

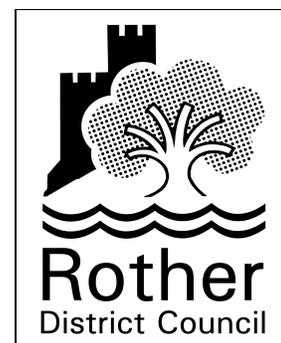
**Rother District Council**

**A Strategy for Young People in Rother 2010 – 2016**

**Consultation draft V3.0**

**April 2010**

**RDC Youth Strategy Working Group**



## **Rother District Council Youth Strategy**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Why develop a youth strategy for the Council?

Rother's Corporate Plan is very clear on the future vision for the District. It foresees, amongst a number of other factors,

*"A place of greater vibrancy with a more youthful demographic profile, supporting economically active lifestyles"*

What does this mean in practice? Rother District Council believes there is a task, the scale of which should not be underestimated, to influence the demographic profile of the district from a growing number of older people to a more balanced population where families, children and young people chose to live and remain in the area, contributing to both the economic activity and social and community life. We think that this will generate economic growth for the district in the form of higher value business activity and inward investment, halting a decline experienced most severely in the pockets of deprivation that exist in Rother. Without this growth the district will fail to keep pace with the rest of the South East and is susceptible to the social, economic and environmental challenges seen in other coastal areas and seaside towns.

The wider issues of this sustainability and regeneration task are addressed through the Community Strategy *Pride of Place*, the Council's Local Development Framework and the Economic Regeneration Strategy. The purpose of the youth strategy is to fit in beneath these strategic plans, influencing how the leadership, services and facilities of the Council are deployed to best effect in ensuring young people are able to play their part in Rother's future. This is not to give young people preferential treatment, an "easy ride" – there is evidence that the challenges facing young people are growing. Quality further and higher education, skills and training, well paid jobs and affordable accommodation, the cornerstones of a prosperous life in Rother, are not easy to secure, particularly for those born into disadvantage and poverty.

We are very realistic about the length of time such an ambition will take to achieve. This strategy is intended to set the way forward in the long term – as much as the next ten to fifteen years. The rolling action plan is naturally set to a shorter time frame and will receive regular monitoring and refresh.

The Council believes that this work is best achieved in partnership with an extensive range of players across public, business and voluntary sectors. It will contribute fully to this through the work of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership, the Rother Local Strategic Partnership and their associated thematic action and delivery groups. In itself this constitutes a wide network of groups and organisations, the complexity of which is not always easy to navigate.

It is therefore considered important that the Council is very clear about its role and responsibilities in the provision of services to young people, its engagement and involvement with young people in decision making, in turn leading to better understanding of young people's needs at a number of levels. In setting out its own

objectives, the Council is developing its awareness of its partnership responsibilities and will seek to maximise partnership opportunities across all areas of its delivery. A process of regular monitoring and review will ensure that any changes to the plans set out here are driven by an understanding of the wider partnership picture.

Equally, we are keen to improve how we co-ordinate work that cuts across the internal service delivery structure of the council. By taking a thematic rather than functional look at how we impact on the lives of young people, we hope to develop new insights and learn more effective ways of working with and for young people. In this way we can ensure we are fulfilling our duties and continuing to meet the needs of young people as far as our powers, opportunities and resources allow.

Most importantly of all, the strategy is about raising the profile of the achievements of young people in Rother and challenging the evidence of a developing popular mindset that can sometimes see young people as a threat or a problem. It is our view that a more widespread appreciation of the potential of young people and the value that their contribution makes to life in the area will lead to more cohesive, better balanced communities in which people of all ages get on well as good neighbours.

### **A note about age ranges**

Our plan takes a broad and inclusive understanding of the term young people, ranging in age between about 11 and 25 years. This arises in part because different themes apply in different ways to fairly small age bands. For instance, our approach to housing needs and homelessness approaches 15 year olds, 18 year olds and 25 year olds in very different ways. Similarly participation and engagement plans need to take account of the wide range of young people rather than develop a “one size fits all” approach. Work to prevent youth unemployment may extend to 11 or 12 year olds in an attempt to ensure they remain engaged throughout their secondary school experience.

### **A note on how the strategy has been made**

The starting point behind the formulation of this strategy has been to uncover the raft of evidence for how young people experience life in Rother. It became a firm guiding principle that to be effective the strategy has to deal with the realities of everyday life for young people, not generalised perceptions or preconceptions from whatever source.

This plan contains an extended account of the evidence in order to give coherence and logic to the subsequent strategic choices and action plan.

This evidence base was derived in three forms:

- Interviews with a wide range of witnesses
- Desktop studies of consultation and research reports
- Strategies and plans from local and national organisations

Some may be surprised that we did not start by a new process of youth consultation. This was a deliberate decision taken after the initial evidence trawl. A large number

of surveys and other consultations involving young people have been conducted in the area over recent times and the message that came across very clearly to us was that a fair degree of exasperation was setting in around the propensity to consult but failure to follow through on findings. It was important to us not to raise false expectations amongst young people. What we know of young people's views has had a great influence in developing this strategy. Engagement with young people on issues that matter to them will be a very important and we will enhance our skills in doing it well.

