

Warrington Youth Service Report

Warrington Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

Published: 21 December 2007

Reference no: 877

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Introduction

1. Warrington youth service is located in the council's Children's Services Directorate. The head of service is managed by the Head of Children's Social Care and Youth Service. Some 82 staff are employed in delivering youth work, equivalent to 31 full time posts. The population of 13 to 19 year olds is 18,000 and is one of the fastest growing in the region. The service is in contact with 33% of the youth population. The budget for 2007/08 is £1,042,220. It includes an additional £100,000 committed to youth work from the council for the current financial year and two subsequent years. In addition, the service has secured external funding amounting to some £100,000. This is used to support informal education on sex and relationships and substance misuse.
2. The service directly manages two buildings for the delivery of youth work. One of these is undergoing a substantial refurbishment. Young people have access to mobile and detached provision although most youth clubs and projects are based in community venues and children's centres. The service operates a well used Youth Advice Shop in partnership with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Connexions.
3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work. Inspectors considered the service's self-assessment and met with officers and a cross section of staff and partners. They reviewed key service documentation, talked to groups of young people and observed a sample of youth work sessions in the borough.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Warrington Borough Council youth service is good and uses resources efficiently to provide good value for money. The local authority provides a clear sense of strategic direction and a satisfactory level of resources. It clearly values the service's contribution to initiatives such as youth involvement, reducing unplanned teenage pregnancies, crime and anti social behaviour. The quality of youth work practice and standards of young people's achievement are good. Young people's learning is generally recorded effectively and the use of accreditation is increasing. There are many good examples of young people's involvement in decision making in their clubs, projects, communities and at borough wide levels. Staff are well trained; they understand the needs of young people and negotiate enjoyable and challenging programmes with them. Young people participate in a wide range of opportunities that extend their learning and personal development. The service addresses inclusion well through targeting vulnerable young people such as those leaving care, teenage parents, gay, lesbian and bisexual young people and those at risk of exclusion from schools. However,

strategies for meeting the needs of young people of black and minority ethnic heritage are underdeveloped. Recently introduced quality assurance and management information systems require further development to support more accurate assessments of performance. Partnership work is well developed and results in an enhanced range of provision and services for young people.

Strengths

- Most young people achieve high standards.
- Young people make decisions about provision and influence decisions at local and borough wide levels.
- The quality of youth work practice is good.
- Staff are well trained for their roles.
- Partnership working is strong.

Areas for development

- Develop strategies for meeting the needs of young people of black and minority ethnic heritage.
- Improve quality assurance arrangements to secure continuous improvement.
- Implement management information systems that provide accurate data on participation and impact.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	3
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	3

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

Grade 4: Excellent/outstanding: a service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 3: Good: a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 2: Adequate: a service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

Grade 1: Inadequate: a service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

Part B: The youth service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes

5. The service makes a good contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes in a number of areas. Young people have good access to education about sex, relationships and substance misuse. They make good use of the sexual health services and information, advice and guidance provided by the Youth Advice Shop. They enjoy participating in youth provision and develop a good range of personal and social skills. The use of formal accreditation is increasing. Highly regarded alternative education provision enables young people to remain in education and make progress into employment and training. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and routinely carry out risk assessments. There are strong examples of young people's involvement in decision making in their clubs and projects, local communities and at a borough wide level.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

6. Standards of achievement are good. Most young people participate in their clubs and projects enthusiastically and attend regularly. They engage in a broad range of opportunities and learn about issues such as sexual health and the risks and harms associated with substance misuse. Many young people develop skills in communication, organisation and team work and expertise in subjects such as music and DJing, graffiti art and horticulture. In the best practice their achievements are recorded and accredited, for example through the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Youth Achievement Award. Most young people demonstrate high levels of confidence and are able to articulate what they have learned, achieved or gained from participating in youth service provision. They set their own codes of conduct and abide by them. Standards of behaviour are generally good across the service and young people enjoy good relationships with one another and with youth workers.

7. Many young people take responsibility as senior members of the service and peer educators. At the GLYSS project young people confidently led group activities and the young people from Cinnamon Brow youth club were commended by the community association for helping to organise a community fun day. There are good examples of young people's involvement in decision making in their local communities; for example, young people from Burntwood negotiated with a parish council to develop a skate park. A borough wide youth council effectively influences decisions at a strategic level in the youth service and the local authority. Members of the Youth Council are proud of their achievements in influencing the cost of public transport for young people and their role in recruiting

youth service and council staff. However, decision making at a local level is not well enough linked to borough wide participation activities.

