

Speaking Out Briefing No.7

Placeshaping

Placeshaping is a term that has been recently revived in local government circles to capture the new duty on local authorities to bring together service provision in local areas, rather than just delivering services directly.

This briefing is part of the Speaking Out series.

Speaking Out

Speaking Out is a partnership between the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) and the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), which seeks to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across government.

The project aims to develop closer links between a range of government departments (Home Office, MOJ, DEFRA, CLG, Cabinet Office and HM Treasury) and the voluntary and community sector in delivering cross departmental policies such as *Every Child Matters* and *The Children's Plan* and the direct implementation of initiatives which affect children and young people.

Speaking Out aims to support children, young people and family voluntary and community organisations to better understand the impact on their users of a wider range of government policies and provide routes to influence them. The project is funded by the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office.

Who are these briefings for?

This series of briefings intends to provide members of both NCVYS and NCVCCO and other interested parties with background and analysis on specific policy items affecting the sector.

Other activities

In addition to these briefings the Speaking Out project is developing work streams around the policy themes which include:

- organising a series of seminars and events;
- establishing communities of interest amongst members and other organisations on specific policy themes;
- making representations to government; and
- linking with wider NCVYS and NCVCCO campaigns.

To discuss this briefing or any other aspect of the Speaking Out project please contact Mubeen Bhutta, Policy and Information Manager on 020 7833 3319 or email mubeen@ncvcco.org

1. Introduction

Local government is not just about the provision of services. Indeed, recent debate has focussed on the wider, strategic role local government can play in helping to develop and deliver a vision for its communities - a role referred to as 'place-shaping'.

Sir Michael Lyons, who led an inquiry into local government undertaken at the request of the Chancellor and Deputy Prime Minister, defines place-shaping as:

“ ... a way of describing my view that the ultimate purpose of local government should not be solely to manage a collection of public services that take place within an area, but rather to take responsibility for the well-being of an area and the people who live there, and to promote their interests and their future. Place-shaping should both reflect the distinctive identity and aspirations of the people and area, and function as a means of safeguarding and promoting their well-being and prosperity.”

With the term revitalised by Lyons, and the emphasis on the strategic role of local authorities welcomed by the Government and reinforced by measures contained in the Local Government White Paper and subsequent Act, there should be greater opportunity for the voices of children and young people to be heard in discussions about how to shape local communities and local services. Indeed, the Children's Plan explicitly recognises the place-shaping role of local authorities in relation to Children's Trust partnerships and gives prominence to the principle that services need to be shaped by and be responsive to the children, young people and families who use them.

Consequently it would seem that there has never been a better prospect for the real engagement of, and participation by, children and young people in every aspect of policy and decision-making in relation to the places in which they live, learn, socialise and play.

This briefing paper will examine:

- the policy context for the concept of place-shaping;
- the legal context;
- relevant findings from research and practice;
- possible implications for voluntary and community sector children and youth organisations; and
- useful resources in relation to this agenda.

2. Policy Context

Well-being

As a concept, place-shaping is not new. The 2000 Local Government Act, which introduced Community Strategies and the general power of well-being, was designed to give local authorities wider powers to use their influence more creatively for the general good of local people.

The Lyons Inquiry into Local Government

However, it is the 2007 Lyons Inquiry into Local Government¹ that gave the term ‘place-shaping’ its first major public airing. The final report, *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government*, defined place-shaping as the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens.

Lyons contends that local authorities should be recognised as the body in the locality with the responsibility for bringing together the efforts of the public sector, and also of relevant parts of the private and voluntary sectors, to secure local well-being through a convening role. That, he goes on, is at the heart of what place-shaping is about. However, if local government is to act in the interests of its community, influence its partners and respond to local priorities, then Lyons contends that it must build stronger engagement with its citizens as the foundation for place shaping.

The Local Government White Paper – Strong and Prosperous Communities

The Government set out its proposals for the future direction of local government in *Strong and Prosperous Communities – the Local Government White Paper*, published in October 2006. The White Paper – and subsequent Act - is intended to devolve more power to the local level and reduce the level of central prescription, while strengthening leadership and expanding the opportunities for local people to influence local decision-making.

