

# Gloucestershire Youth Service

Gloucestershire Children's Services Authority Area

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**Age group:** All

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## Introduction

1. Gloucestershire youth service is organised on a geographical basis, with provision managed in the six local council areas. Support is provided by county wide teams responsible for outdoor education, participation, inclusion, accreditation, information and advice and training. The level of funding provided by the local authority is below the average for comparative authorities but additional funding of some £1.6 million is raised annually. The service employs 87 full-time equivalent staff and over 400 part-time youth support staff.
2. The county has a total population of 575,000 of whom 52,000 are aged 13 to 19. The proportion of young people from minority ethnic groups is relatively low at 6.8% but rises to 12.8% in Gloucester City. Although Gloucester City and Cheltenham are large urban areas the county is predominantly rural. For many young people living in rural areas, isolation, transport, access to employment, training and affordable housing can present difficulties. Within the same communities, comparatively high levels of affluence often contrast sharply with differing degrees of social deprivation.
3. The local authority is establishing an integrated youth support service and has contracted Prospects Services Ltd to lead and manage the new service as from April 2008. Management structures were being developed at the time of the inspection with the aim of enabling all staff working with young people to work together effectively. Functions currently managed directly by the local authority through the youth service, youth offending service, the young people and substance misuse service, youth housing advice service and leaving care service and provided externally through the Connexions partnership will be led by a new integrated leadership team. Staff will continue to work for their current employer with the exception of Connexions staff who will transfer to Prospects Services Ltd. The process for allocating resources within integrated youth support is still to be decided however; the current combined funding for these services is £11.5 million of which £3.18 million will remain in the youth service budget allocation.
4. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

5. The quality of youth work provision in Gloucestershire is good but until the necessary details underpinning the strategic decision to integrate various youth support and development functions are agreed, youth work is not sufficiently secure. The current youth service focuses well on improving young people's well-being and the five every child matters outcomes. It, combined with its voluntary sector partners, achieve good levels of participation. Achievement is also good and

young people develop their skills and self confidence through activities they enjoy. Accreditation arrangements are well designed and implemented. The quality of youth work practice is consistently good whether working with groups of young people or individuals with specific needs. The range and coverage of youth work activities is excellent and the local authority lives up to its ambitious youth pledge. Commissioning arrangements are at an early stage of development. There is much to gain from the local authority resolving the initial tensions these arrangements have caused with some voluntary sector organisations in order to build on the many examples of good practice that exist in the area. The service is committed to promoting equality and diversity and to engaging with underachieving and vulnerable groups. The needs of both urban and rural areas are met well and partnership working is very strong. Good local knowledge, good team work and well established universal youth work enables the service to target specific needs quickly as local needs arise. Young people contribute well to decision making in their own communities and beyond. The leadership and management of the service are good but, as recognised by the council, there is still work to be done to use management information more systematically for planning and assessing the impact of youth work. The council's self assessment of the youth service was generally accurate in identifying strengths and areas for development but failed to recognise the outstanding quality of the curriculum and resources and the overall strength of leadership and management when grading the provision.

### 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	4
3	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale  
4: excellent / outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

### Strengths

- The service is well lead and managed.
- High standards are achieved by most young people.
- Procedures for accreditation are well developed and widely used.
- Young people have wide ranging opportunities for participating in decision making.

- The curriculum is rich and diverse.
- Promotion of social inclusion is good.
- Partnership working is excellent.

### **Areas for development**

- Develop a strategy for engaging looked after children.
- Refine the use of management information in planning youth work.
- Embed the use of qualitative and quantitative data for assessing the impact of youth work.
- Secure the commitment of the voluntary sector to commissioning arrangements.

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

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

6. Achievement is good. Young people make good and sometimes very good progress and both the reach of the service and levels of participation are well above national targets. Young people develop their self-confidence and self-esteem through participating in challenging activities, performing in public and contributing to discussions on a variety of topical subjects. Residential experiences, outdoor education, youth forums and peer education are used particularly well in this respect.

7. Young people are encouraged to tackle the unfamiliar and their attitudes and values develop well through exploring specific issues such as equality and diversity, sexual health and substance misuse. These activities together with opportunities to participate in, for example, music and dance enable young people to learn new skills. Young people are proud of their achievements and the youth centres they attend. They are keen to describe what they have learned and achieved as a result of their involvement in the service. Learning is well recorded, appropriately accredited and frequently celebrated through local and county-wide events. The Gloucester Award Plus is included in the national framework for non formal education awards and, together with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, is widely used to recognise achievement. The former is used particularly well to recognise the progress made by vulnerable young people who may have under achieved in their formal education.

8. There are many good examples of young people who have adopted leadership roles; accepting responsibility for securing funding, helping to decorate and improve the facilities at youth centres and volunteering in local communities,

for example, helping to distribute drinking water to elderly residents during the recent floods. Young people's involvement in decision making in their own clubs, groups and projects is very strong. Through youth councils, they contribute very well to decision making in their own communities, the county and beyond. Their views are respected by officers and elected members. Specific fora provide opportunities for groups such as young people of black and minority ethnic heritage and young carers to discuss their views but there is as yet no clear structure for these to be fed into the wider county forum.

