

# London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Youth Service Report

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Children's Services Authority Area

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**Age group:** All

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## Introduction

1. Richmond upon Thames Youth Service delivers youth work through a mix of open access provision and project work. Since 2006 the service has been located in the Children's Services directorate and is managed by a recently appointed Principal Youth Officer who is solely responsible for the day to day management of the service. There are close working relationships with those responsible for the delivery of other local services.

2. In 2006/07 the core budget was £1,281,000 and the service attracted additional external funding of £170,000. Approximately £75,000 is allocated to the voluntary sector. The full-time (FTE) equivalent staffing complement is 28 of whom 13 are full time, 45 part time and there are 80 volunteers. In addition there are 2 staff seconded from the Connexions Service and 3.9 FTE support staff. The service reports that it reaches 1,429 of the 13,187 young people aged 13-19, 11% of the total. Of these 12% are young people from black and minority ethnic groups, a similar proportion to those living locally.

3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the 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

4. Overall, Richmond provides an adequate youth service. It is making a good contribution to the Every Child Matters outcomes. Young people are becoming increasingly involved in shaping provision. Over the last eighteen months the council has given clear and appropriate strategic leadership and direction but too little progress has been made in improving operational leadership of the service. The curriculum is yet not underpinned by a robust assessment of need and the service is working with too few young people, especially young women. While there are sufficient well-qualified staff, they are not always deployed efficiently or effectively. Curriculum leadership is weak. Quality assurance arrangements are under developed and work has not yet begun to measure the cost effectiveness of the provision. Despite these serious shortcomings the service is delivering mostly adequate youth work to those who participate for reasonable cost and is providing adequate value for money.

#### Strengths

- Work to promote sexual health and drugs awareness provision is highly effective.

- Well planned Duke of Edinburgh's award provision is enabling an increasing number of young people to achieve high standards and gain accreditation.
- Effective partnership work is extending significantly the provision made by the youth service.
- Young people are increasingly involved in decision making, planning and delivery of work.

### Areas for development

- Engage more young people in youth work, especially young women
- Improve the assessment of needs and the curriculum offer for young people
- Provide clearer guidance for workers about curriculum priorities and ensure more consistent delivery of an agreed programme of work
- Deploy staff more efficiently and effectively.
- Improve quality assurance arrangements and data collection

### 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	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**

5. With the help of its partners, the service makes a strong contribution through its work on drugs awareness and sexual health to the Every Child Matters outcomes. Through its projects and its general club activities it is providing those young people who participate with enjoyable opportunities to develop personal qualities, self-esteem and useful skills. Young people are increasingly involved in planning and shaping provision through youth forums and their work with the Youth Opportunities Fund. All youth centres provide activities to promote healthy living within their programmes. There is an established culture of safeguarding young people.

## **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's achievement is adequate. Currently only 11% of young people participate in the service's provision. Most of those who have sustained contact make useful progress especially in terms of their social and personal development. For example, at the Heatham House band event, young people actively contributed their views, opinions and ideas and took full responsibility for their own learning in the session, not least by contributing views and opinions about planned events and the lessons to be learnt from previous performances.

7. Workers are rightly keen to make it a priority to ensure that the introduction of a new accreditation system is suitably matched to the programme of work and the standards young people achieve. However, levels of accreditation are low by national benchmarks and relatively few young people gain qualifications other than through the well planned Duke of Edinburgh's award programme. Work is now in hand to increase the opportunities for them to do so.

8. Some examples of high achievement were observed during the inspection. For example, at the Castlenau centre, young people took advantage of the activities provided to gain useful skills and knowledge in cooking and using information and communication technology (ICT). Similarly, at the 'youth speak' project, young people were active in promoting responsible drinking. On the youth café bus, young people showed good listening skills, high levels of confidence and an ability to discuss with staff and other young people the issues that most concern them. At a Hampton youth centre basketball session, young people took full advantage of the opportunity to improve their levels of fitness, teamwork and co-operative behaviour as well as take some responsibility for taking the work forward.

9. The quality of youth work practice is adequate although the difference between the best and worst practice seen on the inspection was wide. Most workers are committed and enthusiastic and develop good relationships with young people. Their energy and drive is responsible in many instances for motivating young people to engage with work that they would not otherwise have chosen, for example in many of the open club night sessions. Staff teams work well together and are clear about their objectives and responsibilities but they do not routinely record young people's progress or identify actions for improvement.

