



Youth Service Advisory Group Review

October 2009

1.0 Introduction

This paper will give an outline of the workings of the Youth Service Advisory Groups (YAGs), indicate the reasons change is required in order to achieve the best outcomes for the service and its partners and make recommendations for future delivery. As part of this review the following national and local policies have been considered:

- Every Child Matters.
- Youth Matters.
- Aiming High, the Ten Year Strategy for Young People.
- Kent Children and Young People Plan: 2008-11
- Local Children's Services Partnership Plans

In addition, 7 (out of 12) meetings were observed and the previous 4 sets of minutes for each of the 12 groups were reviewed. A number of proposals for change were developed and disseminated to the YAG's for discussion, this report draws together the final views of the YAG's and the recommendations for future action.

2.0 Background

YAGs were first formed in March 2003 and initially reviewed in November 2004. They were created to focus on the Youth Service's provision and relationship with local agencies, provide guidance and support and assist in the development of new work relevant to local needs.

The remit of the YAGs was as follows:

- Young people's issues and needs within the area.
- Youth Service delivery within the area and any partnership work directly related to Youth Service delivery.
- Receive qualitative and quantitative reports from the Area Youth Officer on progress of youth service delivery in the area.
- Assist in defining partner responsibilities between the Youth Service and other agencies to support joint working.
- Assisting the Youth Service respond to policy changes within a local context.
- Act as a point of contact for partner agencies with the Youth Service.

Membership of the group comprised of officers, local partners and a requirement for representation of at least three young people. Local KCC Members are invited to attend, and the groups are chaired by a KCC Member appointed by Cabinet.

3.0 Issues & Required Action

The following are the key issues which arose during the review of the current working of the YAGs and the action required to address these issues, ensuring the continued effective development and working of the Groups:

3.1 Function

The function of the majority of YAGs has changed over a period of time as interaction with specific groups of young people has meant that the nature, level and variety of topics debated has become increasingly focused on specific youth work interventions rather than supporting the overall strategic direction of the Youth Service, such as the need to engage in strategic planning for Integrated Youth Support Services at a District and Borough level. Whilst the current situation has been a positive way to keep local councillors and agencies informed about provision, it has significantly changed the purpose of the group and removed the contribution to the strategic direction.

Action required:

To adopt the new terms of reference (included as Appendix 1), ensuring a strategic focus for the groups and to support this with regular direction from the Head of Kent Youth Service and Area Youth Officer.

3.2 Participation Structures

Since the establishment of the YAGs, opportunities for the participation of young people has evolved considerably; Kent Youth County Council (KYCC) has developed exceptionally well and young people are able to take direct budgetary decisions through engagement with various Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF) groups. The 2008 elections to KYCC saw over 30,000 young people vote for candidates in their area, whilst the work of the various YOF and YCF groups has seen young people decide on the allocation of £1.8m in YOF monies to almost 598 projects (up to Sept 08) and £1.9m in YCF monies to 78 capital projects (up to Mar09), including grants of £250,000 towards the construction of Parklife Youth and Children's Centre in Herne Bay and over £140,000 for the newly opened Hadlow Youth Club.

It is crucial that, as the YAG's deliver a strategic focus for young people's provision locally, effective decision making structures are developed which allow young people to actively influence the development of services locally.

Action required:

The development of a robust structure which allows for the meaningful participation of young people through: clear representation of KYCC and District/Borough forum members; meeting structures which support the engagement of all young people; evidence of how young people have engaged in the decision making process. Each YAG need not use the same structure but these principles should be applied.

3.3 Age group

Whilst YAGs have always maintained a clear focus on the Youth Service's priority age range of 13-19 the wider integrated Children's Services environment offers a clear benefit to be achieved through an expansion of the Groups' focus to incorporate young people aged 10 and over. For partners whose work does not fit neatly into the 13-19 age bracket this will allow easier engagement and joint planning.

