measures, street lighting, street cleaning, cycle paths, tourism activities, festivals and celebrations, traffic calming measures and local youth projects.

Local councils have the advantage of being close to the community; their councillors will be part of that community and thus representing the needs of their neighbours. Therefore, local councils will be much more likely to understand the needs of the local community and be able to respond to them. Engaging young people is a key consideration for many local councils and they are at the forefront in ensuring that the needs of young people are more fully represented.

The purpose of this booklet is to highlight and celebrate just some of the excellent activities aimed at young people being undertaken by local councils across the country. Local councils are ensuring that young people are entertained, kept active, made to feel that their needs are catered for and made to feel that they are listened to. The examples in this booklet are illustrative of the wider work that local councils undertake to better represent younger people but the booklet only scratches the surface. Local councils across the country provide or support a wide range of activities including playgrounds, youth councils, youth clubs, youth cafes, transport schemes, skate parks, sports facilities, advice and information centres, arts and crafts, youth outreach and voluntary activities.

The case studies included within this booklet show just some of the innovative approaches that local councils take in order to better represent young people in their communities.



## Ringwood Town Council

**Number of electors:**

11,148

**Population:**

13,700

**Precept:**

£350,080

**Project: Community Involvement – Student Advisors**

Ringwood town is situated in the south west corner of Hampshire in New Forest district. Part of the town is within the New Forest National Park and is bisected by the A31 that links the M27/M3 with Bournemouth and the south.

The idea of Student Advisors was initiated by the town clerk to enable councillors to have a better understanding of the needs, hopes and aspirations of the younger generations. The underlying reason for the proposal was that, as most of the councillors children had left home they were no longer in regular contact with young people. Councillors were therefore seeking a structured arrangement that would give them direct access to young people to enable them to obtain their views on a regular basis. They were acutely aware that they were making decisions that would often have more effect on these young people in the future than on themselves.

The proposal was simple in concept; built on the premise that sensible people gather all the relevant facts before making decisions. The council has always sought advice on relevant issues and as the decisions being taken will affect the future of the town's young people, councillors believed that they should seek the views of young people in the town. They felt that their views and advice should be treated in exactly the same way as the expert views sought on other issues.

The council had already built good relations with the local secondary school, working in partnership on a number of projects. It approached the school and offered it the opportunity to appoint two Student Advisors to each of the council's committees. The council determined the overall arrangements, which were agreed with the school and incorporated in a Protocol that sets out roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the initiative. There is no age bar for Student Advisors with the emphasis being on appointing the most suitable applicants irrespective of age. The arrangements enable Student Advisors to be present at council meetings and contribute at that time to debates before decisions are made.

## Ringwood Town Council

The council now has two Student Advisors for each of its four main programme committees whose role is to provide views and advice. In order to assist members in coming to reasoned conclusions and decisions, the students are encouraged to give their views in the same way that officers or any other specialists would.

While the students are appointed by Ringwood School, they are expected to represent the views of all young people in Ringwood, including those who have not reached an age to attend Ringwood School, and also those who have left school. The students are also required to represent the views of former students who currently reside outside the area.

There are a number of reasons the council feels that the initiative is working, from the start it was honest about what would be expected from all parties and made sure that the initiative was achievable. It was made clear early on that the Student Advisors would not be able to vote at council meetings but that an advisory role would bring about greater benefits to the council's decision making. The council started with smaller partnership-working with the school to build trust and understanding and, perhaps most importantly, recognised that without the support and enthusiasm of councillors, the clerk and head teacher the initiative would fail.

The council see the initiative as helping to bridge the gap between young people and their elected representatives, and are keen to emphasise that young people have a very important stake in the future of the town. Councillors accepted the students from the beginning and the students have risen to the responsibilities entrusted to them. The council feels that the initiative has revealed views they did not have access to before and has added an extra dimension to the decision-making process. Importantly, the council feels that it is making a contribution in getting young people interested and engaged in democratic decision making.

