

Tired of Hanging Around – Using sport and leisure activities to prevent anti-social behaviour by young people

Policy context and literature review

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of:

- the current policy context; and
- relevant academic and other recent literature.

The information within this paper forms the basis for much of the guidance given in chapter two of the *Tired of Hanging Around* report.

Policy context

1. Setting the scene

There is strong research evidence to support the link between poor outcomes in childhood and poor outcomes in later life¹. Young people from poorer backgrounds suffer disproportionately from poor outcomes². Involvement in anti-social behaviour is one example of this, and it dominates media attention.

Recent government policy has focused on reducing levels of social exclusion and improving outcomes for children and young people³. There has also been a focus on responding to the perceived high levels of anti-social behaviour by young people, and recognition that this problem is inter-linked with other social exclusion issues and cannot be dealt with in isolation.

This paper outlines the key policy developments, and the literature that supports these developments and has informed the scope of the study.

2. Improving outcomes for children and young people

In 2003, the government produced the green paper '*Every Child Matters*'⁴. This focused on improving the outcomes for children and young people (from birth to nineteen) to ensure that they all had the opportunity to:

- stay safe;
- be healthy;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution; and
- achieve economic well-being.

In order to improve outcomes and to ensure further children did not slip through the system in the way highlighted by the much publicised Victoria Climbié case, the paper advocated strengthening preventative services for

children and young people with a particular focus on early identification of problems, early intervention and the creation of more joined-up and accountable services. *'Every Child Matters'* was given a statutory basis in the 2004 Children Act. The Act confirmed the creation of children's trusts to oversee the public services for children and young people in an area and to take responsibility for improving outcomes.

The green paper *'Youth Matters'*⁵ followed in 2005. This paper focused on the thirteen to nineteen age-group. It highlighted the need for more integration between services for young people experiencing multiple problems. *'Youth Matters'* also called for services to be more responsive to the needs of young people and their parents. Providers were encouraged to involve young people in the design and delivery of services as a way of promoting increased participation.

The role of positive activities such as sport, leisure and volunteering in the lives of young people was a particular issue highlighted in *'Youth Matters'*. It emphasised the impact of these activities on outcomes in later life. And it identified the key mechanisms that made the links between the activities and the outcomes: increasing educational attainment and engagement, reducing smoking, reducing the likelihood of depression, and preventing involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour.

3. Policy review of children and young people for the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review

The Treasury and Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families) carried out a policy review of children and young people to inform decisions for the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. Three discussion papers were published by the review.

The first paper examined how well services are currently providing support to children at risk of poor outcomes⁶. It identified the factors that increased the risks of children experiencing negative outcomes such as involvement in anti-social behaviour, low educational attainment, unemployment, and poor physical and mental health. These risk factors include:

- low household income;
- low educational attainment;
- poor social and emotional skills;
- poor parenting;
- poor health;
- poor parental mental health; and
- living in a deprived neighbourhood.

This paper also identified protective factors such as high educational attainment, good social and emotional skills, and positive parenting that can reduce the impact of risk factors. Children from lower socio-economic

backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to risk factors and have less exposure to protective factors and hence have poorer outcomes.

For these reasons, preventative initiatives are often targeted at areas of high deprivation. Because of the complexity of risk and protective factors, projects targeting anti-social behaviour must go beyond simple diversionary activity if they are to succeed. Research on childhood risk factors has encouraged investment in the early years and support to parenting⁷ and well-publicised work of Sure Start and Family Intervention Projects.

Children and young people may be exposed to risk factors at different stages of their development. Investment, therefore, is needed for all age groups⁸. The transition between primary and secondary education at around age 11 can also act as a potential risk factor for young people. This is also a time when puberty is added to the environmental influences on young people's behaviour⁹.

The children and young people policy review found that a quarter of council youth services were performing inadequately, and that services were operating in silos. It emphasised the need for co-ordinated young people's services¹⁰.

The second policy review paper focused on supporting families¹¹ and in particular the need to support schools in their role in multi agency early intervention work. The paper highlighted the case of families involved in anti-social behaviour who are often known to education and social services for several years before their situation hits crisis point and their anti-social behaviour is dealt with.

4. Ten year strategy for positive activities

The third paper set out the framework for increased spending on initiatives for young people from £495 million to £679 million between 2008 and 2011. It also led to the launch of *Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities*¹². Positive activities is a collective term that describes activities that range from:

- educational activities that are structured, that contribute to learning and skills development and that focus on personal and social outcomes; and
- recreational activities that can be structured or unstructured and that are generally informal and focus on enjoyment and providing opportunities for social contact.

