



Education Select Committee
29th March 2012

Surrey Outdoor Learning & Development

Purpose of the report: Policy Development and Review

To inform members about the range of provision for young people offered by Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development and seek views on the opportunities for future development to secure these resources at a sustainable cost to the council.

Introduction:

1. This report describes the facilities of Surrey Outdoor Learning & Development (SOLD), the services offered and the benefits that are delivered to a wide range of Surrey's young people.
2. Second, the report outlines the current financial position and the opportunities to realise the potential for SOLD to increase income generation while reducing the cost to the council; deliver significant public benefit; and contribute to SCC corporate and directorate strategies.
3. The decision of the Cabinet of December 2010 (as part of the Services for Young Peoples Transformation Project) was to establish SOLD as an arms-length internal trading unit as a first step on the journey to becoming a charitably constituted external trading concern, this was further endorsed by Cabinet in December 2011.
4. The SOLD team have a strong commitment to inspire and engage young people in outdoor learning opportunities that enrich personal development and enhance learning and achievement for life. This contributes to SCC corporate objectives to ensure every child has a great start to life and every child or adult in need of support is protected and supported to lead an independent life.
5. SOLD is well positioned to significantly contribute to the strategy to increase the participation of vulnerable young people in education training and employment. This will be delivered through an increasing range of specific programmes of outdoor learning from induction, foundation level through to full apprenticeships and work based training.

SOLD Facilities, Resources and Values

6. SOLD operates from three main locations at High Ashurst (Boxhill, Dorking), Thames Young Mariners (Richmond upon Thames) and Henley Fort (Guildford), in addition there is a residential river barge (Angel Blue) operating on the Thames and Wey Navigation in north and west Surrey.

7. SOLD is a nationally recognised training establishment for a number of National Governing Bodies such as the Royal Yachting Association and British Canoe Union. SOLD is licensed by the Adventurous Activity Licensing Authority and was the first Outdoor Learning Service in the UK to gain the Gold Standard Mark within the industry.
8. The staff team comprises 33 permanent employees augmented by 52 seasonally employed bank workers who together represent sector leading levels of experience and qualifications, including teachers, youth workers and a wide range of graduate studies. The staff team provide learning opportunities from each of the three centres, from Angel Blue and also via a dedicated outreach team delivering programmes to young people in all parts of Surrey
9. SOLD's values underpin the working practice, playing a critical role in the establishment of a dynamic, high quality, developing and respected provider. These values are:
 - a) We will continually strive to deliver & develop high quality learning opportunities.
 - b) We are committed to improving the lives of all young people through inclusive & bespoke learning experiences.
 - c) We recognise & value the strength of a motivated, skilled & highly performing team.
 - d) We aim to meet and exceed the expectations of our users.
 - e) We will actively promote sustainability of the natural environment.
 - f) We will behave in a proactive, positive & solution focused manner.
 - g) We will work hard to establish and maintain effective relationships.
10. **High Ashurst Outdoor Education Centre** is situated in 56 acres of wood and heathland on the North Downs, between Leatherhead & Dorking. The site has direct access to Headley Heath and is close to the top of Box Hill. The site has benefited from substantial investment in 2009/10 to modernise its facilities. It has brand new eco-friendly deluxe residential log cabins that can accommodate up to 80 people. In addition, there is a new headquarters building that offers a full catering service, training and conference facilities. The site also offers several Tepee villages for groups who want to experience a camping residential. Activities include environmental studies, bush craft, archery, challenge courses, mountain biking, high and low ropes, climbing and team games.
11. **Thames Young Mariners Outdoor Education Centre** is a large site, including a 10-acre lake, beside the Thames between Richmond and Kingston. It offers a range of activities including sailing, canoeing, Bell boating, power boating, raft building, ropes course, climbing, and orienteering. Camping is available to groups that want to have a residential at the centre during the spring and summer months. With its own lock gate and bank access to the tidal part of the Thames (below Teddington Lock) the operating area is also ideally suited for more challenging programmes. The buildings include seminar rooms, hall, changing facilities, offices and staff accommodation. The centre is in need of some updating and would be the priority for any further capital development programme.
12. **Henley Fort Outdoor Education Centre** is a Victorian mobilisation centre built in the 1880s on the north end of the Hog's Back, near Guildford. The centre offers historical studies from the Victorian era and World War II as well as activities including archery, climbing, mountain biking and orienteering. There are opportunities for groups to have a camping residential during the spring and summer months.
13. **Angel Blue** is a purpose built, canal boat which operates on the Wey Navigation and the Thames. The boat was designed with wheelchair users in mind and has lift access to all parts of the boat. It sleeps 10 people and groups take an active role in the operation of the boat and the locks during their journey. The boat can moor at

most points along the bank so young people can access the rural riverside environment with its manifold opportunities for learning.

14. **SOLD – “Out & About”** provides outdoor learning experiences to schools, youth organisations and community groups where they are, they take a range of equipment with them to meet the desired outcomes of the group.

