

FIRM **FOUNDATIONS**

A framework and tools for
identifying and acting on the needs
of young people

The lower half of the cover features the black silhouettes of four young people standing in a row against the blue background. From left to right, there is a young man with short, spiky hair, a young woman with long hair, a young man with short hair, and a young man with short hair.

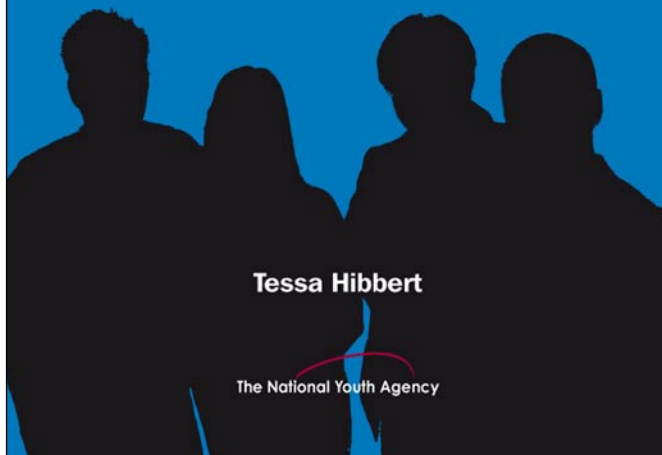
Tessa Hibbert

The logo for The National Youth Agency, consisting of a red curved line above the text.

The National Youth Agency

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Introduction

This toolkit aims to provide youth services in the voluntary and statutory sector with a framework for identifying and acting to meet the specific needs of young people in their defined age group.

It is based on a needs assessment framework developed by the South West Regional Youth Work Unit in 2005. Commissioned by The National Youth Agency it is, in part, a response to criticisms by Ofsted that many youth services lack systematic approaches to needs assessment. It also recognises the importance of a thorough needs assessment as part of the Children's Trusts' planning and commissioning cycle. It is hoped that the menu of practical examples contained herein will provide a starting point for youth services to understand the process better and build up their own approach to this subject.

The examples contained within this toolkit are provided in good faith by local authority youth services and other organisations. If you use them, please give credit where necessary.

For queries or feedback about this toolkit, please contact Tessa Hibbert at tessa@trhibbert.demon.co.uk

1. What is needs assessment and why is it important?

In this paper, 'need' is taken to mean whatever is missing and has to be provided if the gap between young people's current situation and the desired outcome is to be reduced or closed. The desired outcomes are the five Every Child Matters outcomes, namely that children and young people in the local area are supported to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic wellbeing

The assessment of these needs will vary according to who is making the judgment. For a truly person centred approach to informal work with young people, we need to consider some of the following questions, proposed by Bernard Davies in his work *Youth Work: A manifesto for our times*, (*Youth and Policy* number 88, Summer 2005):

- Who are **these** young people?
- Is some youth work intervention in these young people's lives **justified**?
- How do we **personalise this first contact**?
- Within what **'activity' or on what other 'territory'** could the contact be best initiated?
- What connections might be made between these young people's starting points and ways of moving on beyond them – for **prompting additional developmental opportunities** for these young people?
- Within all this, how best to tread the delicate line between supporting and increasing, and certainly not undermining, **these young people's independence and their control** over their own lives?

We must ensure that young people are truly involved in their own assessment of need. Hear by Right¹ states that true and active involvement of young people in decisions that affect them will ensure that services and policies can be designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than presumed needs and this saves money.

Judgments on needs are made on various levels – at a MACRO level across the whole service or organisation, and on a MICRO level within communities, youth clubs or with an individual. Within this toolkit there are a range of tools available to help you in making these assessments and examples are given throughout.

1.1 In the context of the Children's Trust planning and commissioning cycle

Within the Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme, local authorities and their partners will now be publishing the *Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP)*, which is the single, strategic and overarching plan for children and young people in a children's trust area. All authorities are required to have a Plan in place by April 2006, and a key element of the planning and commissioning cycle is undertaking a thorough needs assessment, as shown in the diagram below.



Taken from *Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*, DfES, March 2006.

The Government states² that a shared assessment of local needs:

- will determine the extent to which the five outcomes are already being met
- will help to gain clarity on local expectations
- will help gain agreement on priorities

It should be based on accurate information, involvement of children, young people and their families, and an honest assessment of how well local children and young people are already supported and what the key challenges are. The local analysis will involve an assessment of provision for vulnerable children and the identification of priorities for improvement.

Further guidance on children's trusts' needs assessment states that the process should take account of existing partners' needs assessment, while recognising that changes in method and perspective will be necessary to cope with the '*broader scale and intentions of Every Child Matters*'.

The diagram on page 7 shows how needs assessment is positioned firmly within the context of the planning and commissioning cycle, making a clear link between the needs defined and the commissioning of appropriate services to meet these needs. Therefore an input for youth services into the children's trust needs assessment will help to ensure that the priorities expressed in the CYPP and therefore services commissioned reflect the priorities of youth organisations and young people.

However, managers of youth services are likely to also formulate their own approach to needs assessment, taking close account of the work being done by the CYPP, in order to inform their own planning and delivery.

1.2 In the context of Youth Matters

The 'local offer' for teenagers, will provide a clear statement about what young people can expect in their area and what young people's responsibilities are. The *Green Paper* and *Next Steps* documents confirm that the offer will be underpinned by a needs analysis of things to do and places to go in the area which would include:

- An analysis of the full range of existing activities from all sectors mapped against a detailed understanding of the composition of the local teenage population
- What young people say they need
- Evidence of what works in securing better outcomes
- An understanding of who is currently benefiting from activities and services and who is not
- The views of parents and voluntary and community organisations, including faith communities

The *Next Steps* document states that this needs assessment will form part of the overall needs assessment undertaken by the Children's Trust (see above).

