



Staffordshire youth service report

Staffordshire Children's Services Authority Area

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Introduction

1. Staffordshire youth service provides a range of youth work opportunities in youth centres, schools, community centres, village halls, mobile units and detached projects. The service is structured in four divisions, led by the principal youth officer and three deputies. Each division has a divisional manager. There are 58 full-time and 194 part-time workers, giving a full-time equivalent of 100 youth workers. The service is located within the Children and Lifelong Learning Division of the local authority. The budget made available by the local authority in 2004–05 was £6.1 million. In 2003–04 it was estimated that 21% of young people aged 13–19 were reached by the service, with current year figures showing significant growth.

2. The joint area review was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self-assessment and met with officers and a cross-section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observations of a small sample of youth work sessions in the Chadsmoor and Burton districts, as part of the neighbourhood study, as well as observations within each district.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. The service is good and provides good value for money. Young people achieve well and take an active part in local democratic processes. Youth workers are strongly committed to young people's development. Their work with priority groups is particularly effective. Leaders have managed change well. Partnerships are generally strong but more needs to be done to maximise their potential.

Strengths

- There are many examples of good and very good achievements of young people, particularly in targeted youth work.
- Structures for engaging young people in local democracy are well developed.
- Much of the youth work practice is good or very good.
- There is much effective work in schools which supports individuals' personal and social development, achievement and progression.
- The management team provides very good leadership.

- Strong partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector enhance the range of provision and promote participation.

Areas for development

- There is not enough focus in county level plans for the development of provision for some minority groups.
- Protocols for partnerships with some key agencies are underdeveloped.
- Too many part-time staff are unqualified.
- Cost-effectiveness is not rigorously assessed.
- Some workers in post before current legislation have not received enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks.

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 for children and young people. Health is one of the three key themes of the service and there are effective programmes in the areas of sex and relationships, and drugs and alcohol education. Well-developed health and safety policies ensure that activities are carried out safely. The revised child protection policy is well understood by workers. The youth service makes a significant contribution to supporting the enjoyment and achievement of young people. They benefit from many recreational opportunities, for example in youth centres, summer play schemes and one-off events such as arts festivals. The youth service has developed effective structures for participation in local democracy. There are good examples

of effective partnership working with Connexions, for example in tracking and guiding young people aged 17 who are not in employment, education or training.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. There are many examples of good and very good achievements of young people, particularly in targeted youth work. Young people can explain their motivation for becoming involved, what they have learned and how they would use this. They develop their skills and knowledge in a broad range of areas, including sexual health, drug and alcohol misuse, relationships and citizenship. Youth work in schools is particularly effective in supporting individual young people's achievement through their increased confidence and self-esteem, improved behaviour and achievement of qualifications. For example, in a peer mentoring project, young people learn how to become responsible members of the school community. Those on alternative education programmes are helped to resolve personal conflicts.

6. Where the service works with vulnerable groups, the outcomes are good. On the WIN project, which is aimed at young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, all are making progress in achieving accreditation. Looked after young people gained good knowledge and skills from a DVD project on leaving care. They developed their knowledge of film technique, and increased their awareness of healthy eating, budgeting, accommodation issues and tenancy rights and responsibilities. All had gained Millennium Volunteer accreditation.

7. The youth service has developed effective structures for engaging young people in local democracy. Local forums and the Youth Action Council (YAK) provide good opportunities for participation. Information from the forums provides items for discussion at the YAK meetings. YAK is represented on the council leaders' advisory board, a body providing advice to elected members. There are many tangible outcomes for young people from the Speakout conferences, organised by YAK. The service has recognised that there is scope for increasing the involvement of young people who would not naturally consider joining such ventures.

8. In many settings, young people achieve awards through a variety of accreditation routes. The service facilitates the county's Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, with growing numbers taking part and a significant proportion achieving success. While in some areas many young people are working successfully towards the Staffordshire 'Passport to Success', a youth service developed accreditation route, its take-up in some parts of the county is low. The service is currently not meeting its own target for accredited outcomes.

9. A high proportion of youth work practice in sessions observed was good or better; none was unsatisfactory. Sessions are well planned, with close attention to the needs of the young people in the local area. In most sessions there is effective evaluation. Youth workers lead discussions skilfully to focus on important issues relating to the aims of the session. They also challenge young people's negative statements on issues such as race and sexuality. Good use is made of specialist workers. Young people are engaged well in detached work. Staff are strongly committed to the aims of the service and, in particular, to their work in supporting young people's development. In a small minority of open access sessions, there was insufficient focus on acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The service's well-established curriculum framework is used effectively to assist planning. Three curriculum themes – health, personal development and citizenship – drive all youth work, its evaluation and action planning. Workers have some autonomy within this broad framework to meet local needs and apply this well. The curriculum is reviewed annually and amended to reflect local and national initiatives and is currently being amended to reflect the wider children's services agenda. While there are many good examples of young people involved in planning sessions at local level, there is a minority of sessions where this is not sufficiently well developed.