Benefits of Outdoor Learning and Development

15. Outdoor Learning is a unique tool, which has proved to be highly effective in developing key personal, social, physical and emotional skills in young people. When used correctly, this tool can have a positive and dramatic effect on behaviour, attitudes and outlook, as well as adding to life experiences and encouraging the acquisition of a wide range of skills.
16. Good quality outdoor learning experiences are intense, long lasting and memorable, meeting a wide range of learning styles and preferences. Not only is recognising and acknowledging achievement in young people easy using outdoor learning experiences, but also they allow the identification of areas that need to be developed.
17. Outdoor learning is particularly effective at developing skills such as communication, problem solving, trust, leadership, interpersonal skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. Learning happens in a number of environments, which offer different degrees of challenge. It's not just about an adrenaline rush; it can be about a deeply meaningful process, which is dictated by the young person. In quality outdoor learning experiences, the young person can set the challenge and choose when and how they achieve it.
18. SOLD offer all its groups a bespoke programme based on curriculum outcomes, the chosen activities are varied according to needs of the young people (Appendix 1 – SOLD Curriculum Model).

SOLD's Customers

19. SOLD's customers can be broken down into the following sectors:
 - a) SOLD's Targeted programmes – Young people who are not participating in education, employment or training (NEET) or at Risk of NEET (free service)
 - b) Surrey Schools – Secondary, primary and Special
 - c) Special needs – Specific programmes for non-school special needs young people
 - d) Surrey Youth Groups
 - e) Out of Surrey Schools
 - f) Non maintained schools
 - g) Holiday /community
 - h) Adult Training & Corporate Training

Appendix 2 shows a breakdown of customer sectors for 2011/12

20. The vast majority of the users are young people from Surrey coming from either schools or youth organisations with the usage being concentrated during the period March to November. There has been a steady growth in use during the winter season over the past year.

Benefits to Surrey's Young People

17. SOLD's core offer will continue with a wide outdoor learning programme offered to schools, youth organisations and individuals on a largely traded basis. Surpluses generated from this traded activity support work with Surrey's more vulnerable young people providing the public benefit planned for 2012/13 described below.
18. In line with the transformation of Services for Young People, the SOLD offer is aligned with the strategic objectives of increasing participation; protecting young people from crime and antisocial behaviour; and delivering more quality youth work locally. SOLD will enable the most vulnerable young people in Surrey to access high quality outdoor and alternative learning experiences. SOLD will deliver outdoor learning opportunities to referred young people from the Youth Support Service (YSS) who are NEET or who are at risk of being NEET.
19. There will be eight intensive NEET to Pathways to Education, Training and Employment (PETE) programmes for young people who are NEET to participate in structured and accredited learning programmes to support their transition into full time education and training.
20. A local preventative outdoor learning & development offer of 20 sessions a year to each of the 11 borough/district YSS teams will enable a support programme to re-engage young people at risk of NEET back into sustainable education, training and employment.
21. Looked after child are less likely to achieve a comparative level of academic or social outcome against the majority of Surrey's young people, outdoor learning offers a creative and positive environment to support increased positive outcomes for these young people. SOLD has an aspiration to develop its outreach programme to take such opportunities to the looked after young people.
22. All of the programmes where the contact time is sufficient will be accredited through a range of schemes. These qualifications can be used as a stepping-stone to college, apprenticeships and on-the-job vocational training.

<h2>Operating Models and Finances</h2>
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23. Nationally, local authority outdoor education services are having their funding either withdrawn or significantly reduced. Without a viable business model to overcome these financial challenges it is likely that many will not survive into the future. This has led to many local authorities to force early closure or offer up their facilities for out-sourcing to the commercial sector. The vast majority are not based in delivering education and learning but are compelled to focus on leisure and recreation. SOLD has centred its vision and values in developing curriculum lead programmes leading to specific learning outcomes with the actual activity being subsidiary to the desired learning outcomes.
24. In contrast to the national picture, the transformed Services for Young People supports SOLD to ensure the continued focus on young people's education and learning, with improved outdoor learning opportunities for the most vulnerable young people. The current medium term financial plan assumes that the SCC revenue budget for SOLD will reduce to zero by 2015.
25. SOLD will need to continue to develop alternative income streams not only to reduce the current level of subsidy from SCC but also to generate sufficient income to deliver back to Surrey a social return - a defined free service for vulnerable young people. The SOLD team started the journey to becoming self-sufficient a couple of years ago and

despite a challenging financial climate demand for SOLD services continues to grow.