In response to the findings of the needs analysis, funded services that are unpopular will be re-focused or closed and where gaps are identified, they would be filled through commissioning services.

It is, therefore, vital for youth services – both statutory and voluntary – to be able to show that their provision meets the needs of their target group and that they have evidence on hand to prove their contribution to the outcomes. It is also important that youth services show how their provision contributes to the elements of the Youth Offer. This will vastly increase their 'commissionability'. The voluntary sector has been working in this way for a number of years as it is often a requirement of funding bids to show how projects will meet expressed need, and so it will be in a strong position to develop this work.

Youth Matters also brought in (from April 2006) the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund to which young people will be able to apply to fund projects they are interested in. Bids to these initiatives will need to be supported by a thorough assessment of need, undertaken by the young people themselves.

1.3 In the context of Joint Area Reviews

In the *Youth Service Inspection Handbook*, Ofsted set out its emphasis on assessment of need being a crucial aspect of good practice under Key Aspect 1: *Standards of achievement of young people and the quality of youth work.*

'The range of experiences provided by the service should be based on a thorough analysis of the needs of the full range of young people with whom the service works, or with whom it should be working. Inspectors will want to test how this has been done, how thorough the process has been, how the service assesses and responds to changing needs, and how it reaches out to those for whom a need has been identified, but with whom it does not yet work. Good youth work will take account of priorities set locally, regionally and nationally. For example, it might be one aim to promote social cohesion through sensitive mediation between young people and their local community.'

Under Key Aspect 2: The quality of the curriculum and resources, the Ofsted handbook states that:

'A youth service should have a curriculum statement or policy outlining what it is intending to achieve, the curriculum content and review processes, and its approach towards ensuring the quality of what is provided. In making their judgments on the suitability of the curriculum, inspectors will take account of the service's responsiveness to local and national priorities and the extent to which it has been successful in matching provision to the needs of the young people with whom it aims to work ...'

And Under Key Aspect 3: Strategic operational leadership and management, the handbook states that in making judgments inspectors will consider, where applicable, the extent to which strategic managers:

- consult with service staff, young people and partners, identify clearly what they want the youth service to achieve, relate this to LA strategic objectives, and devise a curriculum to ensure that it meets its aims
- have a clear knowledge and understanding of their area
- are aware of national priorities for the youth service and other services working with the 13 to 19 age-group, and develop policies to meet these priorities

The handbook goes on to say:

'The responsibility for ensuring that provision meets the range of needs of young people rests primarily with operational managers, although they need to liaise closely with strategic managers, who will often have the most direct access to statistics and performance indicators. Inspectors will judge how thoroughly and sensitively services identify and respond to the range of needs presented by young people locally. They should also judge how effectively equality of opportunity is promoted through youth work. Inclusiveness refers to the policies and practices that ensure that youth-service provision is open and accessible to all young people, regardless of individual circumstance; equality to the policies and practices that ensure that no individuals or groups of individuals are discriminated against for whatever reason; and diversity to the policies and practices that embrace young people's different social, cultural and religious backgrounds and allow their specific characteristics to be valued. Central government might be able to identify a standard range of priorities for youth work, for example personal, social and health education, careers and employment advice and guidance, help with housing and benefits and the provision of safe recreational facilities. However, there are likely to be significant local variations in the needs of the 13 to 19 age group. For example, young people in rural areas might have different needs from those in urban areas, different localities have varying degrees of deprivation, and local employment patterns affect the demand for support in skills training. Young people of different age, gender, religious, cultural and racial groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gendered young people or young people with special needs might all have needs specific to them.'

