



Harrow Youth Service Report

Harrow Children's Services Authority Area

**Better
education
and care**

Publication Type	Published	Reference no.
All	13 March 2007	310

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Contents

Introduction	2
Part A: Summary of the report	
Main findings	2
Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes	3
Part C: Commentary on the Key Aspects	
Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice	4
Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources	5
Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management	6

Introduction

1. Harrow youth service is part of Youth Engagement Services in the Young People's Service Group which is part of Children's Services in the People First Directorate. Other teams within Youth Engagement are responsible for Connexions, participation, the Children's Fund and play. Youth service activities involve these different teams to a greater or lesser extent. In addition to an interim operational manager appointed during the inspection, youth service staff include a team leader, three senior youth workers and 14 full time or fractional youth workers. Five posts are currently vacant. Funding allocated to the service in 2006-2007 is £1,501,240 and although it represents a reduction from the previous year it is broadly in line with similar authorities. Some £23,000 are allocated as grants to voluntary organisations. There are 18,750 young people aged 13-19 in the borough. The local authority does not have figures for the proportion of young people reached or who engage in regular activities.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors reviewed key service documentation and considered the service's self assessment. They met managers, staff and representatives from the voluntary sector and carried out observations of youth work sessions.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Harrow has an inadequate youth service. Leadership and management are inadequate and the service lacks a clear identity. There is no systematic analysis of young people's needs to inform curriculum planning and the provision is unsatisfactory. Self assessment has been effective in identifying weaknesses and initial steps have been taken to bring about improvement. Staff often pay too little attention to planning their work and to the needs of individual young people. Few young people achieve accredited outcomes and the quality of practice and achievement are unsatisfactory overall although there are examples of good practice with good achievements. These, together with the enthusiasm of staff and their good relationships with young people, provide a good basis for improvement. Quality assurance procedures and the use of management information are underdeveloped and there is insufficient assessment of the impact of services. The service provides unsatisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- Relationships between staff and young people are good.
- Some effective targeted work.

- Support for the youth council and the involvement of young people in consultative activities.

Areas for development

- Improve the overall quality of youth work practice and standards of achievement.
- Undertake a systematic analysis of young people's needs and use it to plan youth work provision.
- Develop a coherent curriculum and provision in areas of the borough where it is currently absent or sparse.
- Establish robust quality assurance and performance management arrangements.
- Improve the involvement of young people in the development of the service.
- Extend staff development and training to meet the needs of staff and the service.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	1
	Quality of youth work practice	1
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: 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

4. Overall, the service is not making an adequate contribution to Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes although the contribution to encouraging youth participation is good and some projects are effective in engaging young people. While youth service staff are aware and supportive of the aims of the ECM

agenda, the service does not have a coherent curriculum and associated strategies to promote positive outcomes. The service has been successful in providing positive activities during holiday periods and in addressing aspects of antisocial behaviour. Specific initiatives target small groups of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, looked after children and immigrant families. The service is not however having sufficient impact on young people's achievements and in engaging young people in regular activities.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Standards of achievement overall are inadequate although there are examples of groups of young people who make good progress such as those involved in the youth council, the Centenary Park Project and All Change Harrow. Overall however young people are not challenged sufficiently and are not provided with enough opportunities for informal learning and social development through activities they enjoy.

6. The number of young people acquiring accredited outcomes is low and use is not made of any form of local certification or informal accreditation routes. Accreditation is limited to the Duke of Edinburgh award and, although the numbers of young people from schools and other settings registering for the award are increasing for the borough overall, rates of completion are low.

7. Standards range from very good to unsatisfactory. A group of disaffected young people are achieving very well through the Centenary Park Project for example and have developed high aspirations and a desire to help others. These outcomes contrast starkly with those of other young people who participate in basic recreational activities that offer little challenge. In most sessions young people are willing to engage in the activities provided for them and develop good relationships with youth workers and with each other.

8. Youth participation is a priority for the local authority and good progress is being made in encouraging participation through the youth council. Young people are increasingly participating in consultative activities and succeeding in voicing their opinions. Through membership of the youth council, young people develop their self confidence and debating skills. Those involved in allocating the youth opportunity fund are particularly mindful of their responsibilities. Opportunities however for young people to be directly involved in decision making within youth centres and in the design and delivery of the youth service overall are less well developed.

9. Overall, the quality of youth work practice is inadequate although there are examples of good and very good practice. Youth workers are enthusiastic, relate well to young people and are keen to celebrate their successes. Practice is most effective where youth workers are clear about the purpose of specific initiatives.

In general however, youth workers do not pay sufficient attention to planning and developing their work and little attention is paid to the different needs and abilities of those attending sessions. This is particularly evident in general youth club activities. Opportunities to make young people think and develop their attitudes and aspirations are not always taken. There is very little detached youth work to improve engagement with the more hard to reach groups.

10. Recording of outcomes is poor and there is little setting of targets to improve young people's learning. Evaluation activities are often superficial placing too much emphasis on participation rather than on achieving planned outcomes. These evaluations do not constitute an adequate basis for planning further actions and curriculum advancement. Youth workers are aware of the Every Child Matters agenda and supportive of its aims but are not sufficiently aware of how to tailor their practice in different settings and with different groups to promote outcomes. Good practice is not shared systematically.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of venues used for youth work is mostly good but the curriculum is inadequate and resources limit options for youth work activities. Systematic analysis of young people's needs to support curriculum planning is underdeveloped. The distribution of provision across the borough is uneven with insufficient provision in some of the more deprived areas. Plans to re-introduce provision in Rayners Lane and re-open the Cedars Youth Centre were at an early stage of implementation at the time of the inspection. As recognised by the council in its self-assessment, the curriculum is not fully integrated with the priorities for children's services and is not fully addressing national priorities. Curriculum documentation is dated and does not reflect current expectations of a youth service. It fails to set clear expectations for the service and does not provide an appropriate framework for developing generic or targeted work.

12. A good range of opportunities are provided to involve young people in positive activities during school holidays but there are few opportunities for progressing the work outside these periods. There is insufficient general club activity to maintain routine contact with young people and provide opportunities for them to achieve. Although isolated examples of detached youth work have been used successfully to engage groups of young people, the approach is not used routinely to build up working relationships with harder to reach young people.

13. There is some work with schools, and targeted work with priority groups including those young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, looked after children and immigrant families but a coherent strategy for addressing equality and diversity has not been developed. Opportunities for young people to participate in residential activities are very limited.

14. The service does not comply with the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act. There has been no planned response based on systematic analysis of needs and an impact assessment conducted by the council identified little progress over a two year period.

15. Venues used for youth work are mostly good although the furnishings and equipment at the Pinner Centre are in poor condition and the centre is in need of decoration. The Wealdstone Centre is part of a newly built and well maintained community facility but is small for youth work. Cedars Youth Centre provides good youth work facilities but was only beginning to be used again at the time of the inspection having been closed for some time. All the centres are equipped with computers and are accessible to those with limited mobility. The council recognises that all staff do not have formal youth work qualifications although some are undergoing appropriate training. Staff development opportunities are limited and there is no structured training plan. Retention of staff has been poor and staffing difficulties have been compounded by a council-wide freeze on posts.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Strategic and operational management are inadequate. The council has not made their expectations of how youth work should be developed sufficiently clear. Unlike other teams within youth engagement, the youth service does not have a business plan with clear targets to guide its development and the service lacks a clear sense of identity. There are few references to the youth service in the children and young people's plan.

17. A new service manager was appointed for youth engagement in 2006 and an interim operations manager for the youth service was appointed during the inspection. Most of the weaknesses in the service were identified in the self-assessment report which also acknowledges that a breakdown in some working relationships have taken their toll on the service. The service manager for youth engagement has a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve the service and weaknesses are beginning to be addressed with the support of external consultants.

18. Despite the identified weaknesses, the youth service has good working relationships with other services such as Connexions, the youth offending team and the looked after children team. There has been successful partnership working in providing positive activities for young people and in addressing aspects of antisocial behaviour. Partnership working with health services and the drugs action team is less well developed. Commissioned work through the Ignite Trust is providing drugs awareness sessions for young people in schools and other settings. A new and promising partnership agreement with Watford Football Club was at an early stage of implementation at the time of the inspection.

19. Relationships with the voluntary sector are good but there has been no systematic mapping of provision across the borough to determine the extent to which local needs are being met. Commissioning of services from specific voluntary sector groups is at an early stage of development.

20. A new comprehensive management information system is being implemented but there is currently insufficient information about the reach of the service and the extent to which young people's needs are being met across the borough. Quality assurance arrangements are underdeveloped and there is insufficient systematic monitoring of the quality of practice and the impact of the service.