There are three main strands to the ten-year strategy:

- **empowerment** – giving young people the opportunity to influence services;
- **access** – supporting young people to overcome barriers to access of services (cost, transport, safety concerns, disadvantage, confidence, low aspirations, parental consent and perceived hostility of other young people); and

- **quality** – providing services that have a true effect on young people’s outcomes, improving workforce and partnerships between services.

Aiming High for Young People stated that by 2008, local integrated youth services would need to work better to¹³:

- prevent young people’s problems earlier;
- work together to support the development of young people, focusing on those experiencing disadvantage;
- provide improved information, advice and guidance to young people;
- offer a range of positive activities; and
- provide targeted support for the most vulnerable young people.

It also promotes positive activities to reduce concerns about anti-social behaviour, and to enable communities to see young people making a positive contribution to society. The report also acknowledged the research conducted by Feinstein et al., cited below, recognising that it is the level of *structure* in activities that is most important in delivering positive outcomes for young people¹⁴.

5. Other recent Central Government developments

Recent reorganisation of central government departments has focused on improving the coordination in providing services to young people at risk of negative outcomes. In particular, the Respect Unit has moved from the Home Office into the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Links have also been forged between the Youth Justice Board and DCSF. The issue of play for children and young people has also been shared between DCSF and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

There is less integration of services at the local level. DCSF has given children’s trusts the responsibility for mapping the availability of positive activities in an area, publicising them to young people, and commissioning activities to fill gaps in provision¹⁵. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) are responsible for preventing anti-social behaviour. DCSF revised guidance on children’s trusts issued in 2008, stresses that children’s trusts and CDRPs should work together to prevent youth crime and anti-social behaviour, ensuring *that local plans are properly aligned and any conflicting policies addressed*¹⁶. However, children’s trusts arrangements are still in their infancy¹⁷, and although collaborative working has improved, more effort is needed to ensure a coherent approach.

The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review introduced a new youth PSA to ‘*increase the number of young people on the path to success*¹⁸’. This include indicators on the number of young people engaging in positive activities and reducing first time entrances to the criminal justice system of 10-17 year olds. DCSF have emphasised through the ten-year strategy that youth issues require more attention and that young people experiencing one negative outcome are likely to experience more.

The emphasis on giving local authorities more responsibility for the varying needs of young people, and expanding the prevention agenda far beyond the early years, was reinforced with the publication of *The Children's Plan* in December 2007¹⁹. This outlined a ten-year vision for improving services for children and young people, raising levels of attainment and aspiration, and ensuring that services support families. The five key principles of the plan include a recognition that:

- *parents, not governments bring up children, but families need help and support to do this;*
- *all young people have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents will take them;*
- *young people need to be safe, healthy and enjoy their childhood as well as growing up prepared for adult life;*
- *young people and families deserve services that work together for them and meet their individual needs;*
- *it is always better to prevent problems early on rather than tackling a crisis later.*

6. Statutory Duty for Local Authorities

From 2007, local authorities have duties to secure sufficient access to positive activities for young people in their area²⁰. In securing access to positive activities local authorities must:

- involve young people in the consultation and design of positive activities;
- assess the range of positive activities in their area and work with partners to identify gaps in provision;
- commission the best provider from the public, private or community sector;
- remove any barriers to young people taking part in activities; and
- publicise what is available in their area.

Anti-social behaviour

7. Problems with the definition and measurement of anti-social behaviour

There are several, competing, definitions of 'anti-social behaviour'. The Crime and Disorder Act (1998), defines anti-social behaviour as:

*'acting in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as [the perpetrator]'*²¹.

Many definitions lack specificity and measurability. Some definitions only cover behaviour that is criminal, others go further. Most significantly, anti-social behaviour is an issue of perception. The recording of incidents is incomplete and records are held by different agencies.

There is no single, comprehensive dataset of anti-social behaviour incidents. In many areas, only criminal acts of anti-social behaviour are recorded. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of certain types of anti-social behaviour are not reported, as people are unclear who is responsible for taking action, or do not believe that anything will be done about it²².

An alternative approach is to measure *perception* rather than incidents. The British Crime Survey collects data on the extent of these perceptions (going back to 1992)²³. Citizens have consistently reported anti-social behaviour to be a problem in their area. The Home Office recognises that 'people living in hard pressed areas, such as in inner city estates and council areas, were significantly more likely to perceive problems with anti-social behaviour than those living in other areas'²⁴. The 16-24 age group are the age range most likely to perceive high levels of anti-social behaviour²⁵. The greatest concern is about '*teenagers hanging around*' – a concern that been consistently registered since 1996²⁶. This finding sits alongside the other common concern that people often feel that there is not enough for young people to do in their area²⁷.