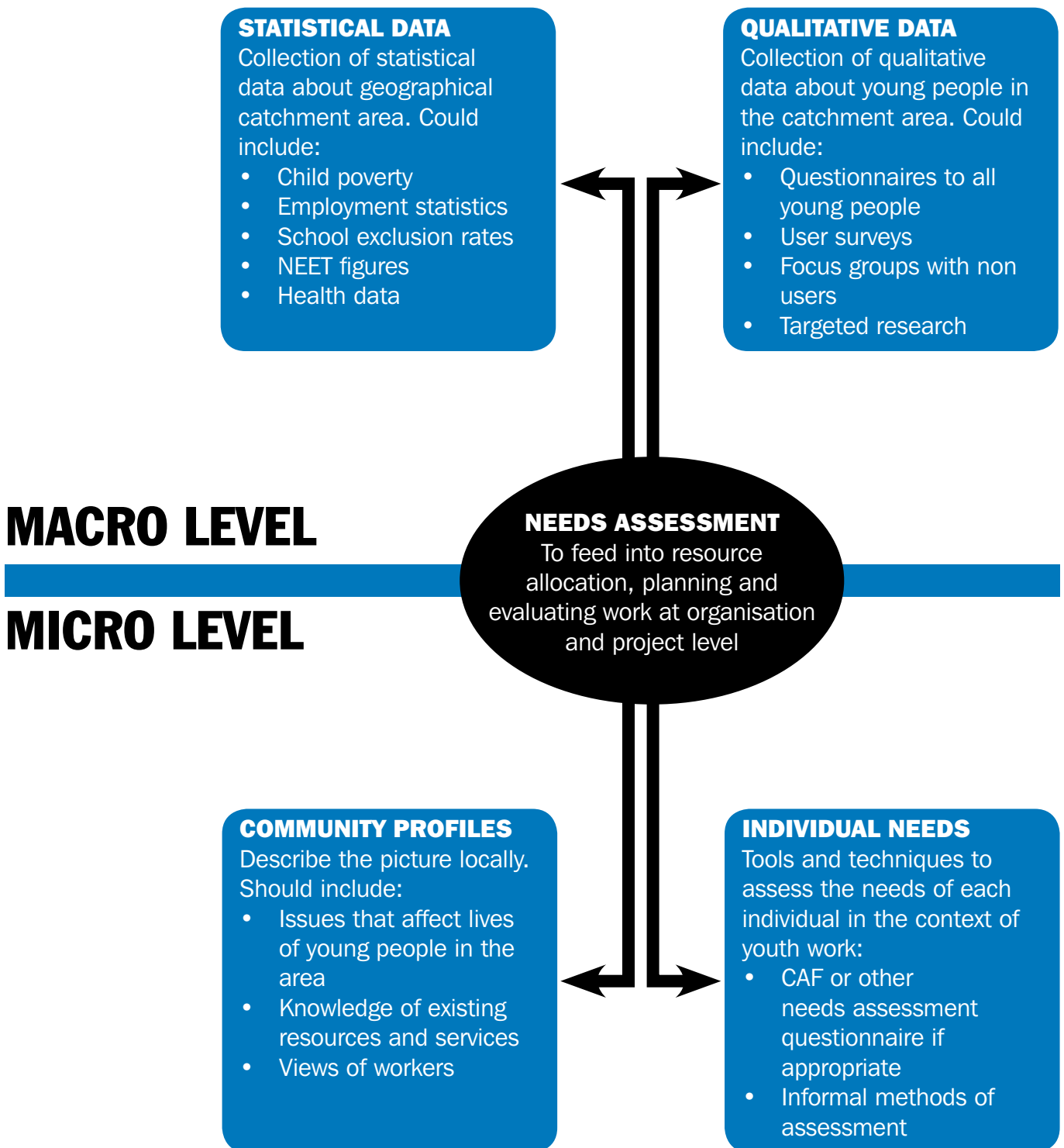
A thorough and systematic approach to needs assessment at every level is a characteristic of good youth services, according to Ofsted's recent report: *Effective Youth Services*³, which states 'Good services were characterised by the thoroughness with which they identified and met young people's needs and their efforts to measure the progress they were making'.

2. Elements of a needs assessment framework

Needs assessment can be looked at on a number of levels. This framework (developed by the South West Regional Quality Assurance Managers Group) suggests that the following elements should be included:

- Collection of hard statistical data about geographical areas
- Collection of qualitative data about opportunities for young people in geographical areas
- Information on the individual needs of young people with whom the youth service is in contact
- Information on what young people want and need from youth work

These elements can be represented in the following way:



3. Approaches to assessing need

3.1 MACRO LEVEL

A macro approach looks at the subject of needs assessment on a large scale. It would take into account 'hard' statistical information on issues that affect young people at a county wide level. It would also take account of qualitative information, such as top-line views of young people across the county/borough/project area, usually expressed through questionnaires.

3.1.1 Statistical data

The aim of collecting statistical data about young people within the target area is to build up a picture of the issues affecting young people and the existing resources available to support them.

Some examples of areas that could be covered are:

- census data, including rankings for child poverty
- data about young people's achievement, school exclusion, engagement in education, employment and training
- health data, eg teenage pregnancy rates
- the local authority ranking against indices of multiple deprivation: these are measures of deprivation for every Super Output Area and local authority area in England – and also rankings for each local authority area 2004. See website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download.

As explained in section 1.2, Children's Trusts will be putting much of this information together at local authority level as part of the process of planning and commissioning. See the DfES' Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework for more information. In addition, many partners within the Trust will have put together similar pictures for their target areas. It is recommended that youth services consult the Trust and key partners to find out what information has already been collated before starting this process from scratch. Youth services who have done this work have found it to be time consuming extracting information first hand.

In addition, self evaluation and self assessment are part of the Children's Services Improvement Cycle and will inform the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of local authority children's services and the Joint Area Review (JAR) of local services for children and young people. As part of the JAR, local authorities are issued with data toolkits, which will be an important source of local authority level data for needs assessment. A full list of the data that is published to local authorities as part of this data toolkit is available by visiting the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/

Once services have collected the data, they can use it to inform a number of key decisions:

- Where are the priority geographical areas for the service to concentrate resources on?
- Who are the priority groups of young people for the service?
- What are the priority issues for the service?

Case Study 1: **Bury Youth Service**

Issue identified: Bury was striving to become a needs led service, and it was clear that accurate collection and analysis of data was needed.

Action taken: A Management Information Systems Coordinator post was identified to provide the skills and expertise required. The post was initially recruited on a temporary contract through the Transforming Youth Work Development Fund. Bury soon realised this was a priority need within the new service, and with the introduction of new money, the post was made a permanent feature within the Senior Management Team in October last year.

The creation of this post enabled the service to interrogate information more closely and to set priorities at service and area level. This has informed the planning process, allowing for SMART targets to be set which led to relevant measurable outcomes for the service action plan.

The project began by information gathering with a wide range of partners, such as Education, YOT, PAYP, Social Services, along with national standards and local needs as identified in the Education and Culture Plan, in order to try to define a number of priority target areas for the service. Working closely with other services allowed an opportunity to ascertain where partners had already carried out needs assessments in their own areas. The service then developed a needs assessment matrix which looked at the statistics behind these priority areas and allowed the service to focus on five key priorities. This in turn linked with the corporate objectives linking the youth service directly into Local Authority Performance Management Structures.

The needs matrix was also used to apportion staff to area allocations. The matrix includes known statistics for each of the identified priority groups. Percentages are apportioned to each area under each priority. An average, over all categories, is then taken which in turn identifies a total percentage for each area. A core staffing establishment is defined by population using the 1-400 ratio identified in the standards then the needs percentage is added. The area staffing allocation is then apportioned according to these totals.

