



Redbridge Youth Service report

Redbridge Children's Services Authority Area

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Introduction

1. Redbridge Youth Service is located within the local authority's children's services. The service is organised into staff teams to support different areas of its work, including open access youth work, advice and information, youth involvement, detached work and specific projects. It has four dedicated youth centres and project work which is run in association with voluntary sector organisations. There are posts for four full-time managers, 20.5 full-time youth workers (of which 5.5 are currently vacant), 68 part-time youth worker (equivalent to 12 full-time posts), 7.5 administrators and four centre supervisors. The service's budget provided by the local authority for 2006/07 was £1,836,966 and £717,747 additional income was raised. Redbridge has 23,053 young people aged 13 to 19 and 18.4% of these participated in the service's provision in 2005/06.

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 with officers and a cross section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions throughout the area.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Overall, the service is inadequate. Without a permanent head for the previous four years, the service has lacked central direction and coordination. Operational management is good in some areas of work, but unsatisfactory in others. Quality assurance procedures are rudimentary. The number of young people in contact with the service is low and has fallen in recent years. Budgets are managed well but there are no performance indicators to ensure that resources are well-spent. Value for money is unsatisfactory. The overall standard of young people's achievements is satisfactory as is the quality of youth work practice; the latter is good for young people with learning disabilities and/or disabilities. A broad range of activities take place in well-resourced youth centres, but there are gaps in provision and an over-emphasis on recreational activities in general clubs. Strong partnership work with Connexions and other local organisations leads to effective work, particularly in advice and guidance, but links with some partners less clear. Young people have a strong corporate voice through an effective Youth Council, but they are not involved sufficiently in the planning and evaluation of provision at a local level. A permanent head of service is now in post and staff morale is high. Local authority officers have formulated a clear strategic direction for the service and new policies and plans provide a good basis for future improvements.

Strengths

- Good provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Strong partnerships lead to effective information and advice services.
- Youth centres are welcoming and well-resourced.

Areas for development

- The prominence of recreational activities in youth clubs.
- Insufficient young people gain formal accreditation for their work.
- Low involvement of young people in planning and evaluation.
- Insufficient observation of practice to improve the quality of provision.
- The inconsistent implementation of performance management and management information systems.

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: 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 makes a satisfactory contribution overall to the outcomes for young people. Effective partnership work provides good advice and guidance on a wide range of personal and health issues, particularly to prevent the misuse of drugs and on sexual health matters. Targeted work seeks to reduce anti-social behaviour where this is identified as an issue and some work

promotes personal safety. Statutory child protection and health and safety procedures are followed. Young people enjoy their contact with the service and participate with enthusiasm in a broad range of festivals and summer courses. Some young people develop high levels of skill, particularly in arts, music and sports. A relatively small number of individuals contribute to local decision-making through the Youth Council, and generally the involvement of young people at a local level is low.

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 overall standard of young people's achievements is satisfactory. The provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a strength of the service. Individuals gain self-confidence and make tangible progress in their personal development. Music technology is used well to generate the interest of young people, develop their skills and, in a small number of cases, gain employment. A flourishing and high-quality Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme at the Downshall Centre attracts a high proportion of Asian young women. Effective sports coaching takes place, although these sessions are focused primarily on skills development rather than youth work. A wide variety of arts activities enable young people to acquire new skills and confidence and gain accredited outcomes. However, the overall proportion of young people gaining formal accreditation for their work is low, although this aspect of the service's work is improving.

6. The quality of youth work practice is satisfactory. Youth workers, often working with staff from other local organisations, provide thoughtful and sensitive information and advice on sexual health, drugs and alcohol misuse, and education, training and employment. Detached workers develop positive relationships and raise the awareness of young people to potential sources of harm at nightclubs through the well-established "Safer clubbing" project. Young people enjoy attending general youth clubs, but activities are dominated by recreational pursuits. Workers sometimes fail to challenge young people to gain new knowledge and understanding. Where young people use information and communications technology, it is often for leisure purposes rather than as a means to promote learning. The planning and evaluation of sessions by staff are sometimes superficial.

