



**Title:** Tired of Hanging Around: Using Sport and Leisure Activities to Prevent Anti-social Behaviour by Young People

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**SCS topic headings:** [Safety of Vulnerable Groups](#); [Partnership Working](#); [Community Engagement](#); [Evaluation and Monitoring](#)

[This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.](#)

## Summary of the intervention's aim

This study focuses on the role of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour in young people aged 8 to 19 years. These activities are part of the actions that councils and their partners can use to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour.

The study aims to help councils and their partners get the best outcomes from sport and leisure activities for young people at risk of anti-social behaviour. It provides examples through case studies, discussion through evaluation of published research, and support via action checklists. It also:

- assesses the impact and efficiency of current funding arrangements; and
- includes the perspective of young people on what they want and what they value from projects.

The report builds on findings from Audit Commission research during winter 2007/08 and summer 2008. This study recognises, but does not cover, local agencies' work with families and young children or the role of schools in helping to prevent or address anti-social behaviour.

## Outcomes

### Chapter 1 – Anti-social behaviour is a local concern

Comparisons between the data sources are difficult (Table 1). The British Crime Survey (Ref. 6) has collected data on seven types of anti-social behaviour since 1992. It specifically defines 'young people hanging around' as anti-social behaviour.

Difficulties with measuring the incidence of anti-social behaviour also make it difficult to put a figure on how much antisocial behaviour costs. The Home Office *One Day Count of Anti-Social Behaviour* estimated the cost to English and Welsh public agencies of responding to and dealing with reports of anti-social behaviour is £3.4 billion a year (see the report's Ref. 1).

For many young people (see reference on p.15) hanging around is a chosen social activity. It makes them feel safe and independent; it gives them somewhere to go; and it is an opportunity to socialise with friends that is free and unsupervised by adults.

It is difficult for young people to find alternatives to hanging around. Barriers include the cost of accessing activities or lack of awareness by young people of what is available locally. There are other, specific triggers that can lead to anti-social behaviour. For some young people, anti-social behaviour is a response to feeling threatened, to the stresses of family life or to peer pressure.

Anti-social behaviour is not confined to deprived areas, but young people in deprived neighbourhoods say that a general sense of dejection can increase the likelihood of involvement in anti-social behaviour. The three contributory factors to this are bullying, ugly surroundings, and having nothing to do (Figure 5, p.19).

## **Chapter 2 – Sport and leisure activities can tackle anti-social behaviour**

This chapter reviews the published research evidence, the case study sites and the views of young people to build the case for sport and leisure activities role in reducing and preventing antisocial behaviour. A more detailed review of the research evidence is available at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/hangingaround](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/hangingaround).

Sport and leisure activities are part of a range of interventions to mitigate and manage the risk factors that contribute to anti-social behaviour. Their value has long been recognised (see the report's Ref. 23). Sport and leisure activities are popular with most young people.

But the right programmes must reflect levels of need. For those young people at high risk of engagement in anti-social behaviour, sport and leisure activities alone are not enough.

Long-term impact will only be achieved by addressing some of the risk factors linked to their engagement in anti-social behaviour. Effective prevention programmes combine sport and leisure activities with developmental components supporting young people to improve their personal and social skills and to change their behaviour.

Developmental activities include mentoring, role modelling, and opportunities for them to volunteer and, eventually, to coach others. These activities can increase self-

esteem and self-confidence, reduce impulsivity and risk taking, and improve educational and employment prospects. But they must be available over the medium- to long-term to have impact.

Young people most likely to engage in anti-social behaviour tend to be attracted to informal, short-term, unstructured activities: those who are most disadvantaged are least likely to get involved.

A major challenge for providers is to find activities that will attract and engage these young people, and then introduce elements of structure and development at the right point.

Cost is a key determinant of accessibility. Charges and transport expense can be a barrier for families on low incomes. They either prevent attendance, or lead to sporadic attendance.

Young people are not always aware of all the activities available in their area. Communications need to highlight that activities will be smart and fun, rather than that they have educational worth. Word of mouth and street-based communications are popular ways of spreading information, particularly for those young people at higher risk of antisocial behaviour. Taster sessions allow them to try a project before committing themselves.

Young men and young women show similar motivations for engaging in antisocial behaviour: showing off, getting a buzz, rebelling, or belonging to a crowd. There are differences in their behaviour, though. Young women are just as likely to hang around on the street as young men are, but they engage in lower risk behaviour that is less outwardly destructive.

