

Southampton Youth Service Report

Southampton Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

Published: 16 October 2007

Reference no: 852

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Contents

Introduction	2
Part A: Summary of the report	
Main findings	2
Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes	4
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. Southampton youth service is located within the Children's Services and Learning Directorate of the city council and delivers youth work primarily through five neighbourhood partnership areas. The youth service has been in a transitional phase for approximately 17 months led by an acting head and deputy head of service pending the results of an extensive council review and imminent decision regarding the implementation of a new integrated youth support service in 2008.

2. In 2006-2007 the operational budget was £1,346,000 and successful external bids contributed a further £366,364 which significantly enhanced the curriculum offer. In addition partnership arrangements across the city contribute further valuable resources. The service directly employs 26 full time staff, a full time equivalent (fte) of 13.9 part time staff and approximately 8 fte administrative and caretaking staff. A significant partnership with No Limits, a registered charity, has enabled city wide provision of information, advice and counselling which targets the most vulnerable. The youth service has a remit to work with the 11-25 age group but concentrates resources on 13-19 year olds and reaches approximately 22% of this population.

3. 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, a cross section of staff and partner agencies and young people. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Southampton has a good youth service that provides good value for money. Targeted youth work is generally of a high standard and much of the work provided through No Limits is also of exceptional quality. The quality of open access generic provision is more mixed. During a period of review and more recent uncertainty about re-structuring, the service has been successful in maintaining its focus on operational support and positive outcomes for young people. Strategic and operational management is effective overall, although there is particular pressure on resources where more intensive support is needed and where external funding is short term. The curriculum is broad in range, incorporating Every Child Matters (ECM) priorities and delivered in a good variety of settings. Sound partnership work has significantly enhanced the breadth of provision and ensured the effective deployment of limited resources. Management information is used efficiently to inform planning. Performance monitoring when used well has effectively raised standards and improved practice.

Strengths

- Young people have many opportunities to gain accreditation.
- Targeted provision engages successfully some of the most vulnerable and hard to reach young people.
- Strong and effective partnerships significantly enhance provision.
- Staff training and development provision is good and participation is high.
- Young people are actively involved in consultation and in promoting activities and events.
- Leadership and management of the service are good.

Areas for development

- Increase the involvement of young people in decision making at a local level and in the process of recording their learning outcomes in all aspects of work.
- Improve the quality of open access generic work.
- Further develop and embed quality assurance systems particularly through a more rigorous programme of observing practice.
- Ensure resources are secure to ensure consistently high quality youth work and greater stability of provision.

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: 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 contribution made to most ECM outcomes is good. Work is particularly effective in focusing on health, well-being and relationship issues and when workers constructively challenge and explore young people's behaviours, attitudes and values. Programmes are generally varied covering topical issues as well as more traditionally based activities to cater for a broad range of needs and interests. Much of the quality of counselling, advice and support that increasing numbers of young people receive is exceptional. Many opportunities are offered to enhance personal and social skills and extend experiences. Young people are consulted regularly on the quality of youth work provision and on local neighbourhood issues and wider matters affecting their lives.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. Young people engage in a wide range of activities and make good progress in developing their awareness, skills and knowledge. There are many opportunities to gain formal accreditation through, for example youth achievement awards (YAA), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DoE) and Millennium Volunteers; young people from diverse backgrounds take part and many achieve accredited units. Numbers involved have increased and creative activities developed which harness and extend young people's new found knowledge and skills. At Hype magazine editorial group young women gave insightful feedback about the proof of their latest publication and made thoughtful contributions in planning an article on knife crime. All had achieved their silver YAA through their involvement and were preparing for a DoE award expedition in the coming weeks.

7. A system for recording learning outcomes is in place and where this is used well young people can clearly articulate their learning and use their new skills to good effect. A number of opportunities exist where young people engage effectively in democratic processes and make significant personal gains in self confidence and maturity. Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities and those looked after are supported to record their personal achievements and to take responsibility for activities. One young man showed high levels of competence and assertiveness in chairing a lively meeting with his peers to monitor the expenditure of youth opportunities funding. In more generic settings however, young people were not always sufficiently engaged in identifying the learning they had achieved.

8. A strong feature of the service is the quality of relationships workers develop with young people, many of whom display very difficult behaviour or possess complex social or mental health needs. In the more challenging work young

people were made aware of inappropriate behaviour and were learning about tolerance and understanding through skilful and effective interventions. Work was of a high quality at the Compass Satellite project, a partnership of the pupil referral unit, and at an after school session a young person diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder responded very well to close but carefully measured attention of the youth worker who skilfully calmed a potentially volatile situation.

9. The quality of youth work practice is generally good. Targeted and specialist provision is of a consistently good standard, delivered by highly motivated and committed workers. Expectations of young people are high and programmes often require them to contribute to planning and evaluation. At Safe House, a youth session set up for older young people requiring a protected environment, workers displayed skill and empathy in enabling young people to explore their personal and often troubled lives. In less effective work, programmes were insufficiently challenging and workers lacked confidence to extend curriculum opportunities, tending to favour more traditional activities and taking scant account of young people's views.