The result: The system has helped to focus the service and give a better understanding of a target driven outcome based service delivery.

Recommendations: Consult a wide range of partners at the start of the process and keep an open mind as to the priority areas to be identified. Ensure you don't duplicate data already being collected and analysed by another partner.

Once you have collected data and set priorities at a local authority or county level, you will want to get ward level data. See the section on Community Profiles for more details. What this includes will be determined by what your overall priority areas are. However, some suggestions include:

Statistical information at a ward level

- Youth population, including breakdown according to gender, age groupings, ethnicity, refugee status, special needs and disability
- School exclusion rates
- Teenage pregnancy and sexual health
- Drug misuse
- Incidents of anti social behaviour
- Incidents of racially motivated attacks
- Bullying
- Access to advice and information services
- Access to transport
- Sport and leisure facilities for young people
- Health factors
- Health facilities available
- Social services referrals
- Young people in or leaving care
- Support available to families
- Other youth groups and specific provision for young people
- Play facilities
- Levels of NEET
- Cultural facilities
- Volunteering opportunities
- Practical training opportunities
- Jobs and local employers
- Opportunities to receive careers advice

- Affluence of the areas
- Skills needed by the area
- Housing and homelessness statistics

A good source for much of this information is neighbourhood statistics available from the web site www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk. Again youth services should be aware that much of this information may be collected and used by partner agencies and may be readily available from them.

3.1.2 Information on what young people want and need from youth work

Some youth services undertake regular questionnaires to young people in the target area to ascertain what they want and need from youth work. These are distributed through neutral channels such as schools, libraries, youth projects and leisure facilities to ensure that non users are captured as well as regular users.

It is essential to ensure that blanket questionnaires are structured carefully for easy analysis and meaningful results. Unless expertise in this exists within the service or organisation, it is recommended that outside advice is sought to ensure that the results are useful.

Case Study 2: Dorset Youth Service

Issue identified: Dorset Youth Service's vision is to work in partnership with young people so that the service is led by their needs and helps them achieve their full potential. One of the mechanisms that the service chooses to use to ensure this is a questionnaire to all young people in the county, carried out every three years.

Action taken: The questionnaire is mainly distributed through schools, and the key to its success is the distribution and collection. The service goes to great pains to distribute the surveys via schools to representative samples of pupils at every secondary school in Dorset. To achieve this, they write to each school, asking teachers to distribute the surveys in tutorial periods, having personally dropped off the forms at school receptions with a supporting note to a named coordinating teacher. The service then collects completed surveys from schools, rather than relying on them to send the forms back. The questionnaire is in two parts, 'About you' and 'About youth service provision'. It is anonymous and takes about ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

The result: The survey was last undertaken in 2005 and response rate was high at 75 per cent. It supplied crucial data on young people's general perceptions of the service and their perceptions of the quality of the service they receive. The results of the exercise feed into the annual service plan. For more on the Dorset survey and how Dorset links needs assessment into planning visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/

Recommendations: If you want schools to be involved, work as hard as you can to ensure they have to do the minimum. Give careful thought to the research methodology.

... and Bedfordshire Youth Service

Issue identified: Bedfordshire Youth Service was inspected in 2004 and was challenged to develop a more systematic approach to the identification of young people's needs. One of the ways they decided to act on this was to carry out a survey based on the Dorset questionnaire.

Action taken: Bedfordshire's survey was distributed through focus groups, project work, partner organisations and youth clubs. Around 1,000 were distributed and 172 completed surveys were received.

The result: This questionnaire revealed that 76 per cent of young people who used youth clubs felt that provision was excellent or good. Seventy-five per cent of young people who responded would like the opportunity to gain a certificate for the learning they achieved in a youth club.

Many youth services now use regular 'user surveys' to find out how satisfied young people are with the Youth Service provision and what they would like to add to it, or do in a different way. Visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download an example of one of Somerset's user surveys. Also available are the results of Dorset Youth Service's 2004 user survey.

It should be noted that user surveys will only identify needs and levels of satisfaction for young people with whom the Youth Service is already in contact. If the hard statistical data indicates that there are key groups in the area (eg Black and Minority Ethnic young people) who are not using youth provision, the service or organisation will need to devise other mechanisms to find out what their needs are, and how the Youth Service can help meet them. Models that have been used effectively include:

- Targeted outreach work
- Peer research projects drawing together focus groups, eg single sex groups
- Developing projects that enable key groups to have their voices heard
- Establishing a 'consultation group' of a fixed number of young people, representative of the local population, who agree to be contacted regularly, either by e-mail, text or in person, on a range of issues relating to youth provision

Case Study 3: Wakefield Young People's Service

Issue identified: This piece of research was initiated by Wakefield Young People's Service to undertake a review of the service they provide for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) young people. They wanted to find out what young people think of the service, and how they'd like to see it developed in the future – existing provision although open to all young people, tended to be predominantly race specific and/or single-gender. The research was aimed at BME young people between the ages of 13 and 20, living within the Wakefield City boundary.

Action taken: The first stage in the process was to identify and recruit a small group of young people, aged 15 and over, to carry out a piece of peer led research with other BME young people across the city. The research took the form of a series of focus groups, interviews and questionnaires. For more information visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/

The result: A series of recommendations were developed and led to an action plan being developed by the workers. One of the targets in the plan was to set up a permanent steering group of young people.

