

consultation practices used in planning children's services

Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme



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1 Executive summary

1.1 About the study

Introduction

As from April 2006 all local authorities (LAs) were required to prepare and publish a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) that will be reviewed annually. The plan is intended to be a strategic document, planning the coordination and development of services to deliver and improve outcomes for children. It is expected that in order to meet this aim, service end-users (i.e. children, young people, parents and the wider community) will be consulted about decisions affecting them and have a role in planning the development of Children's Services.

The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to conduct a study examining the consultation practices used in developing the CYPPs. A particular focus of the study was to examine the extent to which consultation practices had evolved since the first plans were produced.

Aims

The overarching aim of the study was to investigate the role of services end-users in planning the development and improvement of services (through consultation activities). In meeting this aim, the study sought to explore the following research questions:

- What consultation had happened in the first phase of CYPP planning in 2006?
- How were end-users being consulted in 2007 (Who was being consulted, which key groups, how were they accessed and what was the focus of consultation?)?
- How far had LAs moved in their consultation with young people and parents (Was the role of the end-user in service development and planning any more participatory, ongoing, built into/impacting planning? Were there more young people and parents and key groups being consulted?)?

- Did authorities feed back to end-users about the outcomes and consequences of consultation?
- What were the outcomes of consultations with end-users and could LAs provide evidence of consultation affecting planning and practice?

The study also sought to highlight any aspects of perceived good practice in consultation.

Design and methods

There were three phases to the research:

- an audit of consultation practices via an email questionnaire distributed to LA officers. Altogether, questionnaires were received from 69 LAs (representing 46 per cent of all LAs in England)
- telephone interviews with LA officers from 30 authorities for a more detailed examination of consultation practices
- in-depth case studies in seven LAs.

1.2 Consultation practices since 2006 and how they have changed

Who is being consulted?

Responses to our survey indicated that LAs are consulting with a variety of service users in relation to CYPP development. An overwhelming majority of LAs (97 per cent of survey respondents, 67 out of 69) had consulted with young people aged 14–19 and/or children aged 6–13. A much lower number, although still representing roughly a third of the sample (24 out of 69), stated that they had included consultations with young children aged 0–5. Consultation with professionals (88 per cent, 61 out of 69) and parents/carers (81 per cent, 56 out of 69) were also commonly reported by LAs.

LAs had included a range of key groups in consultation since 2006. Most commonly, around 90 per cent (63

out of 69) of LAs reported the inclusion of looked-after children (LAC) in consultations; 56 out of 69 LAs had sought the views of black and minority ethnic groups (BME); and around 75 per cent (51 out of 69) reported consultation work with children with learning difficulties or disabilities (CLDD). Asylum seekers, gypsy travellers, and lesbians, gays and bisexuals were the three key groups that had been involved in LA consultations the least. However, over 30 per cent of LA representatives had still indicated that the views of these groups had been sought.

When consulting with key groups of services users, LAs most commonly did so through specifically targeted means, such as a dedicated event. This was most common for: looked-after and accommodated children, care leavers, children with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those not in education, employment or training. Interestingly, although a high number of LAs stated that BME groups had been consulted, only around half had done so through specifically arranged events. Many LAs collected the views of BME groups through general consultation exercises, thus standing in marked contrast to the other key groups where targeted consultation was more common.

Three-quarters of LA interviewees indicated that there had been changes in who they had consulted since the original CYPP was developed. Of the most frequent were: more extensive and focused consultation with children and young people in general and a greater focus on the younger age group, including the 0–5s, primary children and those under the age of 13.

The methods used for consultation

LA survey respondents reported using a range of methods for collecting the views of service end-users. The most common were: small group events, such as school councils, youth parliament and summer schools, surveys/questionnaires, large events and focus groups. In contrast, interviews were the least common way service end-user views were sought, with a third of LAs indicating that they had undertaken some during CYPP development.

A number of these consultation methods were specifically organised by the LA to inform the development of the CYPP, as opposed to being more general consultation exercises. The three methods that were organised for this purpose the most were: focus

groups, surveys/questionnaires, and interviews. Thus, it appears that when focus groups and interviews were employed by LAs, it was for the purpose of informing their CYPP planning specifically. The need for in-depth data during CYPP development may be a reason for this.

Half of LA interviewees indicated that consultation methods varied according to service end-user. The ways in which these consultation methods varied tended to depend on the age, ability, and individual needs and characteristics of the service end-users.

In terms of effectiveness, LA survey respondents were generally positive about the consultation methods used and recognised their value in collecting service end-user viewpoints for CYPP development. Focus groups and small group events received the highest proportion of 'effective' and 'very effective' ratings from LAs. Large events and interviews were also deemed by high proportions of respondents to be effective.

Just under half of LA interviewees thought that the effectiveness of consultation methods varied according to service end-user, with smaller, face-to-face events deemed most effective for vulnerable and hard-to-reach children and young people or specific key groups, such as LAC and CLDD. In contrast, large-scale events were thought to be most effective in obtaining the views of children and young people in general.

Just under half of LA interviewees indicated that there had been changes in the methods used for consultation since 2005/06, when the first CYPPs were written. The three most common changes to the methods used for consultation included:

- a heavier focus on qualitative research methods, such as focus groups and one-to-one discussions, and a move away from quantitative methods
- the use of more technologically advanced methods such as online surveys and audience response pads
- more continuous, ongoing consultation methods so that the 'voice' of service end-users would become embedded within practice.

Focus of consultation activities

In the survey, LA representatives were presented with a list of five issues and asked to indicate if any of them had been the focus of the consultation activities with

service end-users. The principal aim of LA consultation activities with service end-users was the 'identification and/or agreement of priorities and/or targets'. A similarly high number of LAs said that they consulted with end-users for their 'views based around the five Every Child Matters outcomes' and 'about issues that were important to or affected them'. Through telephone interviews with a subset of LA staff (30), around half reported that they had consulted on particular issues with certain key groups. Where LAs had not differentiated the focus of the consultation, some interviewees explained that this was because they wanted to achieve a baseline measurement on specific aspects for all children and young people in order to measure change/impact. Others commented that services themselves consulted with end-users and that there was not a specific need to tailor the focus of wider consultation activities to the needs of particular key groups.

LA interviewees were asked how the focus of consultation with service end-users was determined in their authorities. Firstly, and most commonly, the focus of consultation was determined by national government imperatives/targets, namely the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes and a need to investigate priorities relating to the outcomes that were most pertinent to service end-users themselves. Secondly, interviewees reported that the focus of consultation was established due to the need to obtain children and young people's views and opinions to help develop the CYPP. This included the need to: develop an in-depth understanding of service end-users' views, produce an accessible CYPP for children and young people, and establish baseline information and gather feedback in order to measure progress and impact.

Just over half of interviewees who responded reported that they had made changes to the focus of their consultation with service end-users since 2005/06 and the first CYPP. For the most part this was to ensure greater attention on particular areas as well as to achieve an increased focus on the views of the end-user. Where interviewees reported that the focus of consultation had remained the same, reasons for this included: the need to continue with the same focus in order to measure change and impact over time, that the focus of consultation was still relevant, and that the LA were still focusing on the same priorities.

Providing feedback to end-users

Only one respondent to the survey indicated that their LA had not fed back to service end-users following consultation in any way. The top three ways in which service end-users were informed of the outcomes of their consultations were: the production of written materials, e.g. publications and booklets direct/targeted feedback to the individuals or groups consulted with and information posted on websites. Nearly all of the 30 LA interviewees reported that feedback methods did not vary by key group of service end-users, however, many recognised that feedback ought to be tailored to meet the needs of specific groups. Of the small number of interviewees who reported using different feedback methods, variations in approach depended on the ages of the children and young people participating in the consultation activity. The majority of interviewees commented that there had been no changes in feedback methods since the consultation activities undertaken for the first CYPP in 2005/06. Indeed, feedback from consultation activities was seen as a particular area of weakness for around half of the LAs and was identified as an aspect to be improved upon.

Suggested improvements to consultation practices

Having described their consultation practices, LA interviewees were asked to consider how processes could be improved to make consultation more effective. The most frequently suggested developments included:

- widening the range and numbers of end-users consulted with, e.g. involving vulnerable groups, younger children
- employing new methods of consulting with end-users, e.g. more qualitative methods, use of technology
- consultation becoming standard practice, rather than an add-on
- ensuring consultation is meaningful for participants, e.g. giving feedback on outcomes
- appointing personnel with a dedicated consultation remit.

1.3 How consultation outcomes are used

Representation of end-user views in CYPPs

The two most common ways for service end-users' views to be represented in the CYPPs (including any reviews, rewrites or refreshments) were through 'direct links between the views and the priorities', such as in a table (reported by 48 out of 69 survey respondents) and a 'summary of the views' in the plans (46 out of 69). In addition, three-fifths (42 out of 69) of LAs included direct quotations from service end-users in the CYPPs. A quarter of LAs used 'visuals in the CYPP' to depict service end-user views.

Around a third of LA interviewees reported that the representation of views in the plans had evolved over time. Most often, this related to an increased presence of end-user views, for example, a section reserved for comments of children and young people. Some interviewees described a much more explicit link between what end-users said and what was being done as a consequence. Where no change was reported, interviewees often added that the inclusion of views was already sufficient/suitable or that the second plan was more of a refreshment, rather than a rewrite.

Impact of consultation on policy and practice

The most common way in which service end-users had impacted on policy and practice was through the development of different LA targets and priorities, as indicated by three-quarters of LA survey respondents. This corresponds with the focus of consultation – the most common theme being 'to identify and /or agree priorities and/or targets'. Alongside this, other typical impacts included: greater emphasis on a particular group of end-users (44 out of 69 survey respondents) and the development of new strategies and policies (43 out of 69). More substantive changes including the development of new services and teams, changes to actual working practices, service commissioning arrangements, and the location of services and teams were much less common. Specifically, just nine LAs (out of 69) indicated that the views of service end-users had resulted in budget changes.

It should be noted that sometimes the reported impacts were in relation to the consultation process itself, rather than the impact on other LA services, e.g. the development of consultation strategies, creation of positive engagement groups to ensure children and young people are involved at all levels, and the greater acceptance of end-users' views across an authority.

1.4 Good practice in consultation

LAs were encouraged to think of any activities or approaches to consultation which they had found to be particularly effective. Featured in their list of nominations were:

Consultation and participation strategies

By developing and working to a consultation strategy interviewees described how it was possible to map out the activities that were taking place in a locality, think about how the information was going to be used and generally, ensure that consultation was a more systematic and planned activity. By monitoring what was happening, they felt it was possible to identify gaps in consultation, e.g. which end-users were being overlooked. Overall, the existence of a consultation strategy was said to produce a much more coordinated approach, with a cross-agency commitment to consultation.

Young people as action researchers

Several authorities had found that young people themselves can prove very effective as 'action researchers', 'youth consultants' or 'junior inspectors'. Involving young people in the process of consultation was said to open up avenues for reaching a wider sample of end-users (that might not be accessible to adults undertaking consultation). At the same time, young people involved in the experience can develop a range of skills, e.g. listening, communicating, report writing.

End-user representation on panels/groups/forums

Sometimes interviewees commented that rather than creating new consultation opportunities, they had capitalised on existing groups of end-users who meet on

a regular basis. Interviewees mentioned tapping into groups such as youth councils and primary school newspaper clubs in order to gather feedback from young people. This was deemed effective because it made use of existing networks, saving time and effort. As well as involving established groups of end-users, a number of authorities also referred to groups that were specifically set up for the purpose of consultation, e.g. a young persons' scrutiny panel.

Conferences

Four LAs had found conference events to be a successful approach to consultation, providing opportunities to enquire on particular themes such as teenage pregnancy, drug use and with particular groups of end-users, e.g. an annual conference for children with learning difficulties. Conferences can also provide an opportunity for services to hear first hand the views of young people, and interviewees described how key services/decision makers were present at events.

Surveys

For some interviewees, surveys were deemed to be an example of effective practice. The value in this particular consultation method centred on its potential to assemble evidence from a much larger population of end-users. Hence, survey consultation can identify strong messages for service planners, voiced by high numbers of end-users. Online surveys were adopted in some authorities and proved popular as they were quick to administer, analyse and can be easily repeated. However, surveys may not necessarily reach all types of end-users and other approaches may be required if a truly representative consultation is to be achieved.

Face-to-face consultation

In contrast to large-scale surveys, there was also support for face-to-face consultation exercises. A similar number of authorities found direct contact with end-users valuable – engaging in face-to-face dialogue made it possible to explore their thinking, make further enquiries and really understand their viewpoint.

Consultation tool kits

In an effort to promote consultation and embed it into the everyday working practices of services, some

authorities had created consultation tool kits/packages/standards. These materials (some available online) take organisations through the consultation process, providing them with the tools to consult with end-users on a local basis. This can provide another layer of consultation activity, although those deciding to use them may need additional support and advice.

Appointment of staff with a consultation remit

In relation to good practice, five authorities mentioned various ways in which there were now staff with designated remits for participation and consultation, e.g. a dedicated participation officer and the appointment of a commissioner for children. These developments signal an increasing prioritisation for consultation in authorities, with staff in place to coordinate activities and to ensure that consultation becomes an ongoing and everyday activity.

In addition to the examples described above, there were a number of other practices which were highlighted by smaller numbers of authorities as illustrations of good practice. These included: a consultation audit, Big Brother style diary rooms, young people acting as mystery shoppers and consultation road shows.

Concluding comments

Reflecting on the findings from this research, we would like to conclude by highlighting some themes for consideration:

- Survey respondents found it difficult to report the actual numbers of end-users they had consulted with. In order to properly monitor consultation activities and evaluate the extent to which end-users are involved, local authorities may wish to keep a central record of this information.
- Ensuring adequate and targeted feedback was identified as an area for development by some interviewees. This is an important stage of the process as it completes the circle of consultation, informing the community of what has happened as a result of their input. This can be achieved through a variety of channels but, as with all elements of the consultation process, should be monitored and reviewed. This would help ensure that feedback has maximum coverage and reaches those directly

involved in consultation, as well as the wider community.

- It was recognised amongst interviewees that a range of activities is required if consultation is to tap into a representative sample of the population. Surveys can potentially reach larger numbers, but may exclude more vulnerable groups, unless specifically targeted. Focus groups and interviews are potentially more labour intensive and generate a smaller set of views; however, the depth and quality of this information was noted. A far-reaching consultation involving all key groups therefore would require considerable investment and the creation of dedicated posts to
- coordinate consultation activity may help improve the efficiency of the process.
- Generally, communicating the impact of consultation activity is paramount if it is to become embedded into the working practices of local authorities. Case studies revealed that consultation with children and young people can produce surprising and powerful information which can really help inform the direction of services. Only by publicising the value of this work will consultation become an accepted, widespread practice throughout local authorities.

2 About the study

2.1 Introduction

As from April 2006 all local authorities (LAs) were required to prepare and publish a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) that will be reviewed annually. The plan is intended to be a strategic document, planning the coordination and development of services to deliver and improve outcomes for children. It is expected that in order to meet this aim, service end-users (i.e. children, young people, parents and the wider community) will be consulted about decisions affecting them and have a role in planning the development of Children's Services. In addition, JAR (Joint Area Review) inspections are expected to examine how data generated from young people's input has been used in service planning and delivery (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2006).

The issue of consulting with, and seeking the voice of, children and young people in planning Children's Services stems from a backdrop of general discourse about young people's rights to be listened to, as well as the value of their greater involvement (for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in England, Every Child Matters, the National Youth Agency's Hear By Right standards, the appointment of national children's commissioners, and numerous tools and partnerships for involving young people). In the 2006 analysis of the CYPPs conducted by NFER, authorities were found to adopt different approaches to consultation to inform the planning process (based on information reported in the CYPPs). For instance, most LAs held specific consultation exercises, while a smaller proportion used evidence collected previously for other purposes. The most common type of consultation activity was found to be surveys, followed by small group events, large events, focus groups and interviews (Lord et al., 2006).

The LGA commissioned the NFER to conduct a more in-depth study examining the consultation practices used in developing the CYPPs. A particular focus of the study was to examine the extent to which consultation practices had evolved since the first plans were produced.

2.2 Aims

The overarching aim of the study was to investigate the role of the end-user in planning the development and improvement of services. In meeting this aim the study sought to explore the following research questions:

- What consultation had happened in the first phase of CYPP planning in 2006?
- How were end-users being consulted in 2007 (Who was being consulted, which key groups, how were they accessed and what was the focus of consultation?)?
- How far had LAs moved in their consultation with young people and parents (Was the role of the end-user in service development and planning any more participatory, ongoing, built into/impacting planning? Were there more young people and parents and key groups being consulted?)?
- Did authorities feed back to end-users about the outcomes and consequences of consultation?
- What were the outcomes of consultations with end-users and could LAs provide evidence of consultation affecting planning and practice?

The study also sought to highlight any aspects of perceived good practice in consultation.

2.3 Design and methods

There were three phases to the research:

- an audit of consultation practices in all 150 LAs in England via an email questionnaire distributed to LA officers
- telephone interviews with LA officers from 30 authorities for a more detailed examination of consultation practices
- in-depth case studies in seven LAs.

