



Stockport youth service report

Stockport children's services authority area

**Better
education
and care**

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Introduction

1. Stockport youth service operates a range of projects and provision across the borough. There are eight local authority youth centres, two voluntary-sector centres and seven other sites, as well as outreach youth work projects and three mobile units. It has three senior managers and is led by the corporate head of youth services. There are 24 full-time and 111 part-time workers, which equates to a full-time equivalent of 56.3 youth workers. The service is located within the Inclusive Communities section of the children and young people's directorate of the local authority. The net budget made available by the local authority in 2005–06 is £2.23 million and an additional £400,000 has been secured from external sources. It is estimated that 26% of young people aged 13–19 are reached annually by the service.

2. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self-assessment and met officers and a cross-section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a small sample of youth work sessions in the Davenport and Cale Green district as part of the JAR neighbourhood study area, as well as other observations of practice across the borough.

Part A: summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Stockport youth service is a good service which provides satisfactory value for money. Young people, especially those who are vulnerable, achieve well and make good progress in their personal and social development. The quality of youth work is good and the majority of workers are well qualified and experienced. The proportion of the local authority education budget spent on the youth service is in line with national averages. Managers ensure that resources are deployed appropriately. Effective partnerships and multi-agency working support a broad range of provision. A clear, strategic direction for the service has been established, but changes to the structure of the service are incomplete and hinder progress. Strengths and areas for improvement are well understood by service managers, including the need to develop the involvement of young people in decision-making and evaluation within the service.

Strengths

- A significant proportion of young people make good progress in their personal and social development.
- Experienced and committed youth workers provide wide-ranging and relevant opportunities that motivate young people.

- Effective multi-agency work supports many vulnerable young people.
- Effective partnerships are in place with statutory bodies, the voluntary sector and other groups.
- The youth service is well led and managed.

Areas for development

- Involve young people in contributing to the planning and management of the service.
- Complete the implementation of the new structure as quickly as possible.
- Implement strategies to measure cost-effectiveness including the quality of management information.

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	2

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 an effective contribution to outcomes in a number of areas. Well-managed information, advice and counselling enable many young people, especially those seeking help with sexual health issues, to be provided with suitable support and, when appropriate, referral to specialist health and welfare services. Projects to support young people with mental health problems

are well conceived and enable young people to take greater personal responsibility. Programmes and activities are risk-assessed to ensure the safety of young people taking part in them. The corporate youth strategy enables a good number of young people to make significant contributions to council departments and statutory agencies at both strategic and operational levels. Young people, including those who are looked after by the local authority and others with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress with their personal and social development, but the needs of some groups, including care leavers and young carers, are catered for less well. Through youth centres and projects, many young people access opportunities to learn, be challenged and enjoy themselves.

Part C: commentary on the key aspects

Key aspect 1: standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

5. The standard of young people's achievement is good. Young people gain knowledge, skills and understanding through their work with the service. They are helped to realise their own goals and to acquire recognised qualifications through, for example, the John Muir awards and the Greater Manchester open college federation. In one session, young people were comparing Stockport with Sunderland following a residential visit and produced thoughtful records of their experiences which contributed to an ASDAN award. Young people benefit from being peer educators and Millennium Volunteers and others, including those from vulnerable groups, take part in and complete Duke of Edinburgh awards.

6. The majority of young people make good progress in their personal and social development. Their achievements are recognised and celebrated through presentations and displays. At a meeting of Diverse Not Different, a forum for young people with disabilities, young people visited a 'paint your own pottery' studio as part of a programme to assess accessibility to leisure facilities. Through their involvement, they increased their self-confidence and made a positive contribution to improving provision for others with a disability. A vibrant youth council, membership of partnership boards and forums for particular groups of young people, together with the UK youth parliament, are among a range of excellent opportunities for young people to plan and participate in activities across the borough and for their voices to be heard. In too many cases, however, young people do not receive feedback from the local authority or partners following consultation programmes.

7. The quality of youth work is good. Experienced and committed youth workers provide wide-ranging and relevant opportunities to motivate young people. The majority of work is well planned, with a variety of activities commensurate with the needs of different groups of young people. Young people respond well to workers and attend sessions expecting to enjoy themselves and to do something worthwhile. In a session for young people with mental health problems, workers

established a safe and trusting environment where participants shared feelings and supported each other. Workers' interventions were discrete and appropriate; planned activities reinforced basic values of care and consideration for each other and all present subscribed to agreed ground rules. In less successful practice, workers are less sure of their roles in relation to other partners and work focuses on the activity rather than on planned outcomes.