10. Most workers understand the planning process and attempts to embed ECM outcomes within programmes are often successful. Best practice was observed where workers had set clear objectives and were well prepared. In such work staff are able to present challenges to young people and explore such issues as social difference and inclusion in imaginative and engaging ways. At Newtown Asian young women's project, the youth worker paid particular attention to a new group of Somali young women, finding out about their interests and ensuring that they felt comfortable in the new environment. Planning was thorough. Mothers had been shown around the centre to alleviate their anxieties and work had been undertaken with the existing group to discuss points of potential difference and similarity.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum and resources is good. Young people have many opportunities to take part in activities which both broaden their interests and engage them in innovative programmes. The curriculum framework, underpinned by ECM outcomes, is well designed and embedded in practice which also promotes equality, inclusiveness and diversity. Sport and recreational programmes are offered alongside specialist projects concerning, for example health and social issues. Positive Activities for Young People programmes run successfully in term time and holiday periods. Outdoor opportunities make good use of the surrounding countryside and seascape. Media and arts activities are popular and inclusive of diverse groups of young people. High quality publications and displays celebrate the success of events and activities.

12. Most workers have a good grasp of curriculum planning and evaluation. All settings contribute well to local and area planning and the best work is informed by well devised curriculum schemes of work closely linked to young people's

needs. This was less evident in some open generic settings. A benchmarking group has been established to monitor and review the process of recording learning outcomes and this has certainly achieved improvement. A few workers prioritise the completion of the forms over the more important aspect of engaging young people in the process.

13. Youth workers and managers demonstrate a good understanding of issues of social inclusion and diversity. The service has achieved level 3 of the equality standards and has worked diligently to address gaps in provision for black and minority ethnic groups. Targeted work is addressing personal and social needs effectively and particularly for those young people experiencing difficult times in their lives. Provision for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people through the Breakout project is successful. Work with girls and young women and teenage parents is of a high standard.

14. Staff are generally well deployed although capacity to sustain provision at its current level is a concern for the service, particularly in externally funded short term projects. The most experienced and qualified workers are appropriately allocated to more challenging neighbourhoods but in some instances staffing resources are insufficient to meet local need. All staff are qualified to local or professional level or are undertaking qualifying training. An apprenticeship programme to train local people has been successful with five workers completing. Funding to continue this is no longer available. Staff retention is good as is the investment by the service in good staff development and training. Participation is high. All staff complete mandatory child protection training and Criminal Record Bureau checks. Safeguarding mechanisms are robust. The service meets the requirement of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

15. The range and quality of resources are good in most settings. Buildings are maintained to variable standards however and not all buildings are compliant with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Asset management plans are in place. Some buildings require refurbishment but workers try hard with young people to make the internal spaces welcoming and bright, using attractive displays that reflect current interests and issues. The use of information and communication technology is well developed. Health and safety legislation is adhered to and all workers implement risk assessments following sound council procedures to ensure safety.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good. The service is highly regarded by senior officers and has been influential in raising the profile of the needs of young people. The acting head of service is well positioned on key strategic groups and co-chairs the youth board, a sub group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. In spite of the current uncertainties concerning its future managers have ensured that the work of the youth service has remained focused and continues to develop and thrive.

17. The use and deployment of resources are satisfactory and greatly enhanced by staff resourcefulness and flexibility. The service has achieved a slight increase in its core budget over a three year period and successfully augments this with additional funding from external sources. This has encouraged development and enabled targeted work to be extended. Imaginative and effective partnership arrangements at local level have enhanced the curriculum. A growing concern for the service however is the increasing reliance on short term funding which at times places pressure on service priorities and stability.

18. Partnership arrangements are very good across the neighbourhood areas and city wide. Investment in joint working by the youth service has paid dividends for young people not least through the excellent delivery of advice, guidance and counselling. The successful K2 urban youth festival, managed by the youth service provides an important show case for youth expression through music and art and has done so over successive years. Simultaneously its focus as a key information and access point about health and well being for thousands of young people who attend is highly valued and its success is well documented. The events have proven to be a catalyst for the growth of a range of youth support services including sexual health services, teenage parenting, drugs information and housing support.

19. Many forums and groups have been established to ensure young people can discuss issues of importance to them. They are keen participants in consultation exercises both internal and external to the service. In many instances their contributions have influenced changes to provision but they were keen to point out that feedback was not always forthcoming. The Southampton City youth parliament is well established and its members show growing confidence in political awareness and acumen. Co-ordination of the various activities is under-developed however and opportunities for greater coherence and impact therefore reduced.

20. Operational management is good. Managers provide effective support and workers respond well to the clarity of focus on priorities and ECM outcomes. Quality assurance arrangements are coherent but observation of practice and support for less experienced workers requires a more strategic approach. Budget monitoring and management information systems are robust but there is some delay in collating monthly statistics. Good progress has been made in embedding formal accreditation but further work is required to ensure that recording of learning outcomes is consistently implemented by all workers. Participation rates are good and improving although numbers observed in generic youth club provision was low. Monitoring and review of the work is sound and senior managers have a good grasp of the service's strengths and areas for development, which is well demonstrated in the self assessment.