**There are local difficulties in interpreting and implementing government policy.**

Shifts in government policy do not always translate into local action.

**Chapter 3 – What is happening locally?**

This chapter considers how councils, children's trusts, and their partners use sport and leisure to engage young people, develop them as individuals, and prevent them engaging in anti-social behaviour. It draws on the findings of a survey of 56 sport and leisure projects, together with the outcomes of 17 focus groups, held with a total of 71 young people in three case study areas.

**Chapter 4 – Funding arrangements inhibit preventive schemes**

Most preventive activities, though, receive fixed-term funding of two or three years and with little prospect of renewal. In general, preventive schemes have to rely on short-term, non-renewable, project funding rather than a needs-based income stream that enables them to become part of the community they serve.

Funds for preventive schemes come from local and national sources. Much travels through other bodies (Sport England for example), before it reaches front-line projects. The average grant from central government is around £27,500, ranging between £900 and £250,000 (see Table 9).

Funding for preventive work goes to individual projects and is rarely coordinated across an area. Individual projects receive funding from several sources. Some receive most of their money from one funder, but others are reliant on many different funding sources. The 56 projects in the survey received funding of just over £3.3 million from 54 different funding streams. The typical project had three different sources of funds.

A typical project leader spends nearly a third of their time (28 per cent) on identifying and applying for funding and on managing budgets. This is equivalent to £8,000 a year diverted from frontline service provision to unbudgeted administration.

Small projects can find it difficult to get the resources they need to run and may have no choice but to make several applications for small amounts of funding. A similar amount of time and effort goes into applying for low-value and high value grants. It costs about £3,300 to apply for and manage each new funding stream. The cost of applying for and managing some funding streams can exceed the value of the grant received. It is more cost-effective to make a smaller number of applications for higher value sums – but only if they are available (see Table 10).

Responsibility for bidding for funds and for managing budgets falls on project staff, such as youth workers and sports development officers, who should be working with young people. Councils and their partners need to decide the best way to manage project finances. One solution could be to employ or make better use of staff with suitable skills, knowledge and experience (Table 11).

**Two approaches to applying for funding** Councils and their partners should, as a minimum, coordinate applications for funding. Failure to do so results in competition for the same money and wasted time, money, and effort. The outcome is a local pattern of provision that fails to reflect need. **Case study.**

One way of reducing competition, duplication, and overlap is to design projects to address related issues as well as anti-social behaviour (Figure 16). Projects with wider objectives received funds from additional sources.

The heavy reliance on external, fixed-term, funding puts all projects at risk of closure at the end of the funding period.

There is little discrimination between effective and ineffective projects.

Many projects do not know if new funding applications are successful until just before the current funding period ends (Table 12). There is little time to develop any exit strategy if projects have to close. **Late funding decisions have implications for project staff, such as stress.**

Long-term funding would give more security, but many councils report that they cannot afford to do it. Even the areas that provide long-term funding will only do it for some preventive projects – and will expect them to get additional funding.

Local community involvement in project management and delivery can increase sustainability. It can make a project into a part of the community and can transfer skills into the community.

Improved local links can lead to offers of added support such as staff time, facilities, and equipment (Figure 17). One project estimated that support in kind from the youth service was worth an extra £2,000, and the management support and accommodation provided by the leisure department equalled an extra grant of £31,000.

Two case study projects had private investment or sponsorship. Sponsors brought money, but they also contributed equipment and volunteers (see Case study 20).

## **Chapter 5- The way forward**

The final chapter reviews how councils, other statutory agencies, and community organisations and voluntary groups can work with central government to help young people and their communities tackle anti-social behaviour.

### ***Councils***

Councils are in a unique position to bring together all the relevant partners who can contribute to this agenda and engage with local communities to ensure that solutions are suitable to their needs.

Many solutions are low cost. Small-scale initiatives such as liaising with other partners and supporting communities to get involved in local projects can make a difference. By working more closely with other partners, councils may be able to increase their existing capacity to run projects with young people.

Councils, children's trusts and CDRPs must target resources appropriately. Low-cost sport and leisure activities that engage young people through accessible, reliable and relevant provision will be enough for most young people. Young people at medium risk of involvement in anti-social behaviour will need access to developmental activities. High cost one-to-one inputs and enforcement action should be targeted to the few young people for whom low-cost preventive activities and developmental

interventions with support have not worked (Figure 18). Spending on lower-cost interventions will reduce the need for higher-cost interventions.

