

West Berkshire Youth Service Report

West Berkshire Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. The youth service in West Berkshire is currently located within the Community Services Directorate. The Youth Service Development Manager reports to the head of Cultural Services. Two operational managers line manage six area youth officers who have responsibility for all of the youth work provision delivered through the area teams. The service currently employs 45 youth workers, equivalent to 29 full time equivalent staff. In addition over 300 volunteers deliver youth work in the area. The budget for youth work is £1.1 million; a further £103,000 is generated through external funding.

2. Youth work is delivered through six youth centres, including two outdoor education centres, detached and outreach programmes, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Prince's Trust TEAM and satellite bases in village halls and leisure centres. Health drop-in centres operate in four secondary schools. There are 13,800 young people in the 13-19 age range; in 2006/07 35% of 13-19 year olds had been in contact with the service.

3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work. Inspectors considered the service's self-assessment and met with officers and a cross section of staff and partners. They reviewed key service documentation and observed a sample of youth work sessions in the area.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. West Berkshire Council provides an adequate youth service that delivers satisfactory value for money. Outcomes for young people are adequate overall as are the curriculum and resources, and leadership and management. The self assessment provided a useful commentary on the strengths and areas for development of the service with which inspectors largely agree. At its best youth work plays a critical part in young people's lives, supports them well in their transition to adulthood and provides them with opportunities that enrich their lives. However, service managers had overestimated the strengths of youth work practice and the consistency of young people's achievements. Other key areas where performance falls short are in the analysis of needs, the promotion of equality and diversity and the strategic direction of the youth service.

Strengths

- The council's work to secure new premises for youth work.
- A very good proportion of teenagers is reached by the service.

- Outdoor education provision and residential opportunities for young people are excellent.
- There are extensive opportunities for young people to volunteer.

Areas for development

- Clarify the strategic direction of the youth service.
- To recruit staff to key posts
- Improve the use of needs analysis in planning provision.
- Develop a coherent approach to equality and diversity.
- Establish rigorous quality assurance procedures.

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 | Strategic and operational leadership and management | 2 |

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

Grade 4: Excellent/outstanding: a service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

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

Grade 2: Adequate: a service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

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

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

5. The service makes a good contribution to *Every Child Matters* outcomes in a number of areas. Support for health outcomes is good. There is a very good emphasis on promoting young people's physical health through outdoor education. Health drop-in centres are available in four secondary schools where youth workers and nurses promote healthy lifestyles including sexual health, and undertake pregnancy testing and Chlamydia screening. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is popular and has a high take-up in the area; outcomes through this programme are good. Young people's economic well being is effectively promoted. Twice each year the Prince's Trust TEAM programme is delivered and successfully supports young people in gaining employment and taking part in further training.

Through volunteering, young people are able to build their capacities and develop important employment skills such as team work and communication.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

6. The standards of young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice are adequate although standards and practice vary across the area. Young people achieve well when youth work has a clear purpose and responds to their needs. In these instances they make significant gains in their personal development.

7. At its best youth work supports young people at important times in their development and helps equip them well for the next phase in their lives. For example at 'Bumps and Beyond' young parents learnt about child care, child development, personal care, health and safety and first aid. They made significant gains in self confidence and were better able to embrace their parental responsibilities.

8. Young people associated with the service over time make very good progress in developing their skills and abilities. At Adventure Dolphin 10 young people, with good support from youth workers, demonstrated their leadership and group work skills delivering a canoeing session for 40 of their peers. Through volunteering young people make significant gains in their self confidence. They learn to take responsibility and develop good team work and communication skills. There are good pathways for young people to learn and develop whilst engaged in volunteering activities with some progress into employment through, for example, a locally developed apprenticeship scheme.

9. Good examples were seen of young people's involvement in the development of clubs and projects. At Moorside Community Centre young people took responsibility for developing the curriculum based on their interests by initiating a regular live music night. Existing youth forums are effective in raising issues relevant to the young people; however, there are not yet regular forums in each area for young people to have their say on matters that affect them.

10. The use of accredited schemes of learning effectively supports young people's development. High levels of accreditation are achieved overall with 34% of participants succeeding in gaining awards. The majority of these are in outdoor education and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. A local award is being developed to ensure that opportunities for accredited learning are available across all settings.