9. The quality of youth work practice is consistently good. The service provides an excellent balance of learning opportunities in open access provision, small group work and one to one support. Youth workers are flexible in responding to the varying and changing needs of young people and involve them well in negotiating enjoyable educational activities. Youth workers understand the educational principles of youth work well whether providing open access opportunities in a youth club or working more specifically with individuals through targeted activities. They are inclusive in their practice and committed to engaging with underachieving and vulnerable young people. Partnership working is strong enabling youth workers to target the most challenging young people and reducing the risk of their involvement in antisocial or offending behaviour.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The range and distribution of youth work activities is excellent. The service is clearly focused on improving young people's well-being and on providing opportunities for them to broaden their experience during their leisure time through activities they enjoy. Provision is well matched to the differing needs of the six local council areas and the service is particularly responsive to the needs of rural areas. The service has a broad range of facilities including two residential and three outdoor education centres. On average, over 350 youth work opportunities are provided weekly through 78 centres. These opportunities are used skilfully to engage young people and promote their learning. An ambitious youth pledge which includes a commitment to providing residential experience is consistently fulfilled. Good use is made of outdoor education centres to provide challenging activities. Specialist work in the arts and with new media and technology extends the scope of learning activities.

11. The service provides a good balance between universal and specialist services targeted at vulnerable groups. Relationships with local multi-agency teams are very good and ensure that vulnerable young people are well supported in their own communities. Specific provision is available for those with particular or complex needs including those with disabilities, young carers, young people not attending school, young runaways and those who are not in education, employment or training. Preventative work in partnership with schools targets those at risk of exclusion. A telephone helpline and a texting service ensure that young people living in rural areas have access to the advice and information.

12. A clearly set out and detailed curriculum policy provides a framework for planning and supporting youth work and underpins its educational focus. Health promotion is given high priority as are the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. These priorities are clearly reflected in young people's achievements. Young people have good access to health advice and information and are encouraged to eat healthily. Targeted work with individuals at risk such as those leaving the youth justice system promotes safeguarding. There is no specific targeted youth work for looked after children. The commitment of the service to equality, inclusiveness and diversity is good. The curriculum is used well to help prepare young people for life in a multicultural society. Activities range from raising awareness of diversity and inequalities to specific provision for Bangladeshi young people.

13. Youth workers are well qualified for their roles and have good access to well planned training and development opportunities. Accommodation used for youth work is at least adequate and often good and is used imaginatively to maximise opportunities for young people. Equipment and resources are generally good, although, as identified by the local authority, internet access is patchy and needs to be improved.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. The youth service is well led and managed and young people are involved effectively in the planning and development of the service. Despite being in temporary posts for eighteen months pending the integration of youth support services, youth service senior managers have been very successful in maintaining the morale of the service whilst also implementing necessary developments. The strategic aims of the county are clearly set out in the Children and Young People's Plan and reflected well in the youth service business plan. Responsibility for achieving the objectives of the service is delegated to a significant extent to district managers. They have detailed knowledge of their areas and have good access to information which is used well to plan and develop the service. The strong focus on local management is a particular strength which enables the service to respond well to local needs. Partnership working including partnerships with the voluntary sector is very strong and is used well in targeting support. A shift from grant aiding the voluntary youth sector to commissioning specific services is however creating tensions. Many voluntary providers feel procedures to be bureaucratic and the council is not focusing sufficiently on building the capacity and securing the support of the voluntary sector during this period of transition. The role of the youth service in responding to specific young people's needs is recognised and respected by partners. The extent of universal youth work, excellent partnership working, local knowledge and good team work enable the service to target specific needs quickly.

15. The local authority is committed to a strategy of developing integrated youth support through joining up services whilst building on existing strengths. How this will be achieved through the new management arrangements provided by Prospects Services Ltd is yet to be clarified as is the impact of changes on the existing youth service and the role of youth workers. Until these matters are



resolved youth work is not sufficiently secure. The council is committed however to maintaining support for the role of youth workers and to ensuring the ongoing development of youth work as a key aspect of the integrated services.

16. Quality assurance arrangements are clear. The council's self assessment accurately identified strengths and weaknesses in the service but graded the overall quality of the curriculum, resources and leadership and management too low. Good use is made of surveys of young people's opinions to develop provision but young people locally have only had limited input into the development of integrated youth support. Observation of practice, including observation by young people, and regular audits of provision ensure managers have clear oversight of strengths and areas for development. Routine supervision of staff helps identify development needs and is used well to communicate and clarify the priorities of the service. The service has correctly identified the need for an electronic system for recording young people's achievements and other data held on paper. Good progress is being made in implementing a system although there are inconsistencies in the inputting of data across the area which limits the capacity of the service to demonstrate the impact and quality of youth work. There is still work to be done to use management information more systematically as part of the service's annual review and planning cycle. Income generation is closely monitored and expenditure carefully controlled. Spend per head of population aged 13-19 is below the national average.

17. Safeguarding procedures are clear and staff know how to log concerns and make referrals. Health and safety procedures are well established with clear guidance and the service is very experienced in conducting risk assessments including those for outdoor and residential activities.