If a blanket questionnaire is not appropriate, it may be that a focus group or small group approach is better suited to identifying young people's needs in an area. One way of structuring such a focus group for assessing the needs of groups of young people – and encouraging them to identify action based on these needs – uses a photo-montage. Download a case study using this model with young Bangladeshi people from the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/. Another approach to structuring a focus group or informal group discussion simply asks young people what they think about where they live and what they need from youth work – download some sample discussions questions from www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/. Young women and young men may have different things they need out of youth work. In order to assess this, it can be useful to conduct needs assessment conversations in single sex groups. For more on the YWCA's Why Women Info Sheet visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/

Youth Action Wiltshire is carrying out some focus groups with young people in the Wiltshire area, looking at young people's needs and how to involve them in solutions and services. More details on their needs analysis/participation research methods on the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/

Case Study 4: YWCA England and Wales, A20 programme

Issue identified: The Inclusion Support Service identified individual young women who were either not engaging or progressing in EET. The ISS also recognised that existing provision was quite male dominated, with young men being more vocal than young women.

Action taken: YWCA put together a programme offering an alternative curriculum focussed on young women in years 10 and 11. A20 took a holistic approach (including health and counselling services) and operated within a women-only space. The programme worked in close partnership with young women themselves, and other professionals, to give the young women a safe-space in which to build their confidence and draw up their own individual learning plans. Crèche facilities were also provided. Youth workers were able to address risky behaviour, and other issues that the young women brought, and provide one-to-one support for young women in the transition from education to employment. Learning was accredited through Getting Connected. Workers also kept in touch with young women once they had moved on.

The result: Nine out of ten of the most recent group have now had successful outcomes. One young woman said: 'I'm more confident now ... I used to feel ugly and hated myself but now I feel great because I've realised who I am.'

Recommendations: Community profiling needs to ensure that issues, which can affect individuals and diverse groups of young people differently, are not lost.

3.2 MICRO LEVEL

A micro approach to needs assessment looks at the subject of young people's needs on the level of the local community, or the individual young person.

One of the most important and commonly used approaches to doing this is using a Community Profile.

3.2.1 Community Profiles

A Youth Community Profile is a planning tool for workers and contains a description of the local area, as it impacts on young people. It should contain information about the key features that shape a young person's experience and future. It includes both statistical evidence, and qualitative information, gained from a variety of sources. It is likely to be written by an established worker with local knowledge, in conjunction with the area team, with young people and key partners.

In urban areas it makes sense for community profiles to be based on ward boundaries, in order to match the relevant statistical data. This may not be appropriate in rural areas with low population density, where it might be appropriate to use broader areas such as school catchment areas or travel to work areas for market towns.

There should be a close relationship between the top line statistical data collated at a service or organisation wide level, and the community profile. It makes sense for the service or organisation centrally to collate some of this information and feed it down to local areas to help them complete their profile, as otherwise there is a risk of duplication (See the planning model from Dorset Youth Service for an example of how this can be done.) In small, unitary authorities it might be the case that a separate community profile is not needed – but that this is simply a development of the overall authority statistical picture with qualitative information and young people's views.

It makes sense for the top line priorities established through the statistical data exercise to be explored in more depth by the community profile, rather than starting with a 'clean sheet'. The five outcomes give a natural focus to the profile. See the example from Bedfordshire.

Community profiles should focus on the issues that affect the lives of young people in the area. This could include:

- Access to advice and information services
- Access to jobs and training
- School exclusion rates
- Teenage pregnancy and sexual health
- Drug misuse

- Anti social behaviour
- Incidents of racially motivated attacks
- Incidents of bullying
- Access to transport
- Education providers (schools, colleges, work based learning programmes)
- Key local employers with opportunities for young people
- Leisure and sports facilities
- Youth provision, both local authority and voluntary sector
- Cultural facilities: theatres, music venues, arts projects etc
- Commercial, youth oriented facilities
- Identified areas where young people meet (parks, shopping centres, skate parks etc)
- Community based decision making and consultation bodies (parish and community councils, neighbourhood associations etc)
- Local councillors (county/unitary, district and parish councils)
- Key local professionals: police, headteachers, regeneration teams etc.
- Local partnership groups and arrangements

The issues affecting young people's lives, when matched with knowledge about existing resources and services, should provide information about gaps in provision and also what issues need to be addressed through the curriculum. Young people should ideally be involved in this process – some suggestions on how to do this can be found here.

Community Profiles should be in a format that makes it easy to update them, ideally on an annual basis. It makes sense for each Youth Service to agree a corporate format for Community Profiles, to enable comparisons across areas.

Case Study 5: **Bradford Youth Service Community Profiles**

Issue identified: The service recognised that in order to respond to the expressed needs of young people quickly and positively, it had to have a comprehensive knowledge of the communities in which it operates and the Bradford District as a whole.

Action taken: The service put together a Community Profile template which is circulated to all staff teams for completion on an annual basis. This contains a general overview of the area, local statistical information, existing youth provision, partnership arrangements, the voluntary sector, statutory provision, local facilities, staffing and inventory. Analysis of this information enables workers to draw conclusions and identify gaps in provision.

The result: Each team uses the Community Profile to base their planning and delivery decisions. It provides an essential tool for rationalising provision and developing new work in the face of scarce resources. The service as a whole is able to use the information to provide a context for work with young people to partners, other agencies, and local councillors. As a result of the exercise, the service has a bank of evidence of what it does, and where it is done, which is up to date and accurate. It also has a baseline to measure service improvement.

Recommendations: Community Profiling needs to be firmly linked in to the broader planning cycle, otherwise practitioners will see it as merely a paper exercise. There needs to be a direct link between the Profile and the Team/Unit Plan so that targets/objectives can be trailed back to the Profile.

