

# THE NEW COMMISSIONING PROCESS FOR YOUTH SERVICES

SURVEY 1



2006 saw the introduction of a radical new commissioning process for youth services, devolving many funding and strategic decisions to Local Authorities. We put five questions to our county and city constituent organisations who cover every part of the UK to assess their initial experiences of the new system.

## 1. Do you receive funding from your Local Authority and what is the impact of any grants you receive?

*Funding of voluntary organisations by Local Authorities shows wide variations and lack of consistency. There are clear reports showing support for local voluntary organisations is in decline.*

In **Devon** the Health, Education and Social Services are merging in theory, but there is no commissioning happening and funding from the Local Authority has been squeezed by about 10%. There is also evidence that statutory youth projects have been set up using charitable status.

**Leicestershire** receives funding from both city and county councils to pay for staff in their clubs. There are service level agreements in place, but it is felt there is a lack of core funding available to cover overheads and capital costs.

**Essex** identifies a will by the county council to engage the voluntary sector, but local government has to save £100m across all the services. They also feel that the distribution of funds is more often influenced by political factors than by the skills of potential providers or the needs of beneficiaries.

**Berkshire** is able to bid for pots of money in partnership with the Local Authority and can access charitable and designated funds, but to date is not aware of any Local Authority that is ready to commission out its own services. In reality they see very little money coming their way and notice that any new money announced by the government very quickly gets a Local Authority stamp and is ring fenced to deliver its own service.

**Warwickshire** has been led to believe that the commissioning process would begin in April 2008. This is the same message that has been disseminated for the last three years. They have received no communication on the process or the models that will be used.

In **Wiltshire** any commissioning that is taking place is happening slowly. Local Authority managers appear reluctant to commission externally, not least because of the degree of change and uncertainty about government changes and new initiatives.

## 2. How easy is it to work with Children's Services and to access available funding?

*The relationship that voluntary organisations have with Local Authorities and/or Children's Services appears to be an unproductive and inefficient one, with evidence suggesting that the Local Authorities do not recognise the*

*arrangements that volunteers have to make in order to meet during work hours; that they are protective of the funds they are responsible for distributing; that they direct funds towards young people with particular or special needs rather than to all young people; and that they take a short-term view.*

In **Leicestershire** volunteers have difficulty attending day-time meetings and when they do, they find that the funding direction is towards 'children' rather than young people. Many feel that their work with all young people is not valued.

**Essex** sees no coherent plan at the moment for commissioning and feels money that was earmarked to go to the voluntary sector has been used in some circumstances to employ more staff by the county council to increase capacity, which was not what the funding was originally planned for.

**Berkshire** is not certain that Education and/or Youth Services understand the concept of contracting work out. The health agencies have a good understanding and, if they had money, would be keen to look at new relationships.

**Birmingham** finds it enormously difficult to access funding. Local government agencies have sufficient and designated staff whereas voluntary organisations have fewer staff who have to deal with a multitude of responsibilities and do not have the capacity to engage with an ever increasing burden of bureaucracy. In their view, Local Authorities in Birmingham, Worcestershire and Sandwell have too many people trying to tell them how to do their jobs whilst, at the same time, making a pretty poor show of running themselves.

**Wiltshire** finds itself in the middle of a transition as the internal restructuring of the Local Authority delays commissioning at the same time as the Youth Development Service, YOTS and Connexions Service all start to come under one Directorate – Education and Young People's Services. Meetings are taking place with VCS, to explain PCT and county council commissioning arrangements.



### 3. Do Local Authorities proactively approach the voluntary sector to provide advice and guidance on partnerships and funding applications?

*The relationship between Local Authorities and voluntary organisations appears to be fragile, seldom based on mutual understanding of their potentially complementary roles. In particular, there frequently appears to be a lack of understanding of the limited resources – staff and funds – committed to the voluntary sector.*

**Essex** has good relationships with Children's Services, but they find that even people who have worked within these departments can show an incredible amount of naivety and lack of understanding about what the voluntary sector does. Those that have a better understanding feel threatened and see jobs being cut so may be reluctant to play ball.

**Warwickshire** has been waiting three years to hear about commissioning and in that time has received no communication on the process or the models that will be used.

