



Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16th June 2009

Report from the Director of Children and Families

Wards Affected: ALL

Issues for Investigation by Service Review on Youth Services

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This paper reports on the work of the Youth Strategy Group, which has met several times to discuss how best to improve services for young people in Brent. It sets out a series of issues which should be the basis of the upcoming service review to be carried out by the Youth Service, in conjunction with the Brent Excellence Support Team (BEST).

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That members note the report, and the recommendations being made to the service review project team; and that they contribute any further issues that the review should investigate.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 Young people form one of the Administration's four strategic priorities for the Council. To address this priority, a group of senior officers and Executive Members (including representatives from Policy & Regeneration, Children & Families, and the Lead Members for Children & Families, and Crime Prevention & Public Safety) first met in June of 2008 to discuss improving the services available to the young people of Brent (ie those from 13-19 years old).
- 3.2 As its remit, the group (meeting under the title of the Youth Strategy Group, and expanded to include the Director of Communications) decided to focus primarily on services available to all young people outside of the formal education curriculum ("universal" services), rather than those targeted at specific groups. These were thought to fall into three main categories: those to help young people enjoy their free time; those to help them achieve qualifications, skills and employment; and those to help keep them safe, secure and healthy. In addition, the group included in its remit consideration of how the council communicates with young people, with a particular focus on use of technology.

- 3.3 During its lifetime, the group considered the performance of and challenges facing the Youth Service; young people's safety, particularly in travelling to and from school; and considered the likely future impact of the recession on young people seeking employment.
- 3.4 In addition, the group examined options for communicating with and engaging young people, especially online. It was agreed that we do not currently do this effectively, with the content on our websites which might be relevant to young people being presented in a way that is inaccessible and unlikely to attract or retain their attention. Options for resolving this have been investigated and initially costed. Currently Children & Families, along with the Communications team, are working with young people in Brent (via the Youth Parliament) in order to ascertain what the output of this work should look like in order to meet their needs, and how they could actively influence its development.
- 3.5 Another key piece of work involved geographically mapping both the population of 13-19 year-olds in Brent (as counted by Mayhew Associates in 2007), and then cross-referencing this with services that currently exist for young people in the borough (as set out in the council's Youth Services Directory). This was also considered along with data and inferences drawn from the Mosaic customer segmentation model, and the numbers of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET). Together, these sources of information were used to establish a picture of how provision and need match up in Brent, and to inform decisions about how these might be realigned in the future.
- 3.6 With services for young people to be subject to one of the service reviews being undertaken under the Brent Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, the Youth Strategy Group's work has enabled it to identify a series of issues which the review team is recommended to address. These should inform the scope of the review, and are set out below.

Issues for Service Review

- 3.7 It is proposed that the review should have two strands to its approach: firstly, tackling issues pertaining to the overall offer of services and facilities available to young people in the borough; and secondly, helping the council's Youth Service to improve its performance.

The Overall Offer

- 3.8 *Challenging the existing basis of provision* – the Service Review should be seen as an opportunity to ask the most fundamental and challenging questions about the current provision of services for young people in Brent, including whether or not they should be directly provided by the Council, and if our resources could be more effectively deployed to improve overall outcomes for young people.
- 3.9 *Further research including consultation of young people* - the information currently available does not give a clear indication of how need is distributed throughout the borough. The conclusions drawn from the mapping work carried out for the Youth Strategy Group (which compared actual provision with distribution of young people) do not necessarily accord with perceptions expressed in, for example, the results of the Place Survey, Safer Neighbourhoods Teams consultations, and Children & Families Locality Boards; and nor do these other sources of perception information give a consistent picture amongst themselves. Thus, there are different and competing views of where the greatest need for services for young people currently lies (such as wards in north and central Brent, the south and east of the borough, parts of the suburban west, and Alperton).
- 3.10 It was not feasible during the life of the Group to carry out detailed qualitative research on service provision. Therefore, the existing mapped information lacks a

qualitative aspect to it, which is crucial to make an informed assessment of the provision for young people that currently exists, and gaps that should be filled.