The work has been taken forward in three stages:

1. Evidence gathering
2. Options appraisal
3. Strategy setting

Through the summer of 2009 a number of evidence gathering sessions were held by the Council's appointed Youth Strategy Working Group, a task group of the Improvement and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Terms of Reference for the Group are attached at Appendix 1. The Group was clear from early on which areas they would investigate and which they would not. For clarity and a degree of convenience, the evidence gathering was structured into six themes:

Housing and health  
Local Development Framework  
Transport and access  
Jobs and skills  
Sports and leisure  
Participation, engagement and equalities  
Partnership and policy

These themes were selected from an initial desktop analysis of the issues coming out of recent literature and local community conferences. The areas that it was felt were very well covered by other scrutiny and planning activities and thus not forming part of the work of the group, except where they cut across Rother's own priorities, were:

Education and attainment  
Crime and anti-social behaviour  
Parenting and child protection

### **Working with young people: our values**

We are clear that we are not embarking on a youth work strategy nor are the actions we propose centred on youth work practice. We understand there are key skills and approaches to this specialist activity and currently this work is undertaken in the district in the main by the Youth Development Service of East Sussex County Council, alongside a number of voluntary sector providers.

There are nevertheless a set of underlying common values arising from youth work practice that we would like to adopt in our work with and for young people.

These values include:

Recognising that the starting point for young people's policy developments is the young person, their needs, interests and perspectives;

Promoting inclusiveness and valuing diversity;

Facilitating and empowering, listening to the young person's voice;

Developing and fulfilling the young person's potential, their capacity to grow and change.

### **A note on Rother's resources**

To reiterate, this Strategy seeks to provide a rationale and blueprint of actions the Council will undertake to improve the lives of young people in the district. One thing is immediately clear that the Council does not have the powers or resources to address all of the complex and intractable issues thrown up through considering the evidence. We will work in partnership, through the Local Strategic Partnership and others, to find further solutions where we can. We hope that being clear on our approach will help in some way to guide and strengthen the work of other agencies.

We want our own Action Plan and the resulting work of the Council to deliver on our set of strategic objectives for young people. Before setting this out, it is worth considering the resources available to us at this time to carry out our ideas.

The current financial climate (2009/10) is not advantageous for planning new publicly funded investment on either a capital or revenue basis. The medium term prognosis is that growth in the public sector will only be achieved by generating efficiencies from existing service budgets or leveraging in external funds. These external funds such as the Big Lottery are crucial to improved facilities and we can use this strategy to pursue them actively.

The economic outlook therefore guides us to plan for the kinds of activities that can be achieved at low cost and high impact. In some ways this suits our strategic objectives in relation to young people, relying on a shift of mindset, a better understanding of and a higher profile for young people rather than a heavy investment programme.

### **Our workforce**

Rother has not on the whole employed staff in the past with specific roles and responsibilities for young people. More recently however a number of areas across housing, leisure, sports, play and arts development, democratic services and policy have developed an increasing understanding of their needs. A good example of this is in the Housing Advice team where a member of staff has developed a specialism in mediation for parental eviction. Equally, Rother has been instrumental in promoting a focus on young people through the Local Strategic Partnership. Staff involved in the Local Development Framework have a strong understanding of the

requirement to include the needs of young people in future development across the district. It is important that further work goes into ensuring that staff recruitment, job descriptions and training for both Members and staff are developed appropriately to meeting the needs of young people.

Councillors have all participated in Member Development Plan, particularly the concept of supporting Members to work at grass roots level in their wards. There is further scope for assisting this development and helping Members of the Council to become familiar with young people and their concerns within their wards.

## 2. A PROFILE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Rother District<sup>1</sup>

It is useful to understand the characteristics of Rother as a district before looking at the lives of young people in particular.

Rother district covers some 500 square kilometres and is a predominantly rural district. Some 88,200 people currently live in Rother<sup>2</sup> many dispersed across the rural area, but with nearly half living in Bexhill. Whilst there are a high proportion of older people, especially those over 85 in Bexhill, there are an equal proportion of young people. This is often overlooked in demographic profiles, although it is true that the proportion of older people is set to rise.

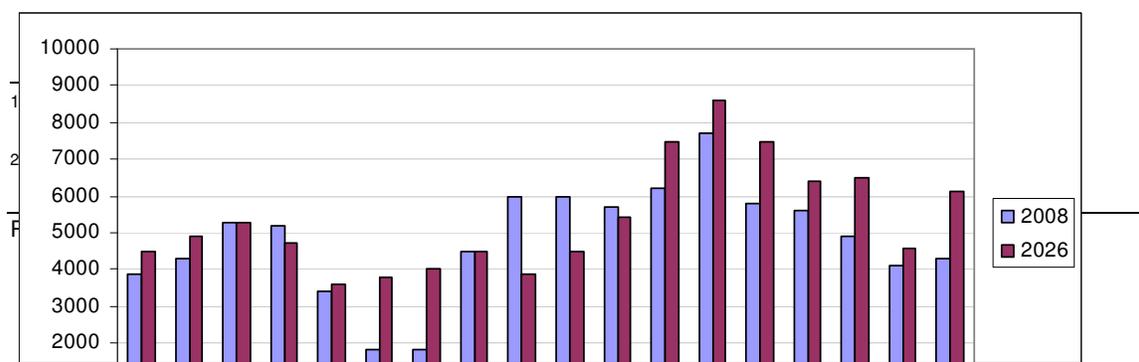
Rother is an attractive and safe place to live. The area benefits from a blend of some of the most beautiful countryside and coastline in South East England and contains the historic market towns of Battle and Rye, the Victorian/Edwardian seaside town of Bexhill and many picturesque villages. This character has arguably acted a key driver of the district's current demographic profile.

The economy is weak relative to the region as whole and average local incomes are correspondingly low. In part, this is a reflection of the poor economic conditions of neighbouring Hastings. Low earnings combined with the area's high house prices result in real difficulties of housing affordability, especially for younger people. This is fuelled by the higher purchasing power of many in-comers and out-commuters.

