



Coventry Youth Service Report

Coventry Children's Services Authority Area

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Introduction

1. Coventry youth service operates a range of provision across the city. There are regular programmes in 15 youth and community centres, one information and guidance facility, jointly run with Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire, and several other venues. In addition, the service works in all 24 secondary and special schools with secondary age pupils, 16 of which have youth workers based on site. Every youth programme is expected to undertake outreach work. The Head of Youth Service and three senior managers manage five team leaders. They, in turn, are responsible for 49 full-time and 108 part-time staff, making a full-time equivalent operational staffing complement of 82. The service is based in the Services for Communities Division of the city council and has a budget of £2.59 million. In addition, it generates £886,000 of external income. The service reports that it reaches 37 per cent of young people 13-19, a high figure, compared to the national benchmark of 25%.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors scrutinised the service's self-assessment and other key documentation. They met managers and a cross-section of staff and partners. They also observed a sample of youth work sessions, which included work in the neighbourhood study areas of Foleshill and Willenhall.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. Coventry youth service is a good service which provides good value for money. It knows its strengths and has responded well to the recommendations of the last inspection and Best Value review. Young people generally demonstrate good achievement, especially the more vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The quality of youth work is good, and workers are well qualified, experienced and motivated. There is clear direction, a comprehensive and coherent curriculum framework and an operational plan that is effectively targeted at need. The service is well led, managed and resourced and receives strong support from the local authority and other partners. Targeted work is responsive and effective, but this good practice is not adequately extended to open access settings. The assessment of individual performance, within the quality assurance process, is underdeveloped.

Strengths

- Young people achieve well
- Assessment of need is thorough, and priority groups are clearly identified for targeted work.

- Youth workers are well qualified and experienced and enjoy very good relationships with young people.
- Accommodation and equipment are generally very good and fit for purpose.
- There is very good strategic leadership, providing a clear direction for staff.
- Partnerships are strong and effective.

Areas for development

- Provide a better focus on achievement and practice in the quality assurance system.
- Share good practice systematically.
- Integrate the effective approaches of city-wide work and targeted projects into open access, community-based settings.

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	3
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	3

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

Grade 4: A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 3: A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 2: A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

Grade 1: A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

Part B: The youth service's contribution to *Every Child Matters* outcomes

4. The service makes a significant contribution in all outcome areas. The SHADOW (Sexual Health and Drugs Outreach Work) programme and similar work provided by school youth work teams contribute substantially to the personal, social and health education of many young people. Programmes and activities are

risk assessed to ensure the safety of young people taking part in them, and all staff are trained in child protection. Youth crime reduction figures achieved during the time of the Positive Activities for Young People programme are impressive. The One Stop Shop is very well attended, and advice and information services are appreciated by young people. Young people take advantage of programmes that help them to learn, achieve and to be challenged, whilst having fun. At city level and, less frequently, at local level, many young people are consulted about services provided by the local authority, through the Youth Council and other opportunities. Young people benefit from activities, such as the 'U' project and the Broad St youth enterprise centre, which assist transition from education to employment and training, especially for the more vulnerable.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. The standard of young people's achievement is generally good but varied across the sessions observed. In the first nine months of 2005/6, 490 young people, from an annual target of 1350, had been helped to define and achieve their goals, accredited through ASDAN, the Open College Network (OCN) or the Duke of Edinburgh's award. Vulnerable young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities derive particular benefit. In Wood End youth centre, a group with a variety of special and additional needs used a computer to edit, design and produce recordings for their own radio show. Through their OCN unit accreditation, they demonstrated the acquisition of ICT skills and were fully engaged, task focused, cooperative and supportive throughout. The range of accreditation options is, however, limited. Following the appointment of an accreditation officer, opportunities are now being extended to recognise wider achievements such as effective participation in the democratic processes of the city council.

6. In the sessions observed, young people were able to articulate positive changes in their attitudes, values and self-confidence as a result of the work of the youth service. They related very well to adults with few exceptions. On a personal development course at the One Stop Shop, young people contributed effectively to a discussion on alcohol use and anger, exploring their attitudes and responses, and were able to apply this to other settings. In well-completed portfolios, young people identified their learning from the course and created action points. The Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) programmes are popular and there is a substantial drop in youth crime when they operate.