10. In general, workers are much more successful in supporting and guiding young people than in setting appropriate challenges. While most record attendance accurately too many are not sufficiently reflective about the progress individual young people are making. Some workers were insufficiently ambitious for the young people they work with and attempted to do too much for them.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The range and quality of the curriculum is inadequate. The service has not established a clear set of curriculum priorities and acknowledges that it does not provide effective curriculum leadership and guidance for workers. There is also much more to be done before the service is able to develop its provision on a rigorous assessment of needs. Significantly, young people have asked the service to explain more clearly what it offers and why.

12. The curriculum offered to young people is determined by each of the youth centres and outreach teams acting independently of one another. In the best examples, such as those at the Castlenau and Heatham centres, programmes were based on good assessments of local needs however this was not the case across the service. Overall too little account is taken of Richmond-wide issues or service priorities. One result is sufficient provision in some parts of the borough, such as Barnes, and too little provision in other parts such as Whitton.

13. Curriculum leadership is weak. While some workers have tried hard to reflect the distinctive contribution of youth work to the Every Child Matters agenda, the guidance documents for staff are not fit for purpose and are rarely used by them to plan their work. Too little progress is being made towards achieving an appropriate balance between targeted and open access work or shifting provision to meet changing needs and priorities. While there is much good work undertaken on drugs awareness, sexual health advice and in work with partners the self assessment identifies the need for more work in areas such as media, ICT and drama. An important consequence of the lack of strategic curriculum planning is that far too few young women use the service.

14. Sufficient suitably qualified staff are in post. They are not however always deployed efficiently or effectively and the service lacks measures to assess the degree to which staffing allocations match need. The workforce development programme is well judged and valued by all staff. The service is the lead authority in a local consortium for the delivery of the National Vocational Qualification level

two youth work training and the first cohort of seven staff is currently being trained.

15. The authority has identified serious shortcomings in the quality of buildings and a substantial capital refurbishment programme is underway. This work is both timely and appreciated by the young people and staff. Good use is made of the premises when they are open but the service self assessment rightly notes that opening hours need to be increased, particularly in holidays, to support neighbourhood plans. Most of the premises visited were being refurbished at the time of the inspection. Those that were in use met the standards required by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Overall, strategic and operational leadership and management are inadequate. Over the last eighteen months strategic leadership and management have improved significantly. Richmond council has provided a much clearer direction for the youth service. There is now the potential for a much stronger link between planning for the service and the overall planning for Children Service's department. At present, the precise contribution the youth service is expected to make to council priorities is not well defined and understood. Provision is not yet regularly evaluated to check its contribution to the authority's priorities and plans.

17. Several areas of operational leadership and management have serious shortcomings. In addition to the issues arising from the poor needs assessments, data from partners and other agencies and parts of the council are not yet used effectively to identify priority groups on which to base a robust operational plan. Although appropriate policies for equality and diversity are in place, the youth service has yet to act upon the equalities impact assessment in several areas. For example to set targets for increasing inclusion of young people with disabilities, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people and other minority groups.

18. The promotion of equality, inclusiveness and diversity is inadequate. Participation is too low and provision is insufficiently focused on the needs of young women. While the service works with some vulnerable groups in some parts of the borough it is not targeting others appropriately. Generally the service provides a healthy and safe working environment. Child protection issues were handled appropriately in the centres visited during the inspection and service wide policies are applied effectively.

19. Good progress is now being made to promote the voice of young people within the youth service. The council has adopted the Hear by Right standards and has a well judged participation strategy based around them. Young people are increasingly well represented on a range of forums. They have made a significant contribution to decision making through the Youth Opportunities Fund forum and they have used their responsibilities well. At most youth centres, young people's views and advice are not sufficiently or consistently influencing practice or



priorities. In some centres young people play an established part in planning programmes whilst in others they have had little involvement so far.

20. Partnership working is undertaken with enthusiasm and contributes to improved outcomes for young people. Many partnerships are working effectively including those with the voluntary sector and those helping to promote sexual health and drugs awareness. Some partnerships have worked less productively. Until recently this included the partnership with Connexions but this has now been improved following the appointment of a new head of service.

21. Quality assurance arrangements are an acknowledged weakness. Current arrangements do not form a consistent or coherent framework for improving quality and raising standards. The service has yet to determine how well it is doing in relation to several national performance indicators not least because it still relies on a manual system for the collection of management information, which is slow, time consuming and inflexible. Full analysis of the 2006/07 data is yet to be undertaken and used to raise standards. Whilst there is agreement to move to an electronic system there is not yet a plan on which data will be collected nor how it will be used.

22. The service has yet to identify a means of measuring its cost effectiveness and it is poorly placed to demonstrate the impact of its work. Despite this shortcoming, youth workers are delivering mostly adequate youth work with a relatively small budget and providing adequate value for money.