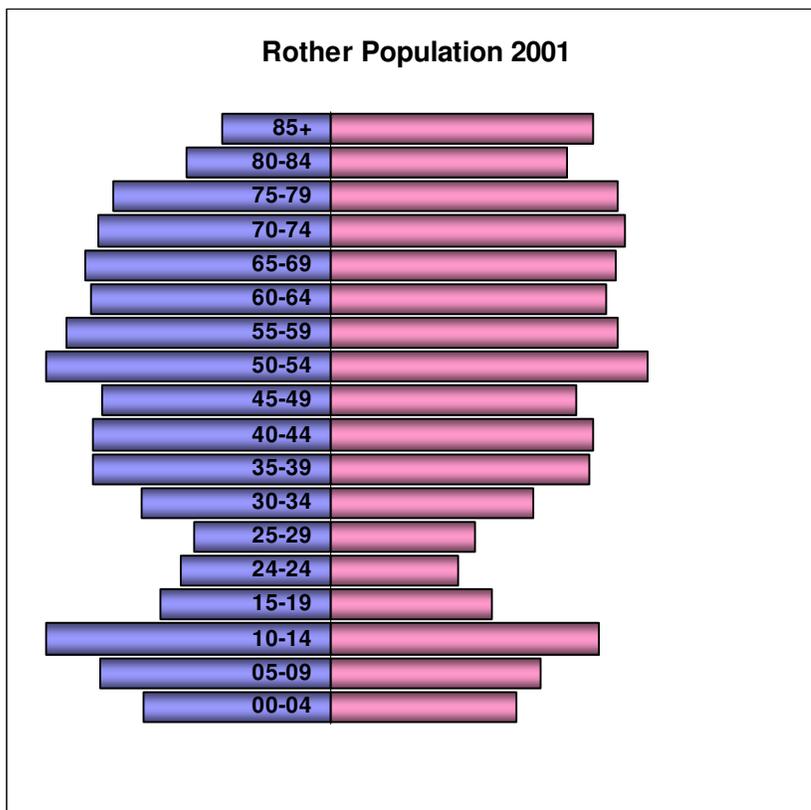
### Population

Rother's population has grown between 2001 and 2009 at a similar rate to the county as a whole. Between 2006 and 2026 the population in Rother is predicted to rise by about 6%. Rother recorded the highest proportion of residents aged 85 and over of all local authorities in England and Wales in the 2001 Census. The average age of the population in the 2001 census was 46.3, higher than the average age of the population in the East Sussex and the South East. Population density in 2001 was 1.7 persons per hectare in Rother, which was considerably lower than East Sussex and the South East.

The 2001 Census revealed that 22% of the Rother working population are economically inactive. This is the highest proportion of all the 67 local authority areas in the South East. The 2001 Census also reveals that 73% of occupied household dwellings in Rother were occupied by just one or two people. The District's average household size is 2.17 persons. This rate is one of the lowest in the South East, ranking 64<sup>th</sup> lowest of the 67 local authorities in the region. Rother's average household income in 2007 was £31,500 which is just 84% of the average household income of the South East (£37,000).



**Fig 1. Forecast changes to Rother population 2008 - 2026**



**Fig 2: Rother Population in 2001 (Source: Census)**

**Household Characteristics**

Rother has a much higher proportion of owner occupancy and a much lower proportion of social housing compared to the national, regional and county averages. In Rother, 78% of households are owner-occupiers, just 11.5% socially rented and 10% privately rented. There are considerable variations across the district in relation to this average figure.

## **Housing Affordability**

The relative affordability of housing is a significant issue in Rother. Over the period 2000-2006, the average price of a house in the District increased at a much greater rate than the increase in average income over the same period. The ratio between lower quartile house prices and lower quartile income is now 16:1 in Rother – meaning a low income family needs 16 times their annual income to buy a house. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation ranks Rother in the top 30 ‘least affordable’ districts in Great Britain.

Research into homelessness<sup>3</sup> in the district found the main causes to be:

- Debt problems, including mortgage repossession
- Domestic violence
- Parental eviction
- Low local incomes
- Advice and support
- High demand/shortage of affordable options
- Empty homes and second home ownership
- Lack of effective mediation

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<sup>3</sup> RDC Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2013

## **Economy and Employment**

The highest percentage of Rother's working population is employed in the service sector, higher than the region as a whole. The regional importance of financial and businesses services in employment terms is not reflected locally nor is employment in transport and communications. Median gross weekly earnings (by place of work) in Rother at £344.5 are 28.3% lower than earnings in the South East. Unemployment in Rother in July 2008 as measured by Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimant rate stood at 1.7%, against the South East average of 1.4%. The claimant rate in Rother has decreased since January 2008 when it stood at 1.9%.

## **Socio-economic Issues**

According to the 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Rother has an overall rank of 166 out of the 354 English local authorities, where the most deprived local authority is ranked 1. Rother is therefore in the middle of the range. However, there has been a fall in the ranking since 2004 when Rother was ranked 191<sup>st</sup>, with 78% of Rother localities showing a worse ranking. There are pockets of deeper deprivation within this overall picture, notable in Bexhill town centre and Sidley and in Rye and eastern Rother. The IMD methodology also masks the depth of the rural share of deprivation, where sparse population densities prevent the registration of clusters of rural poverty. Nonetheless there is a significant proportion of the rural Rother population living on or below average incomes.

Rother has generally low offence rates compared with East Sussex, the South East and England and Wales and recorded a reduction in crime of 22.6% in 2008/09.

