



# Milton Keynes Youth Service Report

Milton Keynes Children's Services Authority Area

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## Introduction

1. Milton Keynes youth service operates projects and provision across the borough including nine youth centres, a youth information centre, work in schools and outreach work. The management team consists of the head of service, who also has responsibility for the council's play development department, two youth service officers and five team leaders who head up a distinct youth work team within the service. In addition there are 22 full-time workers and 79 part-time workers, which equate to a full time equivalent (fte) of 43.3 youth workers. A further 9.5 fte posts are externally funded through partners such as the Connexions service. The youth service is located within the Learning and Development Directorate of children's services. The amount spent on the youth service in 2004-05 was £1,601,099, which is in line with the national average. It is estimated that 29% of young people aged 13-19 are reached annually by the service.

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 across the borough including three observations in areas that serve young people who live in Beanhill as part of the JAR neighbourhood study area.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. Milton Keynes council has a good youth service which provides good value for money. Young people achieve well and take advantage of opportunities to act as responsible members of their community. The quality of youth work practice is good, a significant proportion being very good. An updated curriculum framework has been well received by staff but a minority lack the skills to implement it. Leadership and management are good. Needs analysis is systematic but greater consistency is needed at local level. Partnership working is strong and good use is made of partners to support and guide young people. Managers monitor performance and the use of resources effectively, but quality assurance processes are insufficiently tied in to improving practice.

#### Strengths

- Young people achieve well
- There are good examples of young people planning and taking part in community projects
- Youth work practice is good and a significant proportion is very good

- There is a diverse range of provision
- Partnership working is strong
- Performance is monitored effectively

### Areas for development

- Improve the identification of outcomes for young people in session planning to ensure important achievements are recognised
- Develop a strategy for involving young people in consultation and decision making
- Enable wider representation by more young people in the service
- Raise the prominence and role of the observation of practice within quality assurance processes

### 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	2
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	3

*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 an effective contribution in a number of areas. The revised curriculum based on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters is being implemented in all projects. Good curriculum links are made with national health promotion days such as national no-smoking day. Physical activity is an integral part of the curriculum of a significant number of projects. Many young people, including those who are vulnerable, achieve well and make good progress in their personal development. They take advantage of opportunities which enable them to plan and participate in community projects. Young people experiencing difficulties at school are well supported through small group work, which focuses

effectively on increasing their ability to stay safe and manage conflict situations. Young people are enabled to make their voice heard within the borough although the service recognises the need to develop an overall strategy for involving them in consultation and decision making and to put in place systems to enable wider representation. Strong partnership work and an effective youth information service enable many young people to be provided with appropriate support and guidance and, when appropriate, referral to specialist services.

## **Part C: Commentary on the key aspects**

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

5. From the sample of work observed, standards of young people's achievement are good. Creative arts projects provide very good opportunities for young people to develop their artistic and musical skills as well as leadership, team work and event organisation skills. Such projects can culminate in contributing to borough and local community events such as Black History month or the Bletchley carnival. There are examples of effective personal development and increased self esteem occurring through generic youth work. In one centre, members showed a good understanding of the facts about smoking and effectively engaged in discussion which in turn broadened their social skills. The achievement of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. Young people enjoy the activities available to them through the MK Dons Football club. They demonstrate very good team work skills and high quality social skills towards visitors and fellow club members.

6. A good proportion of young people have their achievement externally accredited through Duke of Edinburgh awards or Sports Leadership awards, or recorded through local certificates and medals. This they value. Youth workers are placing a greater emphasis on learning outcomes and the achievements of young people within project and session planning. However, even in the better sessions, youth workers do not always identify outcomes that young people can achieve through participation in planned activities. As a result, some important achievements are not recognised or celebrated.

7. Young people have a good range of opportunities to act as responsible members of the wider community and their involvement in the Lakes Summer Estates scheme and the development of the SK8MK skateboard facility have been recognised through national awards for voluntary service. Young people are actively involved in planning and running some projects such as arts project and peer mentoring. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are keen to take responsibility for leading activities within their club and to take part in voluntary activities to benefit others in the community. In some projects and centres there are too few opportunities for young people to be involved in leading and organising work.

