



**Better
education
and care**

Hillingdon youth service report

Hillingdon children's services authority area

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Introduction

1. Hillingdon youth service delivers youth work through a series of projects and activities based at four area young people's centres, and eight specialist and targeted teams located across the borough. It also extends its provision through a series of neighbourhood projects, delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector, by using a mobile bus and detached youth work. The service is managed by a youth service manager and a senior management team of five service managers with joint responsibility for managing the youth service and the Connexions service in Hillingdon. The approved full-time equivalent staffing complement is 73, of whom 61 are now in post. The budget of the service is £2,242,920. According to the service, it has reached 4,223 13–19 year olds this year to date. The service is on target to meet or exceed its 2005–06 targets for reach, participation and recorded and accredited learning outcomes. In 2004, funding was increased substantially, making available an additional £800,000 of funds over two years.

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 across the borough and as part of the JAR neighbourhood study area.

Part A: summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Hillingdon has a satisfactory youth service which provides satisfactory value for money. This is an improving service as well as an expanding one. Most young people with whom the service regularly works make good progress and, where appropriate, gain relevant accreditations. The quality of practice is satisfactory. There is a thoughtful curriculum delivered by keen and committed staff, many of whom are new in post. Projects are not evaluated regularly enough in terms of their impact. Some individual sessions are poorly planned and fail to focus sufficiently on the intended outcomes of the work.

Strengths

- Service managers have a clear vision, which is well articulated in the development plan.
- Young people with whom the service works on a sustained basis achieve well.
- Relationships between staff and young people are good in all settings.

- There is a well-judged range of work that effectively promotes equality, inclusiveness and diversity.
- Accommodation and resources are good.

Areas for development

- Involve young people more effectively in helping to shape provision.
- Improve the quality of session planning and the evaluation of the work undertaken.
- Establish more robust quality assurance arrangements.
- Provide more opportunities for staff to share good practice.

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 makes a good contribution to outcomes in a number of areas. Important strategic links with other services have been established, enabling the youth service's voice to be increasingly influential. Through its projects and activities, it is able to provide more young people, particularly many of the most vulnerable, with enjoyable opportunities to develop personal qualities, self-esteem and skills. The emphasis on challenging young people and recognising their achievements through accreditation is beneficial to them. At present there are too few opportunities for young people to develop political skills and become involved in decision-making. Much of the detached and outreach work, developed largely in the last two years, helps to reduce anti-social behaviour by providing alternative activities. All young people's centres include effective health-related activities within their programmes. There are significant projects underway on drugs education and the promotion of sport among disadvantaged groups as well as support for other vulnerable groups. Most of these projects are now making a positive difference. Although the child protection training arrangements of the services require review, 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

5. The standard of young people's achievement is satisfactory. This confirms the service's own view of the quality of its work.

6. Achievement among those with whom the service has been working on a sustained basis is high. In nearly all activities, there is an appropriate emphasis on achievement and the number of young people who gain accreditation is increasing rapidly. Last year 855 young people gained recognition for their achievements; this year it is likely to be more than twice as many. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is particularly strongly embedded. Many of these awards are for young people who would not ordinarily have opted to enrol on the scheme but, through contact with the service, have taken full advantage of all that the scheme can offer. A range of celebratory events reinforces the culture of achievement among staff as well as young people.

7. Most young people are making at least satisfactory progress in personal and social development and in acquiring useful skills. For example, in a music project, young people demonstrated impressively the new practical skills they had learned. Project work with a travellers group was effective in developing confidence and self-esteem as well as providing support with practical life skills. Many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were socially confident and able

to relate easily to visitors. The large majority of young people who use the service are very positive about their involvement. Some can identify changes in their attitudes and behaviour as a result of attending youth work projects. However, there are wide differences in how well young people progress in youth club settings. On some occasions, progress was limited because there was too much focus on purely recreational activities and not enough emphasis on learning.

8. In nearly all of the work seen, young people behaved responsibly towards one another and showed a good sense of teamwork when required. Participants in the Hillingdon Youth Council, for example, showed a good understanding of how local democracy works and commendable tolerance of others with different views or priorities. Young people from different communities come together at the citizenship, dance, music and drama projects as well as in general youth club activities where they learn, among other things, to act, dance, cook and make music.

9. The quality of the youth work is satisfactory. Strategies to engage with young people are varied and workers show a real commitment to wanting to help young people. They have skill, patience and the ability to develop and sustain good relations. The planning and evaluation of work is less successful. In almost all sessions, activities were planned in relation to the perceived needs of the group rather than the individual needs of young people. The outcome is that some young people's needs are met much more effectively than others.

10. Youth workers engage well with young people in a wide range of settings including targeted projects as well as in open and detached youth work. They provide good support and effective leadership. In a few sessions, there was poor time management which meant that important work was left uncompleted. Too little attention is placed on involving young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their work. In some projects it is a requirement for young people to try to evaluate their work, although in others, staff expectations of what young people can do for themselves are too low.

Key aspect 2: quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum and resources to deliver it are satisfactory. Senior managers provide strong leadership through the thoughtful Hillingdon curriculum model, particularly in respect of the guiding principles and priorities. The curriculum coherently links a strategic vision of an expanding service, with a strong emphasis on social inclusion, to a broad range of informal learning opportunities. The five key outcomes of the Every child matters agenda set the policy context but are not explicitly related to individual projects or themes.

12. Curriculum management is satisfactory. Three generic area teams and a number of targeted and specialist projects effectively deliver the programme of work in a suitably wide range of settings. Performing arts and vocational projects particularly benefit from the use of good-quality, specialised studios, theatre space and workshops.

13. Most workers are able to use the curriculum model to introduce new activities, but not to review their impact or undertake detailed planning. Many projects use resources well on a day-to-day basis, although others fail to build on skilful initial contacts, or are new or of too short a duration to allow their impact to be properly assessed.

14. Most staff are well qualified, although many are recent appointments. The service is tackling training needs energetically, although more opportunities are needed for staff to share good practice so that expectations can be appropriately high in all settings rather than just some. Deployment, in relation to priority and need, is satisfactory, but not yet good, as some projects tie up high numbers of workers with low numbers of young people.

15. Accommodation and resources are good. There has been a real benefit to young people from the refurbishment of the four young people's centres at Ruislip, West Drayton, Harlington and Fountain's Mill. Workers now have access to a good variety of premises and locations in the borough's young people's centres, schools, premises of partner organisations, parks and public spaces, and on an innovative mobile bus. The safe, secure premises created comply with access requirements for young people with physical disabilities. The exciting range of music technology equipment, internet café areas, sports and cooking facilities has attracted a wider range of young people to get involved.

Key aspect 3: leadership and management

16. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are clear and appropriately challenging ambitions. Aims and targets are clearly stated and provide a sense of purpose and direction. The youth service manager and the senior management team have demonstrated effective leadership through a period of significant change and development. The service is now adequately funded with sufficient resources to undertake the agreed remit.

17. A strong emphasis is given to social inclusion and these values are widely shared. The service has been very successful in increasing the level of participation and aims to increase further the number of young people who use the service. The credibility and profile of the service are high, as is morale among staff and young people.

18. The promotion of equality, inclusiveness and diversity is good. The service provides targeted projects for vulnerable groups of young people including those with moderate learning difficulties, lesbian, gay or bisexual young people, and for young parents as well as for specific minority ethnic groups. Good progress is being made towards meeting requirements in respect of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act 2001. Appropriate policies for equality and diversity are fully in place. Generally, the service provides a healthy and safe working environment.

19. Too little progress has been made towards involving young people in the planning, implementation and review of youth work and in active citizenship

projects. Some young people have been involved in the re-design of services through workshops, the best value review processes, conferences and ongoing work with the youth council but, as the self-assessment acknowledges, the impact of their contribution has been limited. Young people are now starting to contribute to borough-wide planning events through a growing network of school councils and local and district service user groups, but many of those most closely involved still do not feel that their voice is being heard.

20. Partnership work is developing satisfactorily. Partnerships with Connexions, social services, the voluntary sector and the police are particularly helpful in targeting work with priority groups, including young people at risk of dropping out of education, teenage parents, isolated young people and those at risk of harm or offending, as well as looked after children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and minority ethnic groups. Not all partnership work, however, is leading to beneficial outcomes. For example, in a positive activities programme for vulnerable young people, considerable staff time and resources were wasted when the young people who had been referred failed to arrive.

21. Management, while satisfactory overall, is not as consistently effective as it needs to be. Communications are good and there are clear lines of accountability. Mandatory training in areas such as equalities and disability is in place, but there are serious delays in the arrangements for child protection training. Improvements are needed to ensure young people are more closely involved in shaping local provision. For example, on no occasion did the staff invite a young person to talk to the inspectors about the activity, club or project, nor did young people refer to the way the youth forum had influenced the way the programme had evolved.

22. The service readily acknowledges that much more needs to be done to establish robust quality assurance systems that include a coherent system of internal inspection. While there has been a real effort to improve the flow of information among staff, not enough use is made of the data generated to help monitor the quality of the work. Any improvements need to ensure that they can lead to judgements on the cost-effectiveness of the programme of work.