Phase 1: an audit of local authority consultation practices

In July 2007, questionnaires were sent to all 150 LAs in England, asking them to provide information on the consultation practices undertaken to inform the original Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs) in 2006 and any reviews, rewrites or refreshments carried out since.

The survey obtained information on:

- who was consulted, e.g. age ranges, key groups
- the focus of consultation
- methods used
- effectiveness of methods
- representation of views in plans
- feedback given to service end-users
- impact on planning and practice
- changes to consultation practice over time (since the first CYPPs were written)
- examples of good practice.

Altogether, questionnaires were received from 69 LAs (representing 46 per cent of all LAs in England). The sample comprised 21 unitary authorities, 17 metropolitan authorities, 16 London boroughs and 15 county authorities. Table 2.1 below shows the breakdown of LAs involved in the audit by type.

Table 2.1 Achieved sample of questionnaires

Authority type	Returned questionnaires (n)	Returned questionnaires (%)
Unitary	21	30
Metropolitan	17	25
London borough	16	23
County	15	22
Total	69	100

Source: NFER LA survey July 2007–August 2007

Phase 2: telephone interviews

Short telephone interviews were conducted with 30 LA personnel, selected to represent a range of different consultation practices with service end-users from across different types of LA (i.e. County, Metropolitan, etc.).

The 30 LA interviews involved a range of staff, whose remits covered consultation/participation work. Job titles were varied including: strategy officer, senior education officer, children and young people's commissioner, planning and performance manager and policy officer. It is notable that some authorities had staff with a remit focused on consultation, e.g. as a participation officer, whilst in others, job titles would suggest that consultation is just part of their role, e.g. Children's Fund programme manager.

Questions sought to build on information provided in the survey, with a particular focus on identifying changes in consultation practices since the first CYPPs were written.

Phase 3: the case studies

In-depth case studies were undertaken in seven LAs. Each were selected based on nominations of good practice identified in phases one and two, as well as reflecting a range of LA types and models of consultation with service end-users.

During each case-study visit, interviews were conducted with those involved in organising the consultation as well as the children and young people who took part.

Table 2.2 provides a list of the case studies featured in the research. More details can be found in Chapter 5.

Table 2.2 Case studies

	Type of consultation
Case study 1	Junior Joint Area Review
Case study 2	Integrated survey (covering different topic areas)
Case study 3	Paper and online survey
Case study 4	Mystery shopping
Case study 5	Investigative journalism
Case study 6	Dedicated consultation unit
Case study 7	Residential consultation event

2.4 About the report

The report draws on data from all three phases of the research. Following the summary of findings and this introductory chapter, the report is divided into four main chapters as follows:

Chapter 3 examines, in detail, the consultation practices undertaken by LAs to inform the development of the original Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs) in 2006 and any subsequent reviews, rewrites and/or refreshments undertaken since. It ends by presenting interviewees' ideas for improving the consultation process.

Chapter 4 describes how LAs used the consultations with service end-users including: how their views were

represented in the CYPPs and the impact the consultations had on policy and practice.

Chapter 5 highlights examples of good practice in consultation with service end-users, based on interviewees' nominations and seven illustrative case studies.

Chapter 6 concludes the report by providing an overview of the key findings.

3 Consultation practices since 2006 and how they have changed

This chapter examines the consultation practices undertaken by LAs to inform the development of the original Children and Young People’s Plans (CYPPs) in 2006 and any subsequent reviews, rewrites and/or refreshments undertaken since. The following aspects of consultation are discussed:

- who is being consulted?
- consultation methods used
- accessing end-users for consultation
- focus of consultation activities
- feedback given to end-users
- how consultation practices could be improved.

In addition to describing the approaches to consultation, each section considers how these practices have evolved over time, since the first CYPPs were written.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of the main types of consultation undertaken, along with some examples.

3.1 Who is being consulted?

In our survey, LAs reported consulting with a variety of service users in relation to CYPP development. Figure 3.1 shows that an overwhelming majority of LAs (67 out of 69) had consulted with young people aged 14–19

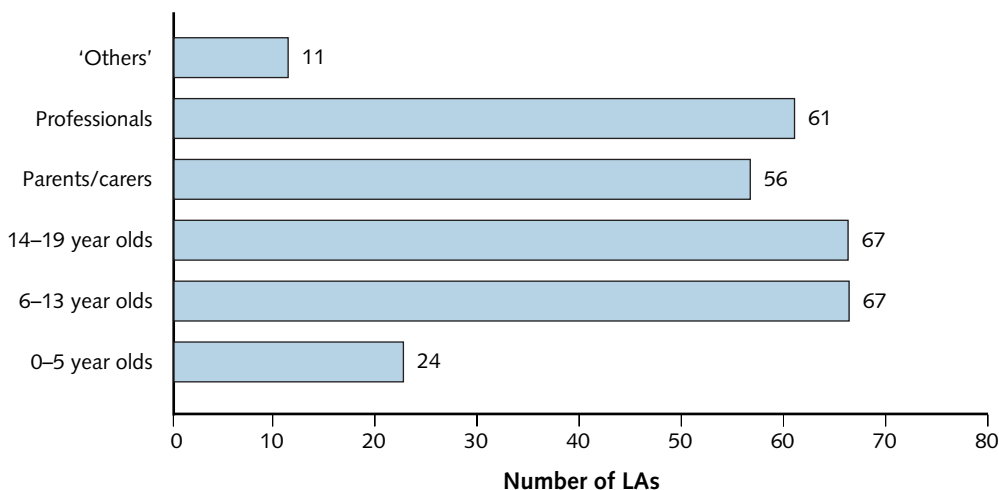
and/or children aged 6–13. A much lower number, although still representing roughly a third of the sample (24 out of 69), stated that they had included consultations with young children aged 0–5.

Consultation with professionals (61 out of 69) and parents/carers (56 out of 69) were also commonly reported by LAs. The professionals included in discussions were from:

- the LA itself such as staff from Children’s Services, elected members and staff on the Children and Young People’s Strategic Board
- Connexions
- Health
- the Police/probationary service
- schools
- the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)
- the Fire and Rescue service.

Eleven LAs (out of 69) also indicated that they had included ‘other’ groups in their CYPP consultations. This was mainly related to work with the general population and local community members. For example, one LA had sent every household a copy of the CYPP consultation document, outlining the LA priorities. From this, 3,000 post-coded residents were specifically surveyed.

Figure 3.1 Service users consulted with



LAs were asked to provide details of the number of service end-users consulted with since 2006. The numbers involved in consultation ranged dramatically across LAs, from six through to 68,000. Many LAs indicated that they were not in a position to provide accurate numbers and, because of this, it is difficult to comment on this aspect of the survey. As one interviewee noted: 'Can't give numbers due to the variety of events and different focus of individual meetings. No overall statistics kept but the potential figure is in the thousands.'

It may be worth LAs keeping track of the numbers consulted with in order to evaluate their consultation practices and to ensure that they are reaching the desired population of end-users.

Consultation with specific key groups

LA survey respondents were presented with a list of 10 key groups, as shown in Table 3.1, and asked to indicate whether any had been included in consultation since 2006 and, if so, had they been specifically targeted, e.g. through a special event/survey organised. Most commonly, 91 per cent of LAs (63 out of 69) reported the inclusion of looked-after children (LAC) in consultations; 81 per cent (56 out of 69) had sought the views of black and minority ethnic groups (BME); and 74 per cent (51 out of 69) reported consultation work with children with learning difficulties or disabilities (CLDD). In contrast, asylum seekers, gypsy travellers, and lesbians, gays and bisexuals were the three key groups that had been involved in LA consultations the least. That said, however, over 30 per cent of LA representatives still indicated that the views of these groups had been sought.

Other key groups included in consultation and noted by a minority of LAs (7 out of 69) were: young carers, young runaways, and children and young people using drugs and alcohol.

When consulting with key groups of service users, Table 3.1 also reveals that LAs most commonly did so through specifically targeted means, such as a dedicated event. The four key groups that were consulted with most often through specifically arranged events/activities were:

- looked-after and accommodated children – 81 per cent of the consultations were specifically targeted (51 out of 63)

Table 3.1 Key groups of service users consulted with

Key Group	Consulting key groups		Specifically targeted at key groups	
	n	%	n	%
Looked-after and accommodated children	63	91	51	81
Black and minority ethnic groups	56	81	29	52
Children with learning difficulties or disabilities	51	74	37	73
Care leavers	42	58	33	79
Not in education, employment or training	41	61	27	66
Young offenders	40	59	25	63
Teenage parents	38	55	23	61
Asylum seekers	25	36	15	60
Gypsy travellers	23	33	12	52
Lesbian, gay and bisexual	22	32	10	45
'Other'	7	10	4	57

This was a multiple response question: respondents could select more than one option.

Source: NFER LA survey July 2007–August 2007

- care leavers – 79 per cent of the consultations were specifically targeted (33 out of 42)
- children with learning difficulties or disabilities – 73 per cent of the consultations were specifically targeted (37 out of 51)
- those not in education, employment or training – 66 per cent of the consultations were specifically targeted (27 out of 41).

It is worth noting that although a high number of LAs stated that BME groups had been consulted, only around half (29 out of 56) had done so through specifically arranged events. Many LAs collected the views of BME groups through general consultation exercises, thus standing in marked contrast to the other key groups where targeted consultation was more common.

Reasons for consulting with specific key groups

As part of the telephone interviews, LA personnel were asked to outline how and why particular groups of

service end-user had been consulted. Two main reasons emerged which focused on ensuring the consultation was as representative and inclusive as possible. As one interviewee noted: 'It was about trying to get quite a generic type picture but also to target specific groups so that we knew we were representing all different types of views and interests.'

Alongside this, a minority of interviewees (four) noted that the ease with which some service end-users could be consulted with, went some way in determining who could be included. For example, existing groups and young people's forums provided a quick and reliable avenue for consulting with particular service end-users.

Changes in who is being consulted

LA interviewees were asked: 'Since 2005/06, when the first CYPPs were written, have there been any changes in who is being consulted?' Just over a quarter of interviewees (eight out of 30) indicated that there had been no changes in who they had consulted and that the review, rewrite or refreshment had mirrored the original CYPP consultation. That said, however, two main reported changes did emerge from the analysis. These were:

- more extensive and focused consultation with **children and young people in general** (five interviewees)
- a greater focus on the **younger age group**, including the 0–5s, primary children and those under the age of 13 (five interviewees).

In relation to the latter, findings from the survey reinforce the significance of this change, as some LAs noted the need for more consultation with the younger age group. Indeed, one LA specifically described how their new Participation and Engagement Strategy focused on primary school age pupils.

A small number of individual LA interviewees noted other changes in who had been consulted with since 2005/06. This included focusing more specifically on: vulnerable/hard-to-reach groups, children and young people with limited verbal and communication skills, non-attenders, voluntary and community groups, and children with learning difficulties or disabilities (CLDD) and their parents.

3.2 Consultation methods used

In our survey, LAs reported using a range of methods for collecting the views of service end-users, as shown in Table 3.2 below. The most common were: small group events, such as school councils, youth parliament and summer schools (63 out of 69), surveys/questionnaires (58 out of 69), large events (49 out of 69) and focus groups (49 out of 69). In contrast, interviews were the least common way service end-user views were sought, with a third (23 out of 69) of LAs indicating that they had undertaken some during CYPP development.

Table 3.2 Methods used for consultation

Key Group	Methods used		Specifically organised for CYPP	
	n	%	n	%
Small group events	63	91	39	62
Surveys	58	84	45	78
Large events	49	71	31	63
Focus groups	49	71	39	80
Interviews	23	33	15	65
'Other'	14	20	7	50

This was a multiple response question: respondents could select more than one option.

Source: NFER LA survey July 2007–August 2007

A raft of 'other' means through which consultation with service end-users was undertaken were highlighted by LAs, many of which were more innovative and unusual. These included: web-based consultations/'blogs', creative activities such as art competitions, drama and video productions, and trips out with a group of young carers to a local zoo. Two specific examples are outlined in Box 1.

Box 1 Examples of 'other' consultation methods

A mobile '**big bruvver**' diary room was erected in this LA in order to capture the views of young people 'hanging around on the streets'. Its presence was particularly focused on Friday and Saturday evenings as these had been identified as peak times for anti-social behaviour to occur in the LA.

The '**Paperchain project**' was used to identify what children and young people thought was good and bad about living in the LA and what they wanted from it in the future. The children and young people had to write their responses down on pieces of paper that were collected and then all joined together into a paperchain to visually demonstrate their views.

A number of the consultation methods outlined in Table 3.2 were specifically organised by the LA to inform the development of the CYPP, as opposed to being more general consultation exercises. Focus groups (39 out of 49), surveys/questionnaires (45 out of 58), and interviews (15 out of 23) were the three methods that were organised for this purpose the most. Thus, it appears that when focus groups and interviews were employed by LAs it was for the purposes of informing their CYPP planning specifically. The need for in-depth data during CYPP development may be a reason for this.

As part of the telephone interviews, LA personnel were asked whether different consultation methods were used for different types of service end-user (i.e. were methods varied depending on who was being consulted). Half of LA representatives indicated that methods did vary according to service end-user. For example, 'It is about approaching different groups in different ways and realising that you get different things from different approaches.'

The ways in which these consultation methods varied tended to depend on the age, ability, and individual needs and characteristics of the service end-users. For instance, interviewees noted that for vulnerable groups, younger children and those with additional requirements (i.e. children with learning difficulties and disabilities), a smaller, face-to-face methodology had been most commonly employed. In contrast, a minority of LA interviewees (four) stated that the same methods were used regardless of consultee. That said, however, there was a recognition amongst these interviewees that their LA should become more 'sophisticated' in their use of different methods and that it would be preferable to vary them according to service end-user.

LA interviewees were also asked to highlight how service end-users were initially approached for

consultation during the development of the original CYPP. Most commonly, as noted by two-fifths (12 out of 30) of interviewees, LAs utilised existing groups, forums, networks and events and, thus, 'just tapped into what was already there' (Voice and Influence Support Officer, County LA). In addition to this, three-tenths (10 out of 30) of authorities used partner agencies and key contacts working with specific groups, to gain access to service end-users (i.e. for LAC, the contacts within social care were approached). Finally, three LAs used the youth parliament/cabinet as a means for specifically accessing children and young people, with one LA conducting focus groups with its representatives.

Effectiveness of consultation methods

LA survey respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of one to five, the effectiveness of the consultation methods discussed previously, in collecting the views of service end-users. Nearly 90 per cent of all respondents provided 'effective' or 'very effective' ratings, suggesting that LAs were generally positive about the consultation methods used and recognised their value in gathering service-user viewpoints for CYPP development.

Focus groups (47 out of 47) and small group events (59 out of 61) received the highest proportion of 'effective' and 'very effective' ratings from LAs, making these the most effectively perceived means of consultation with service end-users. Large events (40 out of 47) and interviews (18 out of 21) were also deemed by high proportions of LA respondents to be effective. Surveys were regarded by approximately three-quarters of LAs to be an effective means of consultation.

LA interviewees were asked to indicate whether the effectiveness of a consultation method varied according to who was being consulted (i.e. different types of service end-user). Just under half of interviewees did think that effectiveness varied according to service end-user, with smaller, face-to-face events deemed most effective for vulnerable and hard-to-reach children and young people or specific key groups, such as LAC and CLDD. In contrast, large-scale events were thought to be most effective in obtaining the views of children and young people in general. However, interviewees did suggest that the effectiveness of a consultation method was not just

influenced by the type of service end-user but hinged on other factors including:

- the type of information wanted from the consultation (i.e. qualitative versus quantitative data)
- the skills and competence of the facilitator running the consultation activity (i.e. the most appropriate facilitator for a focus group).

Changes in the consultation methods used

Just under half of LA interviewees (14 out of 30) indicated that there had been changes in the methods used for consultation since 2005/06, when the first CYPPs were written. The three most common changes to the methods used for consultation included:

- a heavier focus on **qualitative research methods**, such as focus groups and one-to-one discussions, and a move away from quantitative methods which were originally employed for obtaining baseline information from as many service end-users as possible
- the use of more **technologically advanced methods** such as online surveys and audience response pads. One LA representative also noted that the LA was currently investigating the use of a 'mypad': a portable consultation box which service end-users can use to give their views in a private, depersonalised (i.e. non face-to-face) setting
- more **continuous, ongoing consultation methods** so that the 'voice' of service end-users is embedded within practice and consultation moves towards participation.

3.3 Focus of consultation activities

LA survey respondents were presented with a list of five issues and asked to indicate if any of them had been the focus of the consultation activities with service end-users. Figure 3.2 shows that the principal aim of LA consultation activities with service end-users was the 'identification and/or agreement of priorities and/or targets', noted by nearly nine-tenths of LAs completing the questionnaire (61 out of 69).