The White Paper set out the Government’s proposals on how to reinforce and further develop local authorities’ role as ‘place-shapers’. It used similar language to Lyons in describing the need for “strategic leadership to help bring together various local agencies and groups in order to build a vision for how to respond to and address a locality’s problems and challenges in a co-ordinated way.”

¹ Sir Michael Lyons was asked to undertake an inquiry into Local Government by the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister in July 2004 to make recommendations on: the reform of council tax; the case for shifting the balance of funding; and other options for local taxation. In September 2005 the inquiry was extended to consider the strategic role of local government in the context of devolution and decentralisation, and how pressures on local services could be better managed. The Inquiry’s final report *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government* was published in March 2007.

The key difference between the type of place-shaping that local authorities have delivered in the past and what they are expected to do now, as a result of the White Paper, is that local authorities' place-shaping efforts are now more likely to be discharged through partnership: developing joint visions, supporting and working with other agencies and services and by commissioning others to work on solutions – rather than by delivering services directly themselves.

Place-shaping – links with children and young people's policy

The Children's Plan

The shared vision of the Children's Plan is for better outcomes for children, young people and their families. One of the four principles of the Children's Plan is that services need to be shaped by and responsive to the children, young people and families who use them. The plan identifies local authorities as uniquely placed to champion the needs of children and young people as part of the local community, driving change through Children's Trust arrangements. This is consistent with the principle underpinning the Local Government White Paper – that it is local authorities' role to bring together partners to improve local services and the quality of peoples' lives.

It is the role of the Children's Trust to 'convene' local action in the interests of better outcomes for children and young people. Children's Trusts, driven by local authorities, therefore have a key place-shaping role in respect of children in their locality. They must consult widely, assess how well children in the locality are doing, prioritise and plan action and commission services, including from the voluntary and community sector (VCS). They will also drive the process of identifying improvement priorities for the children and young people's theme of new Local Area Agreements (LAAs), and feeding these into the wider Local Strategic Partnership which will negotiate improvement targets with central government, through regional government offices. Local Area Agreements will be a key mechanism to help achieve effective partnership working to improve outcomes for children on issues that are beyond the remit of the Children's Trust. For example, decisions taken by transport, planning, housing and other local government services have direct and indirect consequences for the quality of children's and young people's lives.

The convenor or place-shaping role of local government together with the new prominence for Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements means that there is a key opportunity for the children and young people's VCS to have more influence developing a local vision for service improvements.

Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities

This strategy sets out a series of new commitments to transform opportunities for young people and strengthen the reform of youth support services. It aims to:

- foster a more positive approach to young people across society and in particular within communities;
- increase participation in high quality positive activities, which build resilience and social and emotional skills; and
- empower young people to have greater influence over services for them, with parents and communities playing their part.

It is local authorities, in their place-shaping role, who will take the lead, through Children's Trust arrangements, to deliver the vision set out in this strategy as part of their ongoing Every Child Matters: Change for Children programmes.

The strategy draws on evidence collected for the Policy Review of Children and Young People², which suggested that when young people have the opportunity to influence services they are more likely to find them attractive and to access them. More marginalised young people can find formal processes unappealing and will need additional support to influence provision. The strategy recognises the role that communities can play in improving and raising the priority of youth support services in their area and holding local authorities to account for ensuring activities for young people are a priority.

The Government now expects all local authorities to adopt good practice in engaging young people. It is also committed to investing over the next three years in building capacity of third sector organisations with a proven ability to work in partnership with local authorities to support marginalised young people to influence services.

As a result of the strategy, the Government expects:

- local authorities to ensure that young people, parents and communities know how to mobilise and use their councillors;
- ward councillors to more effectively represent the public's demand for better services for young people;
- ward councillors to engage with young people's representatives in their area; and
- local authorities to bring together young people's and adult's participation forums to develop common solutions for common problems.

