

# Monitoring Re-inspection of Darlington Youth Service – March 2008

Darlington Children's Services Authority Area

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**Age group:** All

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Darlington's youth service was inspected in February 2005 and judged to be inadequate. Ofsted carried out a single monitoring re-inspection and inspectors judge whether there has been **no discernible progress**, or whether progress has been **limited, reasonable** or **good**.

The overall evaluation by inspectors is that the service has made reasonable progress to date in rectifying weaknesses in provision.

The re-inspection focused particularly on the key issues identified in the previous report. These are as follows:

### **Ensure that sufficient resources are available and are effectively deployed to secure sustainable improvements to the service**

Progress has been good. Following the last inspection, the council increased the annual revenue budget for the youth service to a level of expenditure per head of the 13-19 population which is significantly above the national average. This level of resource has been sustained. The number of full-time youth workers has increased and they are effectively deployed across the borough. The volume of provision for young people has grown substantially and the range of opportunities has broadened. More activity is targeted at marginalized groups of young people such as young Travellers. There has been good investment in training and staff development. The service works very effectively in partnership with other agencies and helps to develop the capacity of the voluntary sector. There are clear expectations for youth workers regarding the time spent with young people and regular monitoring is in place. Further work remains to be done at project and area level to assess cost effectiveness.

### **Improve the quality of youth work practice**

Progress has been good. Practice in the small sample of work viewed ranged widely. In some cases youth workers were leading innovative projects with clear benefits for the personal and social development of the young people involved. These sessions were inclusive of the views and aspirations of young people, recognised their needs and provided opportunities for accreditation where appropriate. In the weaker examples, poor planning meant missed opportunities and weaker outcomes. Currently the youth service meets or exceeds national benchmarks for performance such as the proportion of the 13-19 population with which it is in contact. The service is highly regarded by partners and its involvement is now actively sought across a range of interventions. There has been a substantial increase in the opportunities for young people's achievements to be accredited. Innovation and collaboration within the service is encouraged as is the sharing of good practice at regular area meetings.

### **Involve young people more effectively in the overall development, management and evaluation of the service**

Progress has been reasonable. The service has made a good contribution to developing the voice and influence of young people across Darlington. The work of the service's Participation Team in particular has been instrumental in changing the culture of the council towards engaging children and young people in decision-making. The Participation Strategy, with its promotion of the Hear-by-Right standard and the three tier model is beginning to allow the views of young people to have genuine influence. The DOSH mechanism for the administration of Youth Opportunity and Capital Funds is accessible, occupies a high profile in the town and is giving young people real control over the direction of resources and opportunities for their peers. Within the work of the service itself the picture is more mixed: one excellent project was seen, on raising awareness of HIV/AIDS, is planned and directed by young people whose personal development is being enormously enhanced. Other work allows little influence or involves no effective dialogue. Initiatives such as area forums are at various stages of development and have no clear, consistent function across the service. The extent to which young people are involved in shaping and evaluating the service is limited.

### **Review and strengthen the management structure and clarify roles and responsibilities**

Progress has been limited. Managers are clear about their roles and work cooperatively together. Since the last inspection the service has adopted an area-based model which allows for closer identification of needs and is fitting well with the council's move towards locality-based services. However, the restructuring processes that followed inspection have not led to effective management working. The head of service has had too much to do, attempting to combine a growing strategic role with substantial development and operational tasks. This has resulted in progress in some areas being too slow. Too much of the time of other senior managers is spent supporting the operations of the service. The structure overall, for this relatively small service, with area managers, area officers, senior youth workers and a number of small teams, lacks clarity and efficiency. The current structure is unlikely to support the new, wider role recently taken on by the head of service within the council and the service is only beginning to address the wider public policy drive towards integrated youth support services. The service is ill-equipped by its current structure for the challenges ahead.

### **Review the quality assurance arrangements and ensure consistent implementation across the service**

Progress has been reasonable. A good framework for quality assurance, involving the direct observation of work, is beginning to be implemented. This development has been too slow, although progress was disrupted by staffing changes. Despite the fact that staff have been involved in the development process some are not clear about their responsibilities within the framework or how it will affect them. Some of the elements within this framework like the involvement of young people

are yet to be put in place. The implementation of the new processes is too recent for there to be any evidence at this stage of its impact. Furthermore it is not yet clear where responsibility sits for measuring and improving the quality of work. Other mechanisms to support and improve the quality of work are more well-established and are consistently implemented, such as induction, supervision and performance management arrangements. There is a commitment to staff development and training which is overseen by a senior member of staff.

### **Improve the availability and reliability of management information**

Progress has been limited. For two years following the previous inspection the service struggled with a management information system that it found very difficult to use effectively. Following the decision to replace the system there has been an intervening period before the very recent implementation of new software in April 2008. Management information processes have enabled a satisfactory degree of recording and performance management. Information has been used to support regular council monitoring of service targets. However, the use of management information for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the work of the service at various levels remains under-developed.

### **Further develop the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of young people in Darlington**

Progress has been reasonable. The increase in resources that followed inspection enabled a much broader range of provision to be developed that more effectively meets the needs of young people in Darlington. This includes detached youth work, a substantial growth in the work done with and in schools, and project work with targeted marginalised groups such as teenage parents and Traveller young people. Slow progress was made in developing the curriculum policy and framework that was eventually put in place in November 2007. This policy sets out clear principles and processes for youth work that should be contributing to the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. At this stage it is not clear how useful the policy will be as a practical tool for workers in planning a programme. Workers are aware of the framework but are not clear about how their planning might reflect local and national priorities.

### **Develop and implement service-specific policies and plans in a number of key areas, including child protection, equality and diversity and race relations**

Progress has been good. The service has worked hard in developing a comprehensive range of policies and guidelines. These are accessible and well presented in a staff handbook which was launched in September 2007. This includes service-specific child protection procedures. The service adheres to the council's policy on equality and diversity and as part of this undertakes an annual Equalities Impact Assessment which is monitored by the Performance Unit within Children's Services. Equality and diversity priorities are evident in service and area plans.