



# Sefton Youth Service Report

Sefton Children's Services Authority Area

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**Better  
education  
and care**

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## Introduction

1. Sefton Youth Service was fundamentally reviewed in 2004 leading to a reorganisation of the service in 2005. A senior manager from Connexions has now been seconded for an initial year to head the youth service and is positioned strategically to direct the diversionary aspects of Connexions delivery. The youth service is located within the Children's Services Directorate with the head of the youth service being line managed by an Assistant Director. Aside from the head of service, there are two full-time team manager posts, 20 full time youth workers, 5 administrative staff and 143 part-time youth workers which is equivalent to nearly 52 full time equivalent staff. The population in Sefton is around 282,000 with nearly 25,000 young people aged 13 to 19. Service managers estimate that 40% of young people aged 13-19 are reached annually by the service with 17% who engage in regular activities. The service's total budget for 2005-2006 is £2,227,950 representing approximately 1.2% of the education budget. Nearly 17% of this budget is allocated to the voluntary and community sector with an equivalent amount being generated for the service through external funding.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) carried out in Sefton was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. During the inspection period, a total of 18 youth projects, including youth centres and targeted interventions, were visited together with an observation of outreach and detached work. Further interviews and discussions also took place with full and part-time youth workers, youth service managers, the council leader and representatives from the voluntary sector and partner agencies. Information about youth services and partnership working was additionally drawn from other JAR interviews and observations as well as service documentation.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. Sefton council provides an adequate youth service and offers satisfactory value for money. The local authority and the new head of service provide good strategic leadership although some aspects of operational leadership, including quality assurance, remain weak. Despite a low level of funding to date, effective use is made of available resources. The service is able to provide a reasonably wide range of provision and is beginning to work effectively with partners to meet the needs of priority groups in local communities. Staff have created good, trusting and productive relationships with young people. Meaningful participation by young people in the planning, management and evaluation of provision is nevertheless underdeveloped. The service's self-assessment report accurately identifies the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision and inspectors generally agreed with the grades awarded.

## Strengths

- The service has good strategic leadership and clear direction.
- There is effective partnership working in key areas.
- Targeted work with specific vulnerable groups is good

## Areas for development

- Improvement in the collation and use of management information.
- More systematic assessment of need and prioritisation.
- Increase in the consistency of quality assurance arrangements.
- Embedding of workforce training and continued professional development.
- Extension of the involvement of young people in participation and decision-making.
- Improvement of the poor condition of, and resources available to, buildings used by the youth service.

## Key aspect inspection grades

Key aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	2
	Quality of youth work practice	2
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	2
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's contribution to the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes is satisfactory overall. Healthy lifestyles are particularly well promoted within the service and good contributions are made in project work to the promotion of

sexual health and the reduction of drug misuse. There are well-targeted anti-social behaviour interventions involving a range of partners including the youth and leisure services, the police and the youth offending team. A large number of young people, including those who are looked after by the local authority and others with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in the youth service with regard to their personal and social development. Young people are offered appropriately challenging opportunities and are achieving well in national awards, while enjoying sessions within the youth service programme. The youth service is developing good levels of engagement and consultation with young people, some of which have influenced the development of services. Despite good accredited achievements, strong partnership links are only now being developed to enhance the support offered to young people moving towards further training or employment.

## **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 standards of young people's achievements overall are satisfactory. There are, nevertheless, good examples of achievement in youth sessions, particularly with local and national awards and targeted work where young people are well supported in increasing their levels of skill, knowledge and understanding. Here, young people are able to see direct links between achievement and their progression towards further education and employment.

6. Very good levels of achievement and leadership are also evident in 'Youth Bank' sessions, which are organised and run by young people. Grant applications are discussed maturely with a diversity of viewpoints being listened to and valued before the participants make competent decisions. In poorer examples of provision, including some outreach work, lower aspirations of both youth workers and young people are evident and little challenge or development take place.

7. Good progress is being made in encouraging youth participation. Significant steps have been taken in consulting with a large number of young people, notably in relation to Youth Matters, where the council received 750 returns and with the Children and Young People's Plan where 3,000 responses were obtained. Youth councils and emerging youth forums help young people to be self-managing and to develop their confidence and skills as debaters and team workers. There are, however, insufficient opportunities for young people to be directly involved in decision-making within youth centres and in the design and delivery of the youth service as a whole.

8. Overall, the quality of youth work practice is satisfactory. Young people enjoy the opportunity to meet socially and they relate well to each other and the youth workers, who are generally well motivated and enthusiastic. Staff are aware of, and positive about, recent changes within the service and have a good understanding of the ECM agenda. Good personal initiatives exist, with one worker

developing an effective race awareness programme in a youth centre while another is offering effective support to the formation of a group seeking to establish a skate park in an area short of resources. There are examples, however, of youth workers not meeting the support needs of individual young people and of missing opportunities for curriculum advancement.