You can see examples of other areas' community profiles:

- Bedfordshire community profile
- Gloucestershire community profile
- Bath and NE Somerset community profile
- Norfolk community profile

One of the concerns over community profiles is that there is a danger that they concentrate too much on the 'hard' statistical data which is relatively easy to source, and do not contain enough on the qualitative

indicators that have a massive impact on the lives of young people. Examples include: how it feels to live in an area, how strong the community is, how safe it is. One model offered to ensure that this aspect is considered recognises that youth workers, community workers and volunteers have an enormous amount of knowledge about these soft indicators through their day to day contact with young people. Visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download a brief questionnaire for workers in Torbay which can be incorporated into a community profile.

Some youth services now are thinking about ways in which young people can be involved in researching their own Community Profiles, particularly in the context of working up projects for bids to the Youth Opportunity Fund. There are a number of approaches – drawing on writing by David Clark in the '80s – which facilitate this. Visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ for an example of how one approach was used in a foyer's sexual health project to build up a 'map' for young people.

3.2.3 Needs of individual young people

Each young person approaches youth work with their own needs and wants. Even within a group doing the same activity, individuals will have different needs. An important and often informal part of the youth work process is for the youth worker to diagnose the starting point for the young person and work with them to identify goals they want to reach.

There are many tools which youth workers can use to facilitate conversations with young people in small groups or individually about their 'starting point'. Two examples are the Wheel of Life model and the Rickter Scale. It will be important for youth workers to record the needs identified systematically, in order to establish and understand patterns and identify priorities in the project and neighbourhood. Some youth services and organisations have taken into account this aspect in designing a format for 'recorded outcomes'. Visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download an example of Wandsworth Borough Council's recorded outcomes form, which asks workers to consider young people's starting point.

In some aspects of Youth Service provision it will be possible and appropriate for youth workers to use the Common Assessment Framework, in line with other professional groupings in the Children and Young People's services arena. Areas will have their own agreements and protocols on the use of the CAF. Services such as advice and information, and targeted work with small groups of young people in partnership with schools and Pupil Referral Units, would fall into this category.

It is recognised, however, that in much open access youth work, whether centre based, project based or detached, it will be inappropriate to apply the Common Assessment Framework, unless referring an individual to another agency. In these settings, where young people take part as part of their peer group, and because they have chosen to get involved, sitting down with a young person to fill in a complex needs assessment questionnaire changes the very nature of the work, and is unlikely to be welcomed by young people. Youth workers have other means of establishing individual young people's needs.

Case Study 6: Norfolk Youth Service

Issue identified: In September 2005, Norfolk youth service recognised that there was a need to create a coherent, systematic process for measuring outcomes for young people. An inevitable and integral part of measuring outcomes is defining the starting point for young people and what they need from youth work.

Norfolk's rationale for the need to systematically measure outcomes is:

- Keeping the outcomes in mind at all times helps us all to focus on how services can continuously improve for young people and their families
- The development of Children's Services is being informed by an evidence-based approach. A successful monitoring and evaluation strategy will therefore help us develop our own evidence base, assess whether we are delivering effective interventions, and modify them if necessary
- Help communicate the value of the Youth Service to all partners, including schools, parents and other agencies
- The Annual Performance Assessment and Joint Area Reviews self assessment process

asks questions about the impact of local services. For each of the five Every Child Matters outcomes, Children's Services need to identify 'how good are the outcomes?' and 'Are you making a difference?'

Action taken: As a result, Norfolk has begun a research project to pilot and review outcome measurement tools, with a view to making recommendations to the rest of the service about which ones should be used. An initial review has been undertaken and a final report has been written to make future recommendations for the service. Visit the website at www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download a copy of Norfolk's review, project plan and methodology.

It should be noted that the mechanisms above will only identify individual needs for young people with whom the Youth Service is already in contact. If the hard statistical data indicates that there are key groups in the area (eg BME young people) who are not using youth provision, the Youth Service will need to devise other mechanisms to find out what their needs are, and how the Youth Service can help to meet them. See Wakefield Young People's Service's research report on Black and Ethnic Minority young people for an example of this approach.

4. How should needs assessment influence provision?

Gathering a rounded picture of the needs of young people in an area should help services to make decisions on resource allocation, and to inform local and service wide delivery plans.

4.1 Prioritising use of resources

Considerable amounts of Youth Service resources focus on locality based youth centres, where the requirements to maintain and improve the building, and maintain appropriate staffing levels mean there is little flexibility to shift resources to areas and groups that show as high priority through needs assessment exercises. In recent years several Youth Services in the South West have tried to reduce or change their delivery points, and often encounter considerable opposition from local communities and ward councillors, who are concerned at the potential reduction of youth work in their patch. Frequently this pressure prevents Youth Services making changes in how resources are used, and maintains the status quo. In well funded Services, this may not matter. However, where very few youth services can match the aspiration expressed in *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (2001) of one full-time equivalent youth worker for every 400 young people, the inability to move and prioritise resources is a serious problem.

Where the Youth Service has robust management information available, and can clearly demonstrate where its priorities should lie, in line with overall local authority and government policy, it is in a much stronger position to counter local arguments to preserve current patterns of provision. Equally, systematic needs assessment leading to robust management information will enable the Youth Service to show how its existing work helps council strategies for children and young people, and should ensure that this is taken into account in any budget pooling arrangements. Youth Services will need to ensure that their expressed priorities are backed up by a thorough assessment of need.

4.2 Informing Youth Service planning processes

A needs assessment process should precede the development of strategic and operational plans for youth work. Priority setting based on assessed need should inform both local/unit plans and the overall service plan. Youth Work programmes should be designed to meet needs expressed and identified, and should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are updated in line with changing needs.

