

## Tracey Crouch MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Kent Youth Services Consultation  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Invicta House  
Maidstone  
Kent  
ME14 1XX

31 August 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in response to Kent County Council's consultation paper, "Kent Youth Services Transformation Plan" which proposes new methods of delivering youth services across the county.

Having read through the consultation paper, I was shocked to learn that contained within the Council's plans is the proposal to withdraw its direct delivery service at SAMAYS youth centre in Snodland, which falls within my constituency, thus threatening the centre with imminent closure.

Under the plans detailed in this consultation, KCC will cease to deliver this service directly, instead opting to commission, as yet undetermined, providers to deliver the service while replacing it with a new Youth Hub in Tonbridge, on the opposite side of the Borough. This would be a hugely disappointing decision for all associated with the club and indeed for the wider community. SAMAYS was purpose built as a youth facility and has been in receipt of significant investment from KCC over the years. The Council's previous support for the facility has helped it to become one of the most envied of its kind in Kent, providing a range of services associated with the Town and Borough's need.

While I recognise that there needs to be improved youth services in Tonbridge, I simply cannot grasp the logic or motivation behind the decision that this should come at the expense of SAMAYS, a heavily invested in, well attended and successful community-led provision. One of the Council's requirements of each of the solitary Youth Hubs per District/Borough is that it must be able to provide the necessary support to other local commissioned-based and detached services. SAMAYS possess all the qualities indicating it could easily assume this role.

I would also ask, in light of these proposals, whether KCC has a real understanding of the community need for a strong youth service in Snodland. The Borough as a whole may well feature as one of Kent's wealthiest areas but Snodland Town is characterised by pockets of acute deprivation, which represents a particularly deprived LSOA in the Borough, bringing with it unique challenges within the wider area. SAMAYS not only provides a venue for the youth to meet but it also offers other vital outreach and educational services which are not easily available via other organisations. As well as pure cash investment in SAMAYS, partner organisations such as the police, educationalists, sporting

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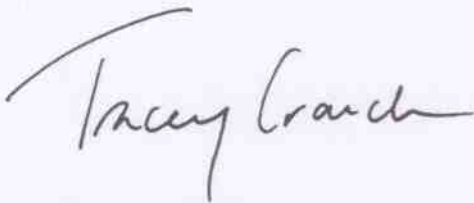
organisations and others, have invested a lot of time and energy into building a relationship with those who use and run the centre. The wider community, I believe, emphatically support the centre and would be bereft without it.

Furthermore the town itself is not particularly well served by public transport. Any suggestion that an 11 year old can get on a bus or train to go, or indeed come back, from a Maidstone based 'Hub' on a school night is ludicrous. Not only would many parents find it an unaffordable option but during the darker nights of autumn and winter it would potentially put children's safety at risk. Direct trains to and from Tonbridge are not available, therefore the proposed Hub in Tonbridge will only be available to those in Tonbridge.

In light of this, and given Kent taxpayer's previous investment in SAMAYS, surely a more cost efficient and logical proposal would have been to continue directly delivering the service in Snodland while establishing an improved youth service in Tonbridge. Instead, what has been proposed for the restructuring of the Tonbridge & Malling youth service is completely counter-intuitive and it is my view that not only is it an inefficient use of past and present Kent Youth Services' budget, but nor will this best serve the interests of children across Borough.

While I have outlined my opposition to the Council's proposals affecting my constituency specifically I do think that, considering recent events which served to bring into sharp focus the prevailing pitfalls of some, but by no means all, youth culture, it is short sighted of the Council to suggest a major rationalisation of youth services which in truth will save not very much money in the short term but could potentially cost the Council a lot more in the long term. I strongly urge the Council to re-evaluate its commitment to investing in our children's future and consider whether it truly believes these set of proposals best serve our wider communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracey Crouch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

TRACEY CROUCH MP

Michael Hill OBE – Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities  
Member for Tenterden

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Ask For: Mr Michael Hill  
Date: 21 September 2011

Dear Tracey,

Thank you for your letter of 31 August 2011 and your detailed views relating to SAMAYS youth centre and youth work provision in Snodland.

Kent County Council is currently working to ensure that £340 million savings can be made through its Medium Term Financial Plan. As a result it is, of course, necessary to review all services to the people of Kent as well as finding innovative solutions to how the Council runs its business more efficiently.

A number of approaches could be taken to reducing the Council's spending; however, Kent County Councillors have fully embraced the Government's commitment to localism. 'Bold Steps for Kent' outlines the medium term plan for Kent County Council for the next four years; one of its three aims is to 'put the citizen in control':

*"...power and influence must be in the hands of local people and local communities so they are more able to take responsibility for their own community and service needs, such as creating new social enterprise".*

In line with this aim, the Youth Service Transformation Proposal seeks to create a minimum £1.2M commissioning budget for a range of providers to deliver youth work within their local communities in addition to maintaining a core KCC provision. The proposal sets out the intended outcomes for young people and the communities in which they live at the heart of the commissioning process.

The vision of the Youth 'Hub' in Tonbridge and Malling is not well served by the existing facility at SAMAYS and this has led to a proposal for new facilities being identified elsewhere in the Borough. However, the need for continuing youth provision in Snodland is absolutely recognised and this will be sought through the proposed commissioning process.

The Service Transformation proposal is currently in a 90 day consultation period ending on 29 October and we have taken your letter as an integral part of this consultation.

Yours sincerely

*M Hill*

Michael Hill OBE

*As I promised I will discuss with you before any decision is made!*



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE