



Somerset Youth Service Report

Somerset Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

Publication Type	Published	Reference no.
All	13 March 2007	933

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Contents

Introduction	2
Part A: Summary of the report	
Main findings	2
Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes	3
Part C: Commentary on the Key Aspects	
Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice	4
Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources	5
Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management	6

Introduction

1. Somerset County Youth Service is located in the Children and Young People's Directorate. It provides a range of opportunities and support for young people aged 11 to 25 and gives priority to those aged 13 to 19. The head of youth services leads a team of five managers with responsibility for four geographical areas as well as county-wide roles which include young people's participation, quality development and business support. The service employs 148 youth workers, equivalent to 66 full-time staff. At the time of the inspection, the service was preparing to manage the move of a significant number of youth workers to locally based multi-agency teams as part of a major reorganisation of children's services.

2. Youth work is provided in 11 council owned young people's centres as well as a number of community and voluntary sector premises, schools and colleges. Provision also includes youth forums, detached work, outdoor activities and specialist projects, many delivered in partnership with other agencies. In 2006/7 the local authority budget for youth work was £2,974,000, of which £244,328 was allocated in grants to voluntary youth organisations. A further £195,000 was anticipated in external funding. The service reaches approximately 22% of its target age range.

3. The youth service inspection formed part of the Joint Area Review (JAR) of services for children and young people in Somerset. Inspectors considered the youth service's self assessment and met officers and a cross-section of staff. They reviewed key documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions, including work in the JAR neighbourhood study areas of Frome and Glastonbury.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Somerset Youth Service is outstanding and provides a model of best practice, both strategically and operationally. It delivers consistently high quality youth work that ensures good outcomes for young people. It has built an extensive range of effective partnerships and makes a significant contribution to the local authority's strategic policy and planning, particularly in relation to the development of integrated youth support services. Occasionally the recording of youth work does not do justice to the good progress made by young people. The service has embraced new challenges and approaches whilst retaining the strong educational focus of its work. At a time of significant change and reorganisation in the Children and Young People's Directorate, the youth service provides a firm foundation of effective practice on which to build and represents a very good return on the budget invested by the council.

Strengths

- Young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice.
- Support for vulnerable groups.
- A rich and diverse curriculum which is responsive to need.
- Well qualified, entrepreneurial staff who are committed to their work.
- Outstanding leadership and management and strong teamwork.
- Excellent partnerships which enhance opportunities and support for young people.

Areas for development

- In a time of significant change, build on the wide-ranging strengths of the youth service.
- Ensure that young people's good progress and achievement are consistently well recorded.

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	4
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	4

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 youth service's contribution to the Every Child Matters outcomes is excellent and its positive influence extends far beyond the high quality work delivered by its own staff. Over time, the rich and diverse range of provision has developed in response to changing need. More recently, in consultation with young people, the curriculum framework has been updated and mapped against

the Every Child Matters outcomes. Youth workers promote healthy life-styles very well and help young people make informed choices, for example about their relationships, diet and the use of drugs and alcohol. Through participation in stimulating youth work programmes, young people gain new skills and experiences and test out their attitudes and ideas. Dedicated work with some of the county's most vulnerable young people supports their social and emotional development and helps them face challenges and frustrations with confidence. The service has long championed young people's active involvement in local community affairs and in democratic decision-making helping to ensure that their contributions are prominent and influential.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. The inspection's findings concur with the local authority's self assessment. In three quarters of sessions observed, achievement and practice were good or better and in the rest, they were satisfactory. Relationships between young people and youth workers were almost always very good, providing a strong basis for the work. Young people responded enthusiastically to the interesting opportunities on offer. Achievement was outstanding at the Special Needs Activities Project where young people enjoyed creative sessions designed carefully to meet their diverse interests and abilities. Members spoke with pride about making an anti-bullying video, performing in a talent show and composing their own poems and music. With support from youth workers, they contributed regularly to planning and evaluation and kept their own records of achievement.

7. Across the wide range of provision which includes youth clubs, music and sport programmes, discussion groups and school-based activities, young people make particularly good progress in their personal and social development and acquire new skills, knowledge and positive personal qualities. A growing number gain qualifications and formal recognition for their achievements, for example in voluntary work, peer mentoring and outdoor pursuits. Many participate in the popular and successful Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. Challenging service-wide targets for accreditation in other settings have also been exceeded.

8. Young people make a very good contribution to decision making both in the youth service and in their local communities. Through West Somerset District Action Group and other youth forum-type activities, young people have campaigned successfully for improved leisure facilities and public transport and developed an impressive repertoire of communication and teamwork skills which helps them argue their case with key decision makers and community leaders.

