

Positive for Youth

What it means for
local authorities

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Introduction

Positive for Youth is a new approach to cross-Government policy for young people aged 13-19. It has been developed through extensive consultation and collaboration with young people and a wide range of other people that work with them, including local authorities.

It will be of particular interest to Lead Members for Children's Services, Directors of Children's Services, and those commissioning and delivering services for young people and their families.

Context

Local authorities can enable young people to have a voice in influencing decisions to improve local services including through auditing them and giving user feedback. They have a pivotal role in the offer of high quality services, not only through those they fund directly but also in coordinating the contribution of local partners. The financial situation means that every local authority is having to make difficult decisions about the services they fund.

The Positive for Youth vision

Drawing on lessons from the best local practice, *Positive for Youth* sets out the principles of what a good system of support for young people looks like and how this can be achieved – focusing strongly on the importance of cross-sector partnership.

- Educational attainment is key to young people's success. The Government has announced significant reforms and investment to improve education standards and increase young people's participation in learning and work. In line with their statutory duty, local authorities have a critical role to play in ensuring all young people participate in learning.
- Young people's experiences outside the classroom at home and in their community are also crucial to helping them form and pursue their ambitions.
- Parents, carers, and families have the primary responsibility and influence to help young people succeed. They need to be supported and services to young people need to take them into account.
- Communities, including local businesses, also need to take responsibility for helping young people belong and succeed.
- Some young people, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, need additional help to develop the personal and social skills and qualities they need to participate and attain in learning, avoid negative and risky behaviours, and be ready for adult life and work. Some also need early help to address specific issues and prevent them causing harm.

The Government is therefore retaining the statutory duty on local authorities to secure the provision of sufficient leisure-time activities for young people's wellbeing, including youth work. It will consult soon on shorter, more concise statutory guidance that provides greater clarity on the Government's expectations.

Youth voice

Young people have a right to have their voice heard in decisions that affect their lives.

There are many ways to listen to young people's voice and it is for local authorities to decide how best to do it. However, the Government does expect every local area to have a group of young people that is able to represent their peers' views in decision making and to audit the quality of local services. It believes in the value of representative bodies of young people able to represent the views of their peers in influencing local decisions, and that young people can add value throughout the process of commissioning services.

The Department for Education is funding the British Youth Council to promote youth voice nationally and locally, including to sustain the UK Youth Parliament and provide information and advice to councils and other public agencies to help them determine the best arrangements for them locally.

Each local authority area will soon have a new organisation called Local HealthWatch to make sure that young people will have a voice in shaping local health services.

Good commissioning

The Government looks to local leaders to work with young people to make decisions about local services in response to local priorities and needs. It won't tell councils which services to commission or how to deliver them – and it will not ring fence funding for this purpose.

Positive for Youth does not therefore announce new centrally controlled funding streams or programmes. Rather, it promotes local leadership and sets out a vision for how councils can work more closely together with their partners – including as local authorities take on new public health responsibilities through health and wellbeing boards and the production of a statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

The revised statutory guidance will make clear the Government's expectation that local authorities work with young people and other agencies to:

- assess the needs of their local youth population;
- consider how aspirational personal and social development programmes, youth work, and youth workers can contribute to delivering their priorities;
- agree priorities for services and how to deliver them most effectively and efficiently;
- determine which services need specific public funding and which can be secured through other routes so that public funding is targeted primarily on young people at risk of poor outcomes;
- consider which providers are best placed to deliver public services, and how to grow the overall role of the voluntary sector; and
- publicise the overall local offer of services and involve young people in giving feedback on their quality.

Local authorities can draw on funding from the Revenue Support Grant, the non-ringfenced Early Intervention Grant worth £2.365 billion in 2012-13, and from 2013 the public health grant, to respond to the priority needs of young people and their families.

Where councils have a Myplace youth centre, the best examples show that this can be a catalyst for them to work with local partners to transform the local offer to young people and pioneer new and innovative cross-sector approaches.

Many councils have already become involved in developing and piloting National

Citizen Service which offers 16 year olds a challenging personal and social development experience and an opportunity for social action in their communities. By 2014, expansion of the programme is expected to make it one of the largest personal and social development programmes for young people in the world. This presents an opportunity for local authorities to work with pilot providers to embed National Citizen Service as part an enhanced local offer to young people.

Sector-led improvement support

Councils are primarily accountable to local people. However, the Government will intervene against any well-founded concerns about long-standing failure to improve outcomes and service for young people.

