
DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE ACTIVITIES ('YOUTH OFFER') IN DARLINGTON

Purpose of Report

1. The primary purpose of this report is to confirm the key elements of the new statutory duty on the Local Authority - the duty to secure access for young people to a sufficient local offer of 'positive activities' - and to outline the plans and proposals in place to meet this duty including design, branding and integration/relationship with providers across all sectors.
2. As the duty to provide the local offer of positive activities came directly from proposals within the government policy paper 'Youth Matters', the report will also summarise (in Appendix C) progress against one of the other key strands within Youth Matters, increasing the voice and influence of young people, as being currently developed via Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds (The Dosh) and via Youth Participation activity (T3, Hear by Right and Council of School Councils)

Background/Introduction

3. The Government released the document Youth Matters: Next Steps on 8 March 2006. This was a follow-up document to the Green Paper (Youth Matters) released the previous year and it set out the vision for empowering young people, giving them somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to.
4. This was followed up by the release of guidance on Promoting Positive Activities on 19 October 2006 accompanied by a grant payment to local authorities to assist them in preparing for and acting on the new statutory duty which would be part of the Education and Inspections Bill.
5. The Education and Inspections Act received Royal Assent in November 2006. Section 6 of the Act commenced in January 2007 and was accompanied by more detailed guidance on the key elements of the new duty and actions a local authority should take.
6. In anticipation of the guidance on Positive Activities, product 10 of the Local Area Agreement was developed to ensure that the Local Authority (and partners) were in a strong position to respond to the requirements of the new Act. This included a specific (fixed term) post of Youth Offer Coordinator and the post holder commenced duties in April 2007.

Information and Analysis

7. Section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 allowed for a new section (507B) to be inserted into the Education Act 1996. Section 507B requires that a Local Authority in England must, so far as is reasonably practical, secure access for qualifying young

persons to sufficient educational and recreational leisure time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities.

8. Qualifying young persons are deemed to be those aged 13-19 – the age range commonly understood to represent a transition period in which participation in positive activities can offer significant benefits. Some young people begin and end transitions at differing ages and the application of the duty can be extended, for example to age 24 for young people with learning difficulties. The guidance also defines ‘well-being’, ‘sufficient’ and ‘reasonably practicable’ as well as indicating the types of activities which might be deemed educational and recreational.
9. The offer of positive activities is expected to be comprehensive, accurate and accessible to young people and should include a directory of provision regularly updated and publicised to young people through a variety of media.
10. The offer of positive activities should not just be confined to what a local authority can offer but must also include provision within the private and voluntary and community sectors, as well as through extended school services and regeneration led youth programmes.
11. National Standards for Positive Activities are prescribed and include access to two hours per week of sporting activity; access to two hours per week of other constructive activities; opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community; a wide range of recreational, cultural, sporting and enriching experiences; and a range of safe and enjoyable places in which to spend time. An authority can work with partner agencies over time to secure opportunities to enable these standards to be met for all young people.
12. As a result a local authority must also set out its planned ambition which should detail the provision the local authority and its partners will, over time, seek to secure young people’s access to. The ambition should address any issues of accessibility and be rural proofed.
13. The active involvement and engagement of young people in the development and delivery of the offer of positive activities is a consistent theme through out the guidance. Specifically young people should be able to comment on current provision, the need for further provision and the accessibility of existing provision. Dialogue with young people should be ongoing and involve disadvantaged young people. Young people should be able to hold their local authority to account on progress to delivery the offer of positive activity.
14. In developing the offer the local authority must map existing provision (across all sectors/delivery agents) and identify gaps in provision and accessibility.
15. Local authorities should not assume the role of default provider of positive activities and the guidance builds in the concept of ‘contestability’ inviting the local authority to consider whether positive activity provision can be improved by delivering the service, or elements of it, through an alternative provider. Contestability is not seen to necessarily mean that others are commissioned to do work. As long as the Local Authority believes

that the market conditions are contestable and they have been rigorous in their assessment of current provision, then that is deemed sufficient.

