



Plymouth Youth Service Report

Plymouth Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

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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. Plymouth Youth service delivers youth work through seven teams, five of which are managed by Community College Principals, with devolved budgets. The two remaining teams are managed centrally. Since September 2006, all teams have been managed centrally. The Principal Youth Officer is supported by two Senior Youth Officers. The budget allocated to the service in the year 2006-2007 the budget is £2,307,112, £270,000 of which is allocated as grants to voluntary organisations. Approximately 70% of the budget is devolved to the five Community College principals and 30% to area teams and central management. In 2004/5 the service attracted additional funding of £713,500. The full-time equivalent staffing complement is 60.1. The service reports that it reaches 6,625 of the 23,230 young people aged 13-19, 28.5% of the total; 1.62% of these young people are estimated to be from black and minority ethnic groups.

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 sample of youth work sessions.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Plymouth has an inadequate youth service. However, there is a strong nucleus of effective staff around which the service can build. There is a clear strategic direction from the local authority and the restructuring proposals are soundly conceived. A growing number of young people with whom the service regularly works make good progress and gain relevant accreditations. However, the quality of practice and achievement overall are unsatisfactory. Projects are not evaluated regularly enough in terms of their impact and quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. While some individual sessions are highly effective, particularly those for which the central team have a direct responsibility, too many are not. Most inadequate sessions fail to focus sufficiently on the intended outcomes of the work and the individual needs of young people. Record keeping is poor and does not provide a sound basis for future planning and evaluation. The service provides unsatisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- There is a clear strategic direction from the local authority.
- Relationships between staff and young people are good.
- In about a third of sessions, young people achieved high standards and youth work practice was highly effective.

Areas for development

- Improve overall standards of achievement and the quality of youth work practice.
- Develop provision in those parts of the city where there is little or none and undertake more work with those young people who are most in need.
- Improve partnerships arrangements and communications, particularly with community colleges and the voluntary sector.
- Continue to work to improve staff professional competences.
- Increase the capacity of the service through better deployment of staff and by reducing the high rates of staff absence.
- Improve performance management through more robust quality assurance arrangements and through better collection, analysis and use of data.
- Measure the impact and cost effectiveness of the service's work.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	1
	Quality of youth work practice	1
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	1
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	1

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

4. The service is not yet making an adequate contribution to the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes in a number of areas. Where it is targeting work through its projects and activities, it is providing some young people with enjoyable opportunities to develop personal qualities, self-esteem and skills. A growing number of young people are participating in local forums though, as yet, the impact of these is limited. Some outreach work helps to reduce anti-social behaviour by providing alternative activities. All youth centres include health-related activities within their programmes. There are significant projects underway to promote the arts. Arrangements for safeguarding young people are adequate.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Overall standards of achievement are inadequate and too few young people make sufficient progress. The service self assessed this aspect as being adequate. While the number of young people acquiring accredited outcomes is increasing, too many lose contact with the service before they have gained significant benefit from their involvement. Accreditations for nationally recognised achievements, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award, are increasing from a low base line but local and informal accreditation routes are developing well.

6. Standards range from very good to poor. There were more occasions when work observed during the inspection was unsatisfactory than when it was good, although a third of the work was of a good standard. Most of the best work was in settings for which the central team bore a direct responsibility. High standards of achievement were found in youth participation events and in some outreach projects. In the Out Youth project designed to help lesbian and gay young people to take on responsibilities, those involved participated successfully in a challenging programme of activities.

7. In most sessions, young people were keen to engage with the activities provided for them and most developed positive relationships with youth workers and with each other. Some spoke about how they had grown in confidence through their involvement in youth work. In one good session, young people in one of the most economically disadvantaged areas of the city had taken part in a summer residential event in an outdoor education centre. They had participated in a wide range of challenging activities and were able to identify what they had learned from the experience. Their achievements were recognised and celebrated through the local Plym Youth Award.

8. The overall quality of the youth work observed was unsatisfactory. While there were examples of good and very good practice in about a third of the

sessions visited, there was unsatisfactory and poor practice in almost half. At the Participation 8 event, a wide cross section of young people from across the city discussed their local communities and what was being done to improve them. One of the sessions was run by the three Youth Parliament representatives. They spoke confidently and thoughtfully answered questions about their roles and priorities.