The Government supports a sector-led approach to local authority improvement of services for children, young people, and families led by the Children's Improvement Board – which is a partnership between SOLACE, ADCS, LGA and DfE. It has provided additional funding of £780,000 in 2011-13 to ensure this programme meets the needs of commissioners of services for young people.

This funding is in addition to the of £900,000 p.a. funding that the Local Government Association provides from a top slice of the Revenue Support Grant to the National Youth Agency to provide tailored support to councils seeking to remodel or otherwise strengthen their youth offer.

Local authorities were consulted in the summer of 2011 on the additional practical support they need to improve services for young people.

In response, the Children's Improvement Board is:

- supporting a small network of 'youth innovation zones' to disseminate lessons from local authority areas that are adopting new, pioneering, and innovative system-wide approaches to involving all local partners in improving young people's outcomes – the first four are Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Knowsley, and a consortium led by Devon; and
- identifying services for young people as a priority area within the overall sector-led arrangements to support commissioners and identify and spread good practice; and
- funding further work by the Young Foundation to develop and test a calculator to determine the financial return from youth interventions.

Monitoring progress

Local authorities will wish to consider for themselves the measures they will use to demonstrate their own success in supporting local young people – taking into account the local data that is also available nationally to enable benchmarking.

The Government will use existing data to publish national measures of overall progress in improving young people's outcomes, focusing on positive outcomes achieved rather than negative outcomes prevented.

It will publish an audit of overall progress in realising the *Positive for Youth* vision at the end of 2012.

Further Information

Positive for Youth can be downloaded from the Department for Education's website at www.education.gov.uk/positiveforyouth. An executive summary is also available.

Case Studies

Positive for Youth contains a number of case studies. The following examples may be of particular interest to local authorities.

A local authority and schools working together

An Independent Young People's Commission funded by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council has had a transformative effect on the design and delivery of local services. The council has responded to evidence that young people need to be empowered to be agents of their own change by devolving power to front line professionals and young people themselves. The new youth-led OurPlace youth facility funded through Myplace is at the forefront of this.

Three additional Youth Zones in secondary Centres for Learning are also offering hundreds of young people over thirty types of arts, sports, cultural and educational activities. These Zones are run by integrated multi-disciplinary teams bringing together council youth workers with staff from the schools, the Police Force and other partners. They are already having a significant impact on participation in learning and on anti-social behaviour, which has reduced by up to 40% in some areas. Overall, over 200 young people have achieved or are working towards a recognised award through the Youth Zones.

Knowsley's youth offer recognises that empowering young people means supporting them to develop resilience and 'mental toughness' – the quality which determines in large part how people deal with challenge, stress, and pressure. Research has linked mental toughness closely with school performance, wellbeing and positive behaviours. This has reinforced Knowsley's development of a more inclusive, rounded, and broader learning offer that embraces wider enrichment and the development of resilience, mental toughness and character – not as an alternative to academic education but as an integrated component of it. The next phase of transformation in Knowsley is to develop the relationships between schools and youth work. This will facilitate a shift from delivering youth services in detached spaces out of school hours to interweaving them into the core school day.

Improving services and reducing costs through integration

Medway Council's new Integrated Prevention Service aims to reduce the number of young people engaging with statutory services. Initially, the services better utilised staff skills by bringing together local youth justice prevention work with targeted youth support for high-risk young people. In the first year, this resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system (285 entrants compared to a target of 514), and an equally impressive increase in referrals from partner agencies by, in some cases, 700%.

More recently, in response to financial pressures and the de-ringfencing of grants, this successful targeted youth support and prevention work has been expanded and amalgamated with family crisis work developed through the Family Intervention Programme. This has created a team of 9 key workers, plus a co-ordinator, who are able to work across a range of presenting issues including complex needs, and work with families in crisis as well as individual young people. Although staff were recruited from different services and agencies the aim has been to create one team that is multi-skilled and able to work in an integrated way with families and young people. The result is a more holistic service for young people who are showing the first signs of being at risk.

After 6 months, indications are very positive with further decreases in first time entrants to the criminal justice system (reduction of 57% on 2010-11), 24 young people prevented from being referred to Social Care, and over 200 families provided with support to address a range of needs. The programme is operating on a budget of £400,000 in 2011-12, compared to a total budget of nearly £700,000 in 2010-11 for the three separate programmes. Yet staff outputs and outcomes have far exceeded expectations. The new structure is enabling Medway to genuinely achieve 'more with less'.