




Local Government Association


The National Youth Agency
 Getting it right for young people

Budget Devolution

Survey and Seminar Report

Summary

July 2008

Supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families

This paper gives the results of the survey of local authorities and the seminar organised by The National Youth Agency for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), supported by the Local Government Association (LGA). These results were not conclusive but are part of the overall exploration work with the DCSF to produce guidelines on the five per cent and 25 per cent targets in *Aiming High for Young People – a ten year strategy for positive activities (the Strategy)*.

Background to the survey run from January to March 2008

The aim of the survey was to gain baseline data on current spending levels on positive activities for young people and young people's involvement in decisions on this. This is in the context of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*, which requires local authorities to secure positive activities for young people, and the targets set out in *Aiming High for Young People* for young people to control specified percentages of youth services or positive activities budgets.

The questionnaire was sent in early 2008 to a sample of one third of first-tier local authorities and, for two-tier authorities, district councils within the selected county councils. It asked for information on specific areas of positive activities spending, both in services for young people only and in universal services. It also sought information on action being taken to implement the *Aiming High* commitments, whether respondents thought they were achievable in their authorities, and what they perceived the barriers to be. It also asked for examples of good practice in involving young people in spending decisions.

Responses were received from 48

authorities, an overall response rate of 36 per cent. This can be broken down into a response rate of 66 per cent for the 50 first-tier authorities (33 councils) and a much lower response rate of 18 per cent (15 councils) for second-tier authorities.

Survey findings

It rapidly became clear from telephone and e-mail communications and analysis of the responses received that the survey would not provide robust baseline information on current spending on positive activities or young people's influence over this. However, it provides:

- Evidence about what data on positive activities is currently available, the difficulties in collecting data on positive activities – particularly on services not focusing on young people – and some information on how local authorities are developing integrated approaches to positive activities and data collection.
- Identification of some of the key issues and challenges including the need for clarity over definitions – particularly of positive activities, the budgets covered by the targets, and budget devolution.
- Some data on spending on

positive activities in particular areas and indications on whether young people influence this spending. However, this data needs to be treated with extreme caution, because of differences in interpretation and the age ranges covered.

- As anticipated, the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds offer young people the most comprehensive opportunities for controlling significant amounts of money. However, the survey has revealed some interesting examples of young people making decisions on funding within other services, including youth services, PAYP, play and parks, and libraries.
- Respondents provided examples of practice from their areas, which offered a range of approaches and covered different services. They include several examples of district councils offering a variety of youth provision and demonstrating commitment to involving young people in determining services. This information is particularly welcome, since district councils will have an important role in developing positive activities within two-tier authorities. Examples from services not focusing on young people also provided evidence of approaches which could

be replicated elsewhere.

The full report of the budget devolution survey can be found on the website at www.nya.org.uk/budgetdevolutionreport

Background to the seminar on budget devolution on 21 May 2008

Delegates included a sample from the local authority respondents to the survey, local authority finance officers, third sector organisation representatives including a young person as speaker, the DCSF and The NYA.

The intention of the day was to build on the findings of the budget devolution scoping survey and for the DCSF to clarify the intent behind the 25 per cent target for budget devolution set out in the Strategy. The seminar sought to complete the sentence:

'At least five per cent/ 25 per cent of local authority [budgets / spend / resources] for [youth services / positive activities / services for young people] should be [controlled / influenced / shaped] by young people by 2010-11 / 2018-19.'

Seminar findings

The lively debate and diverse views reflected the complexity of the issues involved in clarifying the focus of these

targets and working out methods of measurement. The findings below reflect majority views rather than a consensus. See the full report, on The NYA website, for the range of points made.

The DCSF confirmed that the decisions in the sentence above will apply to both the targets in the Strategy – five per cent by 2010-11 and 25 per cent by 2018-19.

The seminar concluded with this completed sentence: 'At least five per cent/ 25 per cent of local authority (unitary, first tier and second tier) budgets for services for young people should be actively shaped by young people with evidence of this.'

There was strong support amongst participants for the ambition of the government for young people to have greater control over services provided for them, hence the wording 'at least' in the sentence rather than the 'up to' in the Strategy.

With the ending of JARS, mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that young people's decision making is a focus of future inspection and assessment processes. Most of the small groups recommended a tailored

tool based on The NYA *Hear by Right standards framework for participation* to use in self assessment of budget devolution, which could be included as part of the self-assessment for the CAA.

Given the responsibility of elected members in law for control of the finances of the local authority, *actively shaping* was generally supported as an accurate term, which could meet the ambitions of the policy. In addition, delegates agreed that each authority should also have a pot of money which young people control, as is the case with YOF and YCF.

Actively shaping should occur and be evidenced at two levels:

- a strategic level at the point of setting priorities – allocation of available funding to which priorities and in which geographical areas;
- an operational level – on the implementation of decisions made at a strategic level. For example, staffing needs and locations are decided at the strategic level and recruitment decisions are operational; or type and location of facilities are strategic and design of the building,

furnishings, equipment, rules and activities are operational.

Collecting data on 'services for young people' was thought to be realistic for enabling the inclusion of data from any department within the local authority or any organisation funded by it that provides services for young people.

There was strong support for a monetary aspect to the target. The use of budgets rather than other options secures young people's involvement in the strategic level of decision making as well as allocation of resources for spend. It was agreed that the term 'budget' included expectations that young people would actively shape resources such as location and recruitment of staff or decisions about facilities.

The full report of the budget devolution seminar can be found on The NYA website at www.nya.org.uk/budgetdevolutionreport

Next steps

The Department for Children, Schools and Families will put a submission up to the Minister before the recess setting out progress to date and recommending a way forward. Further information on this will be available over the summer.


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