

Solihull Youth Service

Solihull Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Publicly-funded youth work in Solihull is delivered almost exclusively through Solihull Youth Service, one of five service groups within the Children and Young People's Division of the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's Education and Children's Services Directorate. In 2007/08, the Youth Service's budget was £1.25 million. The service employs 36 full-time equivalent youth work staff and operates 17 youth work units that delivery services across the borough. The service is led by a team of five managers who report to the head of service.
2. Ten per cent of Solihull's 200,000 residents are young people in the 13-19 age group around 8% of whom are of Black or minority ethnic heritage. Whilst, as a whole it is an economically successful area with high levels of affluence, this masks the deprivation in the north of the borough where three of the wards are amongst the 10% most deprived in England.
3. The Solihull Children's and Young People's Trust has formally agreed to establish an integrated youth support service. These arrangements are being developed in the context of wider local integrated service delivery work and the emerging commissioning arrangements. New arrangements are also being developed to ensure the local authority meets its sufficient educational leisure time duty under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
4. 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

5. The quality of youth work is good. The authority sufficiently secures its provision. Young people enjoy taking part and their engagement is sustained over time. As a result they make good progress, which is well recorded. Young people's voice and influence is given a high priority and many opportunities for participation are offered. The service is well led by an ambitious and determined management team, which is improving operational performance. A well understood curriculum is in place along with a comprehensive range of policies and procedures. Quality assurance arrangements are clear. Extensive use is made of borough-wide and neighbourhood needs assessments and priority groups are clearly identified by managers. However, the extent to which youth workers engage with young people from these groups is too variable and is not adequately monitored. Resources are of an acceptable quality overall and some are very good. The authority is in the process of ensuring all buildings provide the required level of accessibility under the Special Education Needs and Disability Discrimination Act (SENDA) 2001. An equality impact assessment lacks sufficient

detail. Youth work is delivered in a range of different formats with a significant focus on project based work. This work is well planned and of consistently good quality but there is the capacity to engage more young people. Detached work lacks a coherent approach. Overall, the workforce is well supported and has access to adequate professional development opportunities and the service is taking action to reduce the numbers of youth support workers who are unqualified. Relationships with voluntary sector partners are good.

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

- Well-planned and responsive programmes sustain young people's involvement over time.
- High standards are achieved by most young people and youth work practice is good.
- Extensive use of accreditation adds value to young people's achievement.
- Access to a wide range of opportunities for engaging in decision making within the youth service enables young people to participate at an appropriate level.
- Leadership and operational management are good.
- Quality assurance arrangements enable the service to make accurate judgements about the quality of youth work practice and young people's achievement.

Areas for development

- Increase the numbers of young people participating in youth work activities and ensure that all premises are fully accessible to those with mobility difficulties and/or visual impairment.

- Develop and implement detailed strategies for engaging with priority groups.
- Develop a more coherent approach to detached and outreach work.
- Increase the numbers of youth support workers who are appropriately qualified.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. Achievement is good overall. Young people enjoy participating in youth work activities, are enthusiastic and well motivated. As a result their engagement is sustained over time and they acquire new skills and make gains in self-confidence and self-esteem. Young people make good and at times very good progress and most young people can identify what they are learning as a result of their involvement. Rudimentary systems are in place to record young people's progress. In the better practice youth workers and young people use these systems as a starting point to enable young people to identify their own learning needs.

7. Young people take responsibility and display maturity in their interactions with others. One good practice example was the Anti Bullying Behaviour Alliance (ABBA) programme where young people demonstrated an impressive level of sensitivity and empathy towards each other. Good opportunities exist for young people to take on leadership roles and become volunteers but the training and support is insufficient to fully maximise their impact.

8. A wide range of opportunities is offered for young people to engage in decision-making based on their needs, abilities and interests. Opportunities include involvement in the planning and evaluation of youth work, membership of well established local youth centre committees, participation in high profile borough-wide events and involvement in the Solihull Youth Council. This approach enables young people who may find it more challenging to engage, for example those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to find a voice.

9. Accreditation is extensively and enthusiastically used and in many settings adds value to the programme and provides some structure to young people's learning. On occasion the level of accreditation being offered was insufficiently challenging. The use of Information and Communications Technology to support and enhance young people's learning is under developed.