**Website: [www.ringwood.gov.uk](http://www.ringwood.gov.uk)**

**Number of electors:**

8,061

**Population:**

11,700

**Precept:**

£336,000

**Project: Outreach Youth Worker**

Iver is a rural parish on the outskirts of London. At the southern tip of Buckinghamshire it comprises three very distinctive areas: Richings Park, Iver Village and Iver Heath. The parish is relatively affluent but includes a number of pockets of deprivation, particularly in regard to access to services and levels of education.

There are certain factors that limit the number of activities that young people in the parish can engage in. There is no local secondary school so children have to travel several miles by school bus to attend school elsewhere. This makes it difficult for them to participate in after-school activities. There is a railway station in the south of the parish, however, it is situated five miles away from the population in the north of the parish. Bus services out of the parish are limited and services do not run later than 7pm. The public transport situation means that many young people cannot realistically leave the village during the evening and at weekends.

In recent years, the parish has seen increased incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage by young people. Although the county council run a youth club in the centre of the parish it is still a long way away from many young people in the area. The youth club itself was suffering from anti-social behaviour, which meant bans being imposed on some young people. This in turn resulted in some of these young people finding themselves on the streets during the evening with little to do. Coupled with the limited access young people have to activities in nearby towns, the council was prompted to consider how it could better provide for the needs of young people in the parish while cutting down the instances of anti-social behaviour.

The local church employs its own youth worker but this is done through a charity called the Iver Educational Trust that allows the youth worker to access funding the church would not be eligible for. The council felt that a similar approach, whereby a youth worker was employed on the council's behalf, would be beneficial. This also meant that the area would now

## Iver Parish Council

have two youth workers working through the educational trust that could share ideas and volunteer help and funding information. The youth worker would also have access to funding that the parish council would not. The charity agreed to a proposal that the council provide a grant to the charity to cover the salary of the youth worker but that the charity and youth worker secure funding for their activities.

Initially, the youth worker took to the streets in an effort to build a relationship with young people in the area. This was done through a drop-in facility one night a week where free doughnuts and hot chocolate, provided by local businesses, were supplied. It gave young people the opportunity to articulate their needs, voice concerns and engage in dialogue, which helped them to feel more part of the community. As the role has developed, the youth worker has built links with the county council outreach workers, the county council youth club, the District Council Community Safety Team and with the police. There are now three drop-in facilities (covering each part of the parish) and activities are provided during school holidays, including arts and crafts and sporting activities.

The youth worker has also had success in a number of other areas. Graffiti has grown to be a problem in the parish and together with council-driven initiatives to tackle the problem the youth worker works with young people on arts projects.

Another positive to come out of the initiative was that some young people came forward expressing concern that they were all being treated as if they were anti-social and asked if they could organise a clean-up day. This was facilitated by the youth worker and parish council and saw young people cleaning graffiti, painting walls and litter picking.

The council assert that it is vital to get the right person for the job. The individual needs to be able to communicate and build trust with young people. However, it also requires work behind the scenes. The youth worker needs to be able to work with a variety of partners, pitch for funding and motivate others.

**Website: [www.iverparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.iverparishcouncil.gov.uk)**





**Number of electors:**

1,397

**Population:**

1,700

**Precept:**

£12,000

**Project: Mobile Cinema**

The parish of Awre in Gloucestershire is set in a rural area between the River Severn and the Forest of Dean proper. Neighbouring the Forest of Dean, designated as England's first National Park in 1938, the area sees a great number of tourists each year. The parish lies around four miles from the town of Lydney, five miles from the town of Cinderford and 18 miles from the city of Gloucester.

The parish has a fairly stable population with a significant number of senior citizens and a significant number of young people. There is little provision for young people who would have to travel to Gloucester for any significant nightlife for which the transport links are poor. The lack of provisions for young people lead to issues with anti-social behaviour in the parish.

The parish council was only too aware of the lack of facilities for young people and was concerned when the local youth club, run mainly by volunteers, closed.