9. Most of the detached youth work observed was unsatisfactory. Where it was effective, as in Whitleigh, detailed planning, based on an accurate needs assessment, was accompanied by a clear strategy for following up the issues arising from the session. More often these characteristics were not evident and it was often unclear which young people were being targeted and why. While most workers engaged with the young people well and provided useful signposting information about services, there was little evidence of a strategy to help workers to go beyond this basic level of support.

10. As the service's self assessment fully recognises, workers do not routinely develop their work in a planned way. Record keeping is poor and few individual learning targets are set. Session evaluations do not track young people's progress or identify individual needs. They do not provide a basis for evaluating the impact of the work undertaken and rarely form the basis of future actions.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum is inadequate although there are sufficient resources. The service's self assessment judged this aspect to be adequate. Curriculum planning has been seriously hindered by the way funding is devolved with no strategic overview of curriculum priorities to guide decisions. In some of the most disadvantaged parts of Plymouth, the service is making little or no provision while in other areas there is ample.

12. The service has now completed a long overdue needs assessment but it has not yet responded to the analysis. It shows that work often reflects past rather than current needs or the particular interests of local teams and young people. The range of work undertaken is too narrow and the balance between general club activities and targeted provision that meets the needs of priority groups is inappropriate. For example relatively little work is undertaken with looked after children, asylum seekers, young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and some minority ethnic groups.

13. Curriculum management is unsatisfactory. Some projects are well managed on a day-to-day basis although many are not. In June 2006, a new service-wide curriculum framework was launched. Workers are keen to apply the framework but have not had time to do so. Most staff spoken with are unclear as to how to use the framework to help them plan, record, review and evaluate their work.

14. Youth workers are well qualified but are inefficiently deployed. Staff absence is high. Work is managed by experienced local area managers for the two central teams but by nominated representatives when it is delivered by the five

community colleges, not all of whom have youth work backgrounds. Given the restructuring that is taking place and the Every Child Matters agenda, demands on the staff training programme far exceed the capacity of the service to meet them. While appropriate training is provided on child protection workers need more help on how to develop a programme of high quality work.

15. There is no coherent strategy to address issues of equality or diversity. Often examples of good practice occur as a result of initiative by workers rather than as a result of a clear lead from senior staff. For example, very few young people with disabilities are accessing the service and there is no prioritisation of their needs or plans to address the gaps in provision. Several premises used by the youth service do not have access for those with disabilities. The service complies with the requirements of the Race Relations Act. Except in the area of detached youth work, arrangements for safeguarding young people are adequate.

16. There is well resourced mobile provision that is playing a vital part in ensuring young people can learn and achieve in a safe environment. Detached work by contrast is poorly resourced. The accommodation visited was uneven in its quality, location and standard and much was unsuitable for youth work.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

17. The service accurately identifies that strategic and operational leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The local authority provides a clear strategic direction and adequate funding. However, the work of the service does not reflect the priorities of the new children services directorate; resources are not used effectively. While useful progress is being made in setting up local youth forums, many of these are too recent to have made an impact and young people's involvement in the management and delivery of the service is underdeveloped.

18. The oversight and support of partnership arrangements have suffered due to the lack of capacity within the senior management team. Many partnership arrangements are piecemeal and reflect individual initiatives by staff rather than a strategic lead. The service level agreements with the community colleges are particularly unsuitable. While there is an effective working relationship with the Connexions service communications with the voluntary sector are limited.

19. In most settings, staff and young people operate in safe working environments although in some detached work they do not despite the existence of a detached work policy. The policy is not fully understood by workers and is interpreted incorrectly by some.

20. Some staff benefit from regular support and supervision but most do not. A high proportion of staff are in temporary promoted posts, seconded to other posts or doing more than one job because of gaps in the service created by long term staff absence. Many have not been replaced because of the freeze on staff recruitment. Despite these problems most workers are optimistic about the service's planned restructuring.

21. Quality assurance arrangements are inadequate. A limited system of peer inspection commenced shortly before the inspection but this is limited in scale and impact. The process is not yet followed up by action planning to support improvement in practice. Managers do not have access to accurate management information which severely restricts their ability to make judgements on standards and to effectively plan and develop provision locally.

22. The service lacks any secure basis to measure its cost effectiveness or judge the impact of its work.