

Shropshire Youth Service

Shropshire Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Shropshire has a population of 289,000 and there are about 26,500 young people in the 13 to 19 age group, around 1.2% of whom are of minority ethnic origin. Local authority youth work is provided mainly by the Youth Service (YS) in partnership with the Connexions service through three area teams using nine youth centres. Youth work is also delivered in some 50 locations across the county often using mobile provision, buses and facilities which are leased or rented.
2. Since April 2007, the youth service is located within the newly formed Youth Support Division of the Children and Young People's Directorate of the council. A core budget has been allocated for 2006-07 to youth work of £2.070 million with funding from other sources amounting to £482,593 giving a gross budget of £2.550 million. The staffing complement is equivalent to some 38.6 full-time posts. During 2006-07, 18% of young people aged 13-19 participate in the provision.
3. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

4. The quality of youth work provision in Shropshire is good. A clear strategic direction is provided and sufficient provision of youth work is made in conjunction with the Connexions service and partnerships with the voluntary sector. Young people typically achieve high standards. One of the most impressive features is the consistently high quality of youth work practice. Staff are well qualified and establish good relationships with young people. They are supported by a carefully judged workforce development programme which both full and part-time staff access regularly. The curriculum offer to young people is a good one which is delivered with enthusiasm. Most young people report that they get involved with the youth service primarily to enjoy themselves. Many gain useful additions to their curriculum vitae which they see as a useful bonus. Great care is taken to ensure that opportunities for accreditation are not gained at the expense of good youth work practice. The service makes an effective contribution to the Every Child Matters outcomes, especially for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The needs analysis is thorough and many young people actively participate to help shape provision locally and to make their voices heard in civic affairs. Leadership and management are routinely good at all levels and morale is high. The close partnership with Connexions staff in piloting joint working arrangements in the Ludlow area bodes well for the future. Despite some acknowledged difficulties with the collection and use of management information, communications are generally good and quality assurance arrangements are fit for purpose. Partners are comfortable with the way the service is moving forward and

about plans to involve them in the process, but whether or not Shropshire can instigate the reforms it is making by September 2008 is an open question.

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	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: excellent / outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

Strengths

- The service has the strong support of elected members and ambition is strong.
- Young people demonstrate high standards of achievement.
- Good youth work practice was seen consistently across a wide range of provision.
- A strong contribution is being made to Every Child Matters outcomes, especially for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Workforce development policies and practices are effective.
- Young people are involved effectively in developing the service.

Areas for development

- Staff are not always effectively deployed.
- Better session planning and evaluation would allow workers to meet more effectively young people's individual needs.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Achievement is good. Most of the young people who use the youth service enjoy themselves and make good progress. Young people participate with a real sense of commitment and enthusiasm. This results in much effective learning and a growing sense of confidence. Young people frequently speak about the impact the activities they are engaged with have on the way they act and think. For example, at the Bishops Castle allotment project the group meet regularly to grow their own fruit and vegetables which they do very successfully. They are also keen to pass on their expertise to others.

6. Young people are for the most part proactive in bringing their concerns and preferences to staff and in ensuring these are acted upon. Nowhere was this more clearly seen than at the Speaking Out Group Day Event where over 70 young people gave up a day of their holidays to comment on the youth curriculum offer and review the youth manifesto.

7. More young people are now gaining accreditation either through the Duke of Edinburgh's award or one of the many other accredited pathways provided. Young people learn a good range of useful knowledge and skills such as how to plan outdoor expeditions and make music. The service has taken care to expand the range of activities that are to be accredited sensitively so that young people enjoy first and gain an accreditation second. At a residential conference for young carers, the group participated with enthusiasm and commitment and developed their creative and social skills. They designed and made musical instruments from junk before performing with them as a group. Afterwards they completed their diaries which would contribute to the evidence for an Arts Award.

8. One of the most impressive features was the tolerance, understanding and sensitivity displayed by young people to one another and to workers. This was much in evidence at the Monkmoor Lodge Forum Group. At an outstanding session, young people carefully chose a name for their new premises and reflected on the design of the building they had lobbied for. Helped by some well judged worker interventions and peer leadership the views of all present were considered before any decision was reached. They discussed issues of concern to them with maturity and insight and were sufficiently confident to disagree and challenge those answers they judged unsatisfactory.

