

Hertfordshire Youth Service Report

Hertfordshire Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. The Youth Service is within the portfolio of the Head of Integrated Young People's Service and is managed by two service managers who between them manage the work of ten district teams and aspects of cross-county youth services. A review of young people's services is currently being carried out in the context of the proposals for an integrated youth support service.

2. This year the youth service budget is £4.67m. The service attracts additional external funding of around £1.3m. In 2005/06, approximately £180,000 was allocated to contractual arrangements with the voluntary sector. The service employed 119 full-time equivalent (fte) staff which includes 21 fte staff in administration and support. It reached around 17% of the 93,160 young people aged 13-19. Some 11% of Hertfordshire residents are from Black and minority ethnic groups.

3. 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, a cross-section of staff and groups of young people. 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. The youth service in Hertfordshire is adequate and improving. Standards and the quality of youth work practice are adequate overall, although where planning focuses well on young people's progress standards are good. Youth workers make good relationships with young people. The range and management of the curriculum are adequate. Curriculum planning at local level takes good account of the outcomes in Every Child Matters, although the quality of the curriculum in some projects is affected by inadequate buildings. Leadership and management are adequate. The service has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision and has put in place quality assurance processes and training which provide good foundations for making further improvements. Currently not enough of the provision is good or better and while the vision for the service is clearly stated, its key priorities and target groups are not yet well understood by some workers. The level of core funding is low and the value for money provided by the service is satisfactory.

Strengths

- The good focus on health in the curriculum is helping young people to make appropriate choices about lifestyles.

- The youth service works effectively in partnership to support the provision of accessible information, advice and guidance to young people.
- Some excellent facilities provide good opportunities for outdoor education.
- Good supervision and training arrangements are supporting the capacity of the service to make improvements.
- Evaluations of the quality of provision are rigorous

Areas for development

- Increase the achievement of accredited outcomes.
- Increase levels of attendance.
- Provide greater focus in local planning on providing challenge, on the progress of young people and on equality and diversity.
- Resolve the accommodation issues which continue to place limitations on the curriculum.
- Improve the understanding at all levels of the service's priorities.

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: 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. The service makes at least an adequate contribution to all of the Every Child Matters outcomes; it makes a good contribution to promoting young people's health, and to their achievement of economic well-being. Standards of

achievement are generally satisfactory and young people engaging with the youth service develop personal and social skills and enjoy the challenge of acquiring new practical and life skills. In many projects, young people are supported well in making healthy lifestyle choices and are helped to understand issues that influence their sexual health. The service supports young people who are seeking information, advice and guidance effectively. In areas where young people take part in local democratic processes youth workers provide good support. Health and safety are given appropriate consideration.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. The service has accurately evaluated the standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice as adequate. In the majority of the projects observed during the inspection, young people were well supported in developing personally and socially; they behaved appropriately and most enjoyed the activities. The development of the personal and social skills of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was particularly good at projects such as Gardens Drama and Snappy G's.

7. While the numbers of young people gaining accreditation is increasing, for example through the Duke of Edinburgh's award, the achievement of accredited outcomes has not met targets. Some young people have shown good leadership, for example in raising funds for and designing a skateboard park at Bishops Stortford, but there is much greater scope for young people to develop their self-confidence through more active involvement in planning, managing and evaluating activities. The service supports young people's involvement in the UK Youth Parliament which has members from eight out of the ten local districts. Links between this and local democratic structures such as youth town councils are underdeveloped, and the youth service does not have the resources to provide support in all areas. Youth service awards are used effectively to recognise young people's achievements.

8. Workers are committed to supporting young people and relationships between them and young people are good. Where planning focuses on the progress of young people, there is good challenge provided by the activities; where specialist workers provide an input then young people's knowledge is increased. Where practice is less successful, the curriculum is not matched to individuals' needs and young people too quickly lose interest. Where young people's motivation or behaviour present particular challenges, workers occasionally lack the skills for effective interaction with them.

