

Association of Principal Youth and Community Officers

Comprehensive Spending Review 2007

Call for evidence: DFES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People

Annex B3: Terms of reference for the Strategy for Youth Services

Q1 What is the current distribution of youth services and youth engagement activities available across the country? How is that likely to evolve following the Youth Green Paper?

150 local authorities across the nine English regions currently lead the delivery of local youth work services focussed mainly on the personal and social development needs of the 13-19 age range. These are distributed as follows:

- London 33
- North West 22
- South East 19
- South West 15
- Yorkshire and the Humber 15
- West Midlands 14
- Eastern 12
- North East 11
- East Midlands 9

Services for young people are also supplied by Connexions Partnerships, Youth Offending Teams, Young Peoples Health Projects and specialist provision for disabled young people, BME, LGBT and young parents amongst others. At the local level additional provision is offered by Leisure, Culture, Safer Communities and a range of national and local voluntary organisations and community groups. It is unusual for the commercial or private sector to opt to develop affordable activities for young people due to the limited profits available from this market.

Activity supporting young peoples' active engagement within the local community is almost exclusively led by the Local Authority Youth Service (LAYS) since this is one of the core principles on which the work is based and a proven key area of skill of the workforce.

The authorities recently receiving Beacon status for the full and active involvement of young people clearly demonstrate the major contribution that the LAYS made to this award. (These are set out in 'Sharing the learning in Positive Youth Engagement', NYA 2006.)

It is too early to comment with any real authority on the likely picture following Youth Matters Next Steps but unless serious steps can be taken by Government to change the current inequitable availability of resources for this age range *for example in 2004-5 a young person living in Rutland enjoyed an annual spend of £43.28 per head compared to a City of London spend of £611.02* some young people will continue to have limited access to learning opportunities which promote their personal and social development.

We would suggest that a statement is made within the guidance accompanying the new legislation addressing a young persons entitlement to the level of service outlined in Resourcing Excellent Youth Services, DfES 2002 to ensure that across the country young peoples needs will be adequately resourced .

Q2. Building on the Youth Green Paper, is there more that could be done to improve and sustain the effectiveness in the delivery of existing services and activities?

Ofsted has previously commented upon the effectiveness of the delivery of existing services and have offered a substantial number of indicators, within their inspection reports, as to why some current services are deemed to be ineffective. Significant differences in political and chief officer support and leadership and structural and funding inequalities are proven barriers to effectiveness. These indicators need to inform your current review together with the evidence that you have collated from your visits. In addition it is our view that attention is given to three main areas in order to sustain and build upon the effectiveness of the delivery of existing services:

1. Guidance is provided to all Children's Trusts on the essential ingredients of high quality youth work provision in order to frame the commissioning processes.

APYCO would be willing to significantly contribute towards this guidance and our attached position statement describes the basic content of this.

2. There is a need to continue to focus on workforce development at all levels of the services.

We would assert our belief that the key skills of building positive, voluntary relationships with young people, grounded within their communities, and developed with a focus to improve and extend their life chances is the unique and crucial aspect of youth work.

We acknowledge that a chosen area of activity, whether sports, volunteering, music or arts, whilst secondary to this, offers a valuable and significant mechanism through which these relationships can be formed. It is imperative therefore that the instructor, leader, teacher, adult volunteer or peer etc. understands the value and importance of the relationship equally to the value of the activity.³ In relation to the Joint Area Review Inspection arrangements, that the current support for young peoples' services that are deemed to be unsatisfactory will remain.

We would recommend that the expertise identified in those services that receive good inspection results is shared. Systems need to be developed to support failing services using the skills of the workforce. A model based upon the comparator ‘School Improvement Partner’ should be in place for these failing services.

APYCO would be willing to contribute towards developing this model.

Q3. What are the particular barriers faced by different groups of young people, including disabled young people, in accessing services, and what are the policy issues that arise?

The barriers faced by different groups of young people including disabled young people give rise to philosophical and other debates mainly around integration. In the context of disabled young people their needs can be seen to be spread across a continuum from those with severe learning, cognitive or physical disabilities most of whom will need specialist provision and high staff ratios through to those who easily access main stream provision provided that the facilities available comply with the legislation. Other groups such as rural young people, young travellers, BME, LGBT will need to be supported to identify how they feel their needs can best be addressed and the appropriate provision then developed with them.

Almost without exception surveys of local residents across the country identify as getting young people off the streets with somewhere to go as a high priority. One behaviour characteristic common to the majority of young people is their desire to socialise with their friends. Young people will always seek out the most desirable options available. Facilities which are not fit for purpose, too small or run down are not attractive enough for young people to see them as desirable.

A capital investment programme for high quality Youth Peoples Centres for the 21st Century modelled on ‘Building Schools for the Future Programme’ and the development of children’s centres is urgently needed to ensure that all young people wherever they live can access good quality youth work services in spaces designed with them.

Q4. What is the national and international evidence on the effectiveness of different types of services and activities in terms of better life outcomes?

At this stage we acknowledge that there is insufficient hard evidence in England of the effectiveness of different types of services in terms of better life outcomes. However recent work commissioned by the DfES including ‘The Evaluation of the Impact of Youth Work in England, Merton et al 2004 and the evidence from the ‘deep dive’ visits undertaken by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit which identified that the greatest progress had been made where there was a ‘well resourced youth service with a clear remit to tackle big social issues such as young peoples sexual health’, DfES, 2006, go some way towards this.

Youth Services are continuing to strive to collect more robust data for the BVPI and to demonstrate their contribution to the wider corporate agenda. . This is supported by best practice sharing, case studies and young people’s testimonies which demonstrate the positive impact that Youth Service interventions have made to improve their life chances.