Figure 3.2 shows that a similarly high number of LAs said that they consulted with end-users for their 'views based around the five Every Child Matters outcomes' (58 out of 69) and 'about issues that are important to them or affect them' (52 out of 69). In relation to the latter, this included:

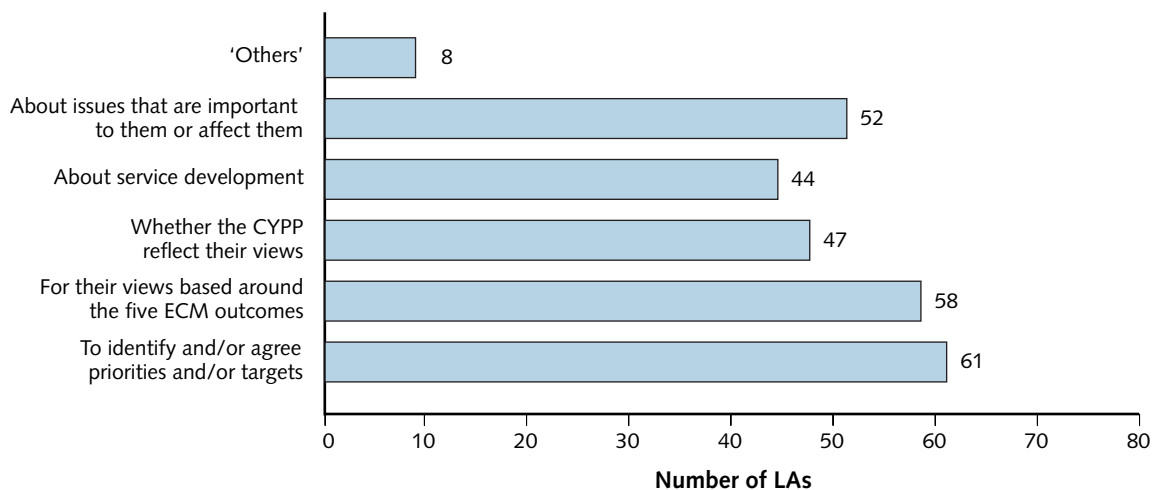
- what children and young people liked and did not like about living in the LA and what would they change
- council-wide issues such as safety on the streets and crime, etc.
- bullying and racism
- school exam pressures
- mental health issues
- environmental issues
- leisure opportunities
- use of the Youth Opportunity Fund
- issues identified by young people leaving care.

Roughly two-thirds of LAs said that their consultation with service end-users focused on 'whether the CYPP reflect their views' and 'service development' (47 and 44 respectively). A minority of LAs (8 out of 69) stated that their consultation had a different focus including: the appointment of the LA Director and senior posts, how well the service end-users thought the LA was doing, and parents' needs for support and information.

Focus of consultation with key groups of service end-users

Through telephone interviews with a subset of LA staff (30), interviewees were asked whether the focus of their consultation activities for the CYPP varied for different key groups of service end-users. Of those who provided a response to this question around half reported that they had consulted on particular issues with certain key groups. Whilst some interviewees reported that there was a change of focus depending on the key group consulted, many also noted that there were common elements to the focus of consultation for all children and young people. The main reason for consulting with specific key groups was to explore issues that were most pertinent to their specific needs and to receive feedback on the services they used.

Figure 3.2 Focus of consultation with service end-users



Where interviewees provided details of the key groups consulted with and the focus of the consultation these included:

- **deaf and disabled young people:** consulted on the adequacy of educational provision they received from the special schools they attended as well as the wider LA provision available to them and their views on transport facilities.
- **looked-after children:** consulted on LAC services and specific aspects of provision, their level of involvement, e.g. their participation in case reviews, and other issues that affect them. In one LA, they carried out a specific consultation event for LAC on the ECM area 'be healthy'. This was held at a local athletics track and they provided young people with advice and information. Also, questionnaires were completed on young people's health issues.
- **age groups, e.g. children aged 3–5, under 12s and over 12s:** in two LAs consultation was differentiated between younger and older children. For example, in one authority the focus for 3–5 year olds was to gauge their understanding of the ECM outcomes, e.g. whether they understood the importance of healthy eating whereas older children were consulted about the relevance of specific priorities and their satisfaction of services delivered to them.
- **young carers:** consulted specifically about the effectiveness of the support that they and the

person they were caring for received, as well as their opportunities to undertake leisure activities

- **young offenders:** consulted on what makes children and young commit crime in the LA and what can be done to reduce this
- **gypsies and travellers:** asked about ideas for improvements to the LA traveller site
- **black and Caribbean:** consulted on issues relating to bullying and racism
- **parents of children with disabilities:** consulted specifically about particular priorities in the CYPP around health outcomes for disabled young people and other relevant priorities in the ECM outcome 'enjoy and achieve'.

Where LAs had not differentiated the focus of the consultation for the CYPP for key groups, some interviewees explained that this was because they wanted to achieve a baseline measurement on specific aspects for all children and young people in order to measure change/impact. Others commented that the specific services themselves consulted with their end-users and that this information had been used to set priorities. Therefore, there was not a specific need to tailor the focus of wider consultation activities to the needs of particular key groups. One interviewee felt that to change the focus of consultation for key groups was 'patronising' and 'presumptive'. Instead they had used the ECM outcomes as discussion points in all consultation activities for the CYPP, and whilst some key

groups had more to say on some aspects than others, all children and young people were given the opportunity to comment on all outcomes.

How the focus of consultation was decided by local authorities

Interviewees were asked how the focus of consultation with service end-users was determined in their authorities. Some LA officers were unable to comment on this specifically; this was largely due to either their not being in post at the time of decision making or that the decision was made during higher strategic level discussions which they were not party to. Where interviewees were able to comment, there were two main factors that influenced decision making. Firstly, and most commonly, the focus of consultation was determined by national government imperatives/targets, namely the ECM outcomes and a need to investigate priorities relating to the outcomes that were most pertinent to service end-users themselves. Secondly, interviewees reported that the focus of consultation was established due to the need to obtain children and young people's views and opinions to help develop the CYPP. This included the need to:

- **develop an in-depth understanding of service end-users' views:** e.g. the need to investigate how the LA could improve and develop services, to deepen understanding of particular issues identified by the LA, and to develop/confirm the LA's priorities and to investigate children and young people's priorities/what was important to them
- **produce an accessible CYPP for children and young people:** to ensure that the CYPP was written in an appropriate and accessible manner
- **establish baseline information and gather feedback in order to measure progress and impact:** e.g. to investigate children and young people's current understanding/views/feelings about how services affect them. This information could then be measured against in the future, thereby establishing if certain priorities have been achieved.

Some interviewees responded to the question by describing the actual process by which the focus of consultation was decided, most commonly this was determined by a strategic partnership board as well as,

in individual cases, by an ECM thematic subgroup and from the outcomes and issues raised through one LA's self-assessments and Joint Area Review (JAR).

Changes to the focus of consultation

Interviewees were asked to report what (if any) changes had been made to the focus of their consultation with service end-users since 2005/06 and the first CYPP. Just over half of those who responded reported that they had made changes to the focus. For the most part this was to ensure greater attention on particular areas as well as to achieve an increased focus on the views of the end-users. Specific changes included:

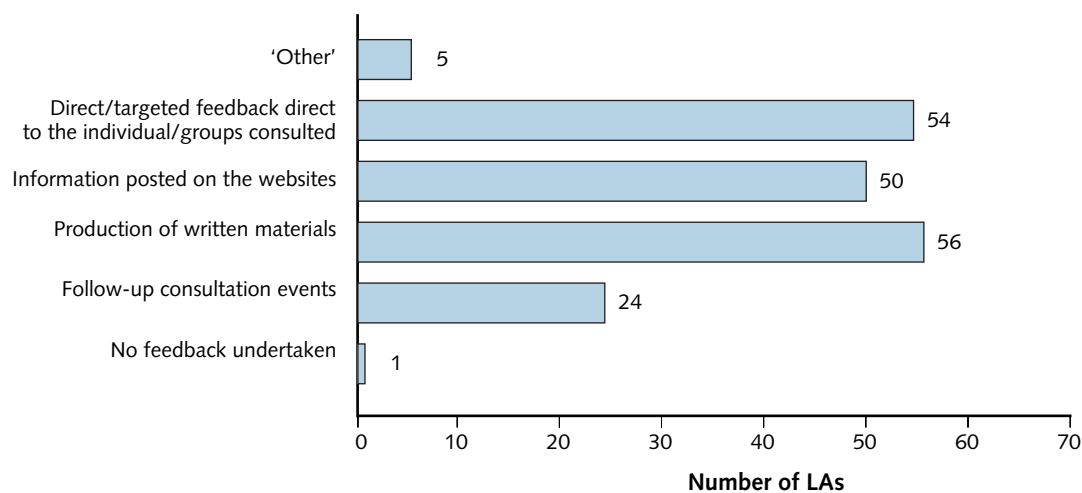
- a greater focus on a specific ECM outcome or related area: making a positive contribution, health and lifestyle, enjoy and achieve, crime and safety
- increased focus on eliciting views of service end-users (i.e. to obtain feedback on specific services, to identify local needs and priorities and issues)
- greater focus on the impact of specific priorities and actions and the difference that the CYPP made, highlighting achievements
- making the focus more relevant for particular age groups.

The move to a greater focus on the views of end-users demonstrates a significant change for some LAs and perhaps indicates a greater recognition among wider LA staff to the importance and value of involving children and young people in the development of priorities and services. As one LA officer noted:

With the first plan it was more about getting the young people to rubber stamp what we had done. The second time round it was more about giving them the opportunities to get in at the very beginning and say 'this is our agenda, how are you (the LA) going to put it in the plan?'

Where interviewees reported that the focus of consultation had remained the same since 2005/06, reasons for this included: the need to continue with the same focus in order to measure change and impact over time, that the focus of consultation was still relevant, and that the LA were still focusing on the same priorities.

Figure 3.3 Feedback provided to service end-users



3.4 Feedback given to end-users

The vast majority of LAs reported providing feedback to service end-users following consultation. Only one survey respondent (out of 69) indicated that their LA had not fed back in any way. Figure 3.3 shows that the top three ways in which service end-users were informed of the outcomes of their consultations were:

- the production of written materials, e.g. publications and booklets (56 out of 69)
- direct/targeted feedback to the individuals or groups consulted with (54 out of 69)
- information posted on websites (50 out of 69).

Just over a third (24 out of 69) LAs chose to undertake a follow-up consultation event as a means of providing feedback to participating service end-users. Other individual authorities provided feedback through the provision of posters, videos for deaf children and young people, youth parliament and school councils, and through Neighbourhood Action Groups.

As part of the in-depth telephone interviews with 30 LA officers, interviewees were asked if feedback methods varied for different types of service end-user. Nearly all of the interviewees reported that methods did not vary; however, many recognised that feedback ought to be tailored to meet the needs of specific key groups.

Of the five interviewees who reported using different feedback methods, variations in approach depended on the ages of the children and young people participating in the consultation activity rather than by a particular key group of service end-user. Here, differentiated methods were used particularly for younger age groups. Most commonly, LAs produced age-appropriate materials, particularly child and young person versions of CYPPs in order to feed back. For example, one LA produced a two-sided document in the shape of a children’s character. In another LA, they fed back on consultation activities to primary aged children through a children’s newsletter. They commissioned a special issue which focused on the outcomes of the consultation and young people wrote articles on the various ECM outcomes. The newsletter was distributed throughout the primary schools in the authority. For the older age groups, the same LA fed back via their youth council. In another authority specialist staff at children’s centres provided verbal feedback to children aged 3–5.

Changes in feedback

Interviewees were also asked if there had been changes to feedback since the consultation activities undertaken for the first CYPP in 2005/06. Of those who responded, the majority commented that there had been no changes in feedback methods. Indeed, feedback from consultation activities was seen as a particular area of

weakness for around half of the LAs and was identified as an aspect to be improved upon.

Of the small number of LAs who reported changes in feedback, one authority had produced a feedback strategy to ensure that every consultation activity now has feedback built into it. Another LA reported that there was now more immediate feedback following a consultation activity to inform the service end-users as soon as possible on the outcomes. Finally, another authority changed their methods by providing more tailored feedback to different audiences and writing a children and young people's version of the CYPP. As the interviewee noted: 'I think we have become a little bit more sophisticated and segmented for the audiences and tried to tailor our messages to the respective audiences.'

3.5 Suggested improvements to consultation practices

Having described their consultation practices, LA interviewees were asked to consider how processes might be improved to make consultation more effective. The most frequently suggested developments included:

- widening the range and numbers of end-users consulted with
- employing new methods of consulting with end-users
- consultation becoming standard practice, rather than an add-on
- ensuring consultation is meaningful for participants, e.g. giving feedback on outcomes
- appointing personnel with a dedicated consultation remit.

To expand on the points listed above, some interviewees felt that views could be captured from a much broader spectrum of end-users. Factors such as a lack of time for consultation, the use of established forums/groups and reliance on one form of data collection, e.g. an online survey, meant that consultation was not as extensive as it could have been. Reflecting on the process, interviewees recognised that there was a need to perhaps work in a more targeted way in order to involve all types of end-user, e.g. those from vulnerable groups

who may not be represented on existing panels, or have access to the internet. Specifically mentioned was a desire to involve children with limited verbal and communication skills, and also very young children (under 4). Gathering the opinions of such groups is likely to require specific activities tailored to their particular skills and abilities. Consequently, another theme for development was a desire to expand the toolbox of consultation methods. Interviewees called for more qualitative methods, the adoption of more advanced technologies to engage young people and better ways of consulting with parents. One authority explained that they were currently consulting with young people, in order to find out their preferred methods of getting involved, 'how they want their voice to be heard'.

This was also recognition amongst interviewees that consultation needed to become more of an embedded practice – something that is undertaken on an ongoing basis, rather than a discrete, one-off activity:

I think it is very much about not seeing consultation as an add-on. It has to be ongoing and everyday. When I start every piece of work I need to think about who my stakeholders are and how I am going to involve them.

Indeed, LAs do appear to be raising the profile of consultation, as many interviewees referred to the development of consultation strategies, implying that consultation and participation are more likely to be coordinated and at the centre of service planning.

Concerns over adequate feedback to end-users was raised in the previous section and these sentiments were again expressed. Respondents underlined the importance of relaying the outcomes of consultation to end-users. They felt consultation had to be meaningful to those involved and that participants should know how their comments have been acted upon. In order to retain good links with the community, and engage them in future consultation activities, some LAs suggested that their methods of feeding back could be improved.

Lastly, on the issue of improving the effectiveness of consultation, four authorities highlighted the value of having personnel dedicated to the task of consultation. Without, a strategic lead for youth participation, one LA officer believed it was very difficult to have an

overview of what was going on in the community with regards to consultation activities. They felt there was a need for more coordination to ensure that schools were not being overburdened with requests for involvement. This particular issue had been tackled in one authority with the creation of a consultation group, to approve all activities and ensure that consultations were not being repeated. To coordinate

consultation with parents, one authority was in the process of appointing a parenting commissioner. Elsewhere, another authority had recently appointed a youth participation officer to engage with young children, thereby ensuring their viewpoints are registered. Such developments signify a more organised and strategic approach to consultation amongst LAs.

4 How consultation outcomes are used

This chapter describes how LAs used the consultations with service end-users including: how their views were represented in the Children and Young People's Plans and the impact the consultations had on policy and practice.

4.1 Representation of end-users' views in CYPPs

The two most common ways for service end-users' views to be represented in the CYPPs (including any reviews, rewrites or refreshments) were through 'direct links between the views and the priorities', such as in a table (reported by 48 out of 69 survey respondents) and a 'summary of the views' in the plans (46 out of 69). In addition, three-fifths (42 out of 69) of LAs, as shown in Figure 4.1, included direct quotations from service end-users in the CYPPs.

A quarter of LAs used 'visuals in the CYPP' to depict service end-users' views and eight LAs indicated 'other' ways in which views were represented. These included representation in children and young people versions of the CYPPs and in the targets specified in the CYPP itself.

Around a third of LA telephone interviewees reported that the representation of views in the plans had evolved over time. Most often, this related to an increased presence of end-user views, for example, a section reserved for comments of children and young

people. Some interviewees described a much more explicit link between what end-users said and what was being done as a consequence, in the style of: 'Children and young people told us this ... we are going to do this'. One interviewee associated the increased prominence of views in the plans with a changing culture in the authority, namely that there was an acceptance of consultation and that now 'everyone recognises the need to have the views of service end-users fully represented'.

Where no change was reported, interviewees often added that the inclusion of views was already sufficient/suitable or that the second plan was more of a refreshment, rather than a rewrite.

A small number of interviewees suggested that end-user representation in the plans needed to be improved, for example, there was an idea to include a more detailed consultation log, which would present the consultations undertaken, alongside the impacts of each activity. Others explained they were considering more 'creative' or tailored approaches to representing end-users, e.g. producing a children's version of the CYPP in Mr Men format. As services develop in response to consultation, LAs would be able to show through the plans what difference consultation has actually made, not just at the planning stages, but in terms of the service delivered. This would serve as another form of feedback to those involved in consultation.

