A FRAMEWORK FOR INVOLVING SERVICE USERS IN COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS
March 2013

In June 2012, the Department of Education produced a paper entitled ‘Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Services and Activities to Improve Young People’s Well-being’. In outlining the responsibilities of local authorities in commissioning services (para 3), the guidance stipulates that ‘local authorities must take steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions about services and activities for them’. The report goes on to say that arrangements should be made for young people ‘to report at least annually on the quality and accessibility of provision.’ The proposed framework draws on recommendations from the National Youth Agency (www.nya.org.uk) in commissioning services for young people and advice from other local authorities, in particular, the Buckinghamshire Children and Young People’s Trust (www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk)

Principles of involving young people in commissioning

The key principles for young people’s involvement in commissioning are:

- **Understand** – assess need, identify young people’s priorities
- **Plan** – Specification drawn up in consultation with young people
- **Secure** – young people involved in procurement
- **Deliver and review** – young people involved in monitoring and evaluation

Why involve young people in commissioning?

**Benefits to young people**

- Young people feel valued for the positive role they have to play in the community
- Enhances young people’s personal and social development
- Gives young people a greater sense of ownership
- Enhances employability skills

**Organisational benefits**

- More likely to commission the right service
- Needs-led, tailored service developed in co-production
- Improved deliver – outcomes are successfully achieved
- Better value for money
Ways of involving young people

Young people should be involved at every stage of commissioning young people’s service, from consultation to evaluation:

1. Assessing need – consultation
   i. Meeting with contract managers, deciding on format for consultation, producing a consultation outline, identifying and contacting young people, preparing them, booking a venue, arranging transport, refreshments, resources and materials.
   
   ii. A focus group comprising young service users (if applicable) and/or others who might access the service. Young people need to consider some of the key issues and whether there is a need for a service.
   
   iii. The group looks at the principles and key points of the draft spec, concentrating on the ‘Description of Service’ section, identifies gaps, strengths, weaknesses; how a service could be developed in the future, its key components and preferred priorities.
   
   iv. Results from the focus group are disseminated to the contract manager and adult Panel so that the specification is informed by the findings from young people.
   
   v. The panel feedback to the young people explaining whether their recommendations can be incorporated or not.
   
   vi. A representative from young service users, with support from an appropriate adult, is invited to the provider open consultation event.

2. Procurement

When the specification has been finalised, providers should be advised that the section of the application form relating to ‘Description of Service’ will be evaluated by young people. Guidance, at the tendering stage, should
therefore stipulate that this section should be written in **clear, accessible language** and to ensure impartiality, must be **fully anonymised**.

**Evaluating Bids – The Young People’s Panel**

i. Liaising with Contract Manager and Commissioning Team, devising a simple scoring system, planning the evaluation session, booking a venue, identifying and engaging with a range of young people, preparation of resources, organising transport and refreshments.

ii. The young people’s panel meets in advance of the professional panel.

iii. To ensure impartiality, there should be a diverse range of service users and non-service users participating in evaluating bids.

iv. Young people will assess the ‘Description of Service’ section only in each of the shortlisted tenders.

v. Young People’s aggregated score amounts to ONE vote overall at the professional panel.

vi. One non-service user representative from the young people’s panel, supported by an appropriate adult, sits on the professional evaluation panel, giving feedback from their own panel meeting.

vii. To feedback through a variety of media the outcome of the adult panel to the young people’s panel.

**3. Monitoring**

**Service user involvement in the design and delivery of the contract**
Consultation with service users in the design and delivery of the contract should form part of the monitoring. If there is no existing facility for young people to be consulted over the design/delivery of the contract, the contract holder should, within the first year of the commission, provide evidence of how young people are involved. This could be linked to a charter mark awarded by B&NES. Service users should contribute to an annual report on quality and accessibility of the provision.