8. Government response to anti-social behaviour

Government policy on anti-social behaviour initially focused on enforcement measures and punishment. The *Together Campaign* (2003)²⁸ saw the use of anti-social behaviour orders, acceptable behaviour contracts, and dispersal orders to deal with anti-social behaviour. By 2006, the government had recognised that enforcement action alone would not deal with the underlying causes of anti-social behaviour and that more preventative measures were also required. The *Respect Action Plan*²⁹ comprised a number of elements, including providing support to families, developing constructive activities for children and young people, and with improving behaviour in schools. These interventions were targeted in the forty Respect Areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were introduced in 1999. They have attracted publicity and criticism. Around half of all ASBOs were originally served on young people, but over time this balance has shifted and now more adults receive ASBOs than young people³⁰. A 2006 review on the use of ASBOs found that in areas with high ASBO use, Youth Offending Teams were often frustrated at the late stage at which they were involved in the application for the order. On many occasions in these areas, the Youth Offending Teams were only informed when the order was ready to be put to court and this was cited as the main reason why they were unable to offer alternatives to the young person, such as diversionary activities³¹.

A 2007 speech by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls stated that too many young people who start by truanting and disrupting classrooms are only coming to the authorities' attention when they start offending³². The recent movement of the Respect unit into DCSF highlights that preventing crime and anti-social behaviour amongst young

people should be a multi-agency agenda as problems faced by young people are often complex and require a multi-agency solution.

The 2008 *Youth Crime Action Plan*, outlines an integrated approach to tackling anti-social behaviour agreed by all relevant government departments. The approach comprises:

- *tough enforcement where behaviour is unacceptable or illegal;*
- *non-negotiable support to address the underlying causes of poor behaviour or serious difficulties; and*
- *better prevention to tackle problems before they become serious or entrenched, and to prevent problems arising in the first place*³³.

The importance of partnership work is highlighted, particularly the links between schools, police and youth provision to ensure that young people are safe and have positive activities available to them. Additional funding of £100million was made available over a two and a half year period commencing in March 2008.

9. The cost of anti-social behaviour

In 2006, approximately 22 per cent of young people aged between ten and twenty-five committed an act of anti-social behaviour³⁴. These young people are more likely to go on to commit more serious offences³⁵. Anti-social behaviour costs public agencies in England and Wales £13.5 million each day/£3.4 billion per year³⁶. The biggest costs are due to criminal damage/vandalism (£2.673 million), intimidation/harassment (£1.98 million), and litter/rubbish (£1.863 million)³⁷. These figures exclude the cost to victims and communities: particularly the effects on community well-being. As well as the costs associated with each incident of anti-social behaviour, there are also costs of dealing with the perpetrators. Each anti-social behaviour order costs at least £2,500 to obtain³⁸.

Scott et al³⁹ conducted a longitudinal study in which they followed cohorts of young people with conduct disorder (persistent and pervasive pattern of anti-social behaviour in childhood and adolescence), conduct problems and no conduct problems at age 10. They found that the average cost of additional services such as social care, education, health, state benefits in adulthood and crime by age 28 for those with conduct disorder were £70,019. This was significantly higher than for those with conduct problems (costs were £24,324) or those with no conduct problems, (costs were £7,423)⁴⁰. Criminal justice costs, followed by education were the highest additional costs identified for those with conduct disorder and conduct problems. Conduct disorder was seen to be strongly associated with social and economic disadvantage. The conclusions of the report were that '*antisocial behaviour in childhood is a major predictor of how much an individual will cost society*'.

Despite the large costs of anti-social behaviour which fall on many agencies, few contribute to prevention⁴¹. It is acknowledged in various reports (DfES, Home Office, and Audit Commission) that early intervention is cost effective⁴². The Audit Commission has estimated that if just one in ten young offenders

had an effective intervention this would save over £100 million a year⁴³. The National Audit Office recommends that developmental interventions as the most effective for non-institutionalised juvenile offenders where there is focus on the risk factors increasing the likelihood of offending behaviour and a range of services are offered, such as counselling, interpersonal skills training, and behavioural programmes⁴⁴.

The needs of young people

10. Social exclusion and young people's role in society

Although much progress has been made over the last decade in tackling social exclusion, the Home Office estimates that 2 to 3 per cent of the population still remain excluded and that 1.7 million children and young people remain in poverty⁴⁵. Children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are most at risk of experiencing acute combinations of problems and are likely to be in need of multiple services⁴⁶.

