



# Wirral Youth Service Report

Wirral Children's Services Authority Area

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## Introduction

1. Wirral youth service operates from 18 youth centres and clubs as well as outreach projects, an information, advice and counselling service, and three mobile units. It has three management staff, 28 full-time and 199 part-time workers which equates to a full-time equivalent (fte) of 71 youth workers. Additionally, 10 full-time equivalent youth workers are externally funded through partners including the drugs and alcohol advisory team, teenage pregnancy strategy group, Connexions and the local primary care trusts. A youth worker is attached to the leaving-care team. The service is located within the Education and Culture Services Department of the local authority. The net budget made available by the local authority in 2005–06 was £2.5 million. It is estimated that 32% of young people aged 13–19 are reached annually by the service.

2. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self-assessment and met with officers and a cross-section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a small sample of youth work sessions in the St James district as part of the JAR neighbourhood study area as well as other observations of practice across the borough.

## **Part A: Summary of the report**

### **Main findings**

#### **Effectiveness and value for money**

3. Wirral has a good youth service and provides good value for money. Young people, especially those at risk of social exclusion, achieve well and make good progress in their personal and social development. The quality of youth work is good and the majority of workers are experienced and skilled. The level of local authority investment in the service is satisfactory. Effective partnership arrangements that support a broad range of provision are in place. Leaders and managers set a clear strategic direction for the service and a good understanding exists about strengths and areas for improvement, including the need to develop the involvement of young people in decision-making and evaluation.

#### **Strengths**

- There are high levels of achievement by young people from priority groups.
- Youth work practice is effective.
- A good blend of broadly based recreational and educational activity is provided.
- Partnership work is effective.

- The youth service makes positive contributions to the corporate strategy for young people.

### Areas for development

- There is insufficient focus on implementing and monitoring the equality and diversity policy.
- The recording and tracking of young people's progress are inconsistent.
- Youth workers' understanding and application of the curriculum framework and quality standards are inconsistent.

**Table 1: Key aspect inspection grades**

<i>Key aspect</i>		<i>Grade</i>
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	2
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 an effective contribution in a number of areas. Well-managed information, advice and counselling provision enables many young people (especially those with complex needs) to be provided with appropriate support, advocacy and, when appropriate, referral to specialist health and welfare services. Programmes and activities are risk-assessed to ensure the safety of young people taking part. Many young people, including those who are vulnerable and others with complex needs who access the service, make good progress with their personal and social development. Young people take advantage of programmes that help them to learn, achieve and to be challenged while having

fun. Through area youth forums and other opportunities, many young people are consulted about a diverse range of services provided by the local authority. Managers play a key role in contributing to the development of the new children and young people's department.

## **Part C: Commentary on the key aspects**

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

5. From the small sample of work observed, the standard of young people's achievement was good. Creative arts and technical media programmes provide first-class opportunities for young people to develop skills while exploring social and political issues. For example, a group of young people looked after by the council has produced a well-received training DVD, 'My ideal social worker'. Opportunities for young people to gain accreditation across a range of activities are increasing. Significant numbers of young people help in their communities as Millennium Volunteers. Very good progress is made by young people taking part in peer education and peer mentoring programmes. However, young people's involvement in planning youth work activities is inconsistent.

6. Success in, and enjoyment of, their contact with youth work has a positive impact on young people's levels of confidence and self-esteem. A group of young people with Asperger's syndrome was able to articulate what it had learnt over a period of time and how it was supported to make positive contributions on behalf of other young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Young people benefit considerably through their involvement with international exchanges. In counselling sessions at Response, young people thought to be at risk were helped to set and achieve targets that foster their social inclusion. Young people respond well to workers and to each other. Good levels of mutual trust are evident. At each centre and project young people produce a charter annually, agreeing the boundaries for behaviour for those attending. Area youth forums and the UK youth parliament are among a range of good opportunities for young people to plan and participate in activities across the borough to influence issues that matter to them.

