



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Priorities for Youth Consultation
Youth and Schools in the Community Team
Room 401, Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

6 December 2012

Dear Sir / Madam

Please find attached our response to the Department's 'Priorities for Youth' consultation. This response has been prepared by the South Belfast Partnership Board in consultation with a number of local community groups and youth work service providers in South Belfast. In particular, views have been captured and input into the response from a number of local community structures, including:

- **South Belfast Partnership Board** – A Broad which brings together all sectors – community, statutory, political and private – to strengthen and better target the efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government to tackle in partnership the economic, social and environmental problems which affect people in the most disadvantaged areas of South Belfast;
- **South Belfast Community Support Group** – A group consisting of a number of representatives from community and voluntary groups that operate in South Belfast which seeks to represent the collective views of the communities they represent;
- **Inner South Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership** – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to oversee the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the three inner city communities of Donegall Pass, Lower Ormeau and the Markets; and
- **South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership** – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to facilitate the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the South West Belfast area, which covers Sandy Row, the Village, the mid-Donagall Road and Roden Street.

Although the response has not been submitted within the Departments response booklet, as we were unable to save and share draft comments for circulation and review by partners, we have followed the general format and have sought to address each question posed in turn.

South Belfast Partnership

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We trust that you find these comments useful and look forward to seeing how they help shape the final Strategy in due course. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the matters raised within this response with the Department, so please don't hesitate to contact me on 02890 244 070 or martyn.smithson@southbelfast.org if you would like any further information or clarity in relation to any of our comments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'M. Smithson', is positioned above the typed name.

Martyn Smithson
Urban Regeneration Officer,
on behalf of the South Belfast Partnership Board

Priorities for Youth Consultation Response
South Belfast Partnership Board, 6 December 2012

Question 1

Do you agree with the vision, aims and principles of youth work supported by the Department of Education as proposed (see Section 3 of the consultation document)?

Response: Agree

Comments:

Generally happy with the proposed vision, aims and principles set out in the consultation document, subject to the following comments:

- Concern that the Vision of 'Every young person achieving to his or her full potential' could be contradicted by the emphasis on 'targeted provision' throughout the document. Should recognise the need to support and maintain services for *all* young people, whilst also recognizing the need to provide additional support for those with specific needs or within areas of need.
- Concern that re-alignment to education priorities and focus on measurable outcomes could be too target driven - many outcomes of youth work are difficult to capture, such as self-esteem, raising aspirations, social skills, etc.

Question 2

Do you agree that youth work supported by the Department of Education should be strategically aligned with the education priorities (see paragraph 2.17 of the consultation document)?

Response: Mostly Agree

Comments:

As noted above, there are concerns that too much focus on educational priorities could lead to youth work that is always measured and linked to accreditation. However, we recognise that youth work offers great potential to complement and support the delivery of mainstream education, but the strength of the sector as an approach is in the voluntary involvement of the young people in the service. To be too target driven and education focussed could risk losing some of the informal ethos of youth work.

Many of the youth work outcomes, which can help support involvement in education and educational attainment, are difficult to measure. This includes skills such as social interaction, self esteem, inclusive attitudes, raising aspirations and work ethic, etc. These issues are often difficult to quantify and could only be effectively measured with a significant investment in monitoring systems, which most youth workers do not have the resources to undertake. There is also a need to better utilise data that is recorded.

Question 3

Do you consider that there is sufficient emphasis in the consultation document on enhancing participation for young people in the youth service?

Response: Mostly Agree

Comments:

We welcome the recognition that young people should be actively involved in the identification of needs and development and design of services to meet the needs identified. We are not familiar with the 'Network of Networks' model and would welcome further information in relation to this. We also welcome the recognition at paragraph 4.17 that the model for participatory involvement of young people should "take into account existing and emerging participative structures and forums".

There are many examples of good work being undertaken with the existing community and voluntary sector in relation to the participation of youth in regeneration and the provision of services generally. For example, a Youth Audit was recently undertaken by the Inner South Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership, which involved extensive consultation with young people in the area including through existing youth clubs and school participatory structures. One of the outcomes recognised as part of this work is the need to develop local structures to involve young people more in decision making. The Neighbourhood Partnership will be taking this recommendation forward in the near future. A similar survey and youth audit is due to be undertaken in the South West Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal area within the current financial year.

Question 4(a)

Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 1 (see paragraph 4.5 of the consultation document)? (See Question 4(b) which seeks comments specifically on proposed age bands.)