7. Youth work practice is generally good. Youth workers develop and maintain very good relationships with young people. They know the young people and their communities well and there are high levels of mutual respect. Youth workers analyse local needs effectively, whilst taking account of the needs analysis at city level. They plan and organise their work consistently and enthusiastically,

according to a well-developed process, providing consistent management information. Young people are involved in planning activities, but their contribution to evaluation is often very limited.

8. Youth workers are committed, well motivated, understand their role and work effectively together in teams. Good support and guidance is generally available for young people when they need it. This is especially the case for the more vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, but less so for the more able. Youth workers employ a range of appropriate methods successfully, tailoring them to the needs of young people. In a minority of the sessions observed, insufficient challenge of inappropriate behaviour hindered effective learning and achievement.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is good. The curriculum is informed by local priorities identified in the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan, as well as by national priorities. The youth service curriculum framework is based on a sound rationale but is complex and very detailed. Review and editing would improve accessibility for staff, who nevertheless apply the principles well. The curriculum is broad and relevant with some very strong aspects, for example arts and media work and sporting activities. Curriculum management is coherent, and workers use the framework consistently to create unit development and action plans.

10. Joint planning of programmes in schools is underdeveloped, and school and youth work curricula often do not complement each other effectively. Successful activities, such as those involving health issues and music technology, were not used effectively in the sessions observed as a vehicle to engage young people in discussion of personal and social issues.

11. The service has a strong commitment to equality and inclusion. Provision for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Black and minority ethnic young people comprise 24 per cent of the service's high 'reach' figure. Effective work is done with asylum seekers and refugees in programmes such as the 'Harry and Hussan' theatre project, which compared the experiences of refugees with the impact of warfare on Coventry in World War 2 and enjoyed several well-attended performances. The need to cover specific issues, such as sexuality, health, race and gender, is clearly identified and well targeted in project programmes, but there was no evidence in observed sessions of such issues being integrated into open access work.

12. The service has well qualified staff, whose skills are effectively utilised. Their broad experience is supplemented by that of colleagues from partner organisations such as MIND and YMCA. Specialist expertise is developed and extensively used in targeted programmes. However, there is a corresponding dearth in community-based youth work. Deployment is generally adequate,

although levels of staffing were either excessive or inadequate in some of the sessions observed.

13. Accommodation is generally very good and fit for purpose. Resources and equipment are of good quality and well used by young people. The development programme, following from the last inspection, continues substantially to improve the provision for young people in community centres. The newly refurbished premises at the Broad St youth and enterprise centre provide an excellent example of how good accommodation and skilled staff enable young people in a deprived area to achieve very positive outcomes. There is poor accommodation in some schools, and this adversely affects the impact of programmes.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good. Strategic management is strong, including support from the local authority. A clear direction is articulated for the service and understood by its staff, who know how their work relates to local and national objectives. The curriculum framework is comprehensive and coherent, and there are well-defined links between all levels of management.

15. The youth service is well resourced and manages to attract 25% of its budget from external sources. Resources are effectively and efficiently deployed. The service fulfils its statutory responsibilities in respect of equality, inclusion and diversity. All staff are trained in child protection and checks are consistently carried out with the Criminal Records Bureau. There is a wide awareness of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities Act.

16. Young people are involved in shaping their service in a variety of ways at city level. The Democracy Project has been the mainstay of youth service activity with the Youth Council as its main component, and the service is an active member of the Multi Agency Group Involving Children and young people (MAGIC). At local level, involvement is more informal, and there is no consistent systematic participation of young people in planning, managing and evaluating provision. However, the Broad St Youth Action Group is one successful exception.

17. Partnerships at strategic level are extremely strong and varied. Partners value the role of the youth service, which is proactive in joint development of issues of importance to young people. Good use is made of information and intelligence from partners.

18. Staff are well managed and supported. Supervision is thorough and morale is high, generating positive responses in young people. Individual performance reviews are conducted on a regular basis and are linked to training needs analysis and a comprehensive training programme.

19. The quality assurance system is extensive and enables judgements to be made about whole service and local programme delivery. However, staff find it cumbersome, inaccessible and overly focused on unit delivery rather than

achievement and practice. Young people and peers are not involved in the process. Quality assurance does not identify and share best practice effectively.