16. The guidance draws on recent research that shows that different young people experience a number of barriers to participation in positive activities resulting from a combination of their personal circumstances and the inadequacy or inappropriateness of local provision. Guidance is provided on six factors likely to influence accessibility of provision – availability of attractive provision; transport; charging and subsidy; barriers to equal access; personal support and information.
17. The guidance recognises that there is no single national measure capable of recording progress against the new duty and local authorities are invited to develop local measures as well as utilising existing performance indicators which would contribute towards the overall picture of provision and would be capable therefore of supporting performance assessment.
18. Finally, the guidance anticipates that provision of positive activities is integrated with other support functions such as information, advice and guidance and more targeted support (for those young people who require it).

Proposals

19. As noted above, product 10 of the Local Area Agreement is facilitating the development of the local offer of positive activities and the Youth Offer Coordinator has been in post since April 2007. Key tasks have been undertaken to date to create a detailed and achievable plan which will ensure that the Darlington Offer will be in place by 1 April 2008, the deadline as laid down in the statutory duty on the Authority. The detailed work plan addresses the key items as identified in paragraphs 6-17 above.
20. It is proposed that the vision for the Darlington Offer is “Everything to do ... never again will a young person in Darlington claim that there is ‘nowt to do’!”.
21. The aims of the Darlington Offer reflect the guidance and national standards and are attached in Appendix A.
22. It is suggested that the planned ambition for the Darlington Offer be developed with key stakeholders internal and external to the Authority (and inclusive of young people) and key themes developed for discussion are attached in Appendix B.
23. Stakeholder sessions (with key individuals/agencies from across statutory, voluntary/community and private sectors) have taken place on 15 September 2007 and 9 November 2007 (with a final session planned for 16 January 2008), and have covered the key themes of: what is required to establish the Offer in Darlington; mapping and collation; and publicity and maximising the potential of the Offer for young people and the community. Both stakeholder sessions to date have been very successful with a wide range of partners from all sectors attending and participating fully in the development of the Darlington Youth Offer. This augers well for the development of a comprehensive offer to which all providers are signed up to.

24. Young people are involved in the development of the Offer. A young people's reference group has been established to inform the key elements including promotion, communication, collecting and collating information etc. This reference group will liaise with more disadvantaged groups of young people through established networks. The Yo Yo event in April 2007 marked the launch of the development of the Offer and promotion of the concept with young people.
25. Negotiation on the development of a specific website for the Darlington Offer is ongoing and linked to wider plans for the Children's Trust Service Directory. The Board, at a meeting on 6th July 2007, has agreed the development of the Children's Trust Service Directory. The website for the Darlington Offer is being designed, developed and branded alongside the Children's Trust Service Directory. Young people have been fully involved in the development of website and in particular its branding and promotion. The group have named the site 'Click' (click here for everything to do!) and are currently running a competition to choose a brand image.
26. The strategic links between the Offer of Positive Activities and related plans and programmes have already been mapped, and key officers and individuals responsible for associated plans have been included as stakeholders.

Conclusion

27. The Education and Inspections Act lays down a new statutory duty on local authorities to secure access for young people to a local offer of positive activities.
28. Whilst the statutory duty rests with the Local Authority, there is a pivotal role for the Children's Trust given the expectations on the scope and extent of any local Offer.
29. A detailed work plan has been developed (and work is underway) to ensure that the Darlington Offer will be in place by 1 April 2008 and that it fulfils all the obligations placed on the local authority by the new legislation.
30. Key stakeholders, including young people, will be fully involved in the process of development and in maximising the potential of the Offer once established.
31. The Darlington Offer will be comprehensive, representative of activity across all sectors, and initiate a process of young people being key stakeholders in assessing and shaping the provision available to them.
32. Activity continues on other key strands within the Youth Matters policy paper – in particular action to ensure the active involvement and engagement of young people in decision-making processes.
33. The detail outlined in the report (and accompanying appendices) puts the Local Authority (and key partners) in a strong position to respond to some of the key elements of the 10 year strategy Aiming High for Young People (2008-2018).

Recommendations

34. That the Scrutiny Committee note the content of this report and the accompanying appendices.
35. That the Scrutiny Committee comments on, or adds to, the initial themes of the Authority's Planned Ambition.
36. That the Scrutiny Committee agrees to receive further reports as development work on the Offer progresses.

Murray Rose
Director of Children's Services

Author: Mervyn Bell Ext. 227