



Hartlepool Youth Service Report

Hartlepool Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

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Introduction

1. The Youth Service in Hartlepool is located within the Local Authority Children's Services. The service is accountable to the Assistant Director, Planning and Service Integration. In addition to the head of service and an operations manager, there are 7 full time and 82 part time youth workers to 20 full-time equivalent (fte) posts.
2. Youth work is delivered from three main centres and four satellite centres as well as through mobile and detached provision. The service gives priority to 13-19 year olds. There are 9,127 young people in the 13-19 age range. Expenditure from the local authority budget was £127 per head for 13-19 year olds in 2005/06. The budget made available by the local authority for 2006/07 is £994,279 augmented by £66,000 from external sources. The service reached 29.23% of young people aged 13-19 in 2005/6, which is well above the national benchmark of 25%. In terms of its more regular contact with young people it successfully engages 24%.
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 with officers and a cross section of staff and partners. They reviewed key service documentation and observed a sample of youth work sessions in Dyke House as part of the JAR neighbourhood study, as well as work in other parts of the borough.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Hartlepool borough council provides an adequate youth service and delivers satisfactory value for money. It is reaching a high proportion of young people in the 13-19 age group, many of whom exhibit challenging behaviour. Staff have worked hard to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries for behaviour and most young people are making reasonable progress in developing self-confidence and social skills. There is well-targeted provision that is effectively meeting the needs of some vulnerable groups. High vacancy levels and long-term sickness absence have had a negative impact on the quality and quantity of provision. Premises are of a high standard and located appropriately in areas of high need. The involvement of young people in planning, delivery and evaluation of provision is under-developed. Plans are poorly defined, and the management of the curriculum weak. The service collaborates well with a wide range of partners to share resources and expertise. Managers communicate well with their staff and have a good grasp of what needs to be done to improve the service. The service makes good use of the funds available to it.

Strengths

- Youth workers are responsive to the complex needs and significant obstacles to achievement that many young people are experiencing
- Young people's attendance at youth work activities is regular and sustained.
- There is some effective and well targeted provision
- Premises are well maintained, accessible and of a high quality
- There are good strategic links with a wide range of voluntary and statutory partners.

Areas for development

- Very low numbers of young people achieve accredited outcomes
- Curriculum management is weak
- The service's strategic plans and priorities are insufficiently defined
- Strategies and plans to support equality, inclusion and diversity are underdeveloped
- Involvement of young people in planning and evaluating youth service provision at strategic and operational level is limited.

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's contribution to the *Every Child Matters* outcomes is adequate overall though there are good examples of work in some areas. Of particular note is the high priority given to providing a wide range of sexual health advice and services at youth centres, through detached work and from the service's mobile provision. Young people value this provision highly and there is evidence that it is having a positive impact on their sexual attitudes and behaviour. The service is effectively supporting a small number of young people through the UK youth parliament group and the youth opportunities fund group to participate in decision-making and democratic processes. Youth centres are well attended and valued by those who use them as safe and welcoming places to go. Detached workers have developed good relationships with young people who congregate on the streets and are using mediation skills well to tackle local concerns about anti-social behaviour.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. Standards of young people's achievement are satisfactory overall. Attendance is regular and sustained over time. Young people have formed positive relationships with staff. Those attending open access provision, many of whom exhibit challenging behaviour, value the safe environment that youth centres provide and are making reasonable progress in developing their levels of self-confidence and social skills. Young people respond well to sexual health awareness and drugs programmes which have challenged their attitudes and resulted in them taking increased personal responsibility for their health. Those engaged in special projects learn about political and democratic processes. Involvement in multi media and performing and creative arts provide a useful means by which young people can consider and explore issues of interest.

7. Young people at risk of exclusion are making good progress in literacy and communication skills from a low baseline of attainment and are working towards achieving accreditation for their work through ASDAN and the Open College Network. Overall, young people's involvement in reviewing and recording their progress is limited.

8. Young people involved in the UK youth parliament support group and in the Youth Opportunities Fund grant-givers group are developing an understanding of democratic processes as well as self-confidence, planning and presentational skills. Outside of these, insufficient opportunities exist for young people to demonstrate initiative or willingness to take on responsibility either within their projects or in their community.

9. The quality of youth work practice is satisfactory overall. In most practice, boundaries for behaviour have been established and are maintained by the constant efforts of staff. Workers have a good knowledge of their local communities and of the needs of young people with whom they work. They have made good links with other services to extend the opportunities available to young people. There are some good examples of youth workers responding imaginatively to young people's needs. At Throston youth centre, for example, a group of young men with low self esteem and poor school achievement were helped to teach music skills to primary school children.