## Young People in Rother District Council

Data is held on a wide variety of indicators by East Sussex Children's Services, much centring on the requirements of education and attainment, looked after children and offending behaviour. It is not easy to obtain a rounded picture of young people's lives in Rother from the data alone, although the following key issues provide a starting point.

### Poverty

In Rother 18% of 0-16s live in poverty, some 2,600 children. This widely used definition of poverty encompasses those living on less than two thirds of the average local wage. This compares with 10% in Wealden and 29% in Hastings. Using free school meals as a proxy indicator shows higher than average levels of poverty in Bexhill Central, Eastern Rother, Rye, St Michael's and Sidley.

Two-thirds of children with lone parents are poor, compared with one-quarter of children with two parents. The relative disadvantage of children with one parent has risen since 1979, largely because the parent is less likely to have a full time job. 42% children in poverty are from families with 3 or more children. The majority (54%) of poor children live in a household where at least one adult works.

Research shows that children from poorer families have less life chances in general than those from more privileged families. Poverty is shown to shorten the life expectancy of an individual. Poor children are often born with low birth weight, closely associated with infant death and chronic diseases in later life. Poverty shapes children's educational development: before reaching his or her second birthday, a child from a poorer family is already more likely to show a lower level of attainment than child from a financially better off family<sup>4</sup>. Research suggests that young adults who suffered financial hardship as children, were in trouble with the law or played truant have significantly greater than average chances of earning lower wages, being unemployed, spending time in prison (men) or becoming a lone parent (women). These associations exist independently of socio-economic background or experiences in early childhood. They are only partly accounted for by lower educational attainment<sup>5</sup>.

### Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy rates in Rother show a year on year increase since 2001, with last reported teenage conception rates at 29.6 per 1000 females, compared with a figure of 34.5 for the county as a whole. However figures for Bexhill Central and Sidley run considerably higher than the district wide rate, at 52.3 and 90.9 respectively.

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<sup>4</sup> [endchildpoverty.org](http://endchildpoverty.org)

<sup>5</sup> *Poverty and its Consequences*: Paul Gregg, Susan Harkness and Stephen Machin

## **Alcohol and smoking**

A health related behaviour survey conducted in 2007 with 15 year olds found that 19% of students reported never drinking alcohol at all, up from 9% in 2004. Of those who reported drinking in the past 7 days, one in five reported getting drunk on at least one occasion. 42% of students say that if drinking was ever done at home it always took place with their parents' knowledge. The survey found that 6% of boys and 5% of girls in Rother reported drinking over 14 units of alcohol in the past 7 days, not significantly different to the county as a whole but above the safe upper limits for women. 12% of students in this survey smoked at least one cigarette in the past 7 days.

## **Young people missing out on education, employment and training**

Young people leaving school at 16 without a college or sixth form place, job or training are sometimes classified as "NEET". In Rother the number of NEETs in 2009 is above the local average and rising. The reasons behind this trend are not well enough understood and work is underway to identify the issues behind the statistics. We know that young people and youth employment have borne the brunt of the recession over the past year or so.

## What do young people themselves say?

Findings from a survey of young people attending the East Sussex Rural Youth Conference, October 2008.

1. What's important to making somewhere a good place to live?

Job prospects, Health care, Shopping, Low crime levels

2. How satisfied are you with?

Sports and leisure facilities	Over half dissatisfied
Parks and play areas	Over half dissatisfied, 40% very dissatisfied
Arts and music venues	Nearly 80% dissatisfied
Job prospects	56% dissatisfied
The area you live in	33% satisfied, 43% dissatisfied

3. To what extent do you think that people from different backgrounds get along well together in your area?

38% agree, 24% disagree, 23% not sure

4. How well informed do you feel about services for young people in your area

55% not well, 26% well informed

5. Do you agree that you can influence decisions in your area?

50% disagree, 39% agree

6. Generally speaking would you like to be more involved in the decisions that affect your area?

47% yes, 0% No, 48% depends on issue

7. How safe or unsafe do you feel when outside in your local area after dark?

46% safe, 40% unsafe

8. How safe or unsafe do you feel when outside in your local area during the day/

85% safe, 10% unsafe

9. What crimes concern you most in your area?

Criminal damage, Sexual offences, Speeding, Drugs use

10. How many days per week on average do you take part in 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise?

5+ days 41%, 4 days 21%, 3 days 11%, 2 days 5%, 1 day 15%

11. Do you do any voluntary work to help other people?

30% occasionally, 38% regularly, 32% not at all

## **The National and Local Policy Context**

NB A short description of each of these policy drivers will be added before publication of this strategy.

### **Every Child Matters**

**Being healthy** – enjoying good physical and mental health and pursuing a healthy lifestyle

**Staying safe** – being protected from harm and neglect and growing up able to look after oneself

**Enjoying and achieving** – getting the most out of life and developing broad skills for adulthood

**Making a positive contribution** - to the community and to society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviours

**Economic wellbeing** – overcoming disadvantage

### **Youth Matters**

**Hidden Talents: LGA paper on young people's prospects, published October 2009**

#### **Children and Young People's Plan East Sussex, 2008 – 2011**

Priorities for Rother include:

- Reducing teenage pregnancy
- Improving mental health
- Reducing child poverty
- Identifying the problems for young people who are NEET
- Responding to youth homelessness

#### **Pride of Place: East Sussex Sustainable Community Strategy**

#### **Rother Local Action Plans**

#### **Rother LDF Core Strategy**

#### **Rother Economic Regeneration Strategy**

#### **Rother Housing Strategy**

#### **Rother Sports and Leisure Strategies**

- Hastings and Rother Leisure Facility Strategy 2009 – completed
- Rother Playing Pitch Strategy – due to be completed 2010

### 3. WHAT THE EVIDENCE TOLD US

This next section of the strategy pulls together material from the evidence gathering sessions that were held by the Youth Strategy Working Group over the summer of 2009. A broad range of individuals helped the Working Group to understand the current issues for young people in Rother. The resulting discussions, as recorded here, were a fascinating mix of fact, present policy, agency perspective and personal opinion.