Case Study 7: Dorset Youth Service

Issue identified: In May 2004, the service was inspected by Ofsted and was challenged to develop a more systematic approach to assessing the needs of young people, despite its use of user and non user surveys for young people.

Action taken: As a result, from April 2006, centres and projects are supplied with quarterly performance data and annual local demographics report in advance of preparing their unit/area development plan. The annual demographic information report includes:

- Target figures
- 2005 quarterly attendance summary
- Secondary schools (11+) in area
- Connexions NEET figures
- Teenage pregnancy figures
- Survey of young people using the Youth and Community Service – 2005 results
- Catchment area GIS maps
- First three quarters total attendances 2004-5
- Recorded and accredited outcomes 2005
- Dorset Deprivation indices (multiple, income, employment, education and skills and health)
- Index of multiple deprivation 2004 – top 20 per cent most deprived areas in Dorset

Areas are requested to add to this information qualitative information about young people's needs in their area, and from this to draw conclusions about local provision.

The result: This assessment then forms their annual plan which is therefore rooted firmly in need and the local context. Visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download an example of Dorset's annual development plan template and guidance.

... and Norfolk Youth Service

Issue identified: Norfolk Youth Service is aware that reorganisation will potentially be required in 2006-0 to better match Norfolk Children's Services structures, and that the service will also need to respond to the challenges set out in *Youth Matters*. The service feels that, throughout this period of change, the development and delivery of robust plans will be critical to success in providing continuity of service and delivering positive opportunities to young people. One key element of a robust planning process is its grounding in local need. In Norfolk, provision is divided according to cluster groups, around extended services.

Action taken: In January 2006, Norfolk revised its planning process to supply each cluster with management information on their area. Each cluster was then supplied with a planning template and asked to carry out research on the gaps in their community and to draw conclusions on where to focus their resources from this for their annual plan.

The result: This planning process has allowed cluster areas much more freedom to ensure they are responding to local needs and provision of the Youth Offer to all young people in their areas.

4.3 Results Based Accountability

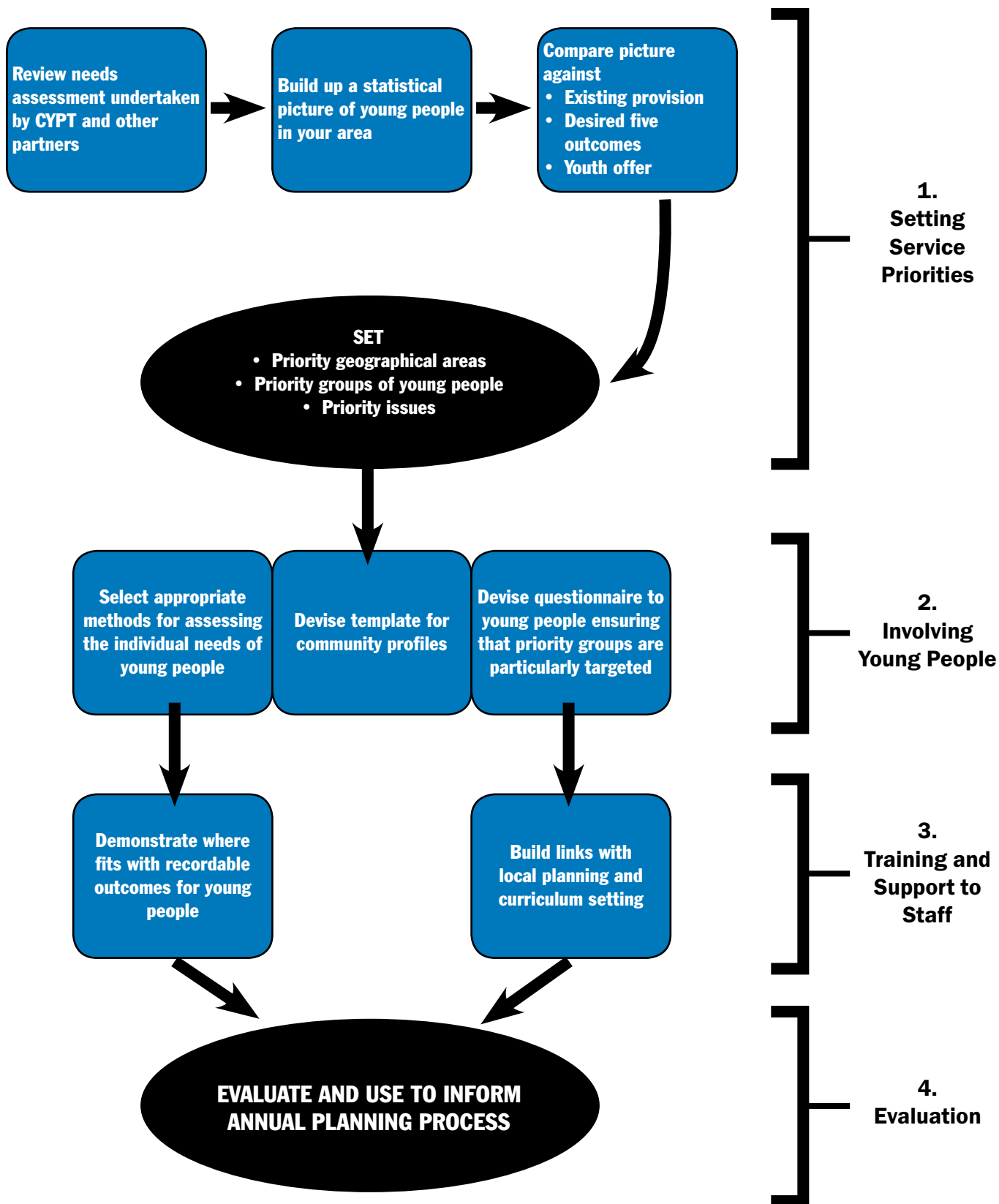
Most youth services and organisations are now working towards a system of results based accountability, which uses indicators or benchmarks to help quantify the achievement of a result. For statutory youth services, these benchmarks are set by Government, but many are supplementing these with other performance measures to help them measure whether they are delivering services well. Needs assessment has a part to play in this process, by establishing a baseline for the young people that projects are working with and then allowing periodic reevaluation in order to establish progress. For more on this way of working, see www.resultsaccountability.com