7. An effective Youth Council provides a forum for young people to participate with enthusiasm in local decision-making processes and develop an awareness of citizenship. Young people are not involved sufficiently, however, in the running of their clubs. Staff consult with young people informally, but they are not drawn into the planning, delivery or evaluation of provision. Relationships between young people and staff are very good and mutual respect is shown. Workers challenge young people if they use

inappropriate language or behaviour. Staff know their area well, but new provision is sometimes slow in being set-up. For example, a change in the ethnic profile of the borough has been identified for some years, but new work to meet this need is still mainly at a developmental stage.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is inadequate. A broad range of provision takes place through youth clubs, sports, youth participation events, detached and outreach provision. The service's educational arts team, sometimes in partnership with specialist organisations, involves young people in music and arts projects. Performances and popular festivals are organised in community venues and local parks. Some 500 young people participated in a successful Summer University scheme during the summer of 2006. Many young people regularly visit the borough's water sports facilities for sailing and kayaking and a large number of residential trips and visits are arranged, which young people value. Specific sessions are held with teenage parents and targeted work aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour takes place in areas where this is identified as an issue.

10. The overall number of young people attending general clubs is low and there are some areas where no suitable local provision is available. Voluntary organisations receive grants from the youth service to work with young people from specific ethnic minority groups, but the quality of this work is not evaluated by service managers. Some women-only sessions are held, but the participation of girls is low in some areas. There is insufficient provision for gay and lesbian young people. The service has under-developed links with schools.

11. Staff have a good understanding of the needs of young people in their local area, but a overall coherent approach to the assessment of need is not in place. A new curriculum framework has been written recently that sets out the principles, aims and intended outcomes of the service. Inexperienced youth workers, however, need far more detailed information and learning resources to enable them to be more effective in their work.

12. Youth centres provide a welcoming and well-resourced environment, with large and well-equipped sports halls. A bus is used effectively for detached work in different locations. Full-time staff are well qualified and experienced. A high proportion of staff compared to young people was observed in some sessions during the inspection without any improvement in the quality of the work. No audit of learning materials or resources is in place and there is insufficient sharing of good practice and resources across service teams and centres.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

13. Leadership and management of the service are inadequate. The service has suffered from the lack of a permanent head of service. The day-to-day running of some centres is good, but unsatisfactory for others, and this inconsistency stems from the absence of central direction and coordination.

14. The service's budget for 2006/07 is adequate for the current provision offered, although it has decreased over the past three years. The number of young people aged 13-19 in contact with the service is lower than the national average and other similar services and has fallen in recent years. Budgets are managed well but no performance indicators are used to ensure resources are effectively targeted and well-spent. Value for money is unsatisfactory. Staff have ambitions to make contact with more young people and plan to formulate a marketing and promotional strategy. The service's web site currently lacks detail or appeal to young people.

15. Good partnership arrangements with the local Connexions service and some voluntary organisations lead to effective work. Comprehensive advice and guidance is available to vulnerable young people. However the working arrangements for some partnerships are unclear. Where voluntary organisations are supported by the service through funding, there is a lack of monitoring and evaluation of the sponsored work.

16. Quality assurance is inadequate. Very little observation of work takes place to improve the quality of provision. Teams meet regularly; staff are updated on new developments and some training takes place. The resource allocated to staff development is low and more emphasis is required on training to raise the quality of youth work. Training is not evaluated systematically to measure its impact. Service managers acknowledge that operational management is inconsistent. Supervision meetings are carried out well for some staff, but are irregular for others. A new management information system is being installed, but this is not yet being used effectively for curriculum development.

17. Statutory requirements for race relations and the special educational needs and disabilities act are satisfactory. Enhanced CRB checks are made where appropriate and all staff take part in child protection training. The service carries out risk assessments for all activities, particularly where they involve off-site and residential trips. Work with young people with learning difficulties and /or disabilities is strong, but senior managers recognise the need for more vigorous promotion of equality and diversity and have established a new team leader post.

18. The main weaknesses of the service are acknowledged by local authority officers and highlighted in a realistic self-evaluation report as key areas for development. After several years of leadership by interim managers, a head

of service is now in post who, along with other senior managers, has made a good start in providing central direction and leadership. Local authority officers have a clear strategy to develop the service's provision through a restructuring process. Staff remain enthusiastic and committed to their work and morale is high. Comprehensive new documents, including a curriculum policy, quality assurance framework and service delivery plan, provide a solid platform upon which the service can improve the consistency of its future management and the overall quality of provision.