#### 3.1 Leadership, partnership and strategic planning

This session brought together the Portfolio Holder and Strategic Management Team in Rother with the Lead Member for young people at East Sussex County Council and a representative from the voluntary sector with the Working Group.

##### **Key Points:**

- Investing in regenerating the District infrastructure was critical, as was addressing deprivation
- We must continue to encourage a partnership approach
- Agencies are committed to developing community facilities as far as resources allowed
- Recognition of transport and access issues for young people in particular
- Engagement with young people was vitally important
- The Local Development Framework would determine much of the future picture for change
- Encouraging an evening economy and community activity was vital to creating a more vibrant place to live

A key long-term aspiration of Rother District Council was to attract younger families into the district. Rother was meeting this key aspiration by investing in the District including Sidley Goods Yard, Next Wave, De La Warr Pavilion, Children's Centre facilities in Sidley and Egerton Park; (details of these can be found in the corporate Plan 2006-2016)

The Council had a role to play in encouraging partners to take more of an interest in young people. There was a need for Town and Parish Councils to be more open to services for young people.

Town centres need review and action – they were usually deserted after 6pm whereas in the past these were places where communities socialised more freely. Coastal towns would be popular places to live in the future – but only those that are investing in development. New technology and improved communication links may well see a migration from the cities to the coastal areas for reasons of quality of life.

Activities for young people could be restricted by local neighbourhoods / noise objectors / other service users. As a result skate-parks and other play areas are

more often than not located in out of the way places / insecure places – the young people are considered as an unwanted annoyance.

The Council takes its duty to provide facilities seriously – parks, open spaces, sports pitches (well used, popular with youth), playgrounds, leisure centres and skate parks.

Young people face tougher financial barriers today - costs of renting a place to live, university debts, cost of living – car insurance - opportunities for work are limited (both seasonal/temporary and full-time).

The Council needs to think of its marketing approach - price (sports centres / activities), place (can they access facilities), product (is it what they want) and promotion (do they know about it).

The current strategic aims for Rother District Council were around providing safe places to play, quality sports pitches/open spaces/leisure centres, informal play areas; to make sure housing needs were met, to help make town centres vibrant places during day and evening and most importantly, engage with young people and let them experience, learn and explore.

Rother District Council spent a significant amount of money on activities related to young people – but like the provision of any service, it needed to be directed to where it could be put to best use.

ESCC valued the good working relationship it had with Rother District and the good work that was being done together as part of the East Sussex Children's and Young Peoples' Plan. ESCC had one of the lowest budgets for the provision of children's services and there would be further budget constraints next year.

Engaging with young people was key but one size does not fit all, there was a need to get away from the "tick-box" mentality of some consultations.

Transport was a difficult issue, both rural and urban – a more innovative approach to these issues was required.

## **The Local Development Framework (LDF)**

The LDF is intended to create and deliver the vision for development of the District. The challenge of the LDF is to promote a place that provides sufficient housing and business development, new training and employment opportunities, amenities and access, recreation and cultural provision, in order to retain young people within the area. There is a duty to ensure that young people are involved through the strategy process in order to shape the future of the District.

The anticipated growth in the younger age groups within the context of an ageing population provides an opportunity for the District. The challenge is providing the necessary measures to meet young people's needs and aspirations to encourage them to remain in the District.

Targeted consultation was held with local school children and college students during the Core Strategy Consultation on Strategy Directions in order to ensure the Strategy reflected their views. For secondary school age children, public transport and services came out as a key concern, as well as sufficient recreation facilities for their age group. For college students, local nightlife was seen as something that could be most improved, as well as wage levels and local cost of living. Public transport was also a significant concern.

The Core Strategy will have a section dedicated to young people which will focus on achieving a sustainable, prosperous future for younger people within Rother, particularly in terms of education and training, employment, housing affordability, health and recreation. These elements should help to promote Rother as an attractive prospect for younger people as a place to live.

### **3.2 Health and Housing Issues**

This session brought together practitioners from the Primary Care Trust, Housing Associations and District Council staff with the Working Group.

#### **Key Points:**

Health issues for young people across the district:

- Teenage pregnancy, Smoking, Alcohol consumption, Active lifestyles and participation in exercise

Housing issues:

- Affordability and supply of homes to rent
- Sofa surfing or hidden homelessness
- Parental eviction
- Advice and guidance to prevent housing need

Choosing healthy, active lifestyles and avoiding risky behaviour is a topical issue for young people. Alcohol, smoking and substance misuse, teenage parenthood and obesity are some of the challenges to overcome. Mental wellbeing is also clearly important and could be enhanced through a range of services, including creativity through arts and music.

RDC was working with Police, Trading Standards and Crime Reduction Partnership to reduce under age sales of alcohol. Not many premises failed the under age sales test but this may mean the test was not effective in identifying what was actually occurring. There was a persistent problem of adults buying alcohol to give to young people.

The level of obesity in the district was considered average when compared with national trends. Increasingly young people don't sit round a table to eat meals with their families. A Healthy School initiative aimed to provide healthy food for pupils.

The Primary Care Trust was encouraging young people to quit smoking. Efforts had been increased to work with local schools on sexual health and relationships education for their pupils.