**Monitoring service quality**
Ways of involving young people in the monitoring of the service need to be built into the commissioning contract eg: a section of the monitoring form is completed by young service users; contract holder makes provision for annual feedback from young people to the contract manager. Support and training is provided for contract managers in how to engage cyp in monitoring arrangements.
Evaluation
Providers should include young people in evaluating the service and giving their views about whether it has delivered on outcomes. This can be both quantitative eg responding to an outcome question, from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ and qualitative eg ‘what went well’, ‘what could have gone better.’ It is expected that a record of achievement is kept on young people’s involvement in the programme.

Preparation time to include developing an evaluation template, in consultation with young people, documenting the journey travelled and whether they feel their voice is being heard by the adults running the service. The strategic lead to support contract managers to quality assess the involvement of young people.

4. Recognising and Rewarding Young People’s Involvement

- The adults should ensure that young people’s involvement at focus groups and panel meetings is apposite experience and this includes using language that is clear and jargon free. Wherever possible, meetings should take place out of school hours.
- Where young people are involved in adult meetings, they are adequately supported.
- Food and refreshments are essential.
- Transport should be arranged for young people to attend meetings.
- Young people should receive feedback at each stage from consultation to evaluation and presentation to final outcome.
- Schools/youth groups are notified of young people’s involvement.
- Certificates are sent to young people acknowledging their contribution.
- Financial rewards in the shape of a voucher can also be provided.
- Individual records of achievement should be maintained by the provider.

Trial and Consultation

- The proposed model has been piloted with the two cyp commissions (Project 28 and Young Carers). The contract managers and young people involved gave their feedback as follows:

<table>
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<th>Contract Managers responses:</th>
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<td>The involvement of young people really highlighted which organisations actually demonstrated how they would communicate with young people. The young people cut through jargon and management speak to really ask what the service would be. This was critical in considering which organisation should be considered for the contract.</td>
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The majority of the young people made some very profound observations, most importantly they were able to identify strengths and weaknesses in the bids in relation to how they would respond to young people specifically. It was good to have an existing service user, who has had a very positive experience of the service but was still able to consider the bids objectively.

This is a complex process and for future, it may be worth selecting the young people that are competent and comfortable undertaking such a task. The adult panel commented that the feedback from the young person representative was very powerful and was a clear reminder that the service was for young people.

It was really valuable and appropriate that young people are involved in the process.

Young people responses:

Because we did it in stages, it wasn’t so difficult to get hold of what was expected. We had one session when we looked at the service specification and were asked to make comments about it so by the time we did the evaluations, we knew what to do. I was glad there weren’t any more than three applications – it was hard to concentrate at times.

It was more difficult doing the evaluations after school. (Young Carers Service) It worked better when we got together at half term (Project 28). You could see straightaway whether the organisation writing the tender could work with young people by the way they wrote. Some of them made no attempt to write in language we could understand and that was surprising because it said quite clearly on the form that young people would be reading this section.

The bulls-eye scoring worked well and we all agreed on the order and the marks. There wasn’t any problem about choosing who was going to adult panel. Most of us are at school so couldn’t go anyway. It was good fun really and made us feel that we were part of the real decision making and that what we said mattered. It was good to know afterwards that we voted the same way as the adults. It felt as though we had a real influence.
Recommendations

1. To continue the pilot for the 2013/14 commissions.

2. To adopt, as a matter of principle, the involvement of young people in all relevant commissions.

3. To develop a commissioning schedule which maximises the input of young people. Whereas consultations can be more flexibly timetabled, the evaluation of tenders needs more dedicated time and should take place in the school holiday periods or at weekends. It is not advisable to take young people out of school for a whole day. Thus the model could be:

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<th>Consultation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<td>Summer holidays</td>
<td>Autumn break</td>
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NB It is always helpful to have school leavers in the group as they are generally the only ones who can attend the adult panel.

4. To provide some short training to Commissioning Managers in how to involve children and young people in the commissioning process. The Participation Lead could continue to support the involvement of children and young people in commissioning procedures either indirectly or directly as appropriate.

5. Commissioning is only one area of local authority work that could benefit from having a Participation Kite Mark to help embed the principles and practice of participation. A kite mark could be a valuable way of recording the ways in which the various services, both voluntary and statutory recognise the importance of hearing the voice of children and young people.

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March 2013