

Bath and North East Somerset Youth Service

Bath and North East Somerset Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Bath and North East Somerset has a population of 170,000. There are about 16,748 young people in the 13-19 age group. Approximately 2.8% of the population are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, although this rises to approximately 8% in the school population.
2. Local authority youth work is provided primarily by Bath and North East Somerset Youth Service. Currently the service is managed within the Children and Families 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 2008–09 council budget for youth work is £1.04 million. The staffing complement for the youth service is equivalent to 28 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 Bath and North East Somerset is good and the local authority adequately secures its provision. Young people enjoy taking part in activities, are learning a good range of social and practical skills and are proud of their attainment. Those who take part in decision-making bodies are making an impressive contribution to the community. Many staff respond well to the needs of young people and many use a good variety of approaches and resources to enable young people of differing interests and abilities to play an active part in youth work programmes. They make good use of local networks and partnerships to enrich and extend the opportunities available. The newly appointed management team has a very good grasp of the areas where improvement is needed and has done much in a short space of time to lift morale, improve efficiency and effectively manage a significant budget reduction. There are, however, some shortcomings. There is a small but significant proportion of inadequate practice. A few less experienced staff are poorly deployed and lack the confidence they need to effectively implement their ideas. The creative use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the promotion of positive race relations do not feature in programmes. The contribution of youth work to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups has not been determined and there is no strategy for equality and inclusion. A lack of clarity with regard to the service's core business and priorities coupled with the current high level of vacancies is having an impact on the service's capacity to meet all the expectations and demands placed upon it.

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	2
3	Leadership and management	2

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

Strengths

- Young people are developing a good range of skills and are proud of their achievements.
- The quality of practice is good overall with some that is outstanding.
- The service has established strong and effective operational partnerships.
- Staff are highly motivated and committed.
- Capable managers are providing strong and supportive leadership which is rapidly improving the service.

Areas for development

- Define more clearly the core business and priorities for youth work.
- Establish fully the new mechanisms to measure and monitor performance.
- Develop the involvement of young people in evaluation and quality assurance.
- Develop and implement strategies to promote equality and inclusion.
- Broaden the range of routes to accreditation.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. Young people's achievement is good. The vast majority of young people are welcoming, motivated and attend their projects regularly. They are sensitive towards the rights and feelings of others and engage with enthusiasm in the activities provided. Many young people gain useful practical and social skills and develop their ability to make informed choices particularly with regard to sexual health and drug use. They enjoy their involvement in the arts such as dance, sculpture, photography, and fashion design and the standard of work is high. Some have made impressive gains in self-confidence and in their awareness of and respect for others. Many young people demonstrate an eagerness to take responsibility, where offered, and to become involved in decision making processes. At the Democratic Action for Youth project (Dafby) young people were developing an interactive website, briefing organisations on the importance of youth participation and campaigning for improvements to local transport. They were learning about democratic processes and developing skills in decision-making, presentation, project planning, and communication and were putting this learning into practice. Young people at the youth bank, in charge of distributing youth opportunities funding, reflected carefully on the impact of the project and were using the results of their evaluation to further develop and improve the venture.

6. Where offered, accreditation is used appropriately and young people are proud of their attainment. At the Peasedown centre, young people's involvement in arts work and a babysitting course was formally accredited and contributed towards GCSE assessment. Their portfolios showed a growing sophistication in their ability to set themselves personal goals and reflect on their learning.

7. Where there is good and outstanding practice, workers plan programmes thoroughly and effectively in response to identified needs. Sessions are well structured, and staff use a good variety of methods and resources to ensure that those of different abilities are able to play a full and active part. Workers have high expectations of young people and stretch them to achieve high standards. In a small but significant proportion of sessions, workers lacked the confidence to put their programme plans into action, were uncertain of their roles and failed to interact effectively with the young people. Where practice is poor, programmes are repetitive, lack imagination and do not encourage young people to progress. Overall, evaluation of the impact of the work is weak. There is insufficient focus on outcomes and the involvement of young people is not a consistent feature of practice.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

8. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate. The service is provided in a wide range of suitable locations including detached, mobile provision, youth centres, advice and information services and project work. Most workers know their communities well and many have developed productive local partnerships to help identify needs and to extend and enhance opportunities for young people. Good use is made of partnerships in some communities to develop additional meeting places for young people. There is limited availability of youth provision at weekends.