**Scotland** is seldom approached by councils, but when contact is made they often find that money has already been allocated. Members felt all the councils have legal teams who interpret guidelines and no uniform policies are available. Another effect of putting the money through councils is that national organisations have to put in 32 different applications for a national event and small organisations do not have the capacity to battle through the system.

### 4. What levels of funding have been received or are seen as available for the voluntary sector?

*At best there appears to be limited distribution of funds to voluntary organisations.*

In **Essex** some funding finds its way to voluntary organisations, although it is described as 'crumbs off the table'. The Children's Fund has successfully distributed nearly £1m a year to voluntary groups and Connexions £600,000; both organisations operate outside the county council and have fair, transparent and above board processes for bidding. This may be further compromised from April 2008 when Connexions will be taken back in-house by the county council and the Children's Fund will disappear.

All the grants received by **Warwickshire** that are accessible to them through Local Authorities are

relatively small and for short-term projects, not sustainable long-term work. They also receive some core funding which is also relatively small and will stop once commissioning begins.

**Durham** covers several local councils but only received £1,325 per year from one – Durham County Council. This was suspended last year although it is likely to be reinstated this year.

**Birmingham** is tiring of raising concerns about the ineffective way they see how funding percolates to the end user – this meaning all young people irrespective of any particular aspect of their lives. In their view, specifically directed funding leads to the division and factionalism we see today by emphasising differences rather than giving credence to what binds people together; youth work today has become meaningless because it wants to create an awareness that is not matched in other strands of young people's lives, families and street culture.

### 5. What improvements could be made?

*Suggested improvements focus on the need to clearly identify young people's needs, as specified in consultation with them and as separate from children's needs; and to provide a universal service for all young people, properly accountable and adequately monitored. There should also be closer cooperation and collaboration between Local Authorities and voluntary organisations.*

**Devon** recommends that there should be a robust level of scrutiny into the use of Local Authority funding as currently some funds appear to be used to support Local Authorities in the guise of the charity sector.

**Leicestershire** suggests that larger voluntary organisations should be commissioned to engage with smaller voluntary projects to capitalise on their stronger understanding of the sector and their ability to support where capacity is limited. This would create a focus on young people rather than children.

**Essex** believes that the funds available to the voluntary sector will diminish over the next few years. To ensure that funding finds its way to the grass roots it should be ring fenced, otherwise it will go to underpinning existing services and posts.

**Birmingham** would like to see the removal of short-term funding and to have shadow groups of young people helping them to make the day to day decisions that affect everyone. In their view, the voluntary sector would not exist without young people making a huge contribution and taking on more responsible roles as

they get older. They recommend the employment of young people as apprentices which would make a difference to many more lives and create real jobs.

They would also like to see an increasing emphasis on successful engagement with young people (what they want) rather than the 'over-professionalism' of youth work (what experts identify as necessary) that has often led to an increased intensity of disrespect between generations and communities.

**Wiltshire** points out that central government expects VCS to be involved in all stages of development planning and service delivery and that this needs to be monitored nationally or through the regional government offices.



### Clubs for Young People

Clubs for Young People is one of the UK's leading voluntary community and club-based youth work organisations.

Our affiliated network reaches 400,000 young people every year via 3,500 clubs, centres and projects and is supported by over 30,000 volunteers and 1,000 youth workers. Young people are involved throughout our organisation from board level, through communications and strategy planning to involvement within constituent organisations and clubs.

Recent research has highlighted the positive impact and need for continued support for these clubs and projects, all of which are located in the heart of local communities:

- 52% of young people believe that attending their local club saved their life
- 90% regard their club as the safest place to go in their community
- 73% say their club provides support with schooling and education
- 43% would prefer to get active in their community not at school

Many of Britain's foremost sportspeople, entertainers and business leaders have been members in their youth at a Clubs for Young People centre or project.

Our membership comprises 42 constituent organisations, covering every part of the UK. They work closely with local authorities to develop and manage

statutory and non-statutory youth services in their area.

*We would like to thank all contributors and organisations for letting us feature them in these case studies.*

For further information please contact:  
Communications Department, Clubs for Young People  
371 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5QY  
Telephone 0207 793 0787  
office@clubsforyoungpeople.org.uk

www.clubsforyoungpeople.org.uk  
regd charity no. 306065

clubs for young people  
involve • enjoy • achieve