9. The quality of youth work practice is consistently good and in some instances is outstanding. Through the Highley detached project for example, workers have developed a sound knowledge of the young people and the issues impacting on their lives in this isolated community. Through this project they have helped to develop a positive culture where young people's attitudes reflects the trust and respect they enjoy.

10. Nearly all workers establish trusting relationships with young people, many of whom are vulnerable to exclusion from school or are challenging either in terms of behaviour or because of their physical and emotional needs. Most workers are able to use this trust effectively to ensure the groups they work with succeed in what they are doing. However not all plan their work to target the needs of individuals within the group or evaluate sessions in ways that assess the progress they are making.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum and resources is good. A wide range of provision is made at the main youth centres as well as through detached and outreach work. Over 600 young people take part in weekend activities, overseas trips, residential and outdoor activities. Participation by young people across the service is above the national benchmark.

12. The curriculum framework provides a sound basis for planning and nearly all workers apply it effectively. The service makes a good contribution to the Every Child Matters outcomes particularly in supporting young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The service is making a useful contribution to community safety and to reducing anti-social behaviour through the club, outreach and detached work. The contribution made to informing young people of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and promoting sexual health is also prominent in the curriculum plans.

13. The service is an inclusive one that successfully targets many vulnerable groups and young people although too little work is undertaken with those who are lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender. Some of the one-to-one work arises through the partnership with the Connexions service. For example, following a Connexions referral a worker played a valuable role in helping a young person to gain the confidence to skilfully write and successfully present an information technology course to a group of adults keen to improve their understanding of computer technology.

14. The quality of accommodation for youth work is uneven although most is accessible, safe and well maintained. It ranges from state-of the-art facilities in the Grange and Ludlow Centres to much less attractive facilities in some other settings. Information and Communications Technology is not as widely used as it could and should be. This is acknowledged in the position statement.

15. Both full and part-time staff are well qualified and are well supported and guided. However, at several sessions staff were not always deployed efficiently. Sometimes too many workers were present in relation to anticipated numbers of young people.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Leadership and management of the service are good. The council's ambition for young people and youth work is high and there is clear strategic direction. Sufficient youth work is secured helped by the strong support of elected members. The decision to bring Connexions into a new Youth Support Division together with the Youth Service and the Substance Misuse Team ensures that youth developments are high on the agenda. The Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS) has set out its vision for the Youth Offer. Its priorities are widely shared by partners who appreciate the regular and sensitive consultations with the service. Shropshire has also been careful to ensure young people are fully consulted and their views used to help steer these developments.

17. The challenges created by IYSS developments are being managed well and opportunities for expanding capacity are being exploited. For example, before major structural changes are made to staff roles and responsibilities a possible model is being piloted first in the south of the county. Here services are co-located and an integrated management arrangement applied. Early indications are that it is working effectively. The authority has chosen not to actively consider the commissioning of work to voluntary and commercial organisations on a large scale. It has remained content with delivery resting predominantly with existing providers. The local authority establishes clear priorities for the work of the service through the Corporate Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan. Priorities are translated into the service's own targets in the Team Action Plan.

18. Among the workforce morale is high. Workers greatly appreciate the strong commitment made to developing youth services and most are looking forward to the challenges this will bring. Good support is provided for workers on a day-to-day basis and staff are well informed about the changes that affect their roles and responsibilities.

19. Partnership working is strong among both internal and external partners and the service benefits from its close liaison with the Connexions service as well as from its representation on important inter agency working groups. The main agreements are with the voluntary sector and the Shropshire Youth Association. These agreements, underpinned by Service Level Agreements, are an efficient and effective way of delivering a wider range of activities across the county. For example, through its partnership work with the Belmont Arts Centre, the service is able to enable young people who they have jointly targeted to work with specialist staff and state of the art facilities on activities which they would otherwise not have access to.

20. Funding is broadly in line with comparable authorities. Decisions about priorities are sufficiently informed by evidence of the impact of existing work for young people. Performance management and quality assurance processes are effective and young people are regularly involved in commenting on, or evaluating, local provision not least through the peer review monitoring scheme.