² Government's Policy Review of Children and Young People: a Discussion Paper HMT/DfES, 2007

Staying Safe Action Plan

The Staying Safe Action Plan sets out the actions the Government will take to improve children and young people's safety over the next three years, covering a range of areas. It recognises that children and young people should be able to enjoy safe environments wherever they spend their time. A key finding of the consultation which informed the development of the Action Plan was that children and young people themselves wanted:

- safe places to meet their friends during the day and in the evening; and
- facilities that catered for groups and families, as well as individuals.

In response, the Action Plan commits the Government to spend £225 million on play initiatives that include offering every local authority capital funding. There will also be a new programme of capital investment in youth facilities and £160m to support the Government's ambition that there will be new and improved youth facilities in every constituency over the next 10 years.

Local authorities' convening role will be crucial in engaging children and young people and their communities in shaping safe but challenging places, activities and services. Different areas will suit different youth facilities with children and young people uniquely placed to help local authorities determine the best solutions to meeting local needs.

A modern culture of respect: the respect action plan

The Respect Action Plan represents the cross-government commitment to embedding and delivering the Respect programme³ in a number of key areas. The Action Plan highlights the benefits of constructive and purposeful activities for young people in encouraging and enabling children and young people to contribute to their communities and help divert them from anti-social behaviour.

As part of the action plan the Government has made available an additional £53 million to expand the Youth Opportunity Fund, enabling young people to establish their own projects to improve the activities available in their areas. Young people might, for example, rent space in a community centre to put on activities, establish a neighbourhood council or youth café or run sports leagues and tournaments. An average local authority could receive £500,000 over the next two years to make a budget available for projects chosen by young people to improve things to do and places to go in their area. This is a very real opportunity for young people to shape the places in which they live and the opportunities available to them for activities, provided that they are able to access the right support including from the VCS.

³ The Respect programme is a cross governmental and wide ranging response to anti-social behaviour and its causes.

3. Legal Context

Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act received Royal Assent on 30 October 2007. It provides a legislative framework for a number of proposals in the 2006 Local Government White Paper.

The Act establishes a formal framework for cooperation and partnership working around a new statutory Local Area Agreement (LAA). In particular it creates duties on local authorities to:

- produce a LAA and to consult named partners⁴ and such persons as they consider appropriate, including voluntary and community sector representatives;
- co-operate with named partners and agree relevant targets; and
- have regard to their Sustainable Community Strategy when preparing the LAA.

The Act also includes an extension to the requirement on local authorities to consult and seek the participation of such persons as they consider appropriate in the production of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The preparation of the Sustainable Community Strategy should be a local authority's first step towards developing their place-shaping role. The strategy should set out the long-term vision for a place providing the vehicle for considering and deciding how to address difficult cross-cutting issues such as social exclusion or the economic future of an area. The Sustainable Community Strategy is designed to be at the heart of creating sustainable development at the local level.

The Local Area Agreement becomes the delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Act places LAAs at the centre of a new performance framework for local government, becoming the key delivery contract between central government, local authorities, and their partners. Delivery of local priorities will be the responsibility of partners in key local partnerships like the Children's Trust, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the new health and well-being partnerships. Once agreed with the Government, local partners will be required to have regard to these priorities for improvement.

⁴ Named partners largely comprise those bodies which provide key services to the local community and which are named in statute or have statutory basis (e.g. police authorities, PCTs, Learning and Skills Councils, Youth Offending Teams, district councils).

The 2004 Children Act

The Children Act 2004 provides the legal underpinning for the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme. It introduced a series of new statutory duties including a duty to cooperate to improve the well-being of children and young people which, in turn, provides the legal framework for Children's Trusts. Well-being is the term used in the act to define the five Every Child Matters outcomes: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being.

It should be noted that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 put additional duties on the local authority and relevant partners, beyond those duties to cooperate in the Children's Act 2004. As a result of the 2007 Act, named partners are under a statutory duty to co-operate with the local authority to determine LAA improvement targets and to have regard to those targets they have agreed in the course of their business.

Children's Trusts, LAAs and the Children and Young People's Plan

The local Children's Trust oversees the coordination and overarching strategy for improving the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children, young people and their families. The Children's Trust will therefore play an important place-shaping role in feeding into the development of the children and young people's theme of LAAs.

