

**SECONDARY SCHOOL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT OFFICERS**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Council has been approached by Police Scotland with the proposal to deploy Youth Engagement Officers in three secondary schools in Argyll and Bute. Youth Engagement Officers had previously been successfully deployed in our schools until budget reductions required their removal. The proposal offers significant benefits to the schools in question and would be warmly welcomed by the Education Service.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- Agrees to accept the offer from Police Scotland for the deployment of Youth Engagement Officers in Hermitage Academy, Dunoon Grammar School and Oban High School, and
- Notes the proactive approach being taken to raising community awareness of the deployment of Youth Engagement Officers.

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**3.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 3.1 The implementation of policies such as “Curriculum for Excellence” and “Getting it Right for Every Child” has ensured that schools work collaboratively with a range of partners to provide the best opportunities for young people and to help them make the right decisions in life.
- 3.2 Secondary schools in Argyll and Bute have Youth Workers and other partner agencies routinely working within the school. It is widely recognised that the use of Youth Engagement Officers is another way in which education and police services can work together to help young people to engage in positive behaviour and improve wider community safety.
- 3.3 In 2002 Youth Engagement Officers were deployed for the first time in Scottish schools and several were successfully placed in Argyll and Bute until factors, including budget constraints and policy changes, led to their withdrawal. This period of deployment provided evidence that having strong relationships within schools creates safer environments and contributes to effective learning.
- 3.4 It must be stressed that the main purpose of deploying a Youth Engagement Officer is not in response to criminal activities, but rather to create positive relationships and break down barriers between young people and the police through engagement with pupils within schools and the wider community. A Youth Engagement Officer has the opportunity to work directly with a large number of young people on a daily basis, contributing to the delivery of key aspects of the curriculum which can positively influence behavior and support secondary school pupils, teachers and partners to achieve better outcomes.
- 3.5 Police Scotland has indicated an interest in deploying Youth Engagement Officers in a limited number of Argyll and Bute secondary schools - Hermitage Academy, Dunoon Grammar School and Oban High School. Preliminary discussions have taken place with the Head Teachers, Youth Workers and Community Inspector Coleen Wylie, the findings of which inform the content of this paper.

**4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- Agrees to accept the offer from Police Scotland for the deployment of Youth Engagement Officers in Hermitage Academy, Dunoon Grammar School and Oban High School, and
- Notes the proactive approach being taken to raising community awareness of the deployment of Youth Engagement Officers.

## **5.0 DETAIL**

- 5.1 Following initial discussion on the potential placement of Youth Engagement Officers between Education Services and Police Scotland, all parties consulted on the proposal to reintroduce Youth Engagement Officers were extremely positive about the prospect. Most described encouraging experiences of previous schemes.
- 5.2 Crucial to success in deploying a Youth Engagement Officer is identifying an officer with the essential characteristics to engage with young people and the wider community. They need to work in an educational environment, and be able to adapt to, and embrace, the different culture, philosophy and ethos of the sector. There has to be a balance between engagement and authority - “firm but fair”. Being tolerant/patient, good listener, influencer, negotiator as well as a good sense of humour were all identified as important attributes for a Youth Engagement Officer.
- 5.3 A job description exists for the post of School Based Campus Officer, which is fit for purpose, but requires some minor adjustments to reflect the skills/attributes essential for the Youth Engagement Officer role and the intention to include increased partnership working. The job description has to be flexible enough to tailor the role to the individual needs at each school and education staff should be involved in developing school specific tasks and outcomes.
- 5.4 It was agreed that Police Scotland uniforms being worn in school presents no problems and in fact the consensus view is that it's helpful to maintain a high profile.
- 5.5 There's considerable potential for the Youth Engagement Officer and Youth Workers to work together on areas of work such as drugs and alcohol, internet safety, bullying, and safety programmes such as PREVENT, WRAP etc. The different relationships and approaches to working with young people will complement and enhance activities and outcomes for our young people.
- 5.6 Youth Engagement Officer could positively contribute to a wide range of school activities, including:
  - Early intervention;
  - PSE Classes;
  - Input to curriculum classes such as Law and Order/Crime and

- Punishment and Princes Trust XL;
- Parent Nights;
- Providing advice to teaching staff on legal issues;
- Assemblies;
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour;
- Internet/Social Media awareness;
- Addressing “hotspots” i.e. shops etc, near to schools where young people congregate, and
- Extra-curricular and diversionary activities.

5.7 In advance of the deployment of Youth Engagement Officers, to avoid public and press misconceptions around their deployment, consultation will take place with the respective Parent Councils and prior to the Youth Engagement Officer starting the role, the aims of a Youth Engagement Officer will be publicised in local media via a press release. Pupils should be informed at assemblies and pupil councils and educational staff through staff meetings. Parents could be informed at parents' evenings or by a letter from the school and the local community can be informed through newsletters and websites.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The deployment of Youth Engagement Officers can break down barriers and challenge young people's perceptions and views of Police Officers and vice versa. Young people and officers develop a different relationship in school that can be beneficial in the wider community.
- 6.2 Previous experience suggests a Police presence on campus has a positive effect on boisterous or anti-social behaviour, which creates a sense of calm in school and the surrounding area. Having a presence on site also means that issues can be addressed immediately, increasing the feeling of safety at school for pupils and staff.
- 6.3 A Youth Engagement Officer will provide a positive role model, which may also influence the aspirations and career choices of young people.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS**

7.1	Policy	Directly contributes to SOA outcomes 3 and 6
7.2	Financial	None
7.3	Legal	None
7.4	HR	None
7.5	Equalities	None

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| 7.6 | Risk             | The deployment of Youth Engagement Police Officers may lead to negative public perception if not managed properly. |
| 7.7 | Customer Service | None   |

**Executive Director of Community Services**

Councillor Rory Colville

**Policy Lead for Education and Lifelong Learning**

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**For further information contact:**

Martin Turnbull, Youth Service Manager,  
Argyll House, Alexandra Parade, Dunoon  
Email: [martin.turnbull@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:martin.turnbull@argyll-bute.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01369 708542