There was a need to improve the means by which young people received information and make sure that young people were given enough information to make their own informed choices.

There is a well documented shortage of affordable housing solutions in Rother, with a high income to house price ratio impacts on young people and their families. This can force households to share accommodation across generations in a way that creates problems for all concerned.

In 2008/09 31 people were accepted as homeless in the district. 11 (>30%) of these were 16-17 year olds. Many more were hidden homeless, the “sofa surfers”.

Homelessness triggers: a new partners in the house, pregnancy, and the children’s relationships with family members and other. Quite often the same families are making children homeless once they reach the age of 16.

There is a strong link between youth homelessness, education, skills and training. Raising the school leaving age to 18 will have an impact on the economic contribution a young person is able to make to their family – sometimes a cause of parental eviction.

Some young people would always require independent accommodation as they cannot stay with their families. There is a small supply of supported lodgings whereby young people were able to rent a room with a responsible adult. This provision is administered by the County Council who have the task of vetting landlords for under-18s through their Children’s Service department.

Recent tenants’ surveys showed complaints from local residents about young people. The same survey showed that young people felt there was little for them to do in the district.

There is a problem with the location of some of the housing stock in the district for young people, away from jobs with poor public transport links.

There were 16 units of supported housing for young people, managed by Sanctuary Housing.

The Council was sponsoring an initiative aimed at informing school students about housing issues through an interactive play, *Sean’s Story*. The play explored homelessness, its impact on people, the support available, and the triggers (drugs, alcohol and behaviour).

RDC was working with ESCC and other housing authorities in the District on a Countywide Youth Homelessness Strategy to ensure that young people get the support they need to prevent homelessness and helping to house them if there is no

alternative solution. The strategy's overriding aim was to put young people's needs first. Most often this was to remain at home with their family if this could be achieved.

Key ideas for improvement included: drop in advice surgeries, telephone or online advice for young people. A housing officer available online at certain periods of the day. A project for young people work with local firms to improve empty properties and obtain a tenancy as an end result. the housing team to set up systems to forecast which young people would need support in regard to potential homelessness. social landlords to increase engagement with young people in tenancy support projects. Better support for young people to help them set up and maintain a tenancy. Family intervention and mediation to reduce parental eviction rates.

### 3.3 Transport and access issues

#### Key Points:

- Cost and availability of public transport for education and jobs
- Lack of evening buses was a particular issue for both social life and jobs
- Lack of cycle routes and footpaths for safe alternatives to car use
- Reliance on parents was problematical for young people
- Underuse of community transport solutions

In a largely rural area of some 500 kms<sup>2</sup> there are issues of access to education, employment and leisure, posing often insurmountable difficulties to young people in holding down a job or college place. New public and community transport solutions have been limited to date. The provision of important services only in urban centres, for instance sexual health clinics, impacts negatively on young people in rural areas, limiting fair access for all.

ESCC bus priorities are access to education and employment, access to shops and town centres, leisure activities and evenings and weekends. ESCC has a limited bus budget and private operators are expected to contribute 40% towards to costs of running subsidised services. It was noted that there was a conflict in terms of the provision of bus services for taking children to school and providing a service for commuters to use to go to work. In 2007 95% of peak bus services were services provided for schools.

It was identified that young people could take the bus into town to take part in evening activities however because the bus services finish early they could not get a bus back home again.

The concessionary scheme for older people meant there was less incentive for bus operators to provide evening and weekend services.

The cost of bus fares was an issue for young people; there are no reduced fares for young people aged 16-19 although a Pathfinder ticket that cost £11.50 per week for a young person below age of 19 years and in full time education was available. However this ticket was not always cost effective for those in 6<sup>th</sup> form who only needed to be in college 3 days a week. Bus journeys to college from rural areas took a long time. A journey from Camber to Bexhill College takes 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Young people had a fear of using public transport, of being thrown off buses and left in the middle of nowhere – this fear made parents reluctant to let their children have independence. There was a huge reliance on parents to take children to places.

There was a misconception that community transport was for the elderly and disabled. Most of community transport provision was run using volunteers. Providers would need to pay drivers to drive the buses with young people on them in the evening. On average it costs £2.18 per mile to run CT buses and generally young people benefitted from half price fares.

A scheme to get young people to use the train service more often had been successful in Rye.

Some councils provide young people with bikes or mopeds to help their transport requirements.

Cycle routes should be looked at for their safety and convenience especially main routes to schools and colleges.

### **3.4 Skills and employment issues**

#### **Key Points:**

- Growth in number of NEETs (Not in education, employment or training)
- Lack of good job opportunities for 16 – 25s
- Low wage economy in Rother
- Lack of apprenticeships and trainee posts
- Tendency for small hard core group to disengage from education 11 - 14

There are worrying statistics regarding the economic prospects of young people in Rother, including a rise in the number of 16 and 17 year olds not in employment, education or training (NEETS). This perpetuates a cycle of deprivation and clearly impacts heavily on young people's life chances of meaningful employment, home and family life.

Of those young people who do go on to further and higher education, many choose not to return to the district, perpetuating a cycle of limited economic growth. Information, advice and guidance play an important role in ensuring all young people

have the chance to succeed and how this is delivered may be part of Members' consideration of the theme.

Career opportunities for young people in Rother were low and young better qualified people tended to leave. Young professional people were moving out of area to work in London and Brighton.

More apprenticeships were needed alongside investment in transport and technology for business growth.

Opportunities such as the building of the Hastings to Bexhill Link road would bring more jobs to the area and benefit young people.

Careers information and guidance was provided through the Connexions service, however it was understood that this was subject to resource constraints.