The local Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) will provide a key basis of discussion on the children and young people's theme. The LAA will inform the CYPP and vice versa, with the LAA containing the priorities and associated targets, and the CYPP setting the strategic context for the authority's targets and the strategies for achieving them.

4. Findings from research and practice

Participation by children and young people in Children's Trusts

The National Youth Agency has commissioned research examining the process and effectiveness of developing and embedding young people's participation across two Children's Trusts in England⁵. The results are perhaps an indication of the way local authorities might approach their place-shaping role in respect of children and young people. They also point to how to more effectively engage young people in wider place-shaping. For example, participation workers were seen as crucial to developing participation, but the role of 'champions', such as a lead member for Children's Services within the local authority, was also seen as key.

The research found that both Trusts had embedded plans and opportunities for young people's participation within local service structures. Opportunities included, for example, a Young People's Parliament and Shadow Scrutiny Committee firmly locating young people's participation within local decision-making structures. Quality of relationships, meaningful dialogue and sharing of power were seen as key to effective participation. However, the challenge for both Trusts was to widen and connect opportunities and networks for young people to participate beyond centralised decision-making structures and to work to change organisational cultures so that participation became routinely embedded in everyday practices. In effect, this is the challenge to all local authorities – and not just Children's Trusts - as they develop their place-shaping role across all policy and service areas.

Engagement practice amongst local authorities

The final report of the Carnegie young people initiative⁶ concluded that local authorities across the UK are committed to improving their capacity to engage young people and involve them in decision-making. However, public service organisations have struggled enormously to translate this commitment into effective practice. The challenge, the report concluded, lies in how to build capacity across the wider workforce, rather than relying on a few members of staff whose job it is to elicit young people's views, (generally youth and community workers).

A report by the Children's Society in 2006⁷ found that only 17 per cent of young people thought that their area cared about its young people and almost half reported that there were no places for young people to go in their neighbourhood.

5 Barry Percy-Smith, Evaluating the development of young people's participation plans in two Children's Trusts, Interim Report Year 1 (The National Youth Agency, 2007)

6 Carnegie UK Trust, Empowering Young People: The final report of the Carnegie young people initiative (Carnegie UK Trust, 2008)

7 The Children's Society, Good Childhood? A question for our time, the Good Childhood national inquiry launch report (Children's Society, 2006)

Work undertaken by Demos⁸ argues that action to improve the lives of children and young people has tended to focus on the institutional spheres of home and school, ignoring the ‘public realm’ – those shared resources such as streets, town centres and playgrounds. In these places, “we increasingly

exclude and marginalise the young. In the pursuit of sustainable communities and urban renaissance, children and young people are being left out of the picture.”

The Demos research found that place-shaping professionals (for example local authority planning officers, traffic engineers, regeneration managers, youth workers, housing developers and community volunteers) in six case study areas:

- have difficulties seeing and understanding how their work relates to the needs of children and young people;
- lack the capacity, skills and resources to engage with children effectively; and
- find collaboration with other place-shaping professionals across the public and voluntary and community sectors difficult but essential.

The research concluded that the emphasis on children and young people’s wellbeing should facilitate a cross-cutting agenda which recognises the intertwined nature of place-shaping, children’s and young people’s services, and other fields such as health and the environment. As such the introduction of Local Area Agreements represents a huge opportunity for local authorities to join up these agendas. Members of the community and local services (youth workers, teachers, play rangers etc) are key intermediaries, playing a vital role in connecting place-shapers with children and young people.

⁸ Joost Beunderman, Celia Hannon, Peter Bradwell, *Seen and Heard: Reclaiming the public realm with children and young people* (Demos, 2007)

5. Possible implications for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Children and Youth Organisations

Place shaping should reflect the distinctive identity and aspirations of local people, including children and young people, and local areas. This is part and parcel of the way that VCS children and youth organisations operate. The sector has a long history of directly involving children and young people in its work, ensuring that their needs and aspirations drive the services and support that they provide. This is the same responsibility that the emerging place-shaping agenda places on local authorities.

Engagement

Local government's ability to engage local people lies at the heart of its place-shaping role. Consequently, its ability to engage children and young people themselves, as well as the VCS groups that advocate, represent and work with them, will be critical to the success which children and young people feel they have in shaping the places important to them.

