

Bracknell Forest Youth Service

Bracknell Forest Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. The Borough of Bracknell Forest has a population of 110,300. There are about 11,000 young people in the 13-19 age group, around 11.5% of whom are of minority ethnic origin.
2. Local authority youth work is provided primarily by Bracknell Forest Youth Service. Currently the service is managed within the Education, Children's Services and Libraries Directorate. At the time of the inspection the council and its partners were in the process of moving towards an integrated youth support service. The 2006-07 council budget for youth work was £1.09 million. The staffing complement for the youth service is equivalent to 15 full-time posts.
3. 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

4. The quality of youth work provided by Bracknell Forest is good and the local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. Young people enjoy taking part in activities and are learning a range of social and practical skills. Those who volunteer as young leaders in youth clubs, and those who take part in decision-making bodies, are making an impressive contribution to the community. Young people are well supported by competent, and approachable, youth workers who plan their work effectively. Overall, managers and staff make good use of local networks and partnerships to enrich, and extend, opportunities for learning as well as enhancing support for young people through advice and guidance services. Managers have used their longstanding knowledge of the service and well-established arrangements for monitoring, and assessing, provision very effectively to improve the quality of practice. The local authority has taken a number of positive steps in the direction of integrating youth support services and there is a strong commitment from many partners to work together exemplified in a practical way by the multi-agency NRG project for young people who are not in education, employment or training. There are, however, some shortcomings. The creative use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the promotion of positive race relations do not feature with sufficient consistency in programmes. The service does not yet have a coherent approach to consultation with young people who do not use the service. Weaknesses identified during the inspection in the recording of Criminal Record Bureau clearance and in the guidance issued to staff on child protection were dealt with promptly and effectively. The lack of clarity with regard to service priorities, and the arrangements for achieving integration, is unsettling to staff and managers and

there are limitations in the information that is gathered to enable the authority to determine how well it is meeting its ambitions.

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	Leadership and management	2

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

Strengths

- Achievement is good. Young people are developing a range of skills and are proud of their achievements.
- Workers plan well in response to the needs of young people using the service.
- Young people from vulnerable and marginalised groups are well served.
- The service has established strong and effective partnerships.
- There are well established and effective procedures for assessing the quality of practice.

Areas for development

- Broaden the content of programmes in youth clubs.
- Clarify the authority's aspirations and priorities for youth work in the context of an integrated service
- Develop the data requirements needed to monitor progress in achieving priorities.
- Consult with young people who do not currently use the service.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Achievement is good. Young people are developing a range of practical and social skills which are having a positive impact on their self-esteem and confidence. They are proud of their achievements, which are celebrated at a well attended annual event run by young people. At The Wayz Centre, young people with moderate learning difficulties made good use of the Youth Opportunities Fund to plan and organise a visit to a London theatre, which was the first time they had taken part in such an activity with their peers. Young people who attend the borough's drop-in clinics, provided in conjunction with the Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, are acquiring straightforward objective information on contraception and sexual health and becoming more aware of the consequences of teenage pregnancy. The NRG centre provides a valued source of personal support and practical skills development for young people who are not in education, employment or training. Here, they are gaining practical skills such as job search, cookery, budgeting and first-aid as well as enjoying a high degree of emotional, and practical, support from a multi-agency team. Young people took part enthusiastically in the opportunities offered and, in some instances, were playing an active role in planning, organising and running the activities.

6. Young people are encouraged to make a positive contribution to their local community. Those who take positions of responsibility within their clubs and projects are developing a wide range of skills that enable them to become active citizens. They are learning how to chair meetings, plan and manage large scale events, present their ideas effectively and negotiate with decision-makers. Members of the youth forum are represented on, and in some instances chair, sub-groups of local decision-making bodies such as the Local Strategic Partnership and the Children and the Young People's Strategic Partnership. They have organised the UK Youth Parliament elections, run a residential bi-annual youth event and have designed Xpresionz, an informative and interactive website which promotes youth activities in the borough. A small group of young people are involved alongside staff in the assessment of youth provision and the recruitment of youth work staff. Young people are also encouraged to volunteer as senior members in youth clubs. Fifty-five young people gained recognition through the Millennium Volunteer Scheme in 2005-06.

7. The quality of practice is good. Workers plan thoroughly in response to clearly identified needs. They are approachable and have established positive relationships with young people who feel safe, secure and supported by them. In the best work, young people were encouraged to reflect on their learning and to set themselves challenging goals. Workers are adept at identifying the unmet needs of individual young people and referring them to appropriate sources of specialist advice and support. In one very good example, the worker effectively

involved a range of agencies to attend to the previously unmet and complex needs of a young man with moderate learning difficulties.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

8. The range, and spread, of youth work activities is good. Provision is available in a good range of locations across the borough and includes project work, detached work, youth clubs and a drop-in counselling service. Some individuals who come into contact with youth work for instance young Nepalese, young carers, young people in supported housing, those with moderate learning difficulties, and young people who are not in education, training or employment are very well served by targeted provision designed to meet their specific needs.

9. Almost all staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and those who are unqualified are undergoing training. All staff have been trained in child protection but those with line management responsibilities have not been trained to an appropriate level. Supervision and appraisal arrangements are well linked to staff development arrangements. However, staff from other agencies in attendance at some of the provision were not always well briefed and therefore did not contribute effectively.

10. The curriculum framework takes good account of *Every Child Matters* outcomes. The accompanying guidance sets out standards of good practice and is well illustrated with programme ideas and example activities. It does not, however, specify the service's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion and the active promotion of positive race relations was not a feature of programmes or work observed.

11. The content of some youth club programmes was narrow in range and better use could be made of staff expertise to co-ordinate aspects of the curriculum, such as the creative use of ICT, which are underdeveloped. The majority of premises are well maintained, accessible, warm and inviting although two venues have inadequate external lighting. Equipment is well maintained and most venues have good IT resources.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Leadership and management are adequate and the local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work. The authority's ambition and priorities for youth work are not yet articulated in service plans or effectively shared with staff and partners. The recent co-location of staff from a range of services has acted as a catalyst for improved communication and there is a strong commitment to working together. However, the lack of specific plans is giving rise to uncertainty among staff about the contribution that youth work will make to integrated services.

13. Spend per head for the population aged 13-19 is slightly higher than the national average and the council has identified additional funding for the development of a youth facility in the south of Bracknell town which contains some of the most disadvantaged wards in the borough. Financial management is sound. The development and sustainability of Youthline, which is commissioned to provide a counselling service to young people, is hampered by a one year funding regime.

14. The service reaches 23% of the 13-19 youth population, which represents a significant improvement from 10% in 2001. The service collects reliable basic data but too little is known about the profile of young people participating in the service. Strategic and operational targets are imprecise. There is a well-established, and effective, procedure for monitoring youth work practice that promotes critical self-evaluation and has been instrumental in improving the quality of delivery. Managers pay good attention to measuring some aspects of value for money although the authority has not always acted on the findings.

15. The service has established strong, and effective, partnerships with the Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, Children in Arts Organisation and the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership. The service makes good use of information gathered from partners to identify gaps in provision and to respond to some emerging needs. Good partnerships with individual schools, through extended schools steering groups, have resulted in some additional activities being provided. There is room to develop these links further and more consistently. Although an annual survey conducted with service users helps to inform programme planning, the service does not yet have a rigorous approach to consulting young people who do not currently use the service.

16. There are good arrangements for health and safety audits of premises. Prompt, and effective, action was taken to rectify some deficiencies, identified during inspection, in the system for recording Criminal Record Bureau clearance and in the child protection guidance issued to staff.