26. This change has put SOLD in a strong position and it has seen steady growth in the wider context of a rapidly changing market and the past two years of national economic pressure. The steadily growing customer base, the development of new programmes/products, external recognition from regulating bodies, investment in staff, increasing year on year income and early investment in a significant marketing campaign are the key to a sustainable independent future.
27. In pursuit of a sustainable future for SOLD we need to examine the opportunities and constraints that would be afforded by a range of operating models. These options include the status quo, wholly owned subsidiary, out-sourcing, joint venture and independent charitable social enterprise. Each of these options offers differing opportunities to secure a sustainable financial future, minimising risk to SCC whilst adding significant value for Surrey's young people.
28. Central to a successful financial model will be the ability to:
 - 28.1. significantly expand trading, creating surplus to support outdoor learning opportunities for vulnerable young people in Surrey.
 - 28.2. secure commissions to deliver learning from outside bodies
 - 28.3. attract grant funding for both revenue and capital projects

Appendix 3 demonstrates the increased growth in income from 2010/11 to 2011/12

29. SOLD has achieved year on year growth over the past three years both in numbers of users and the level of income generated at the same time that the level of SCC budget has been reducing. Income generation has risen from £500K in 2009/10 to £850K in 2011/12 with realistic target of £1M+ in 2012/13 and by 2015/16 a forecast in excess of £1.7M.
30. SCC revenue budget contribution has decreased from £550K in 2009/10 to £380K in 2011/13, with a budget of £350K planned for 2012/13

Conclusion:

31. Surrey has a leading position in the outdoor learning and development sector with growing demand for programmes from a range of customers, including schools and youth organisations, in Surrey, adjacent authorities and further afield. There is further scope to grow the SOLD "business" exploiting our position in the south east and close to London combined with growing reputation for quality provision. Surpluses generated from traded activity will support significant social return in the form of services available to vulnerable young people. Different operating models may offer opportunities for expanding business and the risks and benefits of each of these will need to be appraised.

Financial and value for money implications

32. The focus of this report is to initiate a process to examine different operating models for SOLD to deliver the best value for money in securing the future of outdoor learning and development for Surrey's young people.

Equalities Implications

33. The Council's ambition is to widen access to vulnerable groups of young people for the opportunities of outdoor learning and specifically to ensure that those young people who

are NEET or who are at risk of NEET have access to appropriate programmes that will increase opportunities for participation. Young people from minority groups and those with looked after status will benefit from this approach.

Risk Management Implications

34. Undertaking the work proposed in this report will inform the levels of risk for a range of options that the Council may wish to pursue in the future.

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy/Local Area Agreement Targets

35. Development of SOLD supports the Council's priority to increase participation by young people in Surrey.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to

- (a) Note the content of this report
- (b) Ask officers to undertake a more detailed appraisal of the options for the development of SOLD for further scrutiny by this Committee in advance of a paper being presented to Cabinet in December
- (c) Note the opportunity for Members to contribute to workshops to be held at SOLD venues during the summer. (Details will be made available separately)

Next steps:

Officers will undertake more detailed study of the options available.

A series of Member workshops will be convened to enable Members to develop their understanding of SOLD and the opportunities that are available under different delivery models

A further report will be prepared for Select Committee to consider in the Autumn

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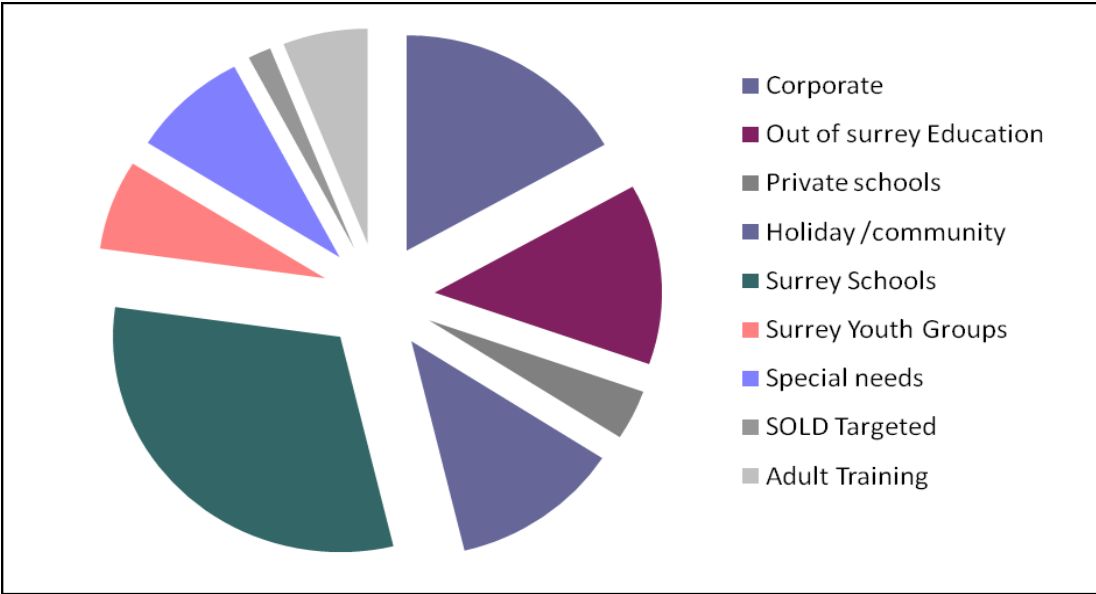
Sources/background papers: [List of all documents used in compiling the report, for example previous reports/minutes, letters, legislation, etc.]

Appendix 1 SOLD Curriculum



Appendix 2

Breakdown of the customer sectors for 2011/12 showing percentages of sessions delivered for each sector.



Appendix 3

The graph shows the monthly increase in booking values for the current year 2011/12 against the previous financial year 2010/11.