In 2004, the council conducted a Parish Plan survey and as part of this included a specific questionnaire aimed at young people in the community. The responses from young people in the parish were very clear: there was nothing to do, and nowhere to go (the nearest towns are quite a distance away and public transport is limited). The responses overwhelmingly called for more activities.

The council was lucky enough to be able to call on a newly elected 21 year old councillor who took on the brief to liaise with the young people in the community and with the other councillors to find out exactly what they wanted and how they could improve things for the young people in the parish. A mobile cinema equipped with modern powerful systems, capable of showing the latest films was identified as the priority.

The youth club had subsequently reopened for younger children in the parish and it was felt that once set up in the

club the cinema would attract the older young people back to the club.

A funding source was identified through the Acorn Trust, administered by the district council and equipment hired from Monmouthshire County Council. The provision of a cinema proved to be very popular, attracting an average of around 40 people to each monthly showing.

However, it has not all been plain sailing and the parish council has been required to be proactive to ensure the continued provision of a cinema service.

Monmouthshire County Council decided not to continue hiring its equipment. This resulted in the parish council having to discontinue the cinema service and take time to consider how they could get around this problem. Enquiries were made and a suitable commercial equipment supplier was identified, which enabled the council to restart the screenings. Hiring equipment through a commercial supplier inevitably meant that costs were higher and eventually the initial grant was used up.

The council secured alternative funding to help support the service into the future and is now making plans to purchase its own equipment. There are a number of benefits to this approach, not least the fact that this will enable the council to ensure that the scheme becomes self supporting. The council also envisage further funding to support the service coming from the hire of the equipment, which would become a parish resource.

In hindsight, the parish council would have given serious thought to purchasing its own equipment much sooner. However, at the outset of the project the parish council was understandably unsure of the longer term demand for the facility and felt that the source available seemed to be the best.

**Website: [www.awre-parish-council.org.uk](http://www.awre-parish-council.org.uk)**

## Sprotbrough & Cusworth Parish Council

**Number of electors:**

9,500

**Population:**

12,500

**Precept:**

£128,000

**Project: Skate park**

Sprotbrough & Cusworth is situated two miles from Doncaster near to the A1 and consists of two large residential areas: Cusworth/Scawsby and Sprotbrough.

The parish council undertook consultation via a community-led plan that identified a wish for a Skate/BMX Park. Provision for young people in the parish is excellent with four recreation sites, four young children's playgrounds, four basketball courts and senior and junior football pitches with pavilions. In addition the parish council runs a community centre and jointly runs another with a neighbouring parish, which caters for a wide range of groups and organisations. However, it was recognised that the area did not have a great deal of 'non-structured' activity available. Therefore, given the wish for a skate park, identified in the community-led plan, the parish council decided to act.

The first step the parish council took was to take advice from a play/sport consultant and the landscape architect section of the local principal authority, which helped to identify a project manager/coordinator – the Groundwork Trust. Groundwork then helped to identify a suitable location in the parish. A consultation exercise was carried out with local schools and local residents given the opportunity to have their say. Councillors and young people also visited existing skate parks to determine what might work in Sprotbrough & Cusworth. A consultation day was then held where young people could have their say on the proposed design. Groundwork assisted with issues such as planning and helped to secure around 50% of costs in grant funding.

As the project took shape, the parish council set up a small project team consisting of members of Groundwork, the parish council and the contractor who met weekly. There was also a twice weekly liaison with 'Friends of the Skate Park' group represented by young people and residents. The group is still active and meets with the parish council once a month.

There were a number of issues that needed to be addressed as the project progressed, not least the concerns of local

## Sprotbrough & Cusworth Parish Council

residents with regard to the potential for anti-social behaviour and noise. The parish council liaised throughout with local police and community wardens and has ensured a visible presence with patrols both targeted and ongoing.

As a result of the partnership with the Groundwork Trust, an additional grant was secured to be paid over three years for sports development. The costs associated with the project needed careful planning as the parish council was not eligible for certain regeneration funds. Therefore, the parish council had to commit reserve funding. Operation costs were also assessed for future budget implications, as were the implications for increased staff time. An allowance for damage, vandalism and insurance was also considered.

The skate park has been a great success since opening in 2005; the project won 'Regional best village venture', an award given by the Yorkshire Rural Community Council and the parish council is already consulting with the User Group about the possibility of upgrading and extending the park. These considerations have been brought on by its huge popularity within the parish and across the region as a whole. However, the parish council has a responsibility to all of its young people and a current priority is to upgrade its playgrounds aimed at younger children.

The parish council has learnt that good partnerships, time spent brainstorming and project planning and community consultation really pays off. Equally valuable is keeping in touch with the roots or driving force within the community, in the case of Sprotbrough & Cusworth, the User Group, made up of local young people and parents.

It has also been vital that the parish council have adequate insurance cover for what is considered an extreme sport with high risk injury status, that regular risk assessments are undertaken and that instances of vandalism are budgeted for. But while vandalism does occur, the vast majority of young people value the facility and contribute to its maintenance.

**Website: [www.sc-pc.co.uk](http://www.sc-pc.co.uk)**





**Number of electors:**

14,240

**Population:**

17,585

**Precept:**

£252,000

**Project: Skatepark and Buddy System**

Beverley is a traditional market town in the East Riding of Yorkshire some eight miles north west of the city of Hull. It has an overall population of about 30,000 covering the three parishes of Beverley Town Council and Molescroft and Woodmansey parish councils. While the town has been categorised nationally as the most affordably affluent town in the country, there are hidden pockets of significant deprivation in terms of educational attainment, employment and mobility. The area has a high proportion of young people who either live or are educated in the town and there has been much discussion on the lack of youth provision within the town.

The project to provide a skatepark facility evolved following representation from a group of avid local skateboarders who had nowhere to skate other than the town centre. The group had identified a number of facilities elsewhere, however, access to these facilities was limited by poor mobility and a lack of public transport. The young people agreed to help in the consultation, design and build, and fund-raising for the facility.

Consultation was undertaken with residents of the town and with its young people to establish the type of facility required and also, given that the town council did not own any land, the location within the town. Much of the funding was secured through Sport England in conjunction with the East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Sports Development Unit and young people were involved in the design and build of the facility and continue to be actively involved in suggesting ideas for improvements and importantly, self policing of the area.

Beverley Skatepark was completed in 2005. Designed to help solve the youth problems in the town it actually became a focus for different youth factions and became the central point for the groups to meet and cause unrest. The genuine skatepark users were aware that they were becoming the scapegoats for the unrest at a facility they had lobbied to be built. As a result they decided to take ownership of the project and the Beverley Skatepark Buddies was

formed. They monitor activity at the site, provide technical assistance to users of the facility and are the eyes and ears for those organisations charged with the welfare of young people. The group operates a timetable system whereby at least one buddy is on site during the core hours of usage, are in regular contact with each other and regular skatepark users and with the assistance of the local authority are able to access key personnel that would assist in the event of an unwanted disturbance, for example leisure centre staff, youth workers and Police Community Support Officers.

The buddies system has been instrumental in reducing disturbance and introducing some of the harder to reach youth groups to the facility. They have provided valuable information to the authorities and, having been trained in the use of basic first aid, have been able to assist young people who have been injured on the site. The buddies have been well received locally and, perhaps more importantly, have been well received by their peers as a positive step by young people to address the issues of young people.

The buddies system has been so successful that in 2007 it was recognised by the Home Office, which awarded the Skatepark Buddies a Respect Award. Not only did it recognise the positive work the group has carried out, it also awarded them £1,000 that has gone towards further training, an expansion of the scheme and information boards.

The project has been a great success. The town council stress that the choice of contractor is vital and that securing the funding can at times be fraught, with goalposts being moved and challenging conditions being set. It also stresses the importance of involving young people at the conception stage and keeping them involved throughout, thus giving them a greater sense of ownership.

