

Diversionsary activities for young people

Briefing from the LGA for prospective police and crime commissioners



Background

Positive diversionary activities such as sport, arts or cultural activities for young people can assist the police by playing an important role in developing resilience to youth offending and risky or anti-social behaviour and building both understanding and relationships in a positive setting between young people and the police. Those young people who the police and local authority find difficult to connect with can be more easily engaged through such positive settings.

These activities have also been proved to increase educational attainment, reduce substance misuse and unauthorised school exclusions, as well as delivering broader objectives which can prevent criminal behaviour in the long term. These include building self-discipline, improving personal experiences and skills and interacting with other local young people, to a reduction in personal prejudices.

Under s507B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 it is local authorities' duty to secure "so far as reasonably practicable" access to sufficient educational and recreational leisure-time activities for the improvement of the well-being of young people aged 13-19 in their area.

As part of this duty local authorities must first consider whether other bodies or persons are better placed to make such provision; seek the views of young people about existing provision in the area and the need for additional provision, and take these views into account, as well as finally publicising information about the 'local offer'.

Local government funding for these statutory diversionary activities for young people sits in the Early Intervention Grant (EIG). This fund is non-ring fenced, which means local authorities have the freedom to decide how and where to spend this money in meeting a range of statutory duties.

Local authorities are the biggest public spenders outside London on delivering sport, art and cultural services. Delivering culture and leisure services are the responsibility of district councils, with county councils being responsible for delivering statutory library services. However local government faces a huge funding shortfall, with a recent LGA report showing that unless reform is introduced immediately there will be a £16.5 billion funding shortfall between the amount of money available to councils to provide all services and the predicted cost of maintaining them at current levels. Contributing considerably to this situation is a 32% cut in the EIG when compared to the funding streams it replaced. This is on top of overall reductions in local government's budget; 28% over the spending review period.

Assuming social care and waste services are fully funded the money available by 2020 to fund all other council services like road maintenance, libraries and leisure centres will have shrunk by 90 per cent in cash terms. With most of culture, sport and young people's services being

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discretionary, councillors will face difficult decisions whether to reduce, or possibly cut, entire non-statutory service areas. Therefore it is important to understand how diversionary activities can contribute to wider political priorities such as reducing youth offending.

Current policy context

The 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and its legacy offers councils and their partners an opportunity to increase youth participation in sport-related diversionary activities. Following the summer riots throughout the UK in 2011, councils supported the police trying to tackle the disturbances by going onto the streets to meet the local young people and signpost them towards local positive diversionary activities to prevent them from joining in the riots.

There is a myriad of good practice around the country of councils partnering with their local police force to provide ongoing diversionary activities. In the London Borough of Sutton the council work with the Metropolitan Police and the local football club to run the Kickz project, providing free football coaching and educational sessions for young people. The project has been successful in improving relations by breaking down barriers between the Police and young people, reducing criminal and anti-social behaviour. A similar project between North East Lincolnshire Council, Humberside Police and the local football club, has seen reductions in one area of ASB by 24%, criminal damage by 25% and violence by 33%.

What is the role of the police in diversionary activities for young people?

Councils work with many agencies, such as the police and voluntary organisations, to address social problems through delivering diversionary activities. It is important for the police to have a good relationship with the council in supporting the range of diversionary activities on offer locally, as these help further the police's agenda of preventing and reducing youth offending and anti-social behaviour.

Many police forces engage in local diversionary activities; such engagement with the local young people offers an excellent opportunity for the police to build positive relationships and get to know their young community.

Diversionary activities will be a core part of community budgets and with the police being a key partner in the development of community budgets it is essential they are aware of the diversionary activities on offer locally to form a part of this early intervention approach. The police also possess invaluable intelligence on local youth offending and as a result the early intervention issues which could be targeted by gaps in diversionary activities. This is an area where the police's input and experience would be extremely valuable.

Suggested documents to read

Positive for Youth – details on the strategy and the Government consultation on local authority services for young people.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/Positive%20for%20Youth>

More information on the “Routes to success” programme – National Youth Agency website <http://www.nya.org.uk/routes-to-success>

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children’s and Young People’s Services (C4EO) have a page of resources around increasing engagement by young people in positive diversionary activities.

<http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/youth/default.aspx?themeid=5&accesstypeid=1>

The Chief Cultural and Leisure Officer’s Association have produced a document offering some alternative options for local partners using the positive engagement of young people through sport and culture.

<http://blog.cloa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Microsoft-Word-2012-01-26-The-role-of-Culture-and-Sport-in-reducing-crime-and-anti-social-behaviour-revised.pdf>

Questions to ask the chief constable

Be clear about what you and the chief constable need to know and the level of detail you require to assure yourself that you and your force are effectively engaging in local diversionary activities for young people.

- Ensure you are aware of the range of diversionary activities on offer for young people in the areas you cover so you can appropriately signpost young people to their services.
- Do you work in partnership with the local authority to provide them with information which they could use to deliver more targeted and effective positive discretionary activities?
- Through your officers’ interaction with local young people have they identified a local need which could be tackled through local diversionary activities?
- Does your police force currently work in partnership with your local council to deliver or support any local discretionary activity projects?
- If not, have you considered doing so?

How you can engage with councils on this issue

As mentioned above, police forces can work in partnership with councils to deliver positive and effective diversionary activity programmes, or signpost young people they are concerned about to such services in a bid to prevent future criminal, anti-social and risky behaviour.

Key to the successful prevention of youth offending and re-offending is effective partnership working, especially engaging with the council and

other relevant agencies through LSCBs and Health & Wellbeing Boards, as well as with the voluntary sector who deliver a wide range of diversionary activities and increasingly so with funding cuts to local government.

Every council that has responsibility for children's services has a councillor who is the lead member for this area; a statutory role with responsibility for the political leadership, accountability and direction of the council's children's services including the remit of youth offending and youth services. The council's lead member for community safety may also have a role in community engagement, services and youth offending as part of their remit. Councils will also have a lead member who will deal with the remit of culture and sport services. You can engage with your council through these lead members.

7. Contact

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