



**Better  
education  
and care**

# Windsor and Maidenhead Youth Service Report

Windsor and Maidenhead Children's Services Authority  
Area

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## Introduction

1. The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Youth Service operates a range of provision for 11 to 25 year olds, but gives priority to those aged 13 to 19. Youth work is provided in nine youth centres and a specialist advice centre, as well as borough-wide programmes that encompass outdoor education, award schemes, detached work, counselling and youth forums. There are 29 full-time equivalent (fte) youth work staff, comprising of two senior managers, four area team leaders, 17 full-time and 53 part-time youth workers, supported by a central administration and facilities team. Three personal advisors are employed as part of a contract with Connexions Berkshire. Based in the Leisure, Culture and Property Services Directorate, the service has a budget of £1,079,000 which is augmented by approximately £180,000 from external funding. The service reaches a high proportion of young people in the 13 to 19 age range compared to statistical neighbours and the national benchmark of 25%.

2. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to include the inspection of the youth service. Inspectors scrutinised the service's self-assessment and met managers and a cross-section of staff and partners. They reviewed key documentation and observed a small sample of sessions, including work in the Ellington area, as part of the JAR neighbourhood study.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. This is a good service that provides good value for money. Many young people achieve well and youth workers engage successfully with vulnerable and challenging groups. Youth work programmes have a strong educational focus and very good partnership arrangements ensure a diverse range of provision and efficient use of resources. Youth service managers provide effective leadership and there is a good level of support and investment from the council. Quality assurance and management information systems are under-developed. The self-assessment is accurate and provides a clear steer for further improvement.

#### Strengths

- Many young people achieve high standards.
- There is a comprehensive range of provision and the quality of youth work is good.
- The service is well led.
- Young people make a good contribution to service-wide policy and development.
- Partnerships are productive and well managed.

## Areas for development

- Young people are insufficiently involved in evaluation.
- The training programme has not kept pace with the changing needs of the service.
- Quality assurance and management information systems require strengthening.

## 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:** A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 3:** A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 2:** A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 1:** A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

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

4. The service makes a good contribution to outcomes in each of the five Every Child Matters areas. Many young people who are reached by the service gain useful information about healthy life-styles through their discussions about diet, drugs and leisure. An accessible range of physical and outdoor activities helps them gain new skills, whilst keeping active. An increasing number of young people gain recognition for their achievement through formal accreditation and award schemes. Good emotional support, as well as specialist counselling and advice services, help young people cope with eventualities such as family breakdown or peer pressure. The service has been particularly successful in engaging young people at risk of, or involved in, anti-social behaviour and provides purposeful activities which increase their self-esteem and respect for others. Through their participation in action groups, youth forums and voluntary work, young people make a good contribution to decision making, as well as the design and development of local services. Those who are most likely to disengage or under-achieve at school or college are given support to tackle the barriers they face in reaching their potential. Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place.

## Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Many young people achieve well and make significant progress through their involvement with the service. They attend regularly and engage enthusiastically in activities that are both educational and enjoyable. Where specific targets are set, for example in the growing range of programmes leading to accreditation and/or qualifications, young people are well motivated and acquire new skills and knowledge that enhance their personal development. Young people's achievements are often celebrated in attractive displays and photographic records. In outdoor education programmes, young people learn about health and safety and quickly gain basic skills, for example in kayaking, canoeing and climbing. Young women at a dance project understood the importance of warm-up exercises, took the initiative in rehearsing steps learned in previous sessions and gave each other encouraging feedback.

6. Young people are self confident and relate well to adults. Frequently, they negotiate their own ground rules and membership contracts. In group activities, participants co-operate well and demonstrate mutual respect. Behaviour occasionally lapsed when sessions lacked focus or where youth workers failed to challenge the limited ambitions of a small minority. Through the mobile project, very good progress was made by a group of young men with a history of disruptive behaviour in the local community. They learned to appreciate the impact of their actions on others and manage more effectively the frustrations and difficulties they faced. In both youth clubs and detached settings, young people readily sought information and advice on matters such as sexual health and relationships.

7. The quality of youth work is good. Sessions strike an appropriate balance between structure and informality and provide a stimulating mix of well-paced activities. Workers are sensitive to the often diverse interests and abilities of the young people in their charge. A thorough analysis of need securely underpins much of the targeted work; however, it is less systematic in some of the more universal provision. Relationships are very good and youth workers confidently challenge inappropriate language and behaviour.