9. Sefton youth service offers a good range of opportunities for young people to gain formal qualifications. The numbers who undertake and successfully complete awards, particularly in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, are very high with 27% of all regular service users gaining an accredited outcome. Sports leadership and coaching awards are well used and there are good examples of achievement by peer educators in these areas. The predominant focus on accredited outcomes, however, can sometimes result in other elements being overlooked, such as the concurrent promotion of relevant ECM aspects.

10. Planning and evaluation of youth work in Sefton is underdeveloped and inconsistent. Community profiles are, however, beginning to be used effectively to review current needs and to help ensure that provision is planned to meet local circumstances. This development, together with a useful pro forma sheet to assist with session planning, are both improving this part of the process but further work needs to be undertaken to ensure consistent understanding and application.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum and resources is satisfactory. There is a broad range of activities and settings, supplemented well through the voluntary sector. Provision includes generic work in youth centres, detached and outreach work and specific work in schools and in leisure centres. In addition, there is good targeted work with priority groups including those children and young people with learning needs and disabilities, those not attending school, looked after children and immigrant families. Issues for immigrant families were identified well by youth workers, leading to further positive work with parents and other family members to reinforce the work with young people. Further effective and discrete work with vulnerable groups includes the 'Young Gay Sefton' initiative. Good inclusive practice is less evident in open settings, however, where even an appropriate gender mix can appear difficult to achieve.

12. A wide analysis of anti-social behaviour issues was undertaken with the inclusion of police, leisure and Connexions data which led to multi-agency 'Youth Only Zone' (YOZ) work and an encouraging extended use of leisure passes. Further useful work has been undertaken by Sefton youth service in conjunction with the transport police, as part of the YOZ initiative. Despite very good feedback from agency staff, young people and the general public, however, overall monitoring and evaluation of this scheme is insufficient.

13. Useful information and advice is being provided by youth workers to young people on sexual health and substance misuse. Work in schools also encourages pupils to participate fully and learn a great deal through the 'Face to Face' drugs awareness scheme.

14. The condition of some of the buildings used by the youth service is poor, despite efforts being made by staff to change the situation through, for example, attracting help from the probation service to decorate premises. The council has carried out an audit of premises to ensure that they comply with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. While resources are limited, some centres have experienced recent investment. Staff try to make the best use of their premises and available resources, including the imaginative use of mobile youth service facilities, but too often the centres appear sparse and somewhat neglected. The use of information technology is also underdeveloped with little improvement having taken place since the critical review in 2004.

15. The number of qualified staff has improved although recruitment and retention remains problematic. There are high numbers of sessional workers who work a small number of hours, which lessens the opportunity for sustained and consistent work with young people: efforts are being made to ease this situation by increasing hours where possible. A comprehensive training strategy now exists, which includes relevant compulsory elements such as child protection and the curriculum framework, but this has not yet been consistently applied or properly embedded. Youth workers are, nevertheless, aware that they are working to educational principles and are reasonably clear about the curriculum strategy which has been adopted.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Strategic and operational leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The council demonstrates a keen interest in, and support for, the growing resolution of the residual problems in the youth service. Decisive action has been taken and good recent progress has been made at a strategic level to deliver a better quality of overall youth work practice, to engage more constructively with local partners and to forge a more positive identity for the service. Although staff feel more focused and supported, they are unclear about the current operational split between targeted and area-based work within the service, and there are inconsistencies in relation to delivery.

17. Recent increases in funding are welcomed, given the under-developed infrastructure of the youth service. Despite the overall budget per young person increasing between 2004 and 2006, Sefton remains behind statistical comparators and the national figure. The previous level of under-funding has prevented fuller investment in youth service training and necessary improvements to the existing facilities and resources.



18. Strong partnership-working exists with particular agencies and focuses on clearly specified geographical areas. An integrated approach is well developed at strategic level through groups such as the multi-agency support team (MAST). Some of the best examples in practice relate to those with the police, leisure and education although there is also a rapidly improving relationship with Connexions which has been enhanced by the secondment to the head of the youth service.

19. Senior managers are aware of the lack of reliable objective information which limits their ability to both prioritise provision and evaluate the impact of all interventions. Attempts are being made to analyse systematically local needs and the availability and use of complementary resources. This will enhance the appropriate deployment of staff. Quality assurance systems are under-developed despite recent improvements. Processes to ensure the quality of youth work practice now exist but these are inconsistently applied.

20. Sefton youth service has a legacy of poor leadership, unfocused practice, under-developed systems for monitoring and evaluation together with independent and isolated working practices. More recently good and clear initial progress has been made and outcomes are improving. Capable strategic leadership has helped youth workers to become clearer about the ECM agenda, the curriculum framework and the focus on young people's learning outcomes. Information leaflets for all aspects of the youth service within Sefton are particularly well designed and attractive. Positive developments within the service are also reflected in a significant increase in reach and accredited outcomes.