Action required:

To expand the terms of reference for the groups to allow some discussion and planning for young people aged 10-12 to be included (terms of reference are included as Appendix 2).

3.5 Links with Local Boards

A key issue for the effective working of YAG's is the links that they are able to develop with other key decision making bodies eg Local Members Boards, District/Town Council Groups and most importantly Local Children's Service Partnerships (LCSPs).

Issues of duplication need to be considered during any change process, currently some LCSPs have been developing groups which cover similar subjects to the YAG's. As LCSPs develop, this issue is likely to become more prevalent as youth sub-groups are established. However, these sub-groups omit the key elements of direct input from KCC Members and young people and as such LCSP's should be encouraged to utilise the YAG groups in order to debate and resolve issues around the 13-19 (and wider 10-19) age group, particularly those relating to the statutory responsibility to provide positive activities.

Action required:

Ensure that clear links are made with relevant boards/groups, creating opportunities for agencies to be represented and share agenda items. In particular, an advisory relationship to the LCSPs should be formalised.

4.0 Conclusion

The review of the current YAG process found considerable support from the membership for them to continue. There was overall agreement that a refresh of focus and structure is needed. In order for the Groups to provide ongoing support and direction to the development of young people's services on a local level, there are three crucial elements:

- the ability to give strategic direction to service development;
- advising Local Children's Service Partnership's on the planning and commissioning of services;
- the meaningful engagement of young people in the decision making and planning for the above.

The actions described in section 3 will to refocus the Groups and provide a structure for the participation of young people to ensure value and meaning to their presence and restating the primary aim of providing strategic direction for the development of young people's services.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for Youth Advisory Groups

The purpose of these Groups is to:

- Focus on the strategic needs and priorities for young people's services across the local District/Borough area, contributing to the development of a local strategy for young people aged 10-19
- Advise the relevant Local Children's Service Partnership
- Focus on Youth Issues and young people's needs in the District/Borough, in order to take a holistic view on how partner agencies can respond
- Contribute to planning and general discussion on youth matters in the Local Members' Boards and Local Children's Services Partnerships
- Agree District/Borough priorities as guidance for decision making by local YOF panels
- Provide a networking forum for partner agencies, young people and other interested parties to address issues regarding young people
- Receive information on new Government, County Council or the partner agency initiatives, action plans, area inspection reports, business planning, annual reports and other information that would help the Group to carry out its strategic advisory function
- Clearly define responsibilities of agencies in the District/Borough to assist other groups looking at community safety, regeneration, education, health and development in achieving their own strategic objectives
- Assist in responding to and reporting on County Council and Government initiatives that impact on work with young people

The group should meet 4 times per year with briefings provided for the Chairperson by the Area Youth Officer to ensure a robust agenda. In addition an annual meeting will be held between the Chairs of the groups and the Head of Youth Service in order to review progress, discuss common issues and ensure clarity and common direction.

Appendix 2: Recommended Membership for Youth Advisory Groups

The Chair of the YAG should be a local KCC Member, appointed by KCC's Cabinet.

The membership of the groups should consist of no more than fifteen people drawn from the following:

- All local KCC Members.
- The District/Borough Council portfolio holder for Youth Matters.
- At least four young people (supported by Youth Worker who will brief them beforehand), one a KYCC member and one a District/Borough Youth Forum/Cabinet member.
- The Area Youth Officer.
- District/Borough Council Officer(s).
- The Local Children's Services Partnership Manager.
- Community Wardens
- Voluntary Sector agencies – minimum of two.
- Youth Offending Service representative.
- Police strategic representative.
- Connexions representative.

Other attendees for specific meetings may include:

Parish Councillors

Specialist Providers such as Catch 22 (formerly Rainer), Moving Forward, Barnardos, Action for Children (formerly NCH)

Education Welfare Officers

Health Services

Others who feature in a specific district's youth work / youth issues focus

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