8. Staff provide effective leadership and positive role models that young people often seek to emulate. Programmes are particularly successful where they encourage young people to assume increasing levels of responsibility, for example, as volunteers in youth centres and as members of community action groups. Youth workers are responsive to individual requests for help and make appropriate referrals to specialist services, such as counselling and careers advice. In the best work, planning was regular, followed an established pattern and involved young people consistently. In a minority of sessions, planning was cursory. Across the

service as a whole, young people were not systematically involved in reviewing what they had learned.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The service provides a comprehensive range of high quality programmes and activities. Effective curriculum leadership, alongside the extensive network of partnerships, has ensured that provision is well planned with a strong educational focus. Centre-based work, which meets the needs in local areas, is complemented by borough-wide programmes such as detached projects and participation initiatives. Accreditation has been introduced successfully in a growing number of settings and there is a well established Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

10. A strong commitment to inclusion underpins the work. Specialist projects are carefully designed and engage successfully with hard to reach and vulnerable groups, such as young parents and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The service is taking positive steps to address gaps identified in services for young carers and Asian young women. Youth workers have a good understanding of the curriculum framework and apply it flexibly and sensitively according to local circumstances. The service rightly recognises that the planning and evaluation tools need to be simplified to ensure they are easier to use.

11. Staff are deployed effectively to meet service priorities and to make the best use of their diverse skills, expertise and backgrounds. The service has been proactive in tackling recruitment and retention difficulties through the development of a number of trainee and specialist posts. However, the training programme has not kept pace with the changing staff profile and the development needs of the service and this is a weakness.

12. The council has made a significant investment in buildings and facilities for youth work, above and beyond improvements made as part of its Special Education Needs and Disability Discrimination Act (SENDA) action plan. Youth centres provide a welcoming and comfortable environment, are often shared with a wide range of community groups and are well maintained by the central facilities team. Good specialist resources support the borough-wide work and regular use is made of outdoor settings, both locally and further a field.

## Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

13. The service is well led and forward looking. Managers have a very good understanding of the service's strengths and weaknesses and the self-assessment provides a clear steer for further improvement. The head of service has overseen a successful programme of modernisation and development which has aligned the service well with its key partners. The business plan sets out clear objectives for youth work which are understood by all staff.

14. A very good contribution is made to council priorities, particularly in the areas of social inclusion, community safety and youth involvement. The council's good support and long-standing investment in youth work have enabled the service to consolidate its more traditional provision, as well as develop new and innovative approaches. Spending on youth work is above that of similar authorities; however, in the light of the high proportion of young people reached, overall unit costs are low. Performance against local and national benchmarks is good and improving. At the time of the inspection, a detailed analysis of need was underway to inform service-wide planning and the deployment of resources in the new financial year. Statutory requirements in respect of SENDA are met and the service plays a key role in developing and implementing all aspects of the council's diversity and equity policy. Youth workers understand their responsibilities in relation to child protection and appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out. Good specialist advice in outdoor education is provided to other council services, schools and external partners.

15. Young people have had a discernable impact on recruitment practices and the development of new provision. The service has a good track record in involving young people in research and consultation and provides effective support for the wide-ranging activities of the borough's youth forum.

16. Partnership work is guided by clear strategic priorities. Strong links with statutory and voluntary organisations enhance support for young people in the priority age range, whilst collaboration with the Children's Fund and leisure services has increased complementary provision for younger children and families. The contract with Connexions Berkshire draws effectively on the strengths and resources of both partners and ensures good support for some of the borough's most vulnerable teenagers. Long-standing contractual agreements with youth centre management committees have served the council and local communities well thus far. However, it is timely to review them in the light of wider service and partnership demands.

17. The day-to-day management of the service is generally good. Youth workers have welcomed the recent re-organisation of the service into four distinct but inter-related teams. Communication has improved, morale is high and staff are beginning to share their skills and resources more effectively. However, area team leader roles are not fully embedded and there is some inconsistent practice, for example, in planning and performance management at local level.

18. Quality assurance systems are under developed: young people are not involved in the current arrangements and the agreed programme of youth work observations is not applied to all parts of the service. The collection and use of data have improved substantially and progress against key performance indicators and national benchmarks is reviewed regularly. Management information systems do not yet provide a fully comprehensive picture of the quality of outcomes for all young people in contact with the service and work is in progress to address this.