11. The service has a strong focus on inclusion, for example through its school-based and detached work programmes. It works well in partnership with many schools and the range of work undertaken includes: alternative curriculum; drugs education; lunch clubs; peer health; personal and social education; information, advice and guidance; buddying; and facilitating the school council. Open access provision is also available in 20 schools. The service facilitates the Duke of Edinburgh award at over 30 schools. Its REACH programme is for pupils at Key Stage 4 who have been permanently excluded. Young people on this programme attend well. Case studies show the positive impact of the programme on individuals, although occasionally young people are not fully occupied. The service develops programmes in response to needs identified by the school, for example peer mentoring. It has recognised that there is scope for developing more partnership work with some schools, for example in the Chads Moor area. Young people take part in international visits, and the service has particularly strong links with Ghana.

12. The service has a good recruitment and retention strategy. To address staff shortages, it has developed opportunities for working towards qualifications including a foundation degree in partnership with Staffordshire University. The county has recruited eight senior practitioners who give effective support to workers who are underperforming or otherwise need support. While the service has acted to provide a means for workers to become qualified, the current level of unqualified part-time workers is too high.

13. Youth centres are bright and welcoming and provide a safe environment. Workers and young people have created colourful and attractive displays promoting the service and celebrating young people's achievements. Many centres have very good ICT facilities with access to the council's intranet and the Internet. Sports and arts facilities are available. Resources are often shared efficiently between centres and with other agencies. The new centre at Cannock is an excellent facility. Although the service provides an extensive summer programme, there are some young people for whom access to this programme is difficult. The service meets its statutory duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. Whilst the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2001 (SENDA) action plan is almost complete, two buildings remain that do not have adequate access for young people with limited mobility. In some of the observations of youth work carried out, the staffing levels were high, even taking into account the nature of the programmes.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. The very good leadership from the principal youth officer, ably supported by the senior team, has secured significant improvements in the service, particularly in the quality of youth work practice. Effective action was taken to address issues that were identified in the council's best value review of the service. Staff morale has been maintained throughout a period of significant change. The service is well funded and receives excellent support from elected members. Staff supervision is effective.

15. The management structure, introduced two years ago, has supported change effectively. Divisional managers give good support to district teams. Regular, scheduled meetings ensure that communications are good. Workers are well-informed about issues facing the service and its achievements, and benefit from opportunities to share good practice. The administrative team provides good support. While the structure has enabled key developments to take place, the roles of the deputies and some middle managers are in need of review. The service has an impressive range of performance data at outlet, division and county level, which is presented in a helpful format. The application of this data is under-developed in some projects and for measuring cost-effectiveness.

16. Revised quality assurance arrangements have been put in place and there is good evidence that this has led to improvements in youth work practice. Not all projects have yet been reviewed under the new system. The views of young people about the quality of provision are considered through the use of surveys, but they are currently not involved in observations. Workers conduct thorough self-assessment and develop action plans, although links between them are not always clear.

17. There is good partnership working between the youth service and the voluntary sector through the Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS). A seconded youth service manager to SCVYS has helped to strengthen working arrangements, and this partnership has led to increased participation by young people.

18. Equality and diversity approaches are satisfactory and meet statutory requirements. Local planning is needs led, and there are many examples of effective curriculum projects for specific groups, which have been developed as a result of workers' local knowledge. There is insufficient emphasis in county level plans on the development of provision for young people who are looked after or have learning difficulties and disabilities. Not enough is done to guide local planning to meet the needs of groups such as travellers or gay and lesbian young people.

19. Staff are fully aware of the new child protection guidelines. Although there are some workers who were in post before current legislation, who have not received enhanced CRB checks, all new staff are fully checked and the service works within the agreed policy of the council. Rigorous health and safety checks on buildings are carried out regularly and risk assessments are completed for all youth work.

20. There is much good partnership work taking place at local level but protocols for joint working and information sharing, and the guidelines to staff on referrals, are under-developed. In particular there are under-developed protocols for joint working with the youth offending service, social services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and district councils. The protocol for joint working with Connexions does not make sufficiently clear the arrangements for the sharing of information.