Response: Mostly Agree

Comments:

In general terms, we are supportive of the principles set out in Paragraph 4.5 in relation to raising the standards in education and youth work. This is subject to a number of specific comments:

- **Youth Development Plans:** We welcome the need to undertake a baseline assessment of needs as a means of developing annual Youth Development Plans at all levels. We would highlight the need for such assessments and Plans to be completed at a local level as well as at a District Council and Sub-regional levels. We would note that the two youth audits mentioned above will provide a valuable source of information to identify needs and to feed into the development of local Youth Development Plans.
- **Advisory Groups:** We welcome the recognition that stakeholders should be involved identification of priorities, but suggest that participation could move beyond 'advisory'. Steering Groups could be established with representation from all relevant sectors and could be more than advisory, instead providing strategic direction and local accountability for service providers. As part of this, the community and voluntary sector should be a key partner and community and voluntary representatives, who are accountable to the sector locally, could be appointed through an open, transparent and democratic election process. This may also necessitate the need for local support

structures and reporting pathways for representatives to feed back to the sector. Existing structures, such as Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, could be utilised to this end.

- **Outcomes and Monitoring:** Whilst we recognise the need for robust monitoring of activities within the youth sector, we would emphasise the need for this to be proportionate and realistic in terms of time and resources available to service providers, particularly those within the community and voluntary sector.

Question 4(b)

Do you agree with the proposed age bands for youth provision, as set out in action 7, paragraph 4.5 of the consultation document?

Response: Mostly Disagree

Comments:

We are concerned that the proposed age bands would be difficult to implement within most youth club settings. Whilst we recognise the need to tailor the focus and approach to young people at different stages in their development, there needs to be flexibility within the parameters to recognise best use of local resources and to allow for better progression through the system.

For example, most youth clubs have junior, intermediate and senior groups, but age bands vary from situation to situation. The most effective youth work approach is through building relationships with the young people and progressing them as fit to their personal development. For example, the 9-13 age bracket spans both primary and secondary education, and the transition between the two, and fails to recognise the different stages of development and learning this represents. Similarly, the focus on leadership and volunteering in the older age bracket may not be appropriate to all young people. It should also be recognised that additional resources are required to enable accredited training, but appropriate funding is not always easy to secure at present.

Question 5(a)

Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 2 (see paragraph 4.7 of the consultation document)? (See Question 5(b) which seeks comments specifically on the action on additional targeted provision).

Response: Mostly Disagree

Comments:

Whilst we welcome the recognition that funding distribution mechanisms could be better streamlined and harmonised to improve clarity and transparency, we are concerned that the proposals outlined do not explicitly address some of the key problems for the community and voluntary sector under current arrangements.

For example, there is a lack of equity in the allocation of funding and access to support between the statutory sector and the community and voluntary sector. Leaders in charge of statutory clubs have better access to infrastructure support in relation to management matters, such as building maintenance and human resources, etc, whilst local management committees (who are often voluntary) and Leaders in charge of voluntary clubs do not have this support and take on a range of additional responsibilities which are not recognised in

resource allocation. Such additional duties include, personnel management, recruitment, building maintenance and cleaning, training, fundraising, child protection, health and safety, servicing management structures and parents groups and volunteer management.

Nevertheless, we do welcome a move to provide greater parity, including budget analysis work, allocation of funding based on needs, weighted according to disadvantage and providing suitable resources to address needs in terms of opening hours and youth worker hours during periods of high demand for services. However, within this, we need to recognise that diversionary work during periods of high tension needs to go far beyond the opening of a youth club during periods of high tension within communities.

This often involves outreach to young people – those who are likely to be involved in civic unrest will not simply divert to a youth club because it is open – and the provision of additional services to ensure continued engagement in diversionary activities. This work is also not limited to the youth work sector and must be seen within the wider context of community development. We do not believe this is recognised within the draft document.

Question 5(b)

Do you agree that additional targeted provision should be supported to help meet the needs of specific groups of young people assessed as facing barriers to learning, as proposed in action 3, paragraph 4.7 of the consultation document?

Response: Mostly Agree

Comments:

Whilst we agree in general terms that there is a need for a targeted approach to youth work, we would re-iterate our concerns that some “ordinary” young people could lose out. There is a danger that the document could give the impression that youth services are only for ‘badly behaved’ or ‘troubled’ young people and we believe the Department should be sending out a strong message that *all* young people are entitled to access youth services if they want to.