Consideration needs to be given to resourcing a longitudinal study into this area of work. Young people trained as researchers could usefully contribute to the project

Q5.How can we best combine demand led provision for young people with provision that is planned and structured to have the best outcomes for children and young people?

The potential size of the market especially in the context of progressive universalism makes the debate around supply and demand led provision extremely complex .Traditionalists would continue to argue the case that every young person deserves an equal entitlement to youth work provision. One of the challenges is the frequently expressed needs of young people to be able to access provision seven days a week. With better co-ordination across all LA services for young people this may be deliverable although clearly one of the limiting factors would be the availability of staff. Equally elected members are rarely willing to allow provision in ‘their ward’ to be closed down which frequently results in old tired buildings which are no longer fit for purpose or of interest to young people being retained.

It is often the case that the bulk of young people who currently choose to link in to their LAYS provision are those who are in need of additional support for a variety of different reasons.

Q6.

What more can we do to support and enable young people to exert a strong demand side influence on provision? What would we expect in return from young people – their rights and responsibilities?

Young people have demonstrated their ability to exert strong influence on the demand side. There are many examples of youth councils, forums, assemblies and other campaigning groups which provide some limited evidence of where statutory, third sector and private organisations have amended, altered and adjusted their provision in response to these groups.

We assert that it is where this influence has been acknowledged, supported and turned into ‘real power’ that effective change takes place.

Whilst the current negative perception of young people prevails then little change will take place. Much needs to be done to support adults, at all levels of the process, to amend their traditional perceptions of young people as “troubled” (e.g. victims) or “troubling” (e.g. criminals or anti-social). Clear and irrefutable evidence points to the fact that the vast majority of young people are generally well aware of their rights and take their responsibilities seriously and that they are limited only by our lack of confidence in their ability to deliver.

Q7. What principles and priorities should guide the allocation of current and future resources? And who do we need to target?

Resources should be calculated to take account of key demographic data but also consideration and a weighting applied to take account of the current level of provision for young people 13-19. Provision of places to go ,things to do and someone to talk to needs to be developed in the context of recognising that there a mixed economy which needs to be maintained and is derived primarily from local community needs.

The creation of a capital fund to create a central high quality seven day a week young peoples' venue in each town or city centre at an average cost of £6 million, together with an allocation for the associated transport and revenue costs, would transform the lives of many of the most disadvantaged young people and prevent their involvement in less positive activities.

Q8. What measures and milestones need to be in place to ensure that performance can be assessed and delivery monitored at a local level

The standards contained in “Resourcing Excellent Youth Services” have been acknowledged by many in the services as a useful benchmark in terms of assessing the quantity and quality of local delivery. Many Principal Youth Officers have used this as a basis for reporting to Local Authorities and other partners.

It would be beneficial for these standards to be revised and built upon with further national standards, in agreement with local deliverers, and subsequently endorsed through the appropriate channels.

We welcome the fact that BVPI's currently exist, whilst acknowledging that these do not accurately measure or monitor the provision. Clear and specific definitions are required in order to ensure that there is not wide ranging differential translation and recording.

APYCO would be happy to contribute to developing these national standards and performance indicators.

Supplementary questions

1. What are the barriers and enablers of effective Third Sector provision, including statutory commissioning capability?

The notion of a third homogenous sector is somewhat flawed as its component parts can range from large national organisations with large budgets and workforces to match through to very small local community groups run on a shoe string with a few volunteers. Barriers and enablers are therefore as broad and varied as the organisations that view themselves as part of the non statutory 'sector.' What is clear though is that they are often able to access sources of funding that are not available to the LA and can thus add considerable value to local provision for young people.

The current LA and voluntary 'sector' compacts need to be expanded to include provision for young people aged 13-19 so that the notion of competition for scarce resource is minimised and partnership working maximised.

2. What can be done to improve the ability of universal provision to identify and provide a service to those with greater needs?

No Comment

3. Which projects and programmes in the last five years have had a proven and sustained impact and brought innovation to the delivery of services for young people

Whilst there has been a proliferation of new programmes and projects in the last five years we feel unable to identify any which have had a proven and sustained impact on the delivery of services for young people

4. What encourages young people to try new and different kinds of activities from those they already do?

Young people are encouraged to try new and different kinds of things firstly by their peers and secondly by adults like youth workers who support them, build their confidence and allow them to develop at their own individual pace. Carefully structured programmes that allow for differential rates of progression, quick wins but continue to offer challenges will ensure that more young people try more things that they would usually feel were beyond their reach. This is particularly true in the context of adventurous sports and outdoor education.

5. What evidence is there of the benefits that arise from young people's involvement in design and provision of their activities? What evidence is there of how outcomes have improved as a result?

There is ample evidence albeit probably not recorded in many formal ways of the benefits that arise from young people's direct involvement in the design and provision of their activities. Skate parks and teenage shelters sometimes developed through Leisure services and the District and Parish Councils are testament to this.

6. What attracts people to the youth work workforce? What is less attractive about membership of this workforce?

People are attracted to the youth work workforce for a variety of reasons but what is common is that they actually like young people and they have a deep and lasting belief that every young person can achieve something positive even if it seems to be very small. They are passionate proponents of young peoples' right to be heard and listened to and that the young person is much more than someone who has achieved , or not as the case may be a series of academic targets that have been set for them by someone other than themselves. They enjoy the opportunity to have fun, to work in the informal learning environment and to contribute to the wide range of agendas that a LA is concerned with. They see themselves as advocates for young people and are willing to challenge other members of the community who have different perceptions and experiences of young people.

In addition to this many people who enter this workforce do so as it offers community based lifelong learning opportunities which are often more accessible than other professional routes into work with young people. What is less attractive is the status, the remuneration, the unsocial hours and the stretch of functions and skills which are expected of a youth worker.