10. Staff are clear about the educational focus of youth work but a minority are struggling to apply this principle and implement the service curriculum effectively. Programmes in much of the open access provision are narrow in range and dominated by the interests of young men. The quality of planning and evaluation is variable. In a high proportion of provision, plans focus on activities rather than learning outcomes and young people are insufficiently involved in the process.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. A curriculum statement sets out the service's broad aims and values. This document is poorly aligned to *Every Child Matters* outcomes and is insufficiently linked to the priorities that have been identified in the service's analysis of need. Management responsibility for curriculum development has not been allocated and too little guidance is provided for staff to help them develop expertise in implementing the curriculum.

12. The curriculum lacks breadth and the extent to which opportunities are available across the borough is limited. For example, although mentioned in the documentation, there are significant gaps in the provision of information and communications technology (ICT), citizenship and volunteering and the promotion of racial and cultural diversity. Detached work, again identified as a priority, is currently available in only two neighbourhoods and delivered by two workers. Plans to develop this work have been hindered by staff vacancies.

13. Nonetheless, young people's needs are effectively identified through discussion with partners and staff, observations of practice and statistical data. The service has identified priority groups with whom it will work and there is some well targeted provision for young carers, deaf young people, young people with learning difficulties and young people at risk of exclusion to ensure that they are able to access recreational and voluntary learning opportunities. The service is reaching a high proportion of young people in the 13-19 age range and open access provision is very well attended. The needs of young women are not being met effectively. There is a significant gender imbalance in the participation of young men and women in the service.

14. High levels of vacancies and long-term sickness absence have had a negative impact on the service's effectiveness. The situation has now been resolved and the recent appointment of five full-time professional youth workers has greatly

enhanced the service's capacity to improve. Service delivery is heavily reliant on part-time staff, many of whom are new to the service and not yet qualified.

15. Specialist youth workers such as those providing sexual health programmes are well trained, demonstrate a high level of expertise and have up to date knowledge. There is a very good in-house training programme that responds well to identified development needs. Mandatory training, such as health and safety, is not co-ordinated or monitored effectively. The induction programme does not provide an adequate introduction to service policies and procedures.

16. Premises used by the service are well maintained, accessible, warm and inviting. They are well located in disadvantaged communities. The mobile unit is well equipped and is fully accessible for those with mobility difficulties. There is a good bank of resources, accessible to all staff. Access to ICT is poor.

17. Effective safeguarding procedures are in place, including health and safety audits for accommodation, in-house child protection training and risk assessments for off-site visits. A child protection issue arising during the inspection was dealt with appropriately. Criminal Records Bureau clearance processes are effective.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

18. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. However, the service's plans and priorities are poorly defined. The annual plan is insufficiently strategic and lacks ambition. Many service policies are out of date and are not supported by procedural guidelines. Despite this, most staff have a reasonable grasp of the service's aims and priorities for improvement. Managers make regular visits to practice, know their service well and have produced an open and accurate self-assessment.

19. The service does not have an equalities and diversity strategy or specific plans to tackle the low uptake of service provision by young women and young people with disabilities. This aspect is unsatisfactory. Although overtly racist remarks by young people are challenged, the promotion of positive race relations does not feature in the curriculum.

20. The recent introduction of termly planning and evaluation meetings, the development of supportive planning documentation and the revised approach to supervision and staff development have helped staff to focus on the importance of planning and evaluating their work. Staff speak very highly of the time and support they receive from managers and as a result morale is high, despite the difficult circumstances caused by high vacancy levels.

21. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The service has an electronic management information system that enables reliable but limited data collection. There is a good system of peer inspection run in conjunction with a neighbouring authority, which is making some impact on improving performance. The inspection visits are, however, infrequent and judgements made are inconsistent. Managers have not established measurable targets for the service or

for staff. Service level agreements with commissioned services lack rigour and expectations are not always made clear. More generally, the service does not evaluate sufficiently the impact of provision.

22. The involvement of young people in planning and evaluating provision is weak. Neither are they involved in the management or quality assurance of the service. An entitlement statement included in the service's curriculum document is not monitored and young people are not aware of it. The service has conducted a survey of users, which received a good response, but has not contacted those who do not currently use the service to ascertain the reasons and to reduce barriers to inclusion.

23. The service has very good strategic links with a wide range of voluntary and statutory partners. Partners value the service's sustained and committed contribution to partner forums, strategic bodies and management boards. Collaboration with partners is effective in identifying needs, and in ensuring that resources are deployed efficiently to meet gaps in provision and reduce duplication.

24. The service makes effective use of the funds available to it by the local authority and pays good attention to the principles of Best Value in the deployment of resources. The good support it provides to voluntary organisations enables them to extend and enhance youth provision in the borough.