9. Young people are provided with an adequate range of activities including sports, arts, residential work, sexual health and drugs awareness programmes. There is strong support for the democratic action for youth project (DAFBY) and the youth bank which provide very good opportunities for young people to become involved in democratic decision making processes. The creative use of ICT is underdeveloped and the promotion of equality and positive race relations is not a consistent feature of programmes. A narrow range of accreditation routes is offered and low numbers of young people are achieving accredited outcomes.

10. The recently revised curriculum framework provides clear guidance to staff. It is appropriately linked to *Every Child Matters* outcomes and provides useful practical suggestions for implementation. Opportunities have recently been introduced for staff to share good practice. This has been welcomed by staff who value the opportunity to share ideas and develop new approaches. Further work is needed to co-ordinate and support the implementation of this new curriculum particularly with regard to inclusion. However, the curriculum has shortcomings particularly with regard to inclusion. The contribution of youth work to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups has not been identified. There is a low take up rate by young people with declared learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a gender imbalance of users of whom 60% are male.

11. Deployment of staff is generally sound although the use of inexperienced workers in a small number of projects is having an impact on the quality of the work. Some good use is made of specialist services such as arts, health, sport and Connexions to enhance the curriculum. Most premises are in good condition, warm, welcoming, well maintained and equipped. Youth centres have good ICT resources. Plans are underway for significant capital investment in the Southside centre which has been poorly maintained and is not accessible for those with mobility difficulties.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

12. Leadership and management are adequate. Under a new management regime, morale has improved significantly from a very low base. Managers and senior workers are competent, held in high regard and work together effectively as a team. This team has quickly developed a very good grasp of the key issues

affecting service performance. Communication has improved greatly and lines of accountability are clear. Good progress has been made in adopting service wide policies, procedures and quality standards. Staff take part in regular supervision meetings and induction is good. Staff understand and adhere to child protection procedures. All staff and volunteers have up to date Criminal Record Bureau clearance. There are very good procedures in place for ensuring the safety of staff and young people on off-site visits.

13. The core business of youth work and its place within and contribution to integrated youth support services have not yet been clearly articulated in service plans nor fully shared with all partners and staff. Priorities are not clearly defined. The strategic plan specifies ambitious and appropriate improvement objectives but is not yet underpinned by detailed costed delivery plans. The development of integrated arrangements for delivering youth support has been slow and ambitions are not yet underpinned by a time-bound delivery plan.

14. There are strong and effective operational partnerships with a wide range of statutory partners including the police, teenage pregnancy and sexual health services, drug misuse services and local and town councils. Partnership with schools and the youth offending team are underdeveloped. The service is moving towards more transparent commissioning arrangements but these are in the early stages of development and more work is needed to build the capacity of the potential youth work providers.

15. Good progress has been made to introduce a culture of accountability and to improve performance management. A system of quality assurance visits has recently been introduced and has had some impact on the quality of practice. Performance monitoring is, however, underdeveloped. Although the performance data gathered is robust, limited use is made of it to inform planning. The service has not yet defined the local performance indicators it needs to monitor progress against key aims. Service level agreements are not rigorously monitored.

16. The authority has taken action to improve the efficiency of the service. A budget reduction has been achieved without significant impact on the availability of provision. However staff are now stretched to full capacity and this, compounded by a high level of part time staff vacancies, is having an impact on the service's ability to deliver everything that is expected of it. A recruitment drive is underway to resolve this problem. Managers continue to review the deployment of resources to ensure value for money. Financial management is sound.

17. Steps have recently been taken to widen the involvement of young people in the planning and development of youth work and youth support services. Young people's involvement in quality assurance is underdeveloped.