- 3.11 For these reasons, it is recommended that the service review undertake further research on the following fronts:
- In-depth consultation of young people, capable of analysis on a geographical basis (eg by ward) to ascertain their views on the existing provision of leisure activities and other services from which they could benefit, and where improvements should be targeted; and
 - qualitative research into the effectiveness and outcomes of services and facilities provided to young people by the council and partners, as well as their range and capacity.
- 3.12 This research should yield information which can inform specific recommendations by the Review. Its brief should be clearly specified to enable this and should, for example, focus on those areas which the Council can substantially influence. Furthermore, it is recommended that the review team consult the Brent Youth Parliament on the scope of the review and on its eventual recommendations; and that meaningful representation of young people should be incorporated into the review process.
- 3.13 *Defined objectives and outcomes specific to the needs of Brent's young people* - the research which would take place as recommended above should result in a more robust evidence base in relation to the varying needs across the borough, when considered alongside the other data available (eg Mosaic data, NEET numbers, existing provision, and any other data which is available at ward level or similar). This should allow the setting of definitive objectives which are tailored to those needs, such as fear of crime, including racially-motivated crime, lack of physical activity and prevention of hypertensive and central nervous system inflammatory diseases, lack of space to themselves at home, and the likelihood of accruing chronic debt.
- 3.14 *Safety of young people on public transport* – particular attention must be paid to this issue, as we know from the most recent TellUs survey, and the Youth Parliament, that it is a major concern for our young people. Projects continue to be piloted to tackle this, such as the Schools Escort Project, which places youth workers travelling with children on buses to and from certain schools in the borough. The review should have regard to this issue, however investigation and recommendations are due to be published later in the year by a Children and Families overview and scrutiny task group which conducted a detailed review of this specific topic.
- 3.15 *Optimising use of the internet, and other relevant media, to engage and communicate with our young people* – the Strategy Group has approved the principle of a website dedicated to young people, should they collectively indicate that this is something they would want. Pending the results of further consultation work being carried out by Children & Families and Communications, this would be specifically branded and designed so as to appeal to this audience, and directly involve them in its design and content. It would help them to find out about and access services in one place, by drawing upon the relevant content of the Family Services Directory, as well as featuring other content of interest to young people. It could also be a useful way for the council to communicate directly with young people on specific issues, and gauge their opinion.
- 3.16 The service review should ensure that the project is meeting the milestones of the project plan which will be developed. It should also ensure that the project truly gives effect to the principles agreed by the group.

- 3.17 *Coordination of services aimed at young people* – at present, it is not clear that this is effectively and strategically done. There are groups with representation from various parts of the council which meet in relation to specific issues, such as the Family Services Directory, and on NEET young people, as well as groups such as that overseeing Integrated Youth Support Services, which is more general but does not necessarily have representation from all areas. It may be that the latter group could be developed and broadened to perform this role.
- 3.18 *Voluntary sector contribution* – youth work grants have been awarded to voluntary sector partners without involvement by the Youth Service or reference to its strategic objectives, by the Voluntary Sector Grants Unit and the New Deal for Communities. This means that services may not be funded where the need is greatest, and the contacts and outcomes of the work cannot be reported by the Youth Service. More strategic management of council funding to this sector is required.

Issues specific to the Youth Service

- 3.19 In addition to the issues for investigation by the service review noted above, there are areas in which it could support the improvement of the Youth Service itself. Initial issues for investigation should include the following:
- 3.20 *Performance against targets* - the Youth Service's performance, in relation to key indicators such as numbers of contacts and accredited outcomes, has improved dramatically in the last year. This is due in large part to the new Integrated Youth Support Services now enabling the counting of contacts and accredited outcomes achieved through partners other than the Youth Service directly. However, accredited outcomes are still some way from the target set for them, missing this by 22%.
- 3.21 *Profile of service-users* – The review should examine the profile of contacts and users of the Youth Service, to ensure that these are representative of the profile of young people in the borough where appropriate (eg for universal services), in terms of gender, ethnicity, faith group and disability, as well as any other relevant measures.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The service review, like others in the transformation programme, will have as one of its main objectives optimising efficiency in provision for young people.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 None.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 As mentioned above, the service review should examine the extent to which the user profile for universal services offered by the Youth Service reflects that of young people in the borough generally. This will identify over- or under-representation of certain groups where they exist, and help the service take action where necessary.

Background Papers

None.

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