As part of this, we feel that the social element of youth work is not fully recognised within the priorities. As re-iterated above, there is concern that some of the less easily measured social outcomes are poorly recognised whilst some of the more measurable educational priorities take too much prominence. Many young people simply want a safe place to meet friends, try new activities and have fun. Meeting this need recognises the fact that ‘prevention is better than a cure’ – meaning that early interventions can prevent problems and consequently the need for interventions further down the line.

Question 6

Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 3 (see paragraph 4.11 of the consultation document)?

Response: Mostly Agree

Comments:

We welcome the recognition that the non-formal education workforce – i.e. youth workers and youth service providers – need to be better supported in terms of training and continuous professional development. In particular, we recognise the need to better equip

and empower local management committees in providing efficient and effective services, through the provision of advice and training in relation to governance, legal requirements and self-evaluation.

Question 7

Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 4 (see paragraph 4.17 of the consultation document)?

Response: Agree

Comments:

We welcome the area-based planning approach to recognising current and future needs and the preparation of Youth Development Plans. Similarly, we welcome the recognition that participatory structures should utilise existing structures where possible and the approach to involving young people in decision making. To this end, we welcome the establishment of small grants programme for young people to administer and would welcome the opportunity to work with the ESA in the future to develop the details of this concept.

Question 8

Do you agree with the proposed actions in Priority 5 (see paragraph 4.21 of the consultation document)?

Response: Neither Agree nor Disagree

Comments:

Whilst we welcome the approach of allocating funding based on need and in a fair and transparent manner, we are concerned that the proposals will not address the imbalance between the community and voluntary sector and the statutory sector. In recent years we have seen a steady reduction in access to funding within the community and voluntary sector, which has led to the loss of local services and an erosion of the local infrastructure. We believe this has often been to facilitate the preservation of statutory services.

Whilst we do not wish to see services retained for the sake of it, we believe there are many very effective and much needed local, non-statutory services lost as a result of funding decisions in favour of statutory service providers. We would therefore welcome a single funding stream that seeks to allocate funding in a clear and transparent way to services that address local needs, regardless of which sector the applicant is from. In many cases, the community and voluntary sector are better placed to deliver tailored local services than the statutory sector.

We also welcome the commitment to a more joined-up approach in the provision of funding through increased engagement with other Government departments and agencies, philanthropic funders and European funding streams. We note that the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) are specifically quoted as an example of a relevant agency. The South Belfast Partnership Board are currently working with the CYPSP and other relevant statutory sector and community and voluntary sector service providers to look at an appropriate model for collectively planning cross-thematic services within the South Belfast locality and within local hubs focussed on early intervention and a comprehensive sharing of information and planning services to support families within our neighbourhoods. This approach goes far beyond the silo mentality often seen within

statutory service providers, bringing together health services, education, youth, social services, etc. We therefore welcome any move to better align priorities and the provision of better services for the communities we work within.

Question 9

Please use the space below for any additional comments you wish to make about the Priorities for Youth.

Comments:

Whilst we, broadly speaking, welcome the proposals and priorities outlined within the draft document, we note that many of the actions relate to the role, work and management of the new Education and Skills Authority. Consequently, the document does not we believe reflect the priorities that young people have for themselves, nor does it fully reflect the important role and function of the community and voluntary sector. We have outlined a number of specific comments in response to the questions posed, but would also highlight the following considerations that are equally important:

- The document outlines a very corporate approach and does not fully acknowledge the management of voluntary sector youth services. Consequently, there is a risk of disempowering local Management Committees in making decisions regarding the delivery of services in their local area.
- The priorities should better reflect the desires and aspirations of the young people with regard to the services they receive.
- There is potential for youth work to impact upon a range of additional community and social themes, particularly when linked to wider regeneration in deprived areas. For example, youth services are able to engage parents and can influence their role in their child's education, but also in relation to health and well-being, employability, community relations, etc.
- Alongside this, the document does not reflect wider work that youth services providers play in the communities, such as inter-generational work or building linkages between the north and south, etc.
- The document does not seem to recognise that the majority of youth service delivery comes from the community and voluntary sector – in many cases without direct funding from the DE or ELBs, for example through faith-based groups. However, the document is still heavily weighted towards the statutory sector and mechanisms for the distribution of funding to both the statutory and community and voluntary sector.