Figure 4.1 Representation of service end-users' views in the CYPPs

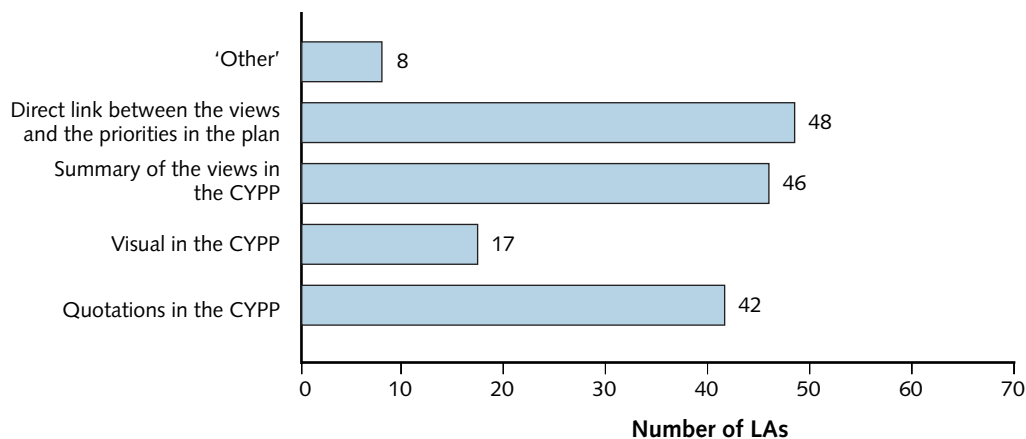
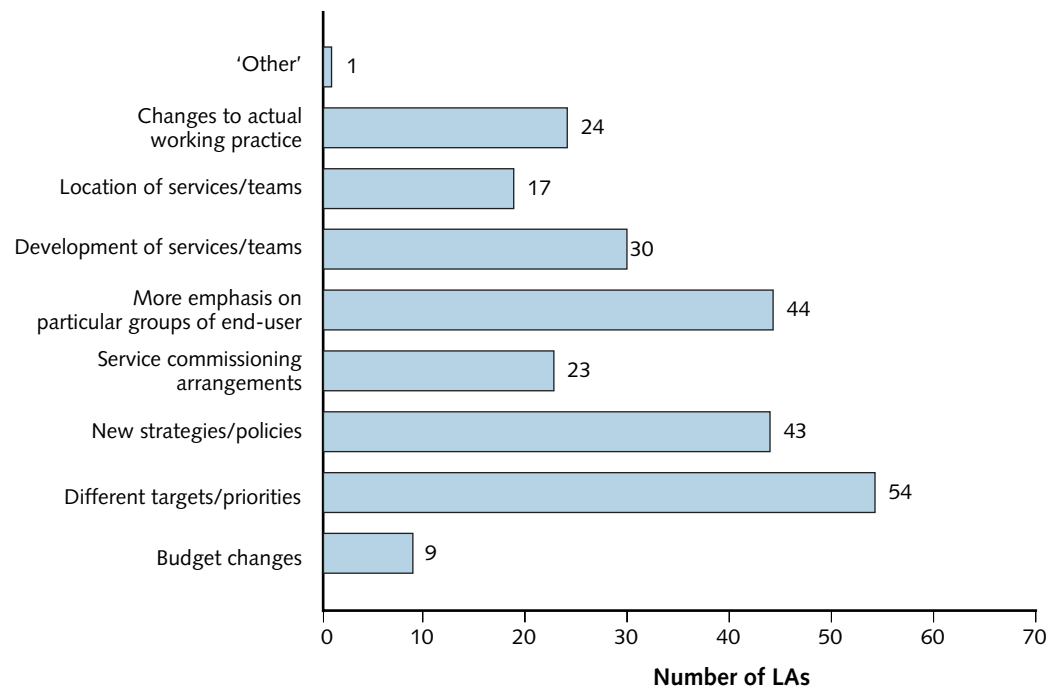


Figure 4.2 Ways in which service end-users' views impacted on policy and practice



4.2 Impact of consultation on policy and practice

The most common way in which service end-users had impacted on policy and practice was through the development of different LA targets and priorities, as indicated by three-quarters (54 out of 69) of LAs. This corresponds with the focus of consultation – the most common theme being ‘to identify and /or agree priorities and/or targets’. Alongside this, Figure 4.2 shows that other typical changes as a result of service end-user consultation included: greater emphasis on particular groups of end-user (44 out of 69) and the development of new strategies and policies (43 out of 69).

More substantive changes including the development of new services and teams, changes to actual working practices, service commissioning arrangements, and the location of services and teams were much less common. Specifically, just nine LAs (out of 69) indicated that the views of service end-users had resulted in budget changes.

It should be noted that sometimes the reported impacts were in the relation to the consultation process itself, rather than impact on other LA services, e.g. the development of consultation strategies, creation of positive engagement groups to ensure children and young people are involved at all levels, and the greater acceptance of end-users’ views across an authority. As LAs become more immersed in the consultation ethos, they are discovering ways in which consultation practices and policies can be improved, e.g. the need for more coordination and the need to target particular groups of end-users. It would appear, therefore, that the impacts of consultation currently register on two levels – refinements to the consultation process itself (covering both policy and practice) and then wider impacts on LA services due to the messages collected during consultation.

The table below provides some examples of the different impacts noted by LA interviewees:

Table 4.1 Some examples of impact arising from consultation activity

Different targets and priorities	Consultation with children and young people revealed that the biggest concern for them was 'Staying Safe' in its broadest sense, e.g. 'I don't feel safe on the bus', 'I don't feel safe in school'. As a result of this feedback the CYPP included actions focused on addressing bullying.
Greater emphasis on particular groups of end-user	Consultation with specific key groups shed light on their particular needs. As a result services have been tailored, e.g. language classes for BME groups, play facilities for young people and help for looked-after children to open bank accounts.
Development of new strategies/policies	A large-scale survey revealed the young people wanted more leisure facilities. To facilitate this, the LA has developed a Play and Leisure Strategy.
Changes to working practices	A consultation was undertaken with looked-after children, looking at why they tended to do less well in education. Acting on the messages received, LAC now have greater access to computers, extra tuition and quiet places to do homework.
Service commissioning arrangements	Under the Children's Fund arrangements there is a young people's panel that makes decisions on how the Enjoy and Achieve budget should be used. They design the criteria, assess application and allocate the money (their decisions are ratified by an adult board – for legal reasons)
Location of teams/services	Following comments from service end-users on service location, services have been reorganised to work more on an area basis, thereby increasing access.
Budget changes	Young people found the local bus service to be very expensive; through the youth council the LA has been prompted to invest in a fifty pence bus fare for anyone in education or training.

5 Good practice in consultation

This chapter of the report presents what LA representatives considered to represent good/successful or best practice in consultation. They were encouraged to think of any activities or approaches to consultation which they had found to be particularly effective. This chapter pools together data from the survey, telephone interviews and seven LA case studies.

5.1 Consultation and participation strategies

A number of authorities put forward consultation strategies as examples of good practice. By developing and working to a consultation strategy interviewees described how it was possible to map out the activities that were taking place in a locality, think about how the information was going to be used and generally, ensure that consultation was a more systematic and planned activity. By monitoring what was happening, they felt it was possible to identify gaps in consultation, e.g. which end-users were being overlooked, which agencies were failing to consult adequately. Strategies can also focus consultation on particular groups – one authority wished to prioritise primary school age pupils and this was written into the strategy. Overall, the existence of a consultation strategy was said to produce a much more coordinated approach, with a cross-agency commitment to consultation.

Box 5.1 Example of a consultation/participation strategy

A Children and Young Person's Participation Strategy was written which sets out

- 1) the LA's vision for consultation, e.g. we believe that effective participation is essential to achieving the best outcomes for children, young people and families
- 2) the aims of the strategy (all children and young people should have the opportunity to be influential and constructive partners within their community)
- 3) how the full involvement of children and young

people will be achieved, e.g. providing training on consultation, developing a participation charter and involving young people in the selection of staff and

- 4) a seven-point action plan for the year, e.g. to carry out four consultation events during summer 2006.

5.2 Young people as action researchers

Several authorities had found that young people themselves can prove valuable as collectors of end-user views. There were a number of good practice nominations which involved young people being trained as 'action researchers', 'youth consultants' or 'junior inspectors'. They would then go out into their communities and obtain the views of their peers or in the case of a Junior JAR, interview service heads (see case study 1). Involving young people in the process of consultation was said to open up avenues for reaching a wider sample of end-users (that might not be accessible to adults undertaking consultation). At the same time, young people involved in the experience can develop a range of skills, e.g. listening, communicating, report writing.

Box 5.2 Example of young people as action researchers

Young People at the Centre (YPAC) was developed in order to make more effective linkages between young people's engagement in their communities, educational attainment and the citizenship curriculum in schools. A group of young people in target neighbourhoods were trained in action-research techniques. They used these techniques to gather evidence from their peers about what would help improve their educational attainment, life skills and personal development outside of the formal school structure. In response to the views of young

people, a number of events were organised, e.g. a community-focused fun day, sports development opportunities and a public speaking event.

5.3 End-user representation on panels/groups/forums

Sometimes interviewees commented that rather than creating new consultation opportunities, they could capitalise on existing groups of end-users who meet on a regular basis. Interviewees mentioned tapping into groups such as youth councils and primary school newspaper clubs in order to gather feedback from young people. This was deemed effective because it made use of existing networks, saving time and effort. However, there was also an understanding that the membership of these groups may not always extend to every type of young person and it may be necessary to employ other methods if a truly extensive consultation is required.

As well as involving established groups of end-users, a number of authorities also noted groups that were specifically set up for the purpose of consultation, e.g. Locality Young People's Issues Groups, Shadow Children's Trust Boards and a young persons' scrutiny panel. These groups provide young people with opportunities to influence decision making and policy issues that affect them.

Box 5.3 Examples of end-user representation on various groups

Example 1

Locality Young People's Issues Groups were established to bring young people at a local level together with elected members. They function to improve: young people's access to decision making, inclusion, and inter-generational dialogue and cohesion. Meetings take place six times per year in each of the locality areas. These can be used as a consultation tool, to gather the views of young people. It allows the children and young people to say what the important issues are for them.

Example 2

KidsBizz is a bi-monthly newspaper written by and for primary age children and distributed to every

primary age child in the borough. There are news crews who work with the children's fund participation officer and the children write the stories. Each edition will have a theme based on one of the five ECM outcomes. There are also newspaper clubs in the primary schools and there is a coordinator in each of the schools that links in with *Kidsbuzz* and this is a good way of getting children and young people's views. The newspaper also provides a communication channel for giving feedback to the children on what progress has been made, as a result of their comments.

Example 3

A youth council is involved in the council's scrutiny process with reserved seats on all City Council Scrutiny Panels, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the Connexions Local Management Committee. The youth council has also engaged with the Local Strategic Partnership on visioning for the city. The youth council has also carried out pieces of consultation on behalf of the city council and other partners, on topics such as skateboarding and skate parks, sexual health and meeting points for young people in the city centre, disability and anti-social behaviour.

5.4 Conferences

Four LAs had found conference events to be a successful approach to consultation, providing opportunities to enquire on particular themes such as teenage pregnancy, drug use and with particular groups of end-users, e.g. an annual conference for children with learning difficulties. Authorities mentioned that the results were shared with other agencies, e.g. a planning group with multi-agency representation, thus ensuring the effective dissemination of consultation outcomes. In the case of the conference for children with learning difficulties, schools were very involved in its organisation and received a report on the outcomes which they could act upon. Conferences can also provide an opportunity for services to hear first hand the views of young people, and interviewees described how key services/decision makers were present at events. To maximise the value of such conferences, therefore, it would appear important to involve service representatives to ensure that they receive the views of end-users and ideally on the day, as conference participants.

Box 5.4 Examples of consultation conferences

Example 1

An annual conference is held for up to 250 young people aged 13–19. This event gives young people direct access to key decision makers in a variety of ways. Focus groups on topics/subjects chosen by the young people are held and a main panel of key decision makers have a question-and-answer session. Evaluation forms are collected and collated after the event and evaluated by the planning group which is a multi-agency group with over 20 organisations represented. These then inform the following year's conference.

Example 2

The Big Day Out is an event for all children, young people and families held yearly to consult with them about services they are involved in. There are over 100 organisations who participate in this event which is free for the community to attend. This is the opportunity for organisations to showcase the good practice they are involved in and to consult with the community in the hope of making services better.

recognised that it was necessary to include a paper-based option in order to undertake a comprehensive consultation.

Face-to-face consultation

In contrast to large-scale surveys, there was also support for face-to-face consultation exercises. A similar number of authorities found direct contact with end-users valuable – by speaking to end-users it was possible to gain more in-depth information on particular issues. Whilst this feedback may not be generated by high numbers of respondents, its quality and immediacy could prove powerful:

We spent some time with a group of hearing impaired young people and were struck by their frustration with service provision and the fact that they generally felt ignored. I think by doing it we probably reached groups that we had never reached before and it has challenged a lot of our assumptions.

Interviewees commented that engaging in dialogue with the end-users made it possible to explore their thinking, make further enquiries and really understand their viewpoint. This may explain why focus groups received the highest proportion of effective and very effective ratings from LAs (as reported in Section 3.2).

5.5 Surveys

For some interviewees, surveys were deemed to be an example of effective practice. The value in this particular consultation method centred on its potential to assemble evidence from a much larger population of end-users. Feedback from several hundred or several thousand young people can make it easier to spot common trends or themes. Hence, survey consultation can identify strong messages for service planners, voiced by high numbers of end-users. The scale of a survey can also highlight some surprising findings. For example, through a survey, one authority became aware that 'middle class schools' contained the highest proportion of children and young people who felt least listened to. The downside of surveys is that, unless specifically targeted, they do not always reach the full sample of end-users, e.g. young people not in school. Online surveys were adopted in some authorities and proved popular as they were quick to administer, analyse and can be easily repeated. However, again, access to the internet may exclude certain groups, and interviewees

Consultation tool kits

In an effort to promote consultation and embed it into the everyday working practices of services, some authorities had created consultation tool kits/packages/standards. These materials (some available online) take organisations through the consultation process, providing them with the tools to consult with end-users on a local basis. One interviewee described how a tool kit gave them another layer of consultation activity, allowing the central participation team to focus on collecting views from other sources. Elsewhere, however, someone commented that although consultation packages exist, those deciding to use them will still need support and advice, which can be costly in terms of the time involved. Two authorities had developed standard frameworks/charter marks for consultation – in one instance, training was provided to embed the standards within new services. Such developments show how LAs are working to promote the widespread adoption of consultation with end-

users, providing services with the necessary equipment and procedures for obtaining feedback.

Appointment of staff with a consultation remit

In relation to good practice, five authorities mentioned various ways in which there were now staff with designated remits for participation and consultation: e.g. a newly established Access and Participation unit, dedicated participation officers and the appointment of a commissioner for children. These developments again signal an increasing prioritisation for consultation in authorities, with staff in place to coordinate activities and to ensure that consultation is an ongoing and everyday activity.

Box 5.5 Example of staff with a dedicated consultation remit

To demonstrate commitment to valuing the contribution of children and young people this authority was one of the first to appoint a commissioner for children. The Commissioner has formed a 'Children and young people's participation subgroup' which helps to identify gaps, share good practice, develop networks, raise awareness of the issues for children and young people and to ensure a consistent approach in participation work. The group comprises professionals who undertake participation work directly with children and young people.

5.6 Other nominations of good practice in consultation

In addition to the examples described above, there were a number of other practices which were highlighted by smaller numbers of authorities as illustrations of good practice. These included:

- **A consultation audit:** One authority looked at consultation activity over a 24-month period, pulling together the data generated. This information was then categorised into different themes, thus creating a library of evidence which could be searched on particular issues.

- **Diary rooms:** Using the 'Big Brother' concept, one authority installed diary rooms as a way of encouraging young people to have their say. A video was produced, giving service planners an insight into the views of young people.
- **Mystery shoppers:** Young people were recruited to act as mystery shoppers, visiting local services to see how they performed in real life.
- **Tear off slips:** One authority include a reply slip on the back of the first CYPP. It asked them to say what their hopes for the future were. A very good response was received from primary aged children which proved 'instrumental' in the authority's needs assessment.
- **Rolling programme of consultation with parents:** Locality forums for parents were set up through which a rolling programme of consultation takes place. Parents are invited to express their general views which then inform the CYPPs and they are also asked to comment on specific outcome areas.
- **Consultation road shows:** Road shows were held over a summer to find out how young people would like to be consulted. There was a mind workshop – using problem solving to decide how the consultation should go ahead, a hands workshop – using art-based work to decide what methods should be used and a body workshop – which included dance, drama and mime to ask young people about topics and views. The road shows allowed the LA to create activities that enabled the children and young people to have their say in a way that best suited them.
- **Plan written for and by young people:** The LA worked with Children's Fund Young Reporters to produce a children and young people's version of the CYPP. This plain English version clearly shows how children and young people interpret the five ECM outcomes and the issues that they feel should be given the highest priority.

5.7 Consultation case studies

The next section of the report provides more detailed information on seven examples of different consultation methods. Each case study explains how the consultation

activity was organised, how the data was used in the LA, the impact of the consultation, as well as some of the challenges encountered. Interviewees reflected on their experiences and highlighted areas for improvement or advice they would give to others considering similar approaches.

- **Case study 1** describes a Junior Joint Area Review where a group of young people were trained to inspect local services, through visits and interviews with service heads.
- **Case study 2** describes how two paper-based surveys conducted in a large secondary school were eventually combined into an integrated survey. One of the surveys was also developed with considerable input from young people.
- **Case study 3** charts the development of another survey which was originally administered in paper form and then switched to an online survey.
- **Case study 4** focuses on how a group of young people were trained as mystery shoppers, in order to capture their experiences of local services.
- **Case study 5** concerns a group of young people who were employed to conduct a piece of investigative journalism to garner information about the use of extended services by their peers.
- **Case study 6** provides an illustration of a dedicated unit set up to facilitate consultation with children and young people, and to coordinate and support their involvement in council services through various groups and forums.
- **Case study 7** features a residential consultation event with young people who are often under represented in mainstream participation opportunities, e.g. young people with disabilities, looked-after children, those from black minority ethnic groups.

Case study 1: Junior Joint Area Review

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

Background to the review

When it was announced that the Directorate of Children's Services and Learning was to be subject to a Joint Area Review it was decided that young people could be a valued part of that process. Consequently, 12 young people (aged 10–15) were trained as inspectors and took part in the Junior Joint Area Review (JJAR) during June 2007 (with preparatory work starting in January 2007).

As youth inspectors they completed three main tasks:

- 1) interviews with seven heads of service
- 2) visits to 11 local projects (including a Children's Home, Connexions centre, primary school)
- 3) analysis of 10 case-study reviews (written accounts of young people receiving support from social services).

The aim of the 'Junior JAR' was to:

- provide a young person's perspective on the services under review

- provide the young people involved with a valuable and enjoyable learning and engagement experience
- develop a model for future engagement of young people in the monitoring and evaluation of services.

Recruiting young people to the JJAR

Three schools (covering a geographical range and both primary and secondary) were invited to recommend young people for this experience. Young people from school councils were subsequently nominated for the JJAR. Care was taken to ensure that the young people were capable of catching up on school work, as their involvement in the JJAR would necessitate time away from lessons. Also, as this was the first time a JJAR had been run, volunteers were taken from school councils, thus ensuring the young people had prior experience of decision making and consultation.

Training

In order for the young people to be well prepared for their roles as junior inspectors they attended four training sessions:

Session one: preparation – this session covered topics such as what a Joint Area Review is, the role of an inspector, deciding on two key lines of enquiry and Dictaphone training.

Session two: services for young people – young people discussed the inspectors' timetable, which heads of service to interview, what they should be looking for when visiting services and the needs that different children might have, e.g. disabled, looked after.

Session three: skills – this session focused on developing the young people's communication and listening skills, what good and bad communication/listening look like and how to speak to different types of people.

Session four: final preparation – this included role play to practise asking questions, practising case-study reviews and thinking about how to record their views for the final feedback session.

Before the review, the young people also attended a meet-and-greet session with the main JAR inspectors.

The review

When planning the review, the same projects were used as for the main inspection but it was made clear that the visits would be simultaneous and not joint. This enabled the JAR inspection to go ahead unhindered while the Junior JAR team had their own guide and programme. The young people investigated the same themes as the main JAR but also decided to identify two additional key lines of enquiry, they chose: 1) Staff qualifications and 2) Attitudes towards young people. During interviews with service heads, young people explored these areas by asking questions such as:

- How do you assess a potential staff member's attitude towards children and young people?

- Why do you think children and young people are important?
- What qualifications or experience do your staff have to have?

For the project visits, young people had devised a set of questions which enabled them to assess the environment, for example:

- Is the building safe for children to be in – is it secure?
- Is it welcoming and cheerful, do you get the impression that the staff are caring and kind (are you greeted well, good attitudes, etc.)?
- Can people with disabilities use the building and get everywhere they need to?

The young people were also asked to read case studies of young people receiving support from social services. These were the same case studies used for the main JAR, but simplified slightly. The young people were invited to make recommendations on what else could be done for the individuals featured in these case studies. Half a day was allowed for the case-study reviews.

After the review

Later in the year, the young people attended a feedback session and an end-of-project evaluation meeting. At this time they produced key messages for a poster disseminating the findings of the review. To thank them for their contributions, the junior inspectors received a gift bag.

Staffing

The JJAR involved contributions from five staff members: the Children Fund (CF) manager, two other CF team members, a staff member from Connexions and someone from a policy and planning department. The Children Fund manager was the main organiser and pulled in others to assist with the practical aspects of the JJAR, e.g. transporting the children round to different services and training.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

Feedback and dissemination

Various avenues have been used to communicate the findings of the review. These include:

- the production of a Junior JAR report, documenting the whole consultation exercise
- feedback to the Directorate conference
- feedback to young people engaged in decision making via the youth parliament
- feedback to young people via a poster
- promotion on the youthnet Southampton website.

Interviewees confirmed that the JJAR outcomes will be used to inform the refreshment of the CYPP and continue to feed into strategic planning generally.

IMPACT OF CONSULTATION

Ongoing reviews

When the project was fed back to the youth parliament, there was a very positive response and other young people expressed an interest. As a result, a rolling project has been set up called 'Junior Review' which will use exactly the same process but will be located in one school at a time to make it logistically more easy to run.

Transferring skills

Two of the junior reviewers now sit on the youth parliament and are using their skills to train others. Similarly, members of the JJAR team will be involved in training young people taking part in the ongoing Junior Review.

Raising the profile and value of young people's involvement

The JJAR proved that young people are capable of commenting usefully on local services. Service heads felt that junior reviewers performed their roles very competently: 'they had good questions, they were confident in what they were asking, they weren't

intimated at all. And they were confident enough to follow up with supplementary questions.'

The value of young people's contribution is now being recognised across the authority and attempts are being made to fully utilise their views and knowledge. For example, all the Chief Officers will now be meeting once a year with the youth parliament and the focus of discussion will be directed by the young people, rather than adults going with their own agendas.

Two interviewees felt that this growing commitment to involving young people stemmed from the quality of the JJAR product. The success of the exercise provided 'clear evidence that young people can step up to the plate when required'. It was acknowledged that at the outset there may have been a degree of scepticism over how successful the process might be, but 'the quality of the outcome was so good'. The JJAR demonstrates how young people can be involved in a range of decision making, e.g. on local transport to 'get a sense of what it is wanted, what might work and what might not work'.

Benefits for the young people

Having conducted their own evaluation of the JJAR, the project manager reported that a major impact for the young people involved was they were now a lot more familiar with local services. This was confirmed by a junior reviewer: 'I learnt how many people are there to help all us kids and how much they actually do for us.' The project manager felt this was important because they could share this information. Also noted was an increase in confidence, an ability to interact better with adults and an increase in communication skills generally.

Highlighting the issue of self-esteem and body image

The JJAR brought service heads face to face with young people – although the reviewers were there to ask questions, one of the service heads welcomed the opportunity to have a two-way conversation with the young people: 'They were very good in giving feedback even during the interview. I said, could I ask them some questions? So they were very positive in

giving their views then.' As a result of some of the questions posed by the reviewers, there was a dialogue around how the prevalence of eating disorders may be influenced by the current government drive to reduce obesity: 'Just getting the young people's viewpoint made us stop and think about the publicity that we are using.' Having realised young people were concerned about this issue, resources are now being directed towards exploring self-esteem and body image. All year 6 students are to be surveyed in order to establish the scale of the problem. The junior reviewer who conducted the interview has been invited to co-chair the fit for life steering group. This will ensure that young people have some input into the obesity strategy (the co-chair also sits on the school council and youth parliament).

Impact on the services visited

The junior reviewers made a series of recommendations after their interviews and visits. The extent to which they have been acted upon will be clear next year, when the project manager will return to the services to find out what has changed. Service heads, though, were very interested to hear what young people felt about their services and they received detailed feedback. Summing up the experience, one service head said:

In all honesty, the young people asked more pertinent and more direct searching questions than the JAR inspectors did. And that's probably because they are in the system, so they know where some of the weaknesses are ... they were picking up a lot more on how life is, they were being real, so actually they came up with some really good positive suggestions.

VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Benefits of involving young people

It comes from younger minds, instead of older ones so we might have a bit more understanding for the young children who are actually involved in that case.

As much as them kind of people think they can understand children, I think it would be better coming from people that are their same age group.

JJAR is good because it's not always the views of adults that count, it's good that young people's voices are being heard.

Impact on them

I gained confidence. I learnt how lucky we are, we aren't disabled, we aren't in social care.

I grew more confident as well.

I was impressed by how much goes into helping children, the Sure Start we saw gives a lot of really good support to parents and families.

Encouraging others to get involved

We've been advising a lot of people to join youth parliament, because of JAR, you should really do it, it's good.

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Challenges

Liaising with schools, obtaining parental consent forms, arranging transport and ensuring that staff were on hand to accompany the junior team took time and was complex in terms of the organisation required. This was identified as the main challenge.

Improvements

The process was evaluated fully by the project manager, with feedback invited from the young people involved, as well as the services visited. Areas for improvement included:

- **the training:** the young people felt the training was the least popular part of the process with suggestions that there be more than one ice breaker, more fun activities and perhaps a more detailed explanation on what a JAR inspector was there to do. The project manager explained that whilst potentially boring, it was important that young people receive information on the services otherwise they would find them difficult to review. In fact, they felt that training could have been doubled in quantity:

It's not just being comfortable about doing the interviews, and visiting the services and asking the questions, it's about being able to understand what happens and being able to interrelate with adult inspectors and the whole expectation that you are making recommendations out of that, which is a pretty big deal.

The challenge for future training would be to deliver the information in a more fun way.

- **fewer case studies:** it was suggested that the number of case studies read by reviewers could be reduced from ten to about three. This was thought to be more manageable for them. Also recommended was for a social worker to introduce each case – having someone present who is connected to the case would permit young people to ask questions or to clarify any points about the case study.

Advice for others considering a JJAR

Reflecting on the process, the project manager gave the following advice:

- Given the complexities of organising a JJAR, a team approach is best (this JJAR used five members of staff).
- It is important to involve someone who has a broad understanding of children's services and can answer the reviewers' questions during training (hence, the involvement of a policy and planning representative).
- For the first JJAR, it is advisable to involve young people who are used to giving their views, taking part in consultations and who have some confidence in talking to adults. As everyone gets familiar with the process, then a wider range of young people could be brought in.

Case study 2: An extended services and community safety survey

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

Background to the surveys

This case study illustrates how consultations undertaken for different reasons and with a slightly different focus can come together for mutual benefit. The consultations focused on obtaining the views of young people (aged 11–16) attending one of the biggest schools in Europe, with around 2400 pupils. During March–April 2007 two separate surveys were conducted: one in relation to extended services and the other associated with the Safer Neighbourhoods (SN) agenda.

In future, the two surveys will be fully integrated into a single questionnaire. Other secondary schools in the area are now doing the same survey because they heard about how successful it was in obtaining the views of young people.

Extended services survey

This survey was devised to explore young people's views of extended services, including:

- whether young people are aware of the services on offer
- how young people feel about them
- barriers to taking part in extra school activities
- what the gaps are in service provision
- what young people would like to see offered in the future (in particular, what could be provided during holidays and after school).

As well as exploring these key questions, the survey was also used to investigate the potential for a youth club on campus. Through her role as community development worker, the extended schools coordinator had contact with a young person who was very keen to set up a youth club in the area. The young person

wanted to know how her peers felt about the idea, so the survey was used to obtain their views. In total, three young people contributed to the design of the questionnaire, making suggestions for which questions should be asked and how they should be phrased.

Safer Neighbourhoods survey

As part of the SN agenda, a series of local consultations are being undertaken to find out what are the main issues that affect the quality of life for residents. Once identified, these issues will be tackled by Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) to be created by the end of March 2008. Feedback from local consultations was highlighting concerns around anti-social behaviour amongst young people. The SN project manager decided it was important to find out how young people themselves felt about their local area and what issues impacted on their lives. Working with the same school, another survey was created focusing on 'What are the three main issues in your community, that affect the quality of your life?'

Method used

The surveys were administered through tutor groups and with tutor support, which resulted in a very high response rate of 1,800 out of 2,000 pupils. The extended schools coordinator opted for a survey approach because of the potential to capture feedback from a large number of pupils. They had considered alternatives, e.g. standing in the playground with clip boards, but this was deemed too time consuming. The coordinator was also very keen that young people directed the nature of the survey questions: 'I really wanted it to come totally from them, the questions, because young people asking young people will be better than me.' This sentiment was echoed by a senior school manager (also involved in the survey): 'That was the big attraction for me personally, that it was an opportunity for young people to be directly involved in driving the whole survey process.' A group of three girls volunteered to devise the questionnaire.

Analysis of survey data

It was during initial meetings at the school that the extended schools coordinator and SN project manager became aware of each other and that they were both wanting to survey the campus students. Although it was not possible to combine surveys during the first year (because of timing), the two project managers realised that they could benefit from having the surveys analysed together, to discuss the findings and think about how the findings from the two might relate to each other. For example, young people may be concerned about vandalism/crime in their area and this may link to a lack of after-school activities.

Analysis of the data was undertaken by a parent (who was being supported to find work by the extended schools coordinator). This parent is now employed as a consultant and will analyse data from future surveys. Now that the surveys have been combined, analysis of the questions will be funded through separate streams: extended schools and safer neighbourhoods.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

How used (extended services survey)

Initially, the consultation will affect planning in school, e.g. the provision of extended services and activities during the next summer holiday. Other schools are now doing the same survey (now it has been integrated), and these findings will inform the strategic planning group and extended school targets. Interest in the survey findings has also been expressed by children's centres and parish councils.

How used (Safer Neighbourhoods survey)

In the first instance, young people's views on what affects their quality of life will be relayed back to the NAG. Secondly, the general nature of the questions posed means that the data is of interest to many other groups across the LA, e.g. youth service, schools, health, youth offending teams. For example, the youth service was about to undertake their own consultation, but once they became aware of this survey they decided to use the results.

Feedback given (extended services survey)

At the time of the research visit, the extended schools coordinator was considering how best to give young people feedback on the results of the consultation exercise. Relaying this information was considered absolutely crucial:

... as important as doing the consultation, because obviously we don't want them to think we did another consultation, and what's happened?! What we wanted to be clear on was how we're going to feed back, what we're going to feed back and how the school is going to address some of the issues.

A meeting to discuss feedback options had recently been held (the extended schools coordinator, local youth worker and young people were present) and possible avenues for giving feedback included:

- student council
- a PowerPoint presentation by the young people involved in questionnaire design
- an article written by the young people
- campus newsletter (to all parents, staff and the wider community).

Feedback given (Safer Neighbourhoods survey)

The data from this year's survey will be compiled into a document and fed back to the school. For young people, information will also be relayed through the youth service and youth clubs. In addition, each NAG is responsible for communicating consultation findings to the local community, e.g. through press releases, articles in parish magazine, posters, flyers, etc. For future surveys, the plan is to ask young people whether they would like to receive feedback. Parental permission would then be sought in order to contact young people via email. This will provide a route through which feedback can be given as well as generating a list of young people who could potentially be approached for other projects.

IMPACT OF CONSULTATION

Extended services survey

The results have only just been made available, so the potential for impact was felt to be limited at this stage. To date, the following impacts have arisen:

- The school has agreed to lay on more activities during holidays and weekends (following requests in the survey).
- To support the extension of these activities, sixth formers are to be trained in sports coaching.
- The school is reviewing communication strategies (the survey revealed that some young people were unaware of services that are available to them).

We will become smarter about how we signpost young people to activities that are already available. One of the impacts for me, from the report, was that they were asking for a lot of things that are already out there somewhere and they don't know that.

(School manager)

- One development, therefore, is the installation of large digital screens around the campus which will provide rolling boards of information.
- Creation of an urban art project.
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course introduced.

The experience was also said to have benefited the girls who took part: 'they didn't quite realise the impact it would have' (extended schools coordinator) and the parent who analysed the data (now working as a consultant for future surveys). For the school, it highlighted the role of consultation and how it can contribute to the planning of services: 'I hope it will mean that sort of thing becomes embedded in our regular thinking and planning and delivering of services to young people.' The extended schools coordinator believed that showing interest in the young people's views had improved relations between the school and its pupils: 'the school shows them they do care'.

Safer Neighbourhoods survey

Again, the potential for impact had yet to be fully realised but the project manager commented on how the NAGS had already started to act on some of the issues identified through the survey. Furthermore, the wider community were surprised to discover that young people were worried about/affected by exactly the same things as they were, e.g. gangs on streets, rubbish, graffiti. In this sense, the results of the consultation had revealed a shared concern between the generations which was said to be bringing the community together.

The survey had also helped identify young people who were interested in receiving feedback and, therefore, potentially interested in the wellbeing of the community. It was hoped that this database of names could be used to approach young people for help with related projects, e.g. a community clean-up day. These names could be passed on to others in the LA, e.g. a youth participation officer, someone trying to find volunteers for a youth forum.

VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

How young people became involved with the extended services survey

Being a teenager out on the streets is quite hard and it gets cold around this time of year. So I thought to myself no, I want somewhere for us to go, to sit, watch telly, talk. So I spoke to [the extended school coordinator], who I knew from previous community volunteering and she said we could do several things and I said right, I want to do a questionnaire but I do need some help.

The importance of feedback

We are going to sit down and think about what they want and we're going to do something about that, rather than just doing a normal survey, where you find out what people want and leave it at that. We want to actually make a difference, that was the whole point of the survey. Feedback is one of the most important things, so they know we are still paying them attention.

The benefits of getting involved

I feel as if I've benefited, because it was my baby to start with and to see it grow and it's now going somewhere. And to have the help, it's really good.

I like the fact I can make a difference.

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Challenges

No major challenges were identified by interviewees, although a valuable point was made about raising young people's expectations. Although the surveys were asking for ideas and suggestions, it might not always be possible or practical to implement every proposal. A lack of action or progress may prove disheartening to young people and possibly even turn them off future opportunities to give their opinions. Honest and comprehensive feedback, therefore, is required to let young people know the outcomes of the consultations and to explain what actions are, or are not, realistic. Importantly: 'We need to prove that it's not consultation for consultation's sake – that we actually want to work with them' (Safer Neighbourhoods project manager).

Improvements

The following were identified as areas for development or possible improvements to the consultation process:

- The schools could run the survey on an annual basis (possibly managed through the school council or involving sixth formers).
- Some of the questions were worded in a very open way which meant that answers were too general (difficult to interpret, analyse or act on). Also, the open nature of the questions meant that the young people were asking for things that the school was not in a position to provide. It may have been better to narrow the focus and ask for comments on specific school-related issues.
- Consider an online survey in future to save time on processing the data ready for analysis.

- Involve a larger and more representative group in devising the survey (three girls were involved the first year). Bringing in more contributors would also help share the time commitment.
- There was a feeling that feedback could have been given more quickly – in terms of planning the project, it would be good to build feedback into the timescale with clear deadlines.
- Because the two surveys originated from different parts of the authority (community safety partnership and extended schools), it took some time before they learnt of each other's existence. Interviewees commented that whilst there is a lot of consultation going on, it is not always joined up or coordinated. Furthermore, information collected by one service may have relevance for another and it is important that this data is widely disseminated, e.g. the links between offending, boredom and the extended services available to young people. Hence, one interviewee suggested:

We need to have broader knowledge of what's going on and what's likely to be happening in given areas. Thinking who might I need to share that with and think could we do a consultation in partnership from the beginning rather than find about it a bit further down the line.

(Policy officer)

Advice for others

Based on their experiences, interviewees gave the following advice for those considering a similar type of consultation:

- Young people should be involved from the very beginning of a consultation, pinpointing the areas for investigation and formulating survey questions.
- Before undertaking a consultation, make sure you know what other consultations are happening to avoid overloading schools/other services.
- If other consultations are happening, consider working together. This can spread the workload, e.g. visiting schools to seek participation, which in turn could increase the numbers who can be involved.
- If working with schools, allow plenty of time for setting up the survey and make the process as easy as possible for them, e.g. the Safer Neighbourhoods survey was sent into each tutor group in bundles of 30, with a covering letter for the tutor and instructions for them to read out.

Case study 3: A paper and online survey

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

Background to the development of the survey

Following the publication of the Every Child Matters Outcome Framework (DfES, 2005), the LA wanted to explore what the five outcomes really meant to children and young people and which were most important to them. Consultation was undertaken in a variety of ways, including through youth groups and schools, and used a range of different methods such as discussion groups and the production of DVDs.

Three questions were used to guide all of the consultation activities. These were:

- What do you think the five outcomes are/mean in your own words?
- Which of the things you identify as important for each of the five outcomes, are most important to put right?
- How will you know when the LA is making a difference to things?

The data/outputs derived from all of the consultation activities were amalgamated and thematically analysed by the LA. Emerging issues were listed

under each of the five ECM outcomes and verified for accuracy with the participating children and young people. After some minor revisions, a final list of issues was re-sent out to children and young people for them to prioritise and list the three things of most importance to them. The findings from these consultations were fed into the development of the original CYPP, with the top three priorities being presented to stakeholders to help them formulate the LA priorities. In addition, the consultation was the driving rationale for the 'Having a Life' survey, as the children and young people suggested that the LA ask them their views directly in a way which could be measured over time (i.e. a survey).

The first paper-based 'Having a Life' survey

The name of the survey, 'Having a Life', carried out in April 2006, was a direct outcome of the initial consultations, as it emerged that the main issues of importance to children and young people in the LA were about having a life, having friends and being able to go out and enjoy things. The survey was paper based and alongside the main survey separate, tailored versions were produced for children and young people in care, and disabled children and young people, thus ensuring these target groups were included.

Based on the priorities identified in the initial survey, the LA devised a set of questions that would get a sense of how it felt to live in the LA from the children and young people's point of view. In order to ensure the words used were clear and relevant they were verified and checked by a group of children and young people. The LA was also very careful to plan how they wanted the children and young people to respond, for example, whether they included boxes to tick or smiley faces for the younger age group.

In terms of survey distribution, every school in the LA (including primary, secondary and special) was sent a letter, which the leader of the council, deputy leader and lead member for children all endorsed, inviting their pupils/students to take part. Following this, schools contacted the LA to register their interest and a member of the LA then personally visited each

school to deliver the survey. Guidance on how to administer the survey was also provided, although the administration was open to the school and, as a result, varied hugely. For example, some schools had an assembly about the survey and then the children and young people completed it in a lesson time whereas others completed the survey in a Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) session. For the two target groups, the surveys were distributed through youth groups and also through the relevant participation officers within the LA.

The second online 'Having a Life' survey

The second 'Having a Life' survey was made available online. This was to reduce the cost of producing the survey and the time needed to distribute and input data. Online administration also made it more accessible to a wider group of children and young people. However, a small number of paper versions of the survey were produced for those who requested it. The survey was live from 1 March until mid-April 2007, although the response date was extended as it coincided with the Easter break.

The survey was based largely on the first 'Having a Life' survey although there were some key revisions. These included:

- changing the age ranges for the survey from 0–5, 5–12 and 12–18 to 6–9, 10–12 and 13 and over, so as to better suit the developmental ages of children and young people. The revised age bands also corresponded with the three school system in the LA (i.e. first, middle and secondary)
- modifying some of the questions either because of wording issues or to 'further unpick' some of the issues in more detail
- changing the response scale from 1–10 to 1–5, thus providing a mid-point to aid statistical analysis.

Survey completion was encouraged by the LA in three main ways. The first was through articles in the Families and Children's Trust fortnightly newsletter which is distributed to all personnel/agencies involved in Children's Services (i.e. schools, youth service, Care Trust, etc.). The LA also put out a press release and

LA personnel attended headteachers' meetings to talk to them about the survey and generally raise awareness of it. Alongside this, the recently formed youth parliament in the LA, the 'Young Leaders Cabinet', fully endorsed the 'Having a Life' survey and saw it as an important way of capturing the views of children and young people. As such, the Young Leader and other members of the cabinet actively promoted the second, online 'Having a Life' survey by visiting schools to talk in assemblies and help administer the survey.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

The first paper-based 'Having a Life' survey

Data from the survey was analysed by the LA according to three variables:

- by school partnership in the LA
- by each district council area (six in the LA)
- by three geographical localities within the LA.

Each school was provided with their pupils'/students' survey responses in data tables. A high number of schools used the data to complete their Self Evaluation Form (SEF) in respect of undertaking consultation. This was thought to be one of the main reasons for the high response from schools (i.e. it was beneficial for schools to complete the survey as they received data that could be put to practical use).

Data was also given to the School Improvement Partners and Extended School Coordinators for each school partnership and also to each of the six district council's strategic partnerships.

The paper surveys produced a wealth of children's drawings that were used in the poster of the CYPP, as well as to illustrate other documents.

The second online 'Having a Life' survey

The data generated from the online survey was much easier to manipulate and was easily exported into an Excel file. Analysis was simplified, with the data only being compared with the previous year and not by

the three variables originally analysed (i.e. school partners, district council areas and geographical localities).

Feedback to children and young people

The primary mechanism for feeding back the outcomes of the survey was a poster. This was sent out to all schools and key community points (i.e. libraries, community centres, etc.), and contained some of the key messages from the consultation. Some of the posters are still on display and the LA suggests this shows the success of disseminating in this medium. However, some of the schools involved in completing the survey felt that more feedback should have been provided to the children and young people to 'really show how their voice had changed things'.

Dissemination

The LA has actively disseminated the findings from the surveys. This has included their attendance and presentation at: the National Safeguarding Conference; Family and Children Scrutiny committee; Family and Children's Trust Board; and the Learning and Skills Council Board. The survey was also shortlisted in the 2006 Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management Innovation Awards.

IMPACT OF CONSULTATION

Impact on LA priority development

The CYPP priority 'Children and young people feeling valued' was specifically developed as a result of the first 'Having a Life' survey which showed that only 60 per cent of 5–12 year olds and 50 per cent of 12–18 year olds felt valued in the LA. This priority remains in the revised CYPP and has targets and lead agencies attached to it, thus reinforcing the importance of it as a key priority for the LA.

Safeguarding for the children and young people

The LA advised that following completion of the survey, the administrator, typically the teacher, briefly

check the responses before sending them back to the LA. If there were any safeguarding issues that needed following up in the survey, the LA contacted the headteacher of the relevant school to ensure that they were aware of these children, thus acting as another means of safeguarding their wellbeing.

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Challenges

Undertaking a paper-based survey proved expensive in terms of printing and distributing. The LA also provided incentive gifts to those who completed the survey, thus adding to the costs. Another challenge was the high number of responses received in terms of data entry and analysis. This was compounded by the responses being unevenly spread across the LA, making it difficult to reliably and validly compare the data by school partnerships. Finally, the changes to the Likert response scale and the wording of the questions in the online survey made it difficult to compare data from the first and second year surveys.

Improvements

The LA feels confident in the survey and feels that they are getting reliable and solid data, as evidenced by the first and second survey producing similar results. However, there is an emerging recognition

that the LA should move towards a more qualitative approach, thus moving from consultation to more active participation of children and young people:

It is just too easy to just do a survey. It is more challenging to have children, young people and parents fully informed and given the authority to help you make decisions, scrutinise what you are doing and where you are prioritising your resources. That is what we are going to do next. What we want to do is establish some form of young people's scrutiny committee.

(Head of Partnership, Planning and Participation)

The 'Having a Life' survey has been deemed a success by the LA and agencies recognise it as an important consultation tool. For example, the Police Authority has approached the LA and expressed their interest in being involved in future surveys which might feature questions about how children and young people perceive the Police. However, with fewer responses being received in the second year of the survey when compared to the first (down from 6500 to 4500), the LA may change how it uses the survey. It was suggested that the national Ofsted 'TellUs2' survey will be the primary means of collecting baseline data from children and young people and the 'Having a Life' survey will be specifically used to target vulnerable groups such as traveller children and those out of school. This will then produce aggregated, specific data for these key groups.

Case study 4: Mystery shopping

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

Background to the consultation

In 2002, the LA decided to sign up to the National Youth Agency and Local Government Association's Hear by Right standards, a framework to improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people. They wanted to achieve the advanced level of these standards within three years. In order to meet this aim, a youth forum was established and methods of consulting with children

and young people were explored. The authority had an established mystery shopper service coordinated by the corporate consultation team. When first formed, the mystery shopping service consisted of a panel of adult residents (the residents' review panel) who assessed the quality of the services offered to the public. Members of the youth forum were asked to consider if they would like to become involved in mystery shopping as a method of consultation on youth service provision. The young people welcomed this opportunity.

Aims of mystery shopping

The main aim of mystery shopping is to obtain feedback from service users about how services operate in practice when staff are unaware they are being evaluated. Mystery shoppers act as service users, they interact with staff as a normal service user would and report on the experience.

In the past, the majority of mystery shopping undertaken by youth forum members had been around generic youth provision, e.g. youth centres. Due to their successes in this area, young people from the youth forum were also recruited to sit on the residents' review panel and inspect wider council services including libraries, parking, etc.

Initiating the mystery shopping exercise

There are established protocols for services that require young people's participation in mystery shopping activities. Commissioning services are required to complete a form for the corporate consultation team who facilitate mystery shopping exercises. They are asked to detail how many young people they want to include in the activity, the numbers of centres or service staff to be included, as well as specific questions or topics they want to obtain feedback on. From this information, survey instruments and assignments are devised along with evaluation forms to be completed by the young people. The young people are consulted on the instruments and these are modified following any feedback provided. Service managers let the young people from the youth forum know which centres/activities are to be mystery shopped. The corporate consultation team have a mystery shopping budget and provide young people with incentives for participating in these exercises in the form of vouchers.

Health and safety

Youth workers carry out a risk assessment of venues for mystery shopping activities prior to the young people's visit. The workers accompany the young people to the venue and arrange a meeting place following completion of the mystery shopping activity. This role is sometimes carried out by older members

of the youth forum. Parent/carer's consent forms are completed prior to the visit.

Training

The young people participating in the exercise are asked to attend a session where they are briefed by staff with expertise in mystery shopping techniques, as well as by representatives from the service commissioning the consultation. In the training, they are provided with a scenario for the mystery shopping exercise and are given suggestions about possible lines of questioning or likely reactions from staff. The young people go through the questions with youth workers prior to their visit. The young people from the youth forum are also peer educators and brief each other on mystery shopping exercises and work through evaluation forms before visits.

The activity

The mystery shopping conducted by young people consists of either a visit to a service/activity or a telephone call to service staff. The young people are given a scenario, e.g. they are looking to apply for funding for a college course or they are enquiring about activities available at a youth centre. They are provided with a script, questions to ask, and measures to record, such as the time it takes to receive attention from a member of staff or if they receive an adequate response to questions. After each visit, the young people complete an evaluation form of their experience. Mystery shopping exercises are repeated in order to follow up on service improvement as a result of the young people's recommendations. Services are informed when they are about to be mystery shopped and they are given a time period in which a young person will visit rather than an exact date.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

The young people carrying out the mystery shopping activities complete evaluation forms. These are analysed by the corporate consultation team and a report of the findings is produced. The specialist support provided by this team was highly valued by members from the youth service who felt that they

did not have the time or the specialist analysis/report writing skills to undertake this task.

The final report of the mystery shopping activity is sent to the head of the service.

It's not to beat staff with but it's to say that the young people went out and these are their experiences, some were good and some weren't. This would be fed back to the centre manager and they would be told that in a few months they will be revisited and that we would like to see some improvement.

(Youth worker)

The reports are also distributed to line managers of service staff who often present the findings of the mystery shopping activity at staff meetings in order to explain the experiences of young people, highlighting areas for improvement.

The service managers produce recommendations and actions based on the feedback. Results from all consultations along with their recommendations and actions are submitted to the youth forum. The young people expect the action points to be acted upon and to see improvements made by the time of the next mystery shopping exercise.

Information from various mystery shopping activities has been incorporated into the CYPP and other service plans. The findings have also been used to develop priorities for services and have been used as examples of best practice in various LA documents.

IMPACT OF CONSULTATION

Improved standards and practice

Following the receipt of the consultation report and the production of recommendations and actions produced by service heads, mystery shopping activities are repeated, to see if there has been any improvement. The youth worker commented: 'It always has appeared to improve, so it has made a difference over the years.'

Positive impacts from mystery shopping exercises undertaken by young people in the authority include:

- customer service training for front-line staff

- the inclusion of data protection statements on enrolment forms
- improvements to disabled access at the town hall
- the development of a website for colleges and voluntary providers to signpost customers to appropriate support/provision
- a proactive application for funding to purchase equipment by young people from a youth centre.

Impacts on young people involved in the mystery shopping activity

The main impacts on young people involved in the mystery shopping activity are:

- increased knowledge of council services
- the young people are able to see their recommendations put into practice.
- financial incentives for taking part in the exercise (e.g. the receipt of vouchers).

Impact on the Children and Young Peoples Plan

The young people involved in mystery shopping exercises have also been consulted about the draft version of the children and young people's version of the CYPP.

We have got members who have been to lots of the different activities and lots of different events from around the borough, this helps because we have that background. Through mystery shopping you get to experience it. So you know that when you are doing the Children and Young People's Plan you are not just talking about your experiences of your youth provision. In general you have got a better understanding of what all young people are dealing with.

(Young person)

VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Effective method of consultation

I think it's really effective, when you are doing it, you are seeing it how it is. Sometimes when we were at school and there was an Ofsted inspection, all of a sudden you would see all these displays going up. With this you get to see the real thing.

(Young person)

Knowledge and skills development

Young people from the youth forum reported that participating in mystery shopping exercises gave them a better understanding about how council services work. They also reported an increase in self-confidence: 'We have done it and we get to see how the inspection is done, how the report is produced, how it is led on and how it has made a direct impact on services.' Young people also reported increased communication and social skills: 'It also develops your skills where you are dealing with strangers and you have to communicate. You also get to meet new people and make new friends.'

Achievements and recognition

Young people felt that this consultation method was effective in enabling them to have a voice on LA services. They also felt that their comments were taken seriously by heads of services and were valued. Moreover, their impact on service improvement had been recognised by a broader range of LA staff as they were now involved in reviews of wider council services such as the library. 'We used to do it for just youth services, but because we have such good effect on improving the youth services we now do it for council-wide services as part of the residents' review panel' (Young person).

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Challenges

Interviewees spoke of the following challenges in relation to the mystery shopping activity:

- Staff from services being mystery shopped may recognise the young people undertaking the mystery shopping from their wider youth service work and thus may alter their behaviour accordingly.
- There are issues around feeding back and whether reports of mystery shopping should identify services and/or individuals. Some services want centres to be 'named and shamed', others prefer to remain anonymous.
- Mystery shopping can take longer to carry out than other types of consultation because it involves substantial coordination and monitoring of service users. For example, the organisation of training sessions, ensuring that visits or phone calls have been completed and collection of evaluation forms.

Improvements

Interviewees suggested that the time taken to produce recommendations and actions after mystery shopping exercises could be reduced, thereby providing more immediate feedback.

Case study 5: Peer-to-peer consultation using investigative journalism

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

Background to the Press Gang

A Children and Young People's Consultation and Participation Strategy was developed by the LA in 2006. Included in this three-year strategy was an action to establish a continuous consultative mechanism with children and young people. One

of the ways of achieving this aim was to establish a young people's website. The Youth Consultation and Participation Officer contacted every school in the authority to recruit young people to contribute to the website's design. They worked with web designers to develop the layout of the site and came up with a name 'Forest Flava'. Following the launch of the website, web-monitoring facilities highlighted limited interaction with the site by users. The LA decided that

a core group of young people between 14 and 17 years old, known as the 'Press Gang' would be recruited with the aim of taking greater ownership of the website, its content, and raising its profile amongst their peers. The Press Gang soon became an established youth group in the authority. Members of the group wanted to write regular news articles about issues that were important to them. They also carried out informal ad hoc consultations in their own schools about the website and what would encourage their peers to use it. As a result, the young people introduced a comments box to the site as well as podcasts and a blog, which they were responsible for maintaining.

Training – investigative journalism skills

The LA provided the core group of young people working on Forest Flava with media training to provide them with 'investigative journalism' skills which included interviewing techniques and writing skills. The training was delivered by a local professional media company called DV8 which specialises in delivering media training to young people. All the young people received four Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) qualifications on completion of the training (equivalent to half a GCSE).

Press Gang activities

The young people from the Press Gang became well respected in the LA. They began work on a wider range of activities than their original brief, including the organisation of a youth conference, writing articles for the local press and voicing their views at events such as the 'State of the Borough debate' attended by local councillors. Recently, they have also taken over a page on the Local Authority Magazine, which is delivered to 100,000 homes in the borough.

Due to their aptitude in investigative journalism and positive interactions with other young people, the Press Gang were also approached by heads of LA services to carry out consultations on their provision in order to bridge the gap between services and their users.

Background to the extended schools consultation

The Extended Schools Service commissioned the Press Gang to conduct a piece of 'investigative journalism' to garner evidence-based information about how young people use extended services and what they liked and disliked about the provision. The consultation was commissioned to inform the development of the LA's Extended Schools Service strategy. 'They [the Extended Schools Service] wanted to gauge something very human about it all really and get to the bottom of why they would use it [extended provision] rather than formally evaluate the service' (Youth Consultation and Participation Officer). The Extended Schools Service Manager at the time became aware of the Press Gang through membership of the Children and Young People's Consultation and Participation Working Group.

A small sub group of Press Gang members volunteered to undertake this activity. They were given a briefing session on what extended services were, and the main aims of the consultation, by the Youth Consultation and Participation Officer who coordinates Press Gang activities. The young people brainstormed ideas for interview questions to elicit the views of service users during the Press Gang's fortnightly meeting.

The two extended schools participating in the consultation exercise were identified by the head of the Extended School Service. In one of the schools, extended services were working particularly well, and in the other, services were working less well. The activity was carried out in each school during lunchtime. The Consultation and Participation Officer attended the consultation sessions with members of the Press Gang. The consultations focused on obtaining the views of a total of 13 service users (aged 11–16) through group interviews conducted by young people from the Press Gang.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

Reports

The information was collated and analysed by Press Gang members and written up as a short report. The

report was sent to the Extended Schools Service, highlighting key points from the consultation. Key messages from the report were also fed back to the Extended Schools network.

Planning

The consultation was carried out to develop the Extended Schools Services Plan and inform service priorities. The aims and objectives of this plan were also fed into the authority's CYPP.

Feedback given

The young people and Extended Schools Service staff from the two schools involved in the consultation were sent a pack containing the consultation report and photos taken on the day.

IMPACT OF CONSULTATION

The extended schools consultation activity was small scale, with the aim of giving a human snapshot from the child's perspective about Extended Services. Young people carried out the activity as it was felt peer-to-peer consultation could possibly reveal views of service users which they themselves might not necessarily disclose to an adult.

They were speaking about getting a healthy breakfast in the mornings and that being a great thing for them ... it was more their human reactions about why it was a good thing.

(Youth Consultation and Participation Officer)

Service users' comments elicited through group discussions with Press Gang members included: 'I get sausage and egg, it makes me ready for work' and 'the clubs make me feel like I am a winner'. The information gathered by the young people was very informative for the Extended Schools Service: 'It really consolidated something for the local authority. It told them what they were doing well and what else they needed to do' (Group Manager for Policy in Children's Services).

Impacts from the consultation on extended schools

The information was used by the Extended Schools Service as a case study to complement existing research on the use and non-use of extended provision. One of the things service users highlighted as a benefit of attending extended provision was the healthy food provided to them. As a result, the extended schools network in the authority raised awareness of healthier eating and breakfast clubs through themed workshops.

Impacts on young people

Taking part in the consultation was a positive experience for the service users. They enjoyed being interviewed by their peers. Involvement in the activity was also inspirational, as several of the service users asked how they could get involved with the Press Gang or similar youth involvement groups within the authority.

Other impacts for members of the Press Gang included:

- increased knowledge about authority-wide issues
- access to events aimed primarily at adults
- opportunities to feed back to decision makers and the wider community on issues that are important to them
- ability to change some adults' negative/stereotypical views of young people.

Wider impacts from the work of the Press Gang

The work of the Press Gang has helped to raise a positive profile of young people across the LA.

The Press Gang has brought young people to the forefront because they are such an able group. When adults meet them and think I can work with you no problem. Whereas on the street, if they walk past a young person on the street they don't identify with them in that way.

(Youth Consultation and Participation Officer)

Following the extended schools consultation the Press Gang have also been asked to undertake further consultation activities for other services. For example, they have been asked to conduct some investigative journalism in schools around healthy eating and the design of healthy menus.

VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Some members of the Press Gang had been involved in consultation activities and investigative journalism prior to joining the group. Some had been involved with their school councils or had contributed to a school magazine/newspaper. All of the young people welcomed the media training that was provided to them. Some commented on the professional standard of the tutors and one individual reported the wider impacts of the training on their own school work. Other young people in the group had not been involved in similar activities prior to joining, but were interested in journalism or enjoyed English at school and joined the Press Gang to learn new skills. The young people particularly welcomed the opportunity to share their views on issues with decision makers within the LA as well as the wider community.

Forest Flava gave us the ability to have a voice because if you turn round to a councillor and say 'I'm not just a random teenager off the street, I go to your town hall every Thursday, I know what I'm talking about, they think you have some knowledge behind your views, they tend to sit and listen.

(Young person)

One service user took part in the consultation activity on extended schools despite having limited time due to his GCSE examinations. This was encouraging for members of the Press Gang: 'I think that showed that he was actually quite interested in Forest Flava and what we do for young voice' (Young person).

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Challenges

Interviewees identified the following challenges around organising the extended schools consultation:

- **Availability of young people:** young people have limited time to participate in activities during the day. There are also more systemic challenges around the expectations of adults that young people can attend activities during school time or late at night. There is sometimes a lack of flexibility among adults in this respect.
- **Motivation:** 'Extended services aren't a topic of great interest to them and it was something we had to sell to them, to make it their own' (Youth Consultation and Participation Officer). Issues needed to be broken down for the young people and repackaged to be made interesting.

Improvements

Reflecting on the experience, interviewees suggested the following improvements:

- **The time-scale of the activity:** There was only four weeks from the initial conversation with the Extended Schools Service to submitting the report. This was particularly difficult as it involved schools which could be hard to access at short notice. Increased preparation for future activities would be beneficial.
- **Background information on the focus of consultation:** Where possible, those commissioning the consultation activity should attend Press Gang meetings in person to meet the young people and provide background context on the purpose of the consultation and details of the service/activity involved.

Advice for others

Interviewees also highlighted some factors which were deemed critical to the success of this consultation:

- **Use of an existing group:** The consultation activity was successful because it involved an established group of young people who met regularly and who had developed a good relationship with members of staff coordinating the consultation activities.

If they were a new group doing this consultation exercise I don't think it would have been as successful.

It worked well within the setting of the Press Gang and the fact that we meet regularly and we know each other. I think it would have needed a lot more preparation if you were going to start from scratch ... it would have become very adult led. I would have to have written the questions and got them to deliver it. I didn't play much of a role in the process. That was allowed to happen because I know the people and you can hand over confidence to them and ownership.

(Youth Consultation and Participation Officer)

- **Motivation for young people:** Select young people to carry out consultation exercises who naturally work well together so that they enjoy the experience in itself. Provide vouchers and other rewards/incentives for their involvement.
- **Training:** Provide training for the young people so that they have the necessary skills to undertake the activity effectively and accredit them so that they can see the value in it.

Case study 6: Specialist unit for consultation with children and young people

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

The development of the Access and Participation Unit

One of the priorities in the LA's CYPP was to involve children and young people in decision making. As a result, the authority decided to set up a dedicated unit to facilitate consultation with children and young people, and to coordinate and support their involvement in council services through various groups and forums including:

- young people's council – a youth democracy project getting young people's voices heard on subjects that matter to them for ages 11–19 (or 24 if they have additional needs).
- Voice – a democracy project for young people aged 5–11.
- Inter Faith Forum For Youth – a group consisting of young people of multiple faiths.
- Young Carers Support – for young people who have the responsibility of caring for a parent or relative.
- Youth Opportunities Fund – a panel of young people who award grants and funding to young people for projects.

- United Kingdom Youth Parliament – two young people from the region are representatives on this group.

The Access and Participation Unit was set up in 2005. Members of staff include an experienced participation worker who heads the unit and two full-time youth workers. Staff have a remit for young people aged 5–19, and up to 24 if they have additional learning needs. They support young people's access to participation across the LA, but particularly young people from groups who traditionally have had limited interaction with services, e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people, looked-after children and young carers. Much of the team's role is split between their work with key groups and facilitating the wider work of the young people's council. The unit also has other paid staff and volunteers working in partnership with children and young people. Young people are involved in recruitment and selection of unit staff.

The unit works within the integrated youth service of the LA, which includes the following services: Connexions, youth service, Substance Misuse, Teenage Pregnancy, Young Carers, and Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP). The main funding for the unit comes from the youth service. The unit has service level agreements to undertake consultation activities

with young people. Topics that young people are consulted about are determined in conjunction with individual services and the young people themselves.

The unit produces a newsletter and has a website (www.rubothered.co.uk) which is managed by young people. They contribute to the participation section of the LA-wide children and young people's newsletter and have produced various information brochures, e.g. the Gay to Z, detailing information on the local nightlife and services for young gay people.

Consultations organised through the Access and Participation Unit relating to the CYPP

The unit first began to engage children and young people through the development of the CYPP. An access and participation subgroup was formed which consisted of key partners from the children and young people's strategic partnership including the youth service, Connexions, Police, Primary Care Trust (PCT) and schools. The group designed a consultation process to start the CYPP consultation. There were a number of group work sessions for primary and secondary schools around the five Every Child Matters outcomes. From this consultation, the LA developed nine priorities for the CYPP.

An event entitled 'Here We Are So Listen' was organised by the access and participation group. Around 160 young people attended the event and participated in various consultation exercises to add detail to each of the nine priorities. The final version of the CYPP incorporated the feedback received from young people in each of these nine areas. Following this, the unit planned another event called 'Here we are – so what are you going to do about it?' in order to monitor the nine priorities and to measure the LA's progress in meeting the actions associated with each of the priority areas. Young people were supported by unit staff to organise this event. They selected and booked the venue, chose the topics and facilitators for the workshops and invited representatives from all schools and youth groups in the LA.

More recently, unit staff and members of the young people's council have set up a forum to establish

regular communication between young people and each of the CYPP priority leads. The young people on this group each have responsibility for one of the nine priority areas. They feed back young people's views and suggest how young people should be consulted with on particular issues relating to the priorities. This group will be involved in the organisation of a young person's conference to develop new priorities for the 2009–11 CYPP. A young person from the young people's council attends Children's Trust meetings to represent the voice of young people in the authority and feeds back information from this group to members of the young people's council.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

Data elicited through the various consultation activities with young people is collected by unit staff and analysed. Staff use both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis and produce a written report containing information from the day and on future actions for services. Staff share preliminary findings with young people, usually members of the young people's council, and as a group they decide on the key points from the consultation that should be fed back.

Following events such as the 'Here We Are So Listen' conference, all schools were sent a copy of the written evaluation report of the day. The unit's 'r u bothered' website is also used as a feedback mechanism and the unit have text systems to inform young people of the outcomes of consultations. There is also sharing of information through young people on the young people's council, as they are also representatives of different organisations and share information between the groups they participate in.

Information used to inform the CYPP

Feedback on the five ECM outcomes was elicited from young people through a number of consultation events. From this consultation, the LA developed nine priorities for the CYPP. The final version of the CYPP incorporated the feedback received from young people in each of these nine areas: 'In the individual priority plans you can measure where the young people's views have come from at the events and

how they have been input into the nine priority plans which feed up to the CYPP' (Head of the Access and Participation Unit).

Information used to inform service development

Services have used information from consultation activities with young people in a variety of ways, including developing local aims and actions for service development, revisions to existing planning or strategy documents, and the establishment of new policies and procedures. For example, feedback elicited from young people attending the alcohol conference (organised and supported by the unit and young people from the young people's council) influenced the PCT's alcohol strategy for the authority.

IMPACT OF CONSULTATION

The development of specialist knowledge and skills

Having a dedicated team allows staff to learn from each other, to share good practice and to develop consultation techniques and new ways of working. Having a specialist team to undertake this work helps to ensure that both the consultation activities of the unit and those carried out by wider members of the authority in their own service areas are of a high standard: 'There is a centre of knowledge and skill to be able to deliver work but also advise others on delivering the same sort of work' (Head of the Access and Participation Unit).

The unit is also able to nurture young talent, and two young people who have previously been involved in the work of the unit have been recruited as members of staff. The young workers have reflective learning logs for supervision and their line manager shares information around participation and youth work to support their professional development. The young workers have also visited other aspects of youth work in the youth service to get hands-on experience of a range of youth work practices.

Increased coordination of consultation activities

Having a dedicated unit means that there is a base of consistency and there are people who have got responsibility for it ... If we weren't here, participation would be bounced around and possibly get lost within the services, because the council is very big and there are many different areas. With us here, we keep it on the radar ... I like to know that people can contact us if they need some support in consultation, participation and governance.

(Head of the Access and Participation Unit)

There are a large number of requests from services for children and young people to take part in consultation activities and having a dedicated unit has led to a greater coordination of consultation across the LA: 'Because there is a well-recognised unit we can say no if we don't want to get involved and to ensure that it is not just a token gesture' (Head of the Access and Participation Unit). The head of the unit coordinates responses for the CYPP and contacts services to collate the outcomes of consultation activities with children and young people. This means that the head of the unit has an overview of the types of activities that have been carried out and the outcome of such activities.

The dedicated unit also means that there is coordination of the accreditation and incentives for those young people involved in consultation activities and those volunteering their time to support the work of the unit. Social activities are organised to ensure that the core group of young people who dedicate time to the work of the unit have fun.

Members of staff with dedicated roles to support key groups

Having members of the unit to support the access and participation of young people from particular key groups has allowed a greater focus on their needs.

Having tried to hold a caseload of 20 care leavers and do a participation job for care leavers at the same time, I found it was absolutely impossible. To be able to dedicate to just looking at helping them have a voice that can change the services that are out there for them

is brilliant. I've had years of feeling I was sticking plasters on and not being able to effect change, it can effect substantial change.

(Youth worker)

Impacts on the CYPP

'Most of the consultations around the nine priorities for the children and young people's plan we can measure that there has been an impact' (Head of the Access and Participation Unit). The items raised by the young people have been included in the action plans for the nine priorities of the CYPP. Impacts from this and subsequent consultation events for the priority areas have included: a scheme to give concessions for young people using public transport out of school hours (commencing September 2008), young people's involvement in the creation of an anti-bullying policy for schools, young people's involvement in the commissioning of an anti-bullying agency worker for the LA, and the development of a police youth plan.

Development of young people's social skills and knowledge

We impact on individuals' lives and people involved in the consultation processes build up massive skill and confidence ... There are two young people who are now employed by the unit and have so much knowledge of the service because they have been involved for so long.

(Youth worker)

Other impacts on young people include: the development of skills and knowledge in group work, the establishment of positive attachments and friendships with other young people, and opportunities to have fun through participation in youth events and social activities organised by the unit.

Accredited outcomes

Young people participating in unit activities have the opportunity to gain millennium volunteers' certification and Duke of Edinburgh awards. Every young person who attends a youth conference receives a certificate of attendance. The unit has also developed a rewards and incentives policy which

outlines to young people what they should expect to receive whenever engaging with the service.

VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and young people are involved in various activities supported by the unit to facilitate their access and participation. A core group of young people, usually members of the young people's council, as well as other volunteers, work closely with the unit on a wide range of activities including consultations, attendance at events and organisation of conferences/workshops usually around the nine priority areas of the CYPP. Many of the young people have responsibility for a specific priority area or a certain aspect of work. For example, one member of the young people's council is responsible for public relations and liaises with the local newspaper on a regular basis. The young people regularly use the unit's premises (set within a Connexions centre) to complete administration work relating to their various roles and are party to discussions of the workers. The flexible 'open door' working practices of the unit's staff helps to facilitate partnership working between the workers and young people.

Young people experienced a range of positive outcomes from participating in the work of the unit. Some outcomes are listed below.

- An increased knowledge of LA services and initiatives.
- Involvement in high-level decision making about services, e.g. involvement in the development of an anti-bullying strategy and attendance at meetings with the police to develop their work with children and young people and to give young people's views.
- Accreditation and awards for their work with the unit.
- The opportunity to help the community, e.g. young people lobbied to prevent the opening of an adult entertainment establishment opposite youth provision in the town centre. The application was withdrawn due to lobbying and pressure.
- opportunities to meet new people and participate in social activities

- Increased confidence – ‘A big thing for me was confidence. If young people feel that their voices are being listened to and are being consulted and their ideas being taken into consideration their confidence grows so much’ (Young person).
- Respect from peers – ‘As a young person a big thing about it is pride, seeing that you have made the change yourself and telling people you have been involved in it and that you have done something not only for yourself but your peers, it is pride and respect from your peers’ (Young person).
- Increased aspirations – the unit has employed two young people who were members of the young people’s council and had volunteered to support the work of the unit. The young people felt that this has helped to improve the aspirations of the others.
- Increased credibility among adults – young people reported that adults positively recognised and supported their involvement with the unit. Their involvement in activities such as the recruitment of teaching staff at a local school was felt to have helped change the views of adults on the capabilities of young people to meaningfully input to such decisions.

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Interviewees listed the following aspects as challenges for the work of the unit and for engaging children and young people in consultation more generally:

- **Service participation** – In certain services within the authority, awareness of the unit is higher than others and there is a need to build up trust between some services and unit staff before involvement can take place. Consultation with children and young people is not legislative and some services see it as a higher priority than others: ‘Progression sometimes depends on who is leading on the service developments and how high young people’s involvement is on their agenda’ (Head of the Access and Participation Unit).
- **Working across services** – The unit works with a range of services, each operate differently and have different working practices. There is often different use of terminology and jargon: ‘What is meant by one service isn’t necessarily the same thing meant by another service’ (Head of the Access and Participation Unit), which can be a challenge.
- **Lack of flexibility** – LA staff typically work 9am–5pm, Monday–Friday and are not always flexible to young people’s needs when involving them in consultation activities, e.g. their unavailability during school hours, alongside the need for meals to be provided and for transport to and from venues.
- **Delays in feedback**

The young people are quite relentless in finding out where the information has gone, in terms of feeding back. Unfortunately, councils aren’t as fast thinking and as dynamic as young people and we have had instances where a young person started off the consultation and they might not have seen the impact because they have left the service, and the impact might be 12 months down the line. We do request that anyone engaging in consultation with the young people that they get back to young people even if the answer is no, we didn’t put in place what you requested.

(Head of the Access and Participation Unit)
- **Long-term planning** – There is uncertainty that involving children and young people in decision making will be included as a priority in the next CYPP; this has significant impacts on long-term planning for the unit and the future of consultation, participation and governance of young people: ‘Services sometimes become casualties of their own success’ (Head of the Access and Participation Unit).

Improvements

Interviewees suggested the following improvements to the unit:

- Widen the work of the unit – specifically to engage more with younger age groups, young people with learning difficulties, looked-after children, young carers and the Polish community.

- Expand the team and recruit a youth worker with specific responsibility for young people with learning difficulties.
- Increase the level of engagement with schools.
- Raise the profile of the unit with other services, particularly social care.
- Increase awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child among those working with children and young people.
- Establish robust complaints procedures for young people and the LA.
- Involve young people fully in the recruitment of all LA staff when possible.

Case study 7: Residential consultation event

HOW THE CONSULTATION WAS ORGANISED

Background to the residential event

The 'Access All Areas' residential was a three-day Youth Democracy event organised by the Voice and Influence Team with input from the Children's Rights Service, Youth Development Service, and involvement of voluntary groups. It was held at an Outdoor Education Centre in June 2007, and a follow-up event was held a month later.

At a strategic level, there was a realisation that looked-after children, disabled young people, and black and ethnic minorities were less likely to be involved in mainstream participatory groups than others. The aim of the 'Access All Areas' event was to try to reduce barriers to participation, and to support these marginalised groups in getting their voices heard. The residential was organised to bring different groups of young people together and to think about the issues that affect their lives. Participants were drawn from a residential unit, a special educational needs school, a children's home, young people from foster care, those who had used after-care services, and young people from black and ethnic minorities. A member of the Assembly of Youth was also present, to help illustrate how young people can get involved. Most of the young people were recruited from existing groups, e.g. 'Bridging project' groups for young people with disabilities.

Approximately 15 young people attended the residential, and also five adult staff.

Focus of the event

The focus at the 'Access All Areas' residential was described as being on the quality of services, that is 'What is good about Wiltshire?', 'What has changed in the last year?', and 'If you had a million pounds, what would you change?'

The activities

The residential adopted an activity-centred approach, with an emphasis on having fun and developing relationships between participants. It was recognised that young people would not necessarily respond to a formal consultation on the CYPP. Hence, it was decided to organise something positive and engaging, through which young people's opinions could eventually be drawn out. Fun activities included rounders, karaoke, survival skills, archery and bowling. Then there were sessions which looked at issues such as:

- what things affected young people
- whether they felt listened to
- whether they felt respected
- what were important issues for them
- what services were good
- what services were not so good.

These sessions sought to allow opportunities for reflection, to ask questions and to develop young people's skills.

The residential encouraged young people to think about issues that affect them personally, and then to think about the impact of these on young people generally. The aim, according to some interviewees, was that by the end, the young people would not just have addressed their own perceptions but the wider perceptions of their friends/peers. There was a focus also on trying to identify if any of the young people would want to set up their own groups, or engage in existing structures, for getting voices heard.

HOW THE INFORMATION WAS USED

Follow-on with the existing participants

There was a half day follow-up event to the 'Access All Areas' residential. Information from the residential consultation was used to develop new activities for young people. The young people were encouraged to think about:

- who makes decisions
- three things they would like to change
- how they would take the identified issues forwards.

The idea was to spark off among young people more of a desire to take charge. This approach was said to be broadly successful, although there was also said to be unpredictability and difference between groups in whether they wanted to take things further.

Planning services

It was intended that information from the residential be used by Children's Services and fed into the CYPP. It was also fed back into services for particular groups, e.g. Children and Young People's Disabilities Bridging projects. There would additionally be feedback to the Parenting Forum.

IMPACT OF THE CONSULTATION

The following outcomes were noted by interviewees.

- Through the parenting forum, parents would become aware of the views of young people.
- The information from the residential has informed the CYPP.
- Young people with disabilities have subsequently joined wider representatives bodies, e.g. the Assembly of Youth.

The following impacts for young people were cited.

- Participating young people were very appreciative of the opportunity.
- Confidence building was reported as an outcome.
- Young people were able to see themselves as individuals who could make a wider contribution.
- Different groups seemed to take a less stereotyped view of each other.
- Some young people with disabilities were interested in continuing to have a say outside of the residential experience.
- Because of their time at the residential and what they had learnt, some young people felt inspired to make changes in their lives.

VIEWS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The views of young people were that the 'Access All Areas' youth democracy residential was great fun. At the beginning of the residential there was anxiety about young people not knowing each other. Later, however, people got to know others and the follow-up event was also enjoyable. Never having been to such an event before inspired some to get involved in further young people's events.

According to the young people, at the 'Access All Areas' event, not everyone was entirely sure about the activities: some of the looked-after children or

children with disabilities could not keep up. Some people found it more difficult than others to talk to a large group, while some people tended to dominate. However, by the second day that was bypassed: bonds developed, and differences between groups were overcome. At the event, most people took each other's comments seriously, listened to each other, and others became more serious as the event went on. After a while, people began thinking along the same lines. The adults were listening too, and they took into account what was said, and produced a document concerning what the young people had done after the residential.

The follow-up event was said by the young people to provide a review of what had happened and useful opportunities for raising awareness of democratic groups for young people and other options for participation.

CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Challenges

Interviewees reflected on 'Access all Areas' and highlighted the following challenges:

- Some of the activities were pitched a little high for some of the young people there, e.g. those with disabilities, looked-after children.
- The structure of the day was perhaps overloaded and initially it was a challenge to get all the different participants to settle down.
- Interviewees commented that there were also some organisational barriers to consultation being embedded in the system. The youth service have ready access to young people, but in other areas it is harder. Organisations like the Assembly of Youth have quite a busy agenda already.

Improvements

In terms of improving consultation events such as the 'Access All Areas' residential, the following suggestions were made:

- There was a need for more time early on to get the different participants to gel together as a group. It might have helped if a pre-residential meeting had been held, so that young people got to know one other before the main event.
- It may have been better to focus on different consultation questions in each training workshop, rather than wait to address them all at the end, as by this stage some of the young people were feeling a little fatigued.
- It might have been very powerful to have had young people who attended the residential event to present their suggestions in person to LA strategic planners.
- Interviewees commented that 'Access All Areas' is only one part of a wider process of the democracy strategy. It is part of a rolling process and needs to be seen as such. There was one follow-up day, but further opportunity would have been good to explore the wider issues. For example, other projects (with youth worker facilitation) could run focus groups to capture the views of young people. More generally, consultation work should be built into the planning processes of existing organisations.
- Continuity is seen as a significant challenge concerning groups for consultation in terms of the CYPP. There is a challenge of retaining people with whom a service can continue to engage. For example, maintenance of a relationship with looked-after children can be challenging.
- Over the next five years, it was felt important to aim at introducing procedural changes to make it easier and more acceptable for service managers to involve young people.

6 Concluding comments

This report has provided an account of the consultation practices used by LAs to inform the first CYPPs and any subsequent rewrites, reviews or refreshments. The timeframe therefore spans from 2005 to the present day. Although this is a relatively short period of time, the research did show evidence that in some LAs the approach to consultation was an evolving one.

In our survey, we asked respondents to indicate whether there had been any significant changes to consultation practices since the first plans were written. Just under half (33 out of 69) considered that consultation had undergone some major developments. If we review the nature of these changes, a considerable proportion (23 out of 33) suggested a more strategic approach. For instance, LAs highlighted the development of consultation/participation strategies which set out their commitment to involving end-users in the shaping and design of services, as well as firming up the process for how this would happen. Others spoke of a more coordinated approach whereby consultation was now carefully planned, monitored and disseminated. In some authorities this work was now being driven and supported by staff with a dedicated consultation/participation remit, again signalling the status with which consultation is now regarded. Lastly, some respondents simply reported that consultation was no longer a bolt-on activity, but had become part of the fabric – undertaken as an ongoing and embedded practice within the LA. Whilst these are encouraging developments they should be put into context – it is worth remembering that a similar number of survey respondents indicated that consultation had not undergone any major changes since the first plans were produced. This may be because consultation practices have yet to evolve in these authorities, or that they are already deemed adequate and therefore do not warrant any alteration.

Apart from the major changes highlighted in the survey, interviews with LA representatives pointed to other trends in consultation approaches. These included attempts to consult more widely, reaching larger numbers of specific groups of end-users, e.g. very young children or those outside of education. Methods of

obtaining service users' views were also being expanded, e.g. undertaking more qualitative work in order to explore views in greater depth, the use of technology to reach a larger population, e.g. online surveys. Comparing the focus of consultation for the first plan with any rewrites or refreshments, interviewees sometimes commented that the first time round, consultation often involved young people agreeing or 'rubber-stamping' the plans. Since then, consultation has provided opportunities for young people to set the agenda and steer the direction of services, rather than simply approving the content of the plans. As alluded to earlier, LAs showed signs of adopting a more strategic approach and this was evidenced by the existence of consultation audits. Some authorities had attempted to pool details of consultation activities currently happening in their region. This meant that duplication of consultation could potentially be avoided and that consultation data was made centrally available to a wider audience.

In terms of the impact, the most common way in which service end-user consultation had impacted on policy and practice was through the development of different LA targets and priorities, reflecting the focus of consultation – 'to identify and/or agree priorities and/or targets'. According to survey respondents, more substantive changes including the development of new services and teams, changes to actual working practices, service commissioning arrangements, and the location of services and teams were much less common. The case studies visited for the research provide examples of how consultation with end-users can make a tangible impact on services.

Reflecting on the findings from this research, we would like to conclude the report by highlighting some themes for consideration:

- Survey respondents found it difficult to report the actual numbers of end-users they had consulted with. In order to properly monitor consultation activities and evaluate the extent to which end-users are involved, LAs may wish to keep a central record of this information.

- Ensuring adequate and targeted feedback was identified as an area for development by some interviewees. This is an important stage of the process as it completes the circle of consultation, informing the community of what has happened as a result of their input. This can be achieved through a variety of channels but, as with all elements of the consultation process, should be monitored and reviewed. This would help ensure that feedback has maximum coverage and reaches those directly involved in consultation, as well as the wider community.
 - It was recognised amongst interviewees that a range of activities is required if consultation is to tap into a representative sample of the population. Surveys can potentially reach larger numbers, but may exclude more vulnerable groups, unless specifically targeted.
- Focus groups and interviews are potentially more labour intensive and generate a smaller set of views; however, the depth and quality of this information was noted. A far-reaching consultation involving all key groups, therefore, would require considerable investment and the creation of dedicated posts to coordinate consultation activity may help improve the efficiency of the process.
- Generally, communicating the impact of consultation activity is paramount if it is to become embedded into the working practices of LAs. Case studies revealed that consultation with children and young people can produce surprising and powerful information which can really help inform the direction of services. Only by publicising the value of this work will consultation become an accepted, widespread practice throughout local authorities.

Appendix 1

CONSULTATION ACTIVITY	Examples
Surveys	Paper-based; online; one-off for the purposes of CYPP development; annual survey used for establishing baseline information and monitoring changes; with children and young people; with families, parents and carers; targeted at key groups including LAC, CLDD and BME
Focus groups	With: children and young people; families, parents and carers; key groups including LAC, CLDD and BME
In-depth interviews	Face to face; telephone; with headteachers, governors, parents, carers and families
'Big Brother diary room' consultation activities	Mobile 'diary room' consultation booths where children and young people can give their views on LA services
Electronic voting systems	Use of handsets for children and young people to prioritise the issues of most importance to them
Action research with children and young people	Recruitment of young advisors; a 'Junior JAR'; children and young people undertaking research, writing publications, managing websites and helping to commission programmes
Consultation with key groups	Early years children taking photographs of their likes and dislikes and putting a smiley face next to the photograph that they liked the most Looked-after and accommodated (LAC) children and young people were asked their views on the children's homes in the LA
One-off consultation events/days with young people	Play Day event which included a stand where children, young people and their families were asked about the kinds of facilities they wanted in their LA, what problems there were and what could be done to improve it Paperchain project which was used to identify what children and young people want from living in the LA and what is good and bad about it. All entries (around 670) were used to inform the priorities in the CYPP and were joined together into a paperchain to visually demonstrate the views of children and young people
One-off consultation events/days with stakeholders	A range of professionals including schools, PCTs, children's services personnel, discussed the outcomes of the children and young people consultation and the priorities they had identified Practitioner workshop focusing on what the priorities were, in their opinions, for children's services
One-off consultation events/days with the community	Stands in supermarkets where shoppers (i.e. community members) were asked what they thought of the CYPP
Activity	Examples
Annual young people's conferences	The 'Learning is fun' and the 'Youthink' conferences are children and young people driven and ensures that their agenda is met. The 'Learning is fun' conference is aimed at the younger age group and 'Youthink' is from the youth parliament. Both have young people from all over the city A conference for children with learning difficulties or disabilities in transition from primary to secondary schools
Consultation and engagement with school councils	Consulted representatives from all school councils on the priorities for the CYPP
Consultation and engagement with the youth council	Youth council involved in the development the CYPP, giving their views and opinions of the draft Youth elections were used as an opportunity to ask young people how they would like to be more involved in Children's Trust arrangements
Permanent children and young people's consultation group established	A young people's forum, led by the youth service, has been established to provide ongoing consultation and feedback to the LA
Permanent LA participation group established	An Access and Participation Unit. This group has been used to drive through a number of continuous participation events, as opposed to undertaking one large consultation event for the purpose of the review of the CYPP A children and young people's participation sub group which includes professionals from across the LA who undertake participation work with children and young people directly
Audit of consultation activity	A mapping exercise of all the consultation in the LA, what it was used for and some of the key findings. This was to avoid duplicating previous consultation
Consultation to determine the best way to consult with children and young people	Children and young people were asked how they wanted to be consulted in relation to priority development for the CYPP

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