However, it is vital that local authorities build stronger engagement with their citizens directly as the foundation for place shaping – this must include building stronger engagement with children and young people. While children and youth VCOs can act as powerful advocates and help to ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard in decision-making, this does not remove the responsibility that local authorities have as democratic bodies to enter into dialogue with local residents. VCS children and youth organisations can support local authorities to put in place participation structures for children and young people alongside adult structures of participation.

Local partnerships

Partnership working will grow in importance as the mechanism by which priorities for places are agreed. This has already been seen in the development of Children's Trusts and is now strengthened by the measures set out in the 2007 Local Government Act. Local VCS children and youth organisations will need to work with local authorities to develop new and existing opportunities, structures and mechanisms for children and young people to help shape the places in which they live and influence decisions about services, including how they are delivered.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) will be the main vehicle for developing a local vision – articulated in the Sustainable Community Strategy– for transforming a place and tackling cross cutting issues. The LSP is also the forum for agreeing the targets of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). The Sustainable Community Strategy must not be prepared without the

engagement of the local VCS. The Local Strategic Partnership must represent the full range of service providers as well as the local community. It is critical that voluntary and community groups are part of the LSP and consequently part of the process for determining targets. This could be as members of the LSP, its thematic partnerships or by other routes of engagement.

Local authorities, as the overall convenor of the LSP, should ensure that all organisations and individuals are provided with a range of opportunities to participate in and influence the determination and delivery of local priorities. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act provides an opportunity for service providers from the VCS to be involved where appropriate, in sharing responsibility with the local authority for developing and delivering against targets in the LAA.

VCOs working with children and young people will want to consider how best to position themselves in relation to these new arrangements. Local children and youth VCOs will have an opportunity to play a vital role in the following ways:

- informing and negotiating local priorities by facilitating communication, consultation and engagement between local service providers and children and young people and, in turn, providing information to children and young people about local decisions, services and performance;
- helping to develop the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement which offer a key opportunity to have more influence over a local vision for children and young people; and
- Children's Trust arrangements and wider commissioning mechanisms may offer new opportunities to directly deliver local services, or have existing services recognised by statutory funders.

Well-being

If the move to place-shaping at the local level is to really pay dividends for children and young people, engagement with the VCS and their users must go beyond those parts of the local authority that have children and young people squarely in their remit. Involvement of children and young people should not always happen separately to involvement of the wider community – children and young people are themselves a part of the wider community and this must be reflected across the full range of local government responsibilities.

It is increasingly clear that the place-shaping agenda is intimately intertwined with the agenda to improve well-being for children and young people and the two need to be brought closer together to facilitate a truly cross-cutting approach which recognises the importance of children and young people as members of local communities. The children and youth VCS has an integral role to play in ensuring that this happens.

6. Resources

Draft Statutory Guidance accompanying the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 is available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/statutoryguidance>

The Department for Communities and Local Government and national VCS umbrella bodies have been working together to establish a standard by which local third sector bodies should organise themselves to be effectively represented on Local Strategic Partnerships. This is available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/principlesofrepresentation>

The Every Child Matters website includes a page on participation of children and young people. It provides links to research and guidance on building a culture of participation and involving children and young people in developing and delivering multi-agency services.

To find out more go to: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/participation/>

Participation Works is an online gateway designed to improve the way practitioners, organisations, policy makers and young people access and share information about involving children and young people in decision making.

You can find out more at: <http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>

Hear by Right offers tried and tested standards for organisations, across the statutory and voluntary sectors, to map and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people, and to encourage continual improvement in an organisation's activities.

You can find out more at: hbr.nya.org.uk/

7. Other briefings

Briefing 1: Knife gun and gang crime

Briefing 2: The Government's Social Exclusion Agenda

Briefing 3: Access to Services in Rural Areas

Briefing 4: Public Service Delivery

Briefing 5: Community Cohesion

Briefing 6: Local Government Reform

All the briefings are available at www.ncvcco.org or www.ncvys.org.uk

This briefing was written by independent consultant Helen Bush for the Speaking Out project.