9. Young people displaying more challenging behaviour often make small, but nonetheless significant, improvements showing more sensitivity in their relationships with others. As a result of recent training, youth workers demonstrate greater confidence and skill in managing the potentially disruptive situations that arise in everyday youth work. However in a few sessions, typically with a relatively wide age range, youth workers did not always engage the boisterous minority fully, leaving them to move from one activity to another with the potential for learning sometimes lost.

10. The most effective work is fun, has an explicit focus on learning and takes careful account of the different starting points of young people and their progress to date. Youth workers maintain a good balance between structure and informality. While most sessions are carefully planned to achieve this, the service recognises that the quality of record keeping is mixed and does not always capture the good progress that young people make.

11. Young people respond very well when given leadership roles within their centre or project, but occasionally youth workers do not delegate responsibility as much as they usefully could. Youth workers have extensive knowledge of the areas in which they work and know many young people and their families very well. They are often seen by the community as the natural advocate for youth issues and concerns. Effective support in both youth clubs and in more specialist projects is given to individuals who need help to manage significant challenges or change in their lives. Youth workers know how to gain young people's trust quickly and create a safe environment in which sensitive issues can be discussed candidly.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

12. The quality of the curriculum and the use of resources are excellent. Over a number of years, the service has developed a rich and diverse range of provision in response to changing need. The curriculum is inclusive, attractive and well designed. Very effective strategies to reach vulnerable and marginalised groups ensure that young people such as care leavers, young parents, those at risk of exclusion from school and young people with learning, physical or emotional difficulties enjoy good access to the support and opportunity that youth work affords. The need to increase the participation of young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is rightly prioritised in the latest delivery plans and the service has forged good links with number of community groups to support this work. In partnership with well established voluntary sector organisations, such as Somerset Rural Youth Project and Somerset Young Farmers, young people in some of the most remote communities are well served.

13. Youth workers have a good understanding of the curriculum framework which has recently been updated and mapped against the Every Child Matters outcomes. Supporting documentation, which helps staff plan, develop and evaluate their work, has also been revised and a well planned programme of on-going training and support is in place to ensure its consistent application across the service.

14. Youth workers are well qualified, entrepreneurial and committed to the young people they work with. A very good staff development and training programme, alongside opportunities for redeployment and secondment, ensures skills and expertise are current and staff are well informed about key developments in youth work policy and approaches. A well managed and effective administration team provides very good support to front line staff and senior managers.

15. Capital investment is improving the quality and accessibility of accommodation and creative use is made of a wide range of community owned buildings. However, not all premises meet the high standards to which the service aspires. The central equipment base, including a fleet of minibuses, is well used by youth workers and staff from other organisations. The service has developed an accessible website which provides a wide range of useful information for staff and services users.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Strategic and operational leadership and management of the youth service are outstanding. The head of youth services provides excellent leadership and is ably supported by a team of experienced, skilled and forward-thinking managers. The youth service plan sets a clear direction for the work and priorities are well understood by key partners and staff. The service has worked assiduously to tackle the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection. A very good contribution is made to council-wide priorities: the service plays a major role in supporting equality and diversity, in promoting community safety and in developing young people's participation. The local authority budget for youth work is in line with similar councils, however the service reaches a high and increasing proportion of its target age range and performance against local and national targets is good and improving. Managers control expenditure effectively and the service provides very good value for money.

17. Effective steps are taken to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people and youth workers. The statutory requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act are met.

18. The democratic culture of the youth service is reflected in its strong team work and open communication. Managers at all levels provide excellent day-to-day support for their staff. Young people have many opportunities to contribute to decision making at county and local level and receive very good support to oversee the substantial resources for the Youth Opportunities and Capital Fund.

19. Performance management is effective. The service has very good management information and monitors progress against unit, area and county-wide targets rigorously. As part of its sound quality assurance arrangements, a successful peer inspection programme has been developed. However, this has

been suspended temporarily while managers focus on the imminent reorganisation of services for young people within the new directorate.

20. Excellent partnership arrangements, many attracting good levels of external funding, enhance the range and quality of provision. Work with Connexions, the police, health partners, district, town and parish councils, as well as a growing number of schools and colleges is well managed, productive and mutually beneficial. The flexibility and responsiveness of the service and its staff are valued highly by key partners. The service has been instrumental in building the capacity of voluntary youth organisations through its grant aid and training programme and the provision of good professional advice and support to individual managers.

21. The service is entering a period of significant change and uncertainty. Morale is high although there are understandable concerns about the changes that the new multi-agency teams will bring. Staff have yet to be reassured with detailed plans of how the current high standards of achievement and the quality of youth work practice will be secured and built upon.