A 2007 report by the charity 4Children⁴⁷, highlighted that young people in prison often have complex needs and come from difficult backgrounds. The report emphasised that agencies could have intervened if these complex problems were viewed as predictive factors and prevention work was implemented early. The report noted that:

- 49 per cent of young people in custody were in local authority care at some point in their life;
- 72 per cent of young people in prison have been excluded from school at some point in their educational career;
- 88 per cent of sentenced male prisoners have been diagnosed with anti-social or paranoid personality disorders.

The same report also found that nearly 70 per cent of 18-20 year olds sentenced to custody are re-convicted within 2 years of their release⁴⁸, clearly highlighting that for these young people, a strict approach to punishment is not acting as a deterrent or addressing the conditions that caused them to offend.

Young people not in education, employment or training have been identified as a significant issue: 1.2 million young people fall into this category⁴⁹. Reducing youth unemployment by one percentage point could save over £2 million in terms of youth crime avoided⁵⁰.

IPPR⁵¹, found that, in deprived areas, young people feel they can not change their community or shape their own future. Low aspirations were seen as a significant problem. IPPR also suggested that government messages about young people are confusing. Young people are vulnerable and require protection, but they are also a threat to society whose actions affect us all⁵². The authors stated that government policy has historically over-emphasised the value of education as the single solution to eradicate poverty and failed to acknowledge the other complex needs of young people which are factors in

dictating the negative outcomes that they experience. IPPR argued that a more holistic service for young people is required, where they can receive advice, help and guidance for the various problems that they experience.

Furthermore, young people are often represented negatively by adults and the media, with 71 per cent of media stories about young people being negative.

11. Evidence regarding the value of positive activities

One reason for local and national government investing in positive activities is the recognition of the role of positive activities, and particularly sport and leisure, in engaging disaffected young people where other methods have failed. In her extensive literature review of the field, Rachel Sandford suggests that government has reinforced the link between disaffection and 'non-participation' on the one hand, and inclusion and participation on the other⁵³. Due to the strength of its appeal to most sections of the population, sport in particular is recognised as a 'hook' to engage young people before encouraging other personal and social development activities as part of the project, so increasing their effectiveness.⁵⁴ This principle is thought to be relevant to other leisure activities.

However, participation in such activities is variable and those who are most disadvantaged tend to be least likely to take part. In addition to transport and cost barriers, young people can consider activities provided as inappropriate or unattractive⁵⁵. Some young people need support to engage with these activities. For example, outreach work is an important means of taking the activities and opportunities out to where young people are⁵⁶.

Investment in the use of constructive activities such as sport to improve the skills of young people at risk of involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour is not new. In the 1980's several probation services ran successful sports counselling projects as a way of building relations with young people, finding them a purpose in life, encouraging them to develop new skills and ultimately reducing their rates of re-offending.

Leo Feinstein, in a longitudinal study conducted by for the Department for Education and Skills, demonstrated that the context in which young people at risk of negative outcomes spend their out of school leisure time is an important indicator of the outcomes they achieve in adulthood. The provision of structured activities is considered to make a difference to future outcomes, whereas activities without structure or facilitation are unlikely to have positive impact and often result in negative outcomes due to peer group effects.⁵⁷ Attendance of unstructured youth clubs in particular was noted as having a particularly detrimental effect upon adult outcomes. Young people at risk of negative outcomes are often more attracted to unstructured activities, and so a major challenge for areas is to engage these young people in activities that are likely to reduce this risk.

Edwards and Latch highlighted a variety of benefits of organised, structured activities, including reduced likelihood of drug and alcohol problems,

aggression, anti-social behaviour, crime, chance of becoming a teenage parent and improved mental health⁵⁸. This report also summarises the findings of Feinstein's longitudinal research:

*By age 30, young people who participated in sports or community centres at age 16 were three times less likely to be depressed; five per cent less likely to be single, separated or divorced; three per cent less likely to be in social housing; two per cent less likely to have no qualifications; and three per cent less likely to be on a low income than those who did not.*⁵⁹

Traditionally, many programmes have been diversionary. This assumes that young people get involved in crime mostly because they are bored or because an opportunity to become involved presents itself, and therefore by distracting them for certain periods of the day, offending rates will reduce⁶⁰. Although diversionary programmes may have short-term effects, their long term impact is limited. They do little to deal with the risk factors acknowledged to be predictors of young people's involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour. To achieve long term impact, programmes need to operate over the medium to long term, contain both diversionary and developmental components and focus on⁶¹:

- developing cognitive and social skills;
- reducing impulsiveness and risk taking;
- increasing self-esteem and self-confidence; and
- improving educational and employment prospects.