Overall, the project was hard work but ultimately very rewarding. The skatepark is a well used facility now run with minimal intervention by the town council.

**Website: [www.beverley.gov.uk](http://www.beverley.gov.uk)**

**Number of electors:**

15,499

**Population:**

20,500

**Precept:**

£316,905

**Project: Youth Support**

Halewood is located within the Merseyside area. A largely urban area surrounded to the north and east by farmland, the last 20 years have seen the area grow from an overspill council estate area of the city of Liverpool into a much larger town. The town has also seen a great deal of new build homes, which has created a great deal of diversity both socially and economically.

Halewood Town Council is a proactive council dedicated to improving the lives of local people including those of its younger residents. A Quality town council, its dedicated approach led to it being awarded the NALC/AON Council of the Year award in 2008.

Halewood Town Council has led on a diverse range of activities aimed at young people in the town: a youth council to ensure they remain in touch with the views of young people in the area, play areas for younger children, sports facilities and cultural opportunities.

An inclusive approach led to the creation of a youth council for the town in October 2007 during 'local democracy week'. The purpose of the youth council is to provide young people in the town with a voice. Representatives for the youth council are drawn from all of the primary schools in the town as well as representatives from the Centre of Learning. Still in its infancy it has proven to be an invaluable way of tapping into the thinking of young people in the town for the town council but also for a number of groups linked to the local principal authority, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

The youngest members of the community are not forgotten. The town council provides open spaces and playparks and completely refurbished the toddler playground in 2004. In addition to this, the council has, for the last five years, funded a pantomime (Oh no it hasn't! Oh yes it has!).

The annual pantomime now takes place at four separate venues on the first weekend in December. A minimal

admission charge per child covers drink, crisps and a selection box, all presented, of course, by Father Christmas. However, the local community do not take a back seat decorating all four venues as grottos.

Successful partnership-working was the key to securing a 'home' for the Halewood Junior Football League. Over a decade ago the sports centre, which was run by the town council that hosted the league, was bulldozed and a state-of-the-art leisure complex was built by the principal authority. The new leisure centre did not leave enough land to allow for the number of games that were needed. The town council allowed the league to continue on land it owned but this land did not have toilet facilities and running water and required the children to change in portakabins.

Everton Football Club made a bid to Barclays4Sport through the Football Foundation and with the support of Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council the existing Arncliffe Sports and Community Centre was extended. Working in partnership, a grant of £600,000 was secured from Barclays and the Football Federation while the borough council and town council each contributed £150,000. The work included additional changing facilities, the provision of two synthetic training pitches, a drainage system for the grass pitches and office space for both the league and for its sister organisation the Halewood Town Sports Association. The Halewood Junior Football League now has a place to call home.

The town council also seeks to engender cultural awareness and has previously worked with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra organising a Christmas concert, which included a choir consisting of pupils from local schools.

The example of Halewood Town Council shows the diverse service requirements of young people and how local councils can work to meet them.

**Website: [www.halewoodtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.halewoodtowncouncil.gov.uk)**



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## **Further Information**

Here are just a few organisations that can provide information, advice and guidance on a variety of issues that affect young people.

### **British Youth Council**

[www.byc.org.uk](http://www.byc.org.uk)

### **Rural Youth Network**

[www.ruralyouth.com](http://www.ruralyouth.com)

### **UK Youth Parliament**

[www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk)

### **The Citizenship Foundation**

[www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk)

### **The National Youth Agency**

[www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)

### **Whizz-Kids**

[www.whizz-kidz.org.uk](http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk)

### **Childline**

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### **The Children's Trust**

[www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk](http://www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk)

### **Every Child Matters**

[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)

### **Directgov**

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople)

### **The Electoral Commission**

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

If you are inspired by the examples in this booklet or work hard to support young people in your local area, NALC would be delighted to hear from you.

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