

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

Objective:

To review the current provision of youth services and support for young people with a view to identifying longer term policy directions that will bring about improvements in the life chances of young people.

Key questions of the review:

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?

From inspection evidence, distribution of youth service activities is extremely variable across the country. This has been the case for many years and continues to be so. Striking differences across local authority areas are mainly linked to: the extent to which they give priority and commitment to the development and provision of youth services; the access that the service has to government funding that is allocated to local authorities through the youth and community sub-block; and the ability of the service to access external funding. Rural areas fare significantly worse than urban areas.

The disparity between areas is not only about the amount and range of provision but its nature. Some local areas are able to provide attractive and well-resourced venues that appeal to young people; others still depend on old and tired premises. Some areas reach out to young people through well-planned detached and outreach work that forms an integral part of the overall provision, whilst others retain a more traditional approach which, in the main, expects young people to come to them.

In terms of leisure and recreation providers, policies differ significantly. Most focus on providing a range of sport and recreation facilities, but fewer take account of provision for what could be described as alternative sports such as skateboarding and BMX – albeit that such alternatives are ‘mainstream’ in the minds of the many thousands of young people involved in them. Additionally, few consider ways to engage those young people who may be more challenging or less interested in sport and recreation. It is also important that ‘contracted out’ provision is evaluated in terms of both quantity and quality if young people who are the most vulnerable and disengaged are to be served appropriately.

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?

Inspection evidence suggests that the best work is where all providers have a good and common understanding of the educational nature of ‘informal’ work and plan programmes that ensure that learning occurs. A properly qualified workforce, whose members have flexible routes to qualification, is paramount.

There is a need to tighten up on qualification frameworks and give youth work parity of esteem with allied professions, thereby opening the opportunity for higher education funding.

For many years, the government's expectations have not been sufficiently explicit about what is expected of local authorities. Children's Trusts need a clear understanding of expectations about the levels of funding that should be allocated to provision for different age groups to secure a fair distribution of resources.

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?

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

Ofsted's inspection reports of local authority youth services and voluntary sector provision provide evidence of the effectiveness of youth services, in particular *Effective Youth Services* published in July 2005 (HMI2445) and *Creating opportunity for young people* published in November 2005 (HMI2444).

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

The welcome Green Paper and the bringing together of youth provision as a single issue provides a chance for better clarity for providers and users. Local areas will benefit from this and it will help them to recognise, in their 'mix' of provision, the different aspects they are trying to achieve. Youth work in the educational sense has a distinct role, activity and summer schemes another, and the pursuit of achievement in sports another. Each provider has a valid part to play ensuring that all three aspects contribute to the range of provision that they offer.

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?

We need to be realistic - only a minority of young people will wish to have a 'high level' involvement in influencing provision. This is acceptable and it would be wrong to give the impression that all can be involved.

There needs to be consideration of others who might become more involved, especially adults who make significant decisions. There is little evidence of training, support or awareness raising activity for such people, which is an inherent weakness.

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

The pre-occupation with targeted work needs re-considering. The argument in favour of directing resources to areas of need is generally taken as read. However, closer examination suggests that the local application of this aspiration varies. Some 'vulnerable' groups receive significant funding injections, which do not always build on established infrastructures. Provision of large amounts of money now and then is not a replacement for reasonable provision of resources in line with an ongoing and defined formula. Targeted work does not support rural young people, nor is it subtle enough to pick up on mainstream issues affecting all young people.

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

Inspection should be part of the risk-based system proposed by the DCLG.