

Consulting young people on new provision

This guidance is aimed at commissioners and project staff who plan to consult with young people about the types of activity that should be developed in their area.

1. The benefits of consulting with young people

There are clear benefits to be gained from taking the time to ask the views of young people before planning new activities, or before reviewing existing activities. These benefits include:

- ensuring that any activities are relevant to young people and based on their needs and interests;
- giving young people a voice and demonstrating that their views are important;
- enabling councils to benchmark their progress in providing accessible, reliable and relevant activities to young people against the findings in the 'Tired of Hanging Around' study;
- understanding any barriers to young people accessing activities so that action can be taken to overcome them; and
- increasing the likelihood that young people will attend the activities and so resources are not wasted.

2. Planning a consultation exercise

Ensure that you have the skills and resources to make consultation work *before* you start. If you do not have the skills in house, you can ask:

- partners in other agencies with experience of working with young people (for example the youth service, voluntary sector organisations, children's service departments)
- your organisation's research staff
- market research organisations experienced in working with children and young people¹.

In designing a consultation exercise you should consider:

- What is the purpose of the consultation – what do you want to find out?
- Are any other partners doing work on this topic that you could link into?
- Who are the young people that you want to hear from (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, whether or not they currently take part in activities, where they live, contact with other agencies etc)?
- How can you get to a representative group of these young people – which partners may be able to help you with this?
- What type of consultation method will be most suited to finding out what you want to know (e.g. focus groups, one-to-one interviews, questionnaires, etc)?
- How many young people do you want to speak to?
- How will you ensure that you speak to a balanced sample of young people (e.g. quotas for age, gender, ethnicity etc)?
- When and where will you carry out the consultation?
- How will you let young people know about the consultation and encourage them to take part?
- How will you ensure that all young people are able to participate in the consultation (e.g. different formats for young people with disabilities)?
- How will you collect and record the feedback from young people?

¹ The Market Research Society www.mrs.org.uk can advise on suitable agencies.

- How will you analyse and report on the results – who could help you with this?
- How will you let young people know how the consultation influenced your decisions?

3. Ideas for accessing young people at risk of anti-social behaviour

You should always check if other agencies are also trying to consult young people in your area. Check with the children's services department in the council or some of the agencies listed below. If you decide to carry out your own consultation exercise, the following list gives some ideas for accessing young people in order to ask for their views on activities in an area.

- **Schools** in areas with anti-social behaviour problems. Schools can be a useful way of accessing large numbers of young people. However this will not include young people who are excluded or truanting who may be most in need of activities.
- **Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)** – any consultation carried out in schools should also include PRUs to include young people not attending mainstream education.
- **Youth service** – many youth services have 'detached' teams who go out and engage with young people on the street. This may give you access to the potential target group for new projects. Youth workers also have experience of consulting with these groups of young people.
- **Youth offending teams** – will often already be working with those young people who have already committed anti-social behaviour. They also work with those at high risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour through their Youth Inclusion and Support Programmes.
- **Existing projects** – run by the voluntary and community sector, youth service, leisure service and others will give access to young people already engaged in activities, but still able to give a view about what else is needed in an area, and what works well about the project they are attending, as well as what could be improved.
- **Police** – Police community support officers (PCSOs) and community police officers (CPOs) may also engage with young people hanging around on the streets. They may be able to canvass views on what activities young people would be interested in.

4. The methodology used in the 'Tired of Hanging Around' study

Tired of Hanging Around included the views of young people aged 8 – 19 years, through focus groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to:

- establish the type of activities young people were involved in, including whether they engaged in anti-social behaviour;
- understand young peoples' views on anti-social behaviour;

- ascertain the reasons for young people engaging with certain projects and not others;
- determine what young people value about projects, and what the limitations of projects are;
- find out whether young people are involved in the design, delivery or evaluation of projects;
- establish whether projects have changed the behaviour of attendees or their relations with staff and the wider community; and
- find out the type of activities young people would like to see in their area.

The sampling of the focus groups was designed to include a balance of:

- males and females;
- different age groups;
- young people who are already engaged in activities;
- hard to reach young people who are not engaged in activities; and
- young people at low, medium and high risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Young people were recruited through local contacts in each area (such as those listed in section 3) and on-street recruitment. As part of the recruitment process young people were asked to complete a short questionnaire giving details of their profile and level of engagement in activities and anti-social behaviour. This helped to ensure that a balanced sample of young people was included in the focus groups.

Levels of engagement in anti-social behaviour were assessed by asking about involvement in the following activities:

- low risk of anti-social behaviour – littering, moving traffic cones;
- medium risk of anti-social behaviour – shouting, swearing or being drunk;
- high risk of anti-social behaviour – graffiti, fighting, damaging property.

Copies of the topic guides used to run the focus groups for the study are included as an appendix. The topic guides were age specific, with one for those aged 11 and below, and the other for those aged 12 and over. You may be able to adapt these to fit the aims of your own consultation.

5. Encouraging engagement in consultation

Sometimes young people are unwilling to take part in consultation. Here are some ways that projects have got over barriers and engaged young people in consultation:

- **Incentives** – in the form of vouchers, free tickets to sports events, going out for something to eat.
- **Snowball recruitment** – encouraging young people to bring a friend to any planned consultation event.
- **Follow-ups and reminders** of dates and times for planned consultation events.
- **Appropriate venues** – some venues, particularly if perceived as too formal (schools, hotels) may put young people off.
- **Letting young people know** the purpose of any consultation, and what will happen to their feedback.
- **Segmented consultation** events by age so younger children do not feel intimidated by older age groups.

- Make the exercises **fun and interactive** for young people.
- Giving young people a summary of the results of the research they have been involved in and **telling them what will change** as a result.

We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this guidance, or are intending to implement any of the advice, please do get in touch: please email nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk