

# Wokingham Youth Service

Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services Authority Area

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**Age group:** All

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## Introduction

1. Wokingham has a population of 153,800 people of which 14,400 are 13-19 years old. Just over 10% of the population is of minority ethnic origin. The Youth Service is located within the Children's Services Directorate of Wokingham Borough Council and is part of the Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS) which was formed in January 2008. The service is led by a principal youth officer and four area youth work managers. There are a further five full-time youth workers and 56 (10 full-time equivalent) youth support workers.
2. Youth work is delivered through six local authority youth centres, seven satellite centres, detached and school-based work. The budget provided by the local authority is £836,800 with additional externally generated funding of £280,000. The service is in contact with 24.4% of 13-19 year olds in the borough.
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 provision in Wokingham is adequate and the local authority sufficiently secures its provision. Youth work practice and young people's achievement are adequate. Young people participate with enthusiasm, attend regularly and form strong relationships with workers and their peers. They achieve well through the international programme and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. However in most projects, there is insufficient assessment of young people's starting points and programmes are not sufficiently tailored to need. Accreditation is underdeveloped. Young people are consulted for their ideas but there are few examples of active participation in decision-making at borough and service-wide level. The vision for IYSS is established and well supported by staff and partners. Although steady progress has been made in developing targeted youth support, the implementation of IYSS is slow overall. The recent introduction of a management information system and quality assurance framework does not yet sufficiently inform service planning. The council's safe recruitment practices are not always followed consistently and action is now being taken to address this. The relatively low level of local authority funding for youth work is enhanced by good income generation. Youth workers are not always deployed efficiently and effectively and too few youth support workers achieve relevant qualifications. Partnership and multi-agency working better enables the youth service to work with more diverse groups of young people and enriches the overall programme on offer. The curriculum framework links well to *the Every Child Matters* outcomes but there is insufficient oversight to ensure consistently high quality youth work practice across the service.

## Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	2
	Quality of youth work practice	2
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 participate well in youth work activities, are enthusiastic and standards of behaviour are high.
- Youth workers deliver some very effective group work programmes with more vulnerable young people
- The strong curriculum framework links effectively to *Every Child Matters* outcomes.
- Accommodation for youth work is good.
- Staff are committed, enthusiastic and morale is high.

## Areas for development

- Accelerate the implementation of IYSS.
- Ensure that youth work practice is better planned to enable young people to learn more.
- Strengthen the involvement of young people in decision-making.
- Increase the number of youth support workers achieving qualifications.
- Improve the use of management information to inform planning and target setting.
- Ensure the council's safe recruitment policy is implemented consistently.

## 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 in youth work is adequate. They gain life skills and self-confidence from their involvement. Well planned group work in partnership with the Youth Offending Service enables young women to reflect on negotiating safe behaviour in relationships. Anti-bullying work in schools and sexual health drop-ins provide young people with access to good quality information and support. A small number of young people take on volunteering or leadership roles and demonstrate high levels of commitment. In the majority of projects, however, personal development work lacks focus and is poorly planned and recorded. In most projects there is insufficient assessment of young people's starting points which then limits opportunities for young people to set personal goals and progress.
6. Young people acquire a good range of skills. At the Arab Youth Project and the Villages Project, international work is used well to develop leadership skills and cultural understanding. At Silverdale, young people learn how to maintain and repair bicycles. Young people develop performance skills at Step Up Academy and healthy eating and budgeting is a regular feature of many youth work programmes.
7. The service has made steady progress towards achieving national benchmarks for contact with young people, recorded and accredited outcomes although performance is below national averages. Accredited programmes are delivered skilfully in a handful of projects where young people respond well. The Youth Achievement Award is used well at the Airfield Centre and supports young people to progress into further education. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve Duke of Edinburgh's awards at Extreme Explorers where the programmes are challenging and well tailored to need. The Berkshire Award is a useful approach to plan and record individual progress but is used inconsistently across the service. The service celebrates achievement well, for example, 180 young people attended the annual high profile celebration event last year.
8. Youth work practice is adequate. Relationships amongst young people and with staff are good in the majority of youth settings. Standards of behaviour are high and youth work sessions take place in a calm and relaxed atmosphere where young people feel safe and can enjoy themselves. Sessions are characterised by small groups of young people and low numbers overall in many projects. At Centre Point the workers offered a lively and challenging programme of activities that appealed to the interests of the young people who participated enthusiastically. Too often the programmes and activities on offer lack sufficient challenge for young people and workers do not evaluate their practice sufficiently.

9. The views of young people are incorporated into programme planning and workers are responsive. However, there are few examples of young people demonstrating active participation, leading or initiating programmes or sessions. The area youth forums lack momentum and the role of Y10 as a forum for representing the views of young people in the borough is currently underdeveloped. However, as the Youth Opportunities Fund panel, it has been effective in developing young people's confidence and understanding of citizenship.

10. Youth workers are reasonably well informed about the areas in which they work but needs analysis is sometimes anecdotal and not based upon research or robust evidence.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum and resources is adequate overall. The curriculum framework is well founded and based on *Every Child Matters* outcomes. Workers understand their role to create informal learning opportunities but there is insufficient management oversight to ensure best practice is shared and consistently high quality work is delivered. The range of programmes and activities is adequate and includes work in youth centres, group work, detached and outreach work, work in schools and leisure centres. There is good use of residential work to create positive opportunities for young people. Large numbers of young people access the ARC counselling service.

12. The youth service contributes to healthy outcomes for young people through work with the Primary Care Trust, Health Zones in secondary schools and sexual health drop-ins. Anti-bullying work in schools, street-based work and work with community wardens helps to develop young people's ability to stay safe.

13. There is some effective work to promote equality through youth work programmes which develops cultural awareness and personal reflection on values. The youth service works well with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young people in the Youth Offending Service and with young parents in dedicated groups.

14. Too few part-time staff hold appropriate youth work qualifications and this impacts significantly on their ability to work independently to provide sufficiently creative and challenging programmes. The ratio of youth workers to young people is too high in many sessions and the balance of experienced and qualified staff is not always well managed. There is high turnover of youth support workers and no strategy in place to address this.

15. The large council-run centres are good quality, well maintained and create a good environment for youth work. There has been some investment in computers and media equipment for young people. Effective caretaking and administration support add to the smooth running of these centres and all centres meet the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001).

## Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

16. Leadership and management are adequate. The vision for IYSS to increase services to vulnerable young people and broaden the amount on offer is well founded and there are good arrangements in place to ensure that it is fully integrated into the management of children's services. The move to align young people's services in January 2008 has been welcomed by managers, staff and partners but implementation is slow. IYSS governance arrangements in relation to the children and young people's strategic partnership are not yet in place and the voluntary sector is not adequately represented. Thus far there has been no audit of positive activities provision in the borough and no implementation plan yet in place. The development of targeted youth support is progressing adequately with good links into the neighbourhood teams although the involvement of youth workers is not consistent across the borough.

17. Youth service planning links effectively to the Children and Young People's Plan and the youth service contributes to all of the youth public service agreement targets. The setting of measurable targets which are understood throughout the service is under-developed.

18. The budget per head of population for those aged 13-19 is below national averages. Additional resources are secured through lettings, use of neighbourhood grants and the Youth Opportunity Fund.

19. Workers are provided with a healthy and safe physical working environment. The induction for all staff is thorough and ensures that workers understand directives and policies relevant to their role. Staff are committed, enthusiastic and morale is high. Safe recruitment policies have not always been consistently applied to ensure that Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out on all staff and volunteers. Action is now being taken to address this.

20. Partnership working enriches youth work provision but the number of voluntary or third sector partners is small. Arrangements for the procurement and commissioning of youth work services are not sufficiently developed.

21. The recently introduced quality assurance framework is comprehensive but not yet embedded and judgements are not rigorously moderated. Findings are not used in a systematic way to secure continuous improvement. The introduction of a management information system has been well received but the use of data to inform planning and target setting is immature. The youth service consults with young people to inform service planning, but they are not sufficiently involved in the quality assurance arrangements.