Young Pioneers, a voluntary sector agency for young people run from Ashburnham, were developing a project in Rother to reduce the number of NEET and pre-NEET young people. They were further developing ambitious plans to provide a centre in Rother to provide youth enterprise training, nurturing young people to develop realistically-scaled start up enterprises of their own.

RDC had a role to play in monitoring and promoting the education improvement agenda.

RDC was running an apprenticeship programme for two young people. The council was looking at ways of working to provide more employment opportunities and trainee posts for young people;

### **3.5 Social, leisure and recreation activity issues**

#### **Key Points:**

- Lack of general youth club offer
- Current youth club facilities in need of refurbishment
- Difficulty in retaining adult volunteers for youth provision
- Difficulty in informing young people of opportunities
- Challenge-based opportunities e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, hard to sustain
- Large investment needed to enhance facilities e.g. Bexhill Leisure Centre and Pool

Activities for teenagers have been top of residents' agenda for improvement for a number of years now. There have undoubtedly been increases and improvements in provision in both indoor and outdoor provision but nonetheless it will be important to test where gaps exist and how these might be best met.

### **The range of facilities available to young people in Rother**

- Sports centres
- Swimming pools
- Sports halls
- Community centres
- Youth centres
- Village halls
- Church halls
- Health and fitness gyms
- Arts venues
- Museums
- BMX tracks
- Cycle tracks
- Schools
- Colleges / universities
- Water sport centres
- Play areas
- Recreation grounds
- Playing pitches
- Synthetic turf pitches
- Multi use games area (MUGA)
- Kickabout areas
- Skate / BMX Parks
- Countryside
- Beaches

More people need to be encouraged to train as volunteers.

Bexhill and Rye Sports Leisure Centres had produced an activity programme for young people during the school holidays.

Bexhill Museum had been updated and recently reopened. The museum encouraged the young to participate in its activities. There was a family room there with activities for children and young people who were able to get work experience at the museums during school holidays. These volunteers got involved with making new displays for the museum.

The Bexhill Youth and Community Centre was very popular and well used. However the building was in need of refurbishment but funding was difficult to obtain.

It was identified that there was a lack of youth clubs in the district generally. Young people needed somewhere safe to go.

Need to also try and provide the young with skills as well as activities and more could be done to encourage the young to get dance, music and sports qualifications.

Develop communications and marketing to attract more young people.

Increase challenge, adventure and achievement opportunities, such as Operation Raleigh, Duke of Edinburgh awards, work experience and part time work, career days, outbound courses, Prince's Trust, cadets, international assignments and global projects;

Encourage employee engagement partnerships whereby employers would support staff opportunities to do voluntary work (eg Rolls Royce working with the Scout Association)

Focus grant funding to clubs and organisations that support and encourage young people.

Invest in more and better facilities for young people such as MUGAs, skate parks, training areas and sports pitches within walking and cycling distance, improved provision for young people with disabilities.

Support more youth centres as hubs of activity

Maintain a range of high quality facilities for sport and cultural activity;

### **3.6 Participation, engagement and equality**

#### **Key Points:**

- Current involvement of youth voice can be patchy but very valuable in policy making
- Hard to reach groups not always engaged – need to find the right channels
- Minority voices not always heard
- Big district to cover with youth councils and good opportunity to use secondary schools
- Opportunities for greater partnership working need to be grasped

Surveys have shown that young people wish to be involved and engaged in decisions that affect their lives and the wider community. Many organisations, such as Scouts, the Prince's Trust and others, have shown that young people are able to make significant contributions through volunteering and other engagement. There is justifiable pressure to enhance how this works and how young people are offered opportunities to participate in and contribute to civic and community life. It is particularly relevant to the Council to evaluate and support equality of opportunity for young people to engage in civic and democratic life.

The Council had been one of the first councils to participate in “I’m a Councillor, get me out of here”, which was a web-based interaction between young people and elected Members. The Council had also participated in 3 political “speed-dating” events held at Claverham (Battle), St Richards (Bexhill) and Thomas Peacock (Rye) – these had worked well in engaging with the students.

The Council was supporting the first meeting of the Bexhill Primary Schools Council which brought together children from each of the Bexhill Primary Schools to discuss matters of concern and to feedback their views to the Council.

Cabinet had received various presentations by young people and this was encouraged wherever possible. The option for greater youth involvement in the Council's scrutiny processes had been written into the Constitution but had as yet not been fully utilised. Previous efforts to produce a youth website for the district had not come to fruition however more resources were now available for this; the Council was looking at new electronic media / social networking sites to reach younger audiences.

There was no problem at all in engaging the youth over recycling issues –they were great ambassadors for recycling.

Methods of communication with young people had to be different. There were some good examples across the Council of working and engaging with the youth from helping to name the new Elva Business Centre (Sidley Goods Yard) development, to discussions on the Next Wave proposals in local primary schools to the play pathfinder scheme and finding out what play equipment was wanted;

There needed to be a frank and open dialogue with young people to find out what they wanted to hear from the Council and how they wanted to receive it.

Formal consultation with young people was difficult – being conscious of this fact allowed the Council to make extra efforts to reach this group - nearly every other age group within the community were represented and happy to express an opinion through formal consultation.

Young people were less likely to attend consultation exhibitions and if they did, were unlikely to complete questionnaires etc; the hardest to reach group appeared to be young males;

The hardest group to engage through the Citizen's Panel was the 18-30 range; this could be overcome to some extent by street interviews. There was an option to establish a Young Citizen's Panel for the under 18 age group.

