

Tired of hanging around

Summary

This report summarises the “Tired of hanging around” report published by the Audit Commission in January 2009, which focuses on the role of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour in young people aged 8 to 19 years.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report, and provide a steer regarding any issues of interest.

Action

Officers to take forward any recommended actions.

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Background

1. *“Tired of Hanging Around: Using Sport and Leisure Activities to Prevent Anti-social Behaviour by Young People”* was published by the Audit Commission in January 2009, and focuses on the role of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour in young people aged 8 to 19 years. The report draws on the findings of a survey of 56 sport and leisure projects, together with the outcomes of 17 focus groups, held with a total of 71 young people in three case study areas.
2. The report argues that sport and leisure activities have an important role in preventing anti-social behaviour. Such activities are popular amongst young people, and provide a positive alternative to anti-social behaviour. With careful management, sport and leisure activities can also bring together groups that would not normally mix. However, sport and leisure activities must be provided effectively. Projects must be available over the medium- to long- term to have a positive and permanent impact. Furthermore, they need to be accessible, reliable and relevant, and reflect the diversity of young people’s needs.

What is happening locally?

3. The report stresses the need for Councils, children’s trusts and their partners, such as families and the voluntary sector, to work together in delivering sport and leisure activities that engage young people, and identifies several weaknesses in current delivery:
 - The first is that consultation with young people about new projects or activities is rare, and that consultation with those young people likely to use those projects or activities is still rarer. Activities in most areas are based on the views of local commissioners or on the requirements attached to funding streams.
 - The second weakness is that none of the case study sites have taken area-wide approaches to coordinating activities. The role of some potential partners was not recognised within certain areas, which has resulted not only in less effective service delivery, but also in a loss of networking opportunities and access to potential funding sources.
 - A further weakness is the current limited evaluation over project effectiveness. For example, just 41 per cent of projects in the case study areas had outcome measures linked to their objectives. There was also a lack of good qualitative and quantitative data collected. This results in a real difficulty in making accurate value for money assessments, and as such, acts as a constraint on future commissioning decisions in most areas.

Funding arrangements inhibit preventive schemes

4. The report findings state that current funding arrangements do not reflect the research evidence about how to change behaviour. Most funding arrangements last for fewer than three years, which limits the effectiveness and sustainability of projects. The report adds that “*a project with three years of funding only has an active life of two years. In the first six months, it recruits staff and builds links with local communities. In the last six months project workers are trying to find new sources of money, referring young people on to other projects and looking for other jobs.*” Money is diverted away from young people towards contingency payments for possible future redundancy.
5. The report adds that over half of the funding for preventive projects comes from central government, but arrangements are complicated and there is little local coordination. This lack of coordination between Councils and their partners results in competition for the same money and wasted time, money and effort.

The Way Forward

6. The report suggests that, in trying to move forward councils, working with their local strategic partnerships, should:
 - Engage with local young people, parents and communities
 - Ensure an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive programme of sport and leisure activities by working with other organisations
 - Train staff to implement strategic commissioning processes, review projects and use findings to improve provision and identify ways to build long-term sustainability in to projects.
 - Assist local projects by providing support in seeking funding and making bids, coordinating applications for funding and funding streams, and promote project management and training for staff.
7. In addition central government should:
 - Support longer-term programmes in preference to short-term projects
 - Reduce the number of funding streams by making increased use of pooling funding for youth anti-social behaviour and associated activities
 - Improve communication and marketing of available funding streams
 - Provide a simple template for project and programme evaluation

Financial Implications

8. No financial implications specific to this report.

Implications for Wales

9. This report does not hold implications for Wales, as this is a devolved matter.

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