

Tired of hanging around

Using sport and leisure activities to prevent
anti-social behaviour by young people



Local government

Summary

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Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

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We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to follow up any of the case studies, please do get in touch:

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Summary

Six key messages for local and national government

- Sport and leisure have an important role in preventing anti-social behaviour.
- Most councils, and many other local agencies, provide or commission some good targeted activities. But there is little evidence of comprehensive area-based approaches.
- A general lack of data on costs and performance constrains effective commissioning.
- Young people are rarely consulted when planning new activities. Young people want activities that are accessible, reliable, and relevant.
- National funding arrangements are inefficient. Projects have to deal with unreliable short-term funding that is expensive to administer.
- Effective solutions engage the young people at risk; they are delivered through local joint working, and national and local funding is coordinated.

Adults and young people see anti-social behaviour differently

- Adults' main concern is about young people hanging around.
- Eight out of ten young people say they hang around to socialise cheaply and to keep safe – only 2 per cent think it is anti-social.
- Young people are concerned about being victims of anti-social behaviour.
- For young people having nothing to do can be the trigger for anti-social behaviour.
- Councils need to challenge community views about anti-social behaviour and its solutions.

Summary

Sport and leisure can prevent anti-social behaviour

- Sport and leisure can engage young people, attracting those at highest risk of anti-social behaviour into more intensive developmental projects.
- Anti-social behaviour cannot be isolated from other social problems: resources must target deprived areas where perceptions of anti-social behaviour are highest.
- Preventive projects are cost-effective. A young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the age of 16, but one given support to stay out costs less than £50,000.
- Projects must be accessible, reliable and relevant, and reflect the diversity of young people's needs.
- Young people value approachable project staff who take an interest in them and offer advice and support.

Government policy now links prevention and enforcement, but this has yet to lead to coordinated local action

- Two-thirds of the 150 local area agreements signed in 2008 included targets for increasing young people's participation in positive activities or for reducing the number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system.
- Funding arrangements do not reflect the research evidence about how to change behaviour: too many projects are short term with limited impact.
- Consultation with young people about new projects or activities is rare. Consultation with those young people likely to use them is rarer.

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- Few councils, children's trusts, or crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) know where activities are available or, where there is wasteful duplication or, gaps in provision, or where young people have choice.
 - Councils, children's trusts and CDRPs lack the performance data to make intelligent commissioning decisions about new or repeat schemes – 48 per cent of projects did not have evidence of their outcomes.
 - Only 27 per cent of projects collected evidence in a way that allowed an assessment of value for money.

National funding arrangements are wasteful, inefficient and bureaucratic

- Over half of the funding for preventive projects comes from central government, but arrangements are complicated and there is little local coordination.
- A typical project leader spends a third of their time chasing new funds and reporting to their current funders.
- The full cost of applying for smaller grants can exceed the value of the grant.
- Most funding arrangements last for fewer than three years: this limits the effectiveness and sustainability of projects.

Summary

Councils, children's trusts, and CDRPs must provide leadership and work together

- Anti-social behaviour must be tackled as part of a response to problems that include teenage sexual health, drug and alcohol abuse, and community cohesion.
- Agencies need to build a strong evidence base about what is needed and what is working as the basis for intelligent commissioning.
- All agencies that can contribute to preventive projects for young people must engage in developing the strategy as well as delivering it.
- Young people and communities should be partners in preventing anti-social behaviour.
- Longer-term funding is a precondition for value for money, proper planning, and for relationship building.
- Local agencies need support in getting funds and in managing, monitoring and evaluating projects.
- Local efforts to involve partners and communities can be very effective without spending a lot of public money.

Recommendations

Councils, working with their local strategic partnerships, should:

- Engage with local young people, parents, and communities by:
 - listening to young people when designing new activities;
 - giving older teenagers opportunities to design their own solutions;
 - telling young people about activities available in their area; and
 - working with communities to improve their understanding of anti-social behaviour and how to respond to it.
- Ensure an integrated, coordinated and comprehensive programme of sport and leisure activities by working with other organisations and:
 - agreeing a local strategy to address youth anti-social behaviour;
 - engaging all relevant partners;
 - promoting schools' role in tackling anti-social behaviour;
 - mapping local activities;
 - prioritising provision according to need;
 - providing activities that are accessible, reliable and relevant;
 - ensuring activities are free or at low cost to young people; and
 - meeting the needs of all young people, including young women and minority ethnic groups.

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- Train staff to:
 - implement a strategic commissioning process of analysis, planning, implementation and review;
 - 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;
 - coordinate applications for funding and funding streams; and
 - promoting project management, monitoring, and evaluation training for project staff.
 - Make evidence-based decisions when commissioning activities by:
 - building and using a strong, local evidence base;
 - drawing on research evidence about effectiveness to specify and commission activities;
 - supporting longer-term local programmes;
 - using light-touch measures to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of activities; and
 - recording project achievements.

Central government should:

- support longer-term programmes in preference to short-term projects;
- reduce the number of funding streams by making increased use of pooled funding for youth anti-social behaviour and associated activities;
- improve communications about, and marketing of, the available funding streams;
- provide a simple template for project and programme evaluation to reduce reporting burdens and increase knowledge about successful interventions; and
- ensure that future surveys to measure anti-social behaviour focus on types of behaviour or its effects, rather than age specific activities such as young people hanging around.

The Audit Commission will:

- produce guidance and tools to help councils and their partners improve their provision of activities; and
- work with other inspectorates to use the lessons from the study in developing and delivering Comprehensive Area Assessment.

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