8. The quality of youth work practice is good. Youth workers provide support, challenge and enable young people to have fun whilst developing valuable personal and social skills. They routinely use the service's recently introduced planning and evaluation procedures and this has improved the quality and impact of the work. However, there is still a need to improve the overall consistency and quality of planning and evaluation to ensure a tighter focus on learning outcomes rather than on immediate gains from participating in an activity.

9. Youth workers possess the knowledge and skills to provide effective advice and referrals to specialist services. They understand the needs of the young people with whom they work and are effective in involving young people in negotiating challenging programmes that respond to their needs and achieve youth service and area priorities.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of the curriculum and resources are good. There is a wide range of opportunities delivered through youth clubs, projects, detached and outreach work, mobile provision, residential, targeted work and alternative education provision. These opportunities are used effectively to engage young people and promote learning. The service also operates a well used youth advice shop in partnership with the PCT and Connexions. Young people across the borough engage in an impressive breadth of activities including seeking advice and information; exploring issues that affect their lives; fundraising activities; arts work; sports; and residential and outdoor activities.

11. The curriculum is well understood and implemented. A useful curriculum document outlines the aim of the service, the principles of youth work, the service's curriculum areas and priority target groups. The quality of sex and relationship and drug education is good. However, policies to support this work are lacking. There is insufficient information available to ensure the aim of this work is clearly communicated to young people, staff, parents and other stakeholders and that young people understand their entitlement to services and their rights in respect of confidentiality.

12. The emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion in the curriculum framework is good. Diversity is promoted effectively through exploring other cultures and religions. However, there was little evidence of planned work to equip young people with the skills to understand and challenge inequality. Needs assessment is good and the service clearly identifies and implements work with its priority groups. This provision is successful in engaging vulnerable young people such as those leaving care; teenage parents; gay, lesbian and bisexual young people and those at risk of exclusion from school, in high quality informal education. Innovative strategies have been developed for meeting the needs of disabled young people but it is too early to judge impact. Strategies for ensuring

that youth service provision meets the needs of young people of black and minority ethnic backgrounds require further development.

13. Staff are generally effectively deployed and possess sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to undertake their roles. They have access to a very good range of staff development opportunities that are well linked to individual needs and service priorities. The majority of premises are suitable and increasing use of the Children's Services recently developed children's centres enhances the range of facilities available to young people.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. Strategic and operational leadership and management are strong. Youth service priorities are consistent with those in directorate and corporate plans. They are understood and implemented by staff at all levels. Performance against plans and targets is regularly monitored. However, procedures for assessing the quality of youth work through direct observation of practice require development and formalisation to secure continuous improvement.

15. Funding is satisfactory, though low in comparison to statistical neighbours. Resources are effectively deployed according to local needs. The council provided an additional £100,000 funding in 2007/08, to be maintained for the next three years. These funds are being efficiently used to pursue service development priorities. Value for money is good.

16. The youth service is highly regarded by its partners and good partnership arrangements enhance the range of services, facilities and provision available to young people. Strong partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector result in increased provision in the borough's outer wards. The youth service and voluntary organisations have developed a valuable scheme that validates arrangements for ensuring health and safety and the quality of youth work in the voluntary and community sector. Partnership work with the PCT and Connexions increases young people's access to a broad range of advice and sexual health services. A partnership with the Drug Action Team secures high quality drug education and access to substance misuse services through the Phaze project.

17. Young people's involvement in the strategic management of the service is good; the Youth Council influences the service plan and designed the process and criteria for Youth Opportunity Funding bids. Well conceived processes to involve vulnerable young people such as young people who have disabilities, those who are gay and lesbian and looked after young people at a strategic level are underway but it is too early to assess impact.

18. Policies to ensure that staff and young people are provided with safe and healthy working environments are in place and routinely implemented. Staff are trained and are confident in applying safeguarding procedures. The service's response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Education Needs and Disabilities Act 2001 is satisfactory.

19. Day to day management is effective and morale is good. The service is making steady progress towards achieving locally agreed targets, national benchmarks and performance indicators. However, judgements about progress are not sufficiently well informed by assessments of the overall quality of the service.

20. The newly introduced management information system is assisting the evaluation of value for money. It does not however, sufficiently incorporate detail on young people's participation and the impact of the service.