7. Youth work practice is of a high standard overall. The best work is well planned and provides young people with a variety of positive activities and experiences relevant to their needs. In a music project for young people with challenging behaviour, short activities provided appropriate pitch and pace to the session enabling everybody to join in and be successful. It progressed from individual work to a group activity in which each young person was able to take the lead. Where practice is less successful, workers fail to fully engage young people or hold their interest and attention. They lack confidence in understanding and translating the curriculum guidance into meaningful activities. The service has identified where to target support for workers.

8. The majority of workers are highly motivated and experienced. They act as effective advocates for many young people, and engage well with those at risk of social exclusion and others with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, insufficient attention is given to work with young people from black and minority ethnic communities or to promoting good race relations. Konnectabus, a mobile provision managed jointly with the education welfare service, is used effectively to encourage school non-attenders to return to education. At an area youth forum attended by many young people not previously in direct contact with the youth service, the lead worker demonstrated very good group work skills to promote positive contributions to consultation on the Youth Matters green paper. In a minority of weaker work, however, young people's involvement with the service is insufficiently recorded to enable them to reflect on their progress.

## **Key aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources**

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate overall. The service has contributed to a pan-Merseyside curriculum framework and supported its implementation with training sessions. The recent incorporation of the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* to session planning, however, has led to difficulties and confusion for less-experienced workers. Resources are not sufficiently modified to accommodate the needs of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

10. The service provides a diverse range of youth activities which includes clubs, outdoor education, outreach/street work and a well-established information, advice and counselling service. Effective use is made of a theatre base. Although the majority of buildings used by the service are old and in poor physical condition, they meet the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. A number of premises shared with other providers, however, do not allow easy access for people with restricted mobility.

11. The service makes good use of its limited access to external funding. It makes good use of what it acquires to support specialist youth workers who focus, for example, on substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, housing and benefits, and health-related issues. They provide effective advice and counselling, outreach work and support to other clubs and projects. A seconded youth worker makes a good contribution to the leaving-care team. The diversity of youth work activity enables the service to meet the needs of the majority of its priority groups. However, insufficient focus is given to implementing and monitoring the service's equality and diversity strategy. For example, there is little provision to support the needs of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual young people. The service meets its statutory duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

12. The service has a good proportion of staff that are well qualified and experienced. The recruitment and retention of part-time workers is problematic and plans are well advanced to resolve the situation by creating substantive posts from existing vacancies and successfully encouraging senior members to become volunteers who progress to part-time workers. Effective professional development

has taken place by providing on-site training at clubs and projects. Significant numbers of part-time staff, however, are unqualified and, although some progress is being made through training to support a national vocational qualification in youth work, many workers experience difficulty in accessing it.

### **Key aspect 3: Leadership and management**

13. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good overall. Well-established and positive links exist between the service and corporate and national priorities and targets. These are supported very effectively through the head of service's part-time secondment to the council's change team set up to establish the new children and young people's department. The youth service reaches about 32% of the 13–19 age range annually. It receives a budget in line with the national average and expenditure is carefully managed. A comprehensive range of policies and plans are in place and those for child protection and street working, for example, are reviewed regularly. Criminal Record Bureau checks are made on all staff prior to working with young people and the local authority maintains a three-year review of existing staff.

14. Senior and area managers have a good understanding of the service's strengths, weaknesses and areas for development. These are well articulated in its plans and self-assessment. Good use is made of locally gathered information to supplement data provided by the local authority, Connexions and other agencies. A new electronic management information system is enabling the service to have a more complete picture of its work and to provide better support to youth workers in centres and projects. Good, well-established measures are in place to assure the quality of work with young people. Moderating the outcomes of monitoring visits has been identified by the service as a means of further improving outcomes for young people.

15. While young people are effectively supported to contribute their views through forums and other activities more widely across the borough, participation in the strategic management of the service is underdeveloped. A small group of young people has been trained recently as peer inspectors to complement the service's quality assurance measures. At an operational level, good practice is evident in a number of projects and centres, but is inconsistent overall. Young people's involvement in the service is weak.

16. Effective partnership arrangements are in place with a range of statutory bodies and voluntary sector providers that lead to good outcomes for many disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. However, the lack of a borough-wide audit of provision for young people occasionally leads to duplication of and gaps in what is available. Joint working with Connexions is limited, although a new protocol relating to shared work around aspects of *Every Child Matters* outcomes has been agreed.