9. In the best sessions observed by inspectors, workers focused their planning and evaluations on the progress made by young people and encouraged them to measure and record their achievements, for example at Zoo Café. Records of

sessions and attendance levels are kept but the effectiveness of the use of this information for future planning and to improve practice is too variable. While there are encouraging signs of increasing participation across the county, in some projects the attendance remains low, particularly by females.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate. The curriculum includes a broad variety of open access and targeted opportunities, including detached and outreach projects. Young people benefit from opportunities for residential experiences. Most activities operate in the evening although the service is planning to develop more targeted day-time activities. Current day-time provision comprises One-Stop-Shops, which provide good access to advice and guidance through partnership with Connexions, a small number of specialist projects and a broad range of holiday activities. 'Hertswired' gives young people good on-line access to advice and guidance including on health and relationships.

11. The curriculum policy is well established and understood, although the influence it has on local planning is inconsistent. The policy has an emphasis on the outcomes of Every Child Matters and in most projects workers address these in their planning but do not always identify the specific knowledge and skills that young people should gain. A particularly strong focus on being healthy is supporting well the development of young people's knowledge of healthy eating and sexual health. Specialist workers are contributing effectively to the curriculum in most areas of the county although in some there has been inequitable deployment of their skills to promote drugs and alcohol awareness. In some projects explicit links to the service's priorities, including the planning and promotion of equality and diversity are not evident. A revised curriculum policy is due to be implemented shortly.

12. Staff have good opportunities for development and training. Professional range workers are well qualified. The majority of youth support workers are not qualified but have attended the service's internal foundation training, which is currently being strengthened. Those who work substantial hours are encouraged to achieve National Vocational Qualification Level 3. Currently the service is not recruiting to fill seven full time vacancies due to budget restraints; this is resulting in restrictions on curriculum breadth at some projects. In some cases, staffing levels observed were high due to low levels of attendance.

13. While there are some excellent facilities, for example for outdoor education at the Herts Young Mariners' Base, and the service has made efforts to improve the quality of accommodation, the condition or location of buildings in some areas places significant restrictions on the curriculum. Many centres have access to information technology but in some the equipment or access to the internet is not reliable. Investments have been made to improve the physical access to buildings but some remain without full access for young people with disabilities. Workers and young people benefit from an efficient service provided by the resource centre.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. Strategic and operational leadership and management are adequate. While there are strengths in leadership and management, and the service is playing a good role in the local authority's planning for integrated services for young people, there are some issues to address. There has been slow progress by the local authority on the service's property, strategy which is inhibiting the service's ability to meet young people's needs. The level of core funding for the service is low. Workers understand well the importance of meeting local targets for participation but the vision for the service and its priority groups are less well understood.

15. Senior managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They showed good leadership in the transition to district working, which has had a good effect on staff morale. Young people have recently taken part in quality assurance observations and are consulted effectively each year about the quality of provision. Workers and young people are provided with a safe environment. Procedures for the safeguarding of young people are in place and all new staff have enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks. Progress by the local authority on carrying out these checks on existing staff has been slow.

16. The service plays an effective role in a broad range of partnerships, for example with Connexions and the police. Strong partnerships with the teenage pregnancy and health improvement services enable the effective promotion of healthy lifestyles. Joint projects with the voluntary sector offer a broad range of opportunities, although service level agreements are not in place in all cases. While the service supports schools for delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh's award, it has recognised that its strategy for partnership with schools is underdeveloped.

17. Reliable data on participation has not been available until the recent introduction of a new management information system. Managers anticipate that planning and targeting will improve as the more detailed analysis provided by the new system is distributed.

18. Supervision arrangements are well established and all but a few part-time workers have regular supervision. Performance management arrangements are good although target setting with individuals by a minority of managers is underdeveloped. Much importance has been given appropriately to increasing the proportion of face-to-face work that workers have.

19. Internal inspections have rigour and provide an accurate view of the quality of provision. Management actions following inspections are improving the quality of provision. Nevertheless, some inadequate provision remains and not enough is yet good or better. Project quality files have improved workers' understanding of quality assurance processes, although their use for quality improvement is inconsistent. The service makes judgements on value for money although lack of reliable data has made calculations of cost-effectiveness difficult.

20. While there is a strong focus on inclusion and equality and diversity in planning documents, the strategic approach to planning for particular groups, for example black and minority ethnic groups and planning to address equality and diversity issues at project level are underdeveloped. The service complies with legislative requirements for race relations and special educational needs and disabilities through application of the council's policies.