8. Youth work practice is good and a significant proportion of the sample that was observed was very good. Relationships between youth workers and young people are of a high quality. The best practice is characterised by very good planning and effective use of time. Youth workers use a wide range of approaches and are very skilled at engaging young people and involving them in planning and taking on responsibilities within the club or project. In one project, workers skilfully introduce issues relating to the challenges young people face in their lives, such as sexual health, while they are working on other activities. Good use is made of links with partners who are frequently invited to youth work sessions to provide specialist support and advice to young people. In the weaker practice, workers lack the skills to use the curriculum toolkit to aid their planning, are unclear of the outcomes for the session and have an insufficient range of activities to maintain the interest of young people. A minority of workers lack the skills to manage group work and the flexibility to respond to the needs of the diverse range of young people they encounter.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate overall. The service has a good broad range of provision which reflects its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes: targeted work, centre based programmes, outreach work, advice and guidance, support groups and residential activities. A more systematic approach to the identification of local needs has been implemented but is variable in quality. Managers and workers have a good awareness of the priority groups they are targeting and are extending provision through outreach and partnership work to meet the changing needs of the growing borough.

10. The curriculum framework and supporting toolkit, updated to meet the Every Child Matters agenda, have been well received by the majority of staff and are having a positive impact on morale and team work. The management of the curriculum is satisfactory. Managers are clear about their curriculum responsibilities and staff value the support they receive to implement the new toolkit. However, more robust management is needed to ensure it is consistently implemented. While most workers are making a good effort to use the toolkit, it is not yet embedded in practice and some workers lack the skills to implement it.

11. A high proportion of managers and full time workers have a professional qualification whereas only a low proportion of part-time workers are qualified. The recruitment of part time workers is problematic and vacancy levels are relatively high. This, together with some vacancies among full time workers is placing pressure on the service. Staff are not always deployed effectively, resulting in a high proportion of staff to the number of young people in some projects. Regular training opportunities are provided for full-time and part-time staff but insufficient use is made of practice observations to inform staff development needs. A few part-time workers have difficulty in attending training at the times arranged. Accommodation is satisfactory overall in terms of accessibility and fitness for purpose and meets the requirements of the Special Needs and Disabilities Act 200.

Some of the accommodation that is not owned by the service but which is being used for outreach work is inappropriate for the activities taking place in it.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good overall. The service is well regarded by elected members and senior officers. A clear sense of direction is set through the Youth Service Plan which is appropriately linked to national and local priorities. The amount spent on the service by the local authority has fallen as a percentage of the overall education budget for the last two years. Expenditure is carefully managed. The service has redeployed some of its resources during a recent restructuring and is entering into partnership arrangements with parish councils to enable it to widen its reach within a growing borough.

13. A comprehensive range of policies are in place to ensure the safety of young people and youth workers. Criminal Records Bureau checks are made on all staff and on behalf of voluntary partners prior to working with young people. Youth workers are aware of child protection procedures and have attended appropriate training, but not all part-time workers are able to access training to update them in this area.

14. Senior managers and team leaders make good use of management information to monitor the performance of the service and identify changing needs. They have a good understanding of the service's strengths and weaknesses and areas for development. Quality assurance systems and processes have been reviewed and updated but are insufficiently tied in to improving practice. In particular, the purpose and role of the observation of practice is given insufficient prominence within quality assurance processes and currently is insufficiently evaluative both for individual workers and the service as a whole.

15. A strong emphasis is placed by the service on consulting with young people and their views are collected by a variety of means. While young people are very effectively supported to contribute their views to key decision makers in the borough, participation in the strategic management of the service is underdeveloped. Young people are represented on the multi-agency Youth Service Advisory Group which oversees the direction of the service and some other management groups, but there are currently no systems in place to enable them to consult with other young people across the borough and so ensure wider representation. In addition, young people are not yet involved in the services quality assurance processes. At operational level, good practice is evident in a number of projects but is inconsistent overall.

16. Strong partnership arrangements are in place at strategic and operational levels with a range of statutory and voluntary sector providers that result in positive outcomes for young people. Relations with the Connexions service are very good. Service level agreements with voluntary organisations are currently underdeveloped.