There was work to do to learn more about the diversity of Rother young population – ethnicity – disability – religious beliefs – sexual orientation; equally the Council could involve special needs schools.

Robertsbridge Community College had its own radio station – this might be a good way to engage with older school pupils.

### **Evidence from Bexhill Youth Council**

The main campaign at the current time was focussing on safety and following a survey with over 500 responders, street lighting and pavements were highlighted as the main issues which were being taken further. The Council was looking to strengthen links with the youth councils of Hastings and Eastbourne through joint meetings although the mechanics of this had yet to be worked out. The rural youth groups were made welcome when they visited Bexhill, although the network tended to be stronger along the coastal towns. The Council had recently joined the National British Youth Councils which was bringing a national perspective back to Bexhill. Ian Coleman had recently spoke to the Bexhill Youth Council regarding the LAP process and it had been agreed that a separate, bespoke questionnaire for the youth be drawn up which would be distributed to the youth clubs and councils.

It was noted that Bexhill Youth Council currently managed to run within the limited financial resources available to it. However there had recently been an increase in membership which may lead to more activities and more funding may be required in

the future. Bexhill Youth Council was made up of young people from the 13-17 age group and the majority left the Council once they turned 18. The only exception to that were those members from St. Mary's School who tended to stay on until they had developed sufficiently to move on.

### **Evidence from ESCC Youth Participation Unit**

Each Youth Cabinet had a lifespan of 2 years and in November 2007 nearly 17,000 young people across the county voted to elect new members to the Youth Cabinet (the Big Vote). There were 18 members appointed to the Cabinet from 9 voting districts – Rother had 2 seats. The Youth Cabinet was not run along party political lines and every member was independent and worked around issues that were important to them and their constituents. The current Youth Cabinet was focussed on smoking, drug use and places to go and things to do. Their work had resulted in a number of real outcomes including:

- A survey of 1000 year 8 and 10 pupils had been undertaken which had resulted in the production of a DVD Why Smoke? This was used as part of a learning package delivered through the PHSE programme at schools and the funding of a smoking cessation officer by the PCT;
- A detailed report identifying the gaps in youth services and a possible extension of hours for youth centres was being considered. It was estimated that there were in the region of 20-25 youth centres across the County;
- Drug use had focussed on alcohol and the problem of under age binge drinking – work had been done in conjunction with Trading Standards and 6 retail outlets had been identified as selling alcohol to young people and these were currently being dealt with through the courts.

They had identified a need for greater partnership working between the Youth Cabinet and local agencies and service providers.

#### 4. A VISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROTHER<sup>6</sup>

Rother will be a place where young people:

Are celebrated and well cared for by their community, with a real recognition both of their distinctive and individual needs and of the huge asset to the community they represent;

Are protected against risks but supported to take increasing responsibility for all aspects of their lives, and to contribute to the wellbeing of their communities;

Have every opportunity: to learn and develop with high quality support; to achieve success in a wide range of fields at all ages; to have meaningful options to choose from; and to have high quality information and advice to guide them;

Have healthy lifestyles and are given access high quality services and facilities that promote good health;

Have the opportunity to benefit from and contribute to, the economic prosperity of the district; and

Participate as fully as possible in decisions that affect them personally, the development of services, broader strategic development and local democratic activity.

From this the Council has derived the following ambition for its contribution to young people's lives:

Rother District Council will endeavour to see that all young people in the district have access to a range of services, activities and facilities, information and support to enable them to participate as active members of the community

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<sup>6</sup> Drawn from the East Sussex Children and Young People's Plan 2008 – 2011 published by East Sussex CYPT

## **5. STRATEGIC AIMS and OBJECTIVES**

### **How can we work towards achieving our vision?**

Using all the evidence we have and matching it against the Council's resources and capabilities we have drawn up the following areas of focus over the term of the strategy:

#### **Aim 1:**

##### **Address the social and economic well being of young people in Rother**

1. Ensure young people's housing advice needs are met and that youth homelessness is prevented
2. Maximise affordable housing options for young people in the district through working in partnership with housing providers
3. Increase youth employment opportunities through our own workforce including work placements, apprenticeships and traineeships
4. Exploit the Council's employment sites and other council-owned assets for youth employment
5. Support youth enterprise initiatives
6. Contribute to education and training partnerships and projects
7. Campaign for better public transport options for young people
8. Use the Council's spatial planning and development control powers to enhance facilities and services for young people. Use the Council's scrutiny powers to advocate young people's rights.

#### **Aim 2:**

##### **Improve the understanding, inclusion and recognition of young people**

9. Support, acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of young people in Rother
10. Ensure young people have opportunities to participate in Council decision making, recognising diversity and promoting equality and inclusion
11. Enhance provision of Council information to young people, developing a strategic alliance with the local press and media as well as developing social networking opportunities on this issue

### **Aim 3:**

#### **Contribute to healthy and active lifestyles among young people**

12. Promote adult volunteering into youth activity across the district
13. Act in partnership to improve the health of young people
14. Enhance provision for young people in active leisure and recreation activities

#### **Way Forward**

After consultation, an Action Plan detailing the activity, timescale and lead member of staff would be drawn up to deliver on the strategic objectives. Once approved by Cabinet and Council, this action plan would be monitored and reviewed by the Council's Scrutiny arrangements to ensure implementation.

Comment, ideas and queries about this draft strategy should be directed to:

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The Councillors appointed to the Youth Strategy Working Group are:

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Cllr Roger Bird  
Cllr Charles Clark  
Cllr Mrs Bridget George  
Cllr Mrs Sue Prochak  
Cllr Ms Gillian Wheeler

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for young people is Cllr Jonathan Johnson.