Key aspect 2: quality of curriculum and resources

8. The quality of curriculum and resources is good overall but vacancies in the management team mean that the curriculum is not sufficiently monitored. There is a good balance of educational and recreational opportunities. Service documents, however, do not help workers to evaluate outcomes sufficiently. Attempts to link the curriculum to the five *Every child matters* outcomes are often not understood well enough by workers or appropriately targeted to specific criteria.

9. The service provides a diverse range of youth activities which includes clubs, outdoor education, health education provision and Central Youth, a well-used information, advice and counselling service. A high proportion of young people develop skills and interests from their participation in dance, drama, residential visits and outdoor pursuits. Young people, including those who do not engage regularly with the service, benefit from the support and guidance provided by the health education development team. Detached work is well established but the service is taking further steps to improve its effectiveness in supporting young people in the locations of greatest need. While the majority of the building stock used by the service is old, workers and young people make positive efforts to ensure that they provide attractive and welcoming venues and are supported with good resources. An audit of premises has been conducted in line with the requirements of the Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001. Some premises shared with other providers do not allow easy access for people with restricted mobility.

10. Many examples of good work with vulnerable young people are evident, including, for example, projects such as Youthful Minds, which provides opportunities for young people with mental health problems, and the Base, a resource for lesbian and gay young people. The service complies with the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Race relations are promoted positively. One programme effectively brings together young people of Asian heritage with those from a predominantly white background to challenge stereotypical attitudes. The annual *Kult'cha* festival has 'migration and heritage' as its focus this year and involves young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, from across all projects and clubs. The service works well with those young people who engage with it over time, but it is less active in following up on those who access services less regularly. For example, the 16–19 age group is under-represented.

11. The service has a good proportion of well-qualified and experienced staff although recruitment and retention is a problem. An annual training week ensures that all workers receive a minimum level of staff development. This is supplemented by good access to a staff training programme. Few opportunities exist, however, for workers to share and then implement good practice.

Key aspect 3: leadership and management

12. Strategic and operational leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The service makes effective contributions to the council's corporate plans and to national priorities, and is well placed strategically within the children and young people's directorate. The youth service reaches about 26% of the 13–19 age range – a significant improvement from the previous year. It receives a budget in line with the national average and, in the last year, has been more vigilant in seeking improved value for money. Criminal Record Bureau checks are made on all staff prior to working with young people and the local authority maintains a three-year review of existing staff.

13. The leadership and strategic direction provided by the recently appointed head of services for young people is recognised as a strength and valued by senior managers and youth workers. A new staffing structure is being put in place with the majority of senior workers taking on new responsibilities. However, this reorganisation is incomplete and there are currently deficiencies within the management of the youth service. A budget overspend earlier in the year has been managed effectively through improved controls. The need to re-adjust priorities has resulted in delays, for example, in completing the strategic plan for 2005–06 and planned updates of the curriculum and the equality and diversity policy.

14. There is an increased awareness of the strengths, weaknesses and areas for development that are clearly articulated in the self-assessment and understood by staff at all levels of the service. Centres and projects have produced thorough development and improvement plans in line with an analysis of the needs of their areas. Senior managers monitor and report effectively on the work of area managers who, in turn, are responsible for assuring the quality of work with young people. Supervision and appraisal are effective and valued by workers. However, specialist work, projects and centres do not work together sufficiently well. Management information systems only provide basic data and are not refined well enough to support effective analysis.

15. The service trains and supports young people to participate in the strategic activity of a number of local partnerships. Too few opportunities exist, however, for their involvement in important decisions in relation to the youth service. While there are good examples of young people's involvement in planning and evaluating activities within individual centres and projects, overall it is variable and inconsistent.

16. There is excellent partnership work and multi-agency activity with statutory bodies, the voluntary sector and other groups, which provide very good outcomes for many young people and especially for vulnerable groups. However, service-level agreements with some partners, for example schools, do not sufficiently reflect youth service priorities. While good work with Connexions takes place in projects and other settings, there is a lack of co-ordination and support for joint work at a strategic level.