Although it is acknowledged that activities are effective as a 'hook' to attract young people to a programme, it is clear that more than just the activity is required to reduce the risks associated with a young person experiencing negative outcomes like involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour.

12. Community and Peer Impact

In studying why some activities could be more beneficial than others, Feinstein emphasises that young people are profoundly influenced by each other's behaviour. As youth clubs in particular tend to attract young people with less developed personal and social skills and are generally settings in which young people can interact in unstructured, unmediated ways, the negative influences of others can be strong⁶².

Edwards and Latch emphasise that like strong communities, the right kind of activities can help young people to develop 'strong identities by being part of a bounded group, structured activities, by their emphasis on team involvement and an end-goal, do something similar.⁶³ This emphasises the problem of 'collective efficacy', the ability of communities to control the precursors of crime such as levels of trust and respect between members⁶⁴. If an area has little collective efficacy, then it lacks friendship networks, supervision of young people and civic participation and is seen as a very important predictor of whether an area will suffer from high crime and anti-social behaviour.

Therefore, there is a significant need for areas facing these problems to provide structured activities for young people, to try to encourage the sense of community, trust and respect that they are lacking.

The *4Children Youth Review* found that young people experience boredom directly after school. Thirty four per cent of 11-16 year olds reported that they regularly return to an empty house. Half of parents surveyed also stated that they do not know where their teenagers are, whom they are with and what they are doing when they are not in school. This rose to 60 per cent for parents of 15 and 16 year olds⁶⁵. MORI reported in 2002 that 43 per cent of young people do not feel safe after dark and 38 per cent feel it is not safe for them to do what they want after school⁶⁶.

Systems needing to be in place

13. Funding issues

It is estimated that central government spends £1.6 billion on the youth service and programmes to engage young people in activities and prevent them from becoming involved in crime or anti-social behaviour⁶⁷. This figure is set to rise with the government's commitment to increase the funding available for positive activities. Recent evidence indicates that the provision of positive activities for young people can create a net saving through reduced spend on social inclusion. It was estimated that every £1 spent on prevention saves £7 on the cost of poor outcomes⁶⁸.

The issue of short term funding is often identified in research as a barrier to success for activity programmes for young people. There are often different providers of services, different funding streams and time limited projects, which can make young people feel disillusioned and confused⁶⁹. Young people need something to rely on and short term funding of activities or youth support makes it difficult for young people to engage, put their trust in the staff and have faith in the system.

14. Evaluation challenges

One of the most significant problems faced by social inclusion projects providing positive activities for young people is evaluation. It has been hard for commissioners of services or policy makers to make decisions based on evidence, when there are problems with both the availability and quality of the evidence collected⁷⁰. Often programmes have unclear objectives⁷¹ making it hard to measure whether or not they have been achieved. Commissioners want to see hard data which demonstrates the success of the project, such as a reduction in crime in the area. However, causality is difficult to prove; particularly when areas with such projects are likely to have other initiatives in place and also, crime has generally been on a downward trend in recent years. In a report evaluating a social inclusion project called *Get Hooked on Fishing*, it highlights other problems with the issue of causality:

The causal relationships between 'sport' and desired social outcomes are notoriously difficult to prove conclusively: it is difficult to be certain that a particular change in behaviour is due to the activity alone (rather than changes in other areas of the young person's life); and such assessments do not take account of unreported offending or anti-social behaviour⁷².

Therefore, even when considering the change in the behaviour of one particular young person, the issue of causality is complex. The evaluators of Positive Futures (a national sports based social inclusion programme funded by the Home Office) have recognised the limitations of reliance on quantitative outcome measures. They have subsequently begun using a more qualitative approach focusing on how projects have changed attendees' levels of engagement and participation with the project⁷³. This 'journey travelled' approach measures more intermediate outcomes such as improvements in educational attendance and attainment, improvements in social relations and gaining employment, which are more within the control of the project. It is assumed that these intermediate outcomes are indicators of wider goals such as reductions in anti-social behaviour.

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² *Ibid.*, p.7, 8

³ Cabinet Office, *Reaching Out – an action plan on social exclusion*, Cabinet Office, 2006.

⁴ Dfes, *Every Child Matters*, Dfes, September 2003.

⁵ Dfes, *Youth Matters*, Dfes, July 2005.

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¹² HM Treasury and Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities*, 2007.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.10,11

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21

¹⁵ HM Treasury and Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities*, 2007, P.15

¹⁶ DCSF, *Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency co-operation to improve well being of children, young people and their families*, DCSF, 2008.

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