Councils should provide leadership, coordination and promote partnerships, making links with the other policy agendas that are relevant to young people's lives. These include obesity, teenage pregnancy and community cohesion. Local partners must work together to a common aim of improving outcomes for young people.

***Commissioning activities requires a strong evidence base.*** Project commissioners need to ensure there is a strong evidence base to support their decisions and spend on what works. That evidence base needs to include:

- shared intelligence on the nature of youth anti-social behaviour problems
- mapping of the range of activities available across an area
- data on the throughput of projects
- clear objectives with defined personal and social outcomes
- evaluation data using both qualitative and quantitative measures
- information on project costs, including staffing costs, management costs, and use of equipment and facilities.

Commissioners should support long-term programmes in preference to short-term projects. This is essential for building relationships with young people and changing their behaviour. They should also support staff in finding ways to make projects more sustainable.

***Central government needs to improve the efficiency of funding arrangements.*** Central government should pool the many funding streams for programmes for young people at risk of anti-social behaviour. Area-based grant is one potential pooling mechanism. Ring-fenced funds provide the security that money is spent on national priorities; they sometimes ensure that new money is spent on local priorities. But the current system creates unnecessary bureaucracy with the costs falling on those least able to carry them. It also makes it more difficult for local partners to work together to pursue linked objectives,

Without an area-based approach, government and other funders should ensure that marketing and communications about available funding makes it easier for projects to identify what is available.

All project and programme evaluation should have the aim of increasing knowledge about successful interventions.

The Audit Commission endeavours to provide guidance, self-assessment tools and case studies to help councils and their partners to improve their provision of sport and leisure activities. An example is included below (and in the report, see also pp.90-92).

The **Audit Commission's self-assessment checklist** includes content and guidance regarding:

- Project design
- Engage with young people
- Ensure projects are accessible
- Help young people to achieve their full potential
- Consult and work with adults and young people
- Coordinate activities across an area
- Improve utilisation of funding and resources
- Improve sustainability
- Gather evidence of effectiveness and cost
- Use evidence to make decisions about future projects.

Additional practical advice is available to download from [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/hangingaround](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/hangingaround) (although this content has not been reviewed as part of an SCSN EIR). It includes:

- self-assessment checklists for coordinating, delivering and reviewing activities
- principles for evaluating projects
- guidance on accessing young people for consultation and sample focus group questions
- questions for councillors to include in scrutiny
- case studies of good practice.

### **Summary of evaluation conclusions**

The study purports six key messages:

- Sport and leisure activities have an important role in preventing anti-social behaviour.
- Most councils, and many other local agencies, provide or commission some good targeted activities. But there is little evidence of comprehensive area-based approaches.
- Lack of data on costs and performance is a constraint on commissioning decisions.
- Young people are rarely consulted when planning new activities. Young people want activities that are accessible, reliable and relevant.
- National funding arrangements are inefficient. Projects have to deal with
- Effective solutions engage the appropriate young people; they are delivered through local joint working, and national and local funding is coordinated.

### **How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions**

This study was researched between July 2007 and June 2008. The study team used a mixed methods approach, with a focus on young people and on providers of sport and leisure activities. There were four main parts to the research:

- A literature review of academic evidence on the effectiveness of sport and leisure activities in changing behaviour, combined with analysis of recent government policy (see [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/hangingaround](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/hangingaround)).
- Documentary analysis and interviews with key stakeholders in a chosen sample of 14 case study authorities. Case study areas were selected mainly on their level of deprivation, but also included different types of authority and areas of the country.

Fieldwork took place over two days at each location and there were 113 interviews. The team spoke to police, fire, and council officers (community safety or anti-social behaviour team, leisure department, youth service, YOT) in all areas. These people then suggested other stakeholders. These included elected members, chairs of CDRPs, directors of children's services, extended schools coordinators or educational support teams and voluntary and community sector providers. In some areas project visits were included as part of the fieldwork.

- An electronic survey of projects running activities for young people was conducted. Projects were identified from the fieldwork interviews. The survey collected data on the type of activities carried out at the project, sources of funding, cost of running the project and monitoring and evaluation data recorded. Data were received on 56 projects.
- Specialist contractors (Progressive Partnership Limited) held 17 focus groups with young people in three fieldwork areas. There were separate focus groups for young men and young women. The focus groups represented young people in terms of age, ethnicity, level of engagement in activities, and likelihood of involvement in anti-social behaviour.

**Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request. Please contact [info@scsn.org.uk](mailto:info@scsn.org.uk)**

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