10. The quality of youth work practice is good overall. Youth workers have a good understanding of the role and purpose of youth work and take a creative and flexible approach to delivering the curriculum. They plan thoroughly and consistently involve young people in all aspects of the planning, delivery and review of the work. Youth workers make good use of ground rules to maintain

standards of behaviour and demonstrate the ability to use a range of leadership styles appropriate to the needs of the young people they work with. A minority of programmes would benefit from more challenging youth work practice.

11. A consistent approach to needs assessments provides youth workers with the opportunity to underpin their work with accurate data on the local area. Most youth workers are aware of neighbourhood and borough-wide support services and are able to refer young people when necessary. Youth workers are aware of the service's priority groups and targeted work provides effectively for the needs of some groups. However, mainstream youth work programmes are far less effective in engaging young people from priority groups. The service does not adequately monitor how well it reaches young people from priority groups.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

12. Overall, the quality of the curriculum and resources is good. The youth work curriculum, which is closely aligned to the *Every Child Matters* framework, is understood by youth workers and well embedded. Priority groups are identified, including Black and minority ethnic young people, young people with disabilities, young people offending, at risk of offending or victims of crime, or engaged in anti-social behaviour, young people not engaged in, or at risk of dropping out of, education, employment or training, looked after young people and those at risk of becoming looked after, lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, young people experiencing bullying and young women at risk of unwanted pregnancies. A wide range of activities is offered by the service well matched to young people's interests and issues, such as tackling bullying and promoting healthy lifestyles.

13. Youth facilities are distributed across the borough and the service works in partnership with others to extend the number of centres it can deliver from. The deployment of resources is based on deprivation and population data although detached work lacks a coherent approach or adequate resources. Appropriate attention is paid to health and safety. Accommodation is adequate although the service acknowledges that it has yet to fully comply with the SENDA. There are some very high quality facilities, such as recording and mixing studios, and the service makes good use of specialist staff where appropriate. During the week buildings are well used however weekend work is underdeveloped.

14. The service uses a range of approaches to promote and raise awareness of youth work activities. However, information and publicity is not available in alternative or accessible formats and the service has no clear strategy for targeting priority groups with messages about the opportunities on offer.

15. Youth workers are provided with a wide range of training and development opportunities which includes on the job mentoring and coaching. Youth workers and youth support workers have an annual entitlement to training. The number of professional youth workers who are appropriately qualified is very good. However, over half of youth support workers are not appropriately qualified.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Leadership and management are good. A task group was established following the publication of Youth Matters and this was successful in engaging elected members. A comprehensive review of the youth service has ensured that it is fit for purpose. However, spending on youth work is below that of other comparable local authorities. Senior managers are well respected. Youth workers are well motivated and morale is high.

17. An annual delivery plan sets out priority target groups and contains a detailed analysis of young people's needs along with an appropriate amount of operational level detail. The youth service falls short of reaching national benchmarks for participation and contact. A performance dip in 2006/07 has been addressed by managers acting on the recommendation in the 2007 Annual Performance Assessment and the service has significantly improved its reach, reporting a 21% contact rate for 2007-08. Data collection and analysis has improved. However participation data, particularly that relating to the engagement of priority groups, is not yet sufficiently robust.

18. An equality impact assessment and action plan is in place but it is insufficiently detailed to be effective. It identifies priority groups but does not include sufficient information on how the service will respond, within what timescales and what resources will be made available.

19. The service has comprehensive quality assurance arrangements in place. Management inspections are sound and provide secure judgements on quality leading to an improvement in standards. Young people's involvement in quality assurance is a strength. Youth workers are provided with a wide range of well written policies and procedures. Safeguarding procedures are clear and staff know how to register concerns and make referrals.

20. Partnerships across the service are good and enhance many youth work programmes. Good use is made of service level agreements, protocols and contracts in order to ensure responsibilities and accountabilities between youth work projects, providers and partners are clear. The well established Solihull Council for Voluntary Youth Services provides an important link between the statutory and voluntary youth services.

21. The local authority is committed to a strategy of developing integrated youth support through joining up services whilst building on existing strengths. A process has been developed to enable the creation of an integrated youth support service. Progress in this respect has been adequate. The authority acknowledges that they are in the early stages of development and that producing a detailed transition plan is a priority.