4.4 Curriculum

Assessment of need can also be used to influence the curriculum offered, both at an organisational level and at local unit level. Somerset Youth Service carried out a survey of young people's learning needs in 2000. All young people in the survey were asked by questionnaire, focus groups and individual interviews, about their learning needs in terms of what they felt they needed to learn and how they wanted to learn it. The first question was: 'What do you feel you need to learn more about?'. The results helped influence the development of the curriculum. Visit the website www.trhibbert.demon.co.uk/firmfoundations/ to download an example of the questions.

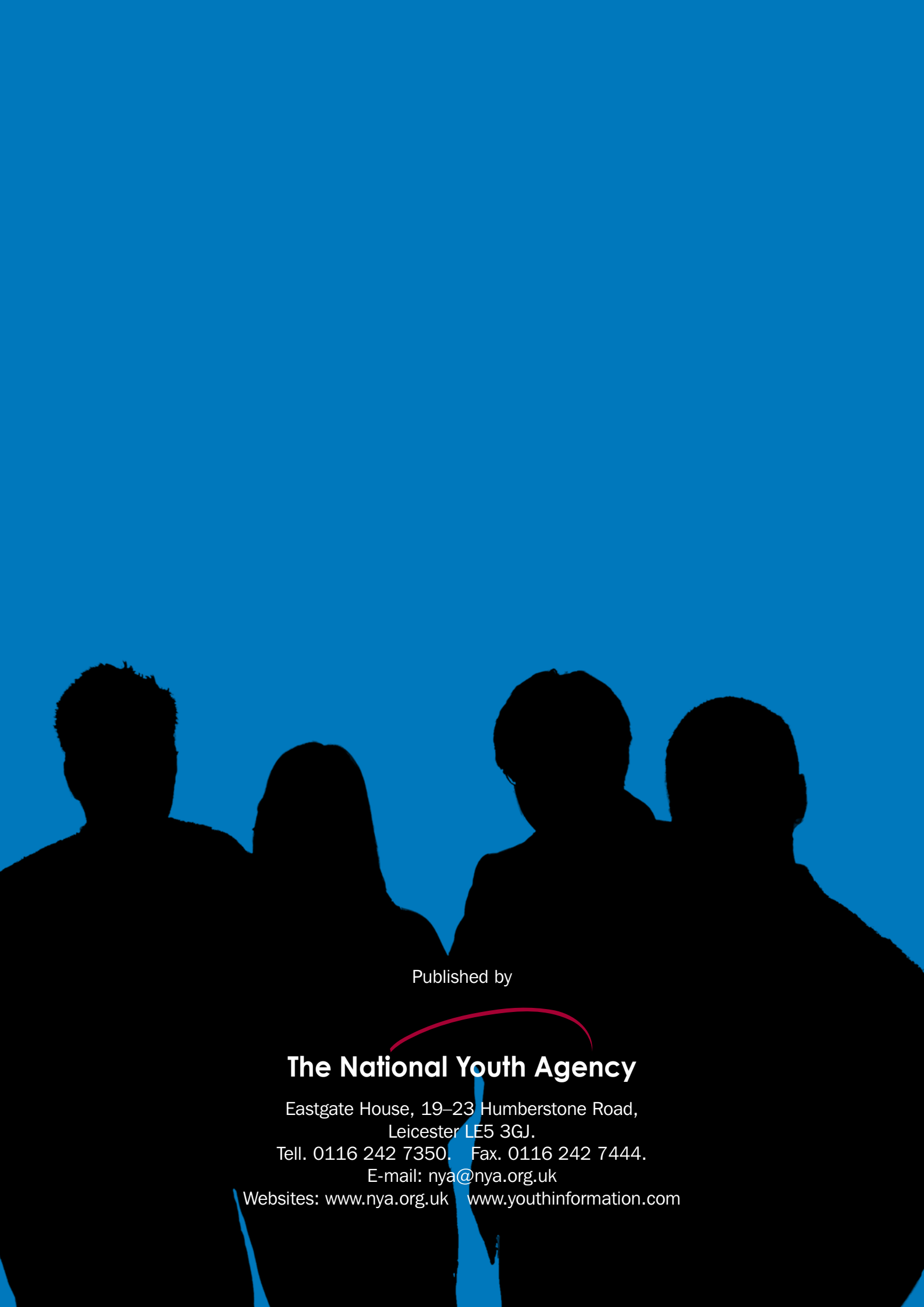
5. How to introduce needs assessment into your organisation

You may find the following flowchart of use to summarise the steps involved.



References

- 1 Hear By Right, The NYA
- 2 www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning/needsassessment
- 3 Effective youth services, Ofsted, July 2005

The background of the entire page is a solid, vibrant blue. In the lower half, there are four black silhouettes of young people, two on the left and two on the right, facing away from the viewer. The silhouettes are simple and lack facial features. The text is centered in the lower portion of the page.

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The National Youth Agency

Eastgate House, 19–23 Humberstone Road,
Leicester LE5 3GJ.

Tell. 0116 242 7350. Fax. 0116 242 7444.

E-mail: nya@nya.org.uk

Websites: www.nya.org.uk www.youthinformation.com