11. Youth workers and young people enjoy a good rapport and relationships are good. In some instances though youth workers do not have a sufficient understanding of the educational purpose of youth work. The less successful work

does not sufficiently focus on the issues affecting young people in their community or on their learning and development. In the unsatisfactory sessions observed planning is superficial and not tailored to local circumstances. Local demographic and other information is inconsistently used to inform the development of the work. The variability in the quality of youth work practice reflects the inexperience of some staff and the lack of a contemporary curriculum framework and is compounded by high vacancy levels.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

12. The quality of curriculum and resources is adequate. There is a reasonable breadth of provision across the area but managers have recognised some inequity in the programmes young people can access in different localities. As a result a core offer to young people in each area is being put in place. The use of needs analysis to inform planning is underdeveloped; consequently the service lacks sharp priorities to inform the development of work and meet specific needs. There is a lack of emphasis on equality and diversity in youth work projects.

13. Outdoor education is a real strength of the youth service. The two vibrant outdoor education centres provide very good opportunities for young people to develop their skills and interests. There are excellent opportunities for young people to learn through residential experiences, with over 100 taking place in the last year. These included many short visits in the United Kingdom but also international experiences in Canada, France and Italy. Young people's health, including their sexual health, is well promoted by the service through school based drop-in centres.

14. Youth workers in the Youth Offending Team and Life Chances Team successfully promote out of school activities. Young people who are looked after are supported in overcoming barriers to their participation through the provision of relevant information to them and their carers based on their interests. Looked after children are accompanied to initial sessions to help ensure they attend. Detached youth work is often used effectively to respond to community concerns about anti social behaviour and partners value the role that youth workers perform in this respect. Youth workers in schools provide a good link to provision in the community.

15. Participation in the service is high with over a third of teenagers taking part, many of these in outdoor education. However not all young people have sufficient access to provision and although overall the numbers of young men and young women who participate is equally balanced some sessions fail to attract young women. There are no clear plans to ensure that open access programmes are available to all. A new curriculum framework is being developed but staff currently lack sufficient guidance in planning and developing youth work programmes.

16. Managers have deployed staff thoughtfully in developing the new model for service delivery. However, one third of full time youth work posts are currently vacant. This has a detrimental effect on the quality and consistency of service

offered and the speed of service development. At the time of inspection, one centre was closed due to staff shortages. The use of volunteers ensures very good opportunities for young people and adults to develop and share their skills and offers access to a broader curriculum.

17. There are good resources and equipment within the service overall. Some high quality music recording facilities are available and a new climbing wall complements the good outdoor education facilities. Premises are of a good standard overall.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

18. Leadership and management are adequate. The council does not yet have an agreed vision for the service and the strategic direction of the youth service is underdeveloped. A well thought through position statement is being considered by senior officers and elected members. Recent changes in the management and delivery structure position the service well to respond to local needs and develop a more coherent local offer to young people.

19. Funding of the service by the council is adequate; the budget allocated for the youth service is in line with national benchmarks and slightly higher than statistical neighbours. The amount of external funding secured to develop youth work is modest. The council has shown good support for developing new premises for youth work. It has secured funding for two new buildings and set aside more than £2 million to develop two additional centres.

20. Whilst aspects of quality assurance are in place such as regular reporting to senior officers and members, the routine supervision of staff and training, quality assurance overall is underdeveloped. Service managers rely too much on reports from operational staff about the quality of the work. This has led to them overestimating the strength of youth work practice and its consistency. The use of management information is also underdeveloped. Young people regularly feedback on their experiences of projects and programmes but this is not garnered across the service or used to evaluate overall performance. Although data is regularly gathered it is not used effectively to support service development or to inform judgements about the performance of individual units.

21. The service's approach to equality, inclusiveness and diversity is underdeveloped. Managers are aware that service development is not securely based on a coherent assessment of needs. Managers do not know whether the needs of particular groups are being met, for example those of young people from black and minority ethnic communities. Within youth work sessions there is insufficient promotion of young people's understanding of diversity. The service has made adequate progress in implementing measures under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

22. Overall, partnerships with other organisations add value and extend the breadth of youth work. The youth service supports and works with voluntary sector partners in a variety of ways although some arrangements are largely

historical. Partners reported a service that was 'willing to help' but was sometimes unable to respond effectively through a lack of capacity and clear strategy.

23. A healthy and safe environment is ensured for young people and staff through effective policies and practice. Staff are competent in applying child protection guidelines and have ready access to support from managers when needed. Guidelines are readily available to staff. Recruitment processes are sound, including for volunteers. Operational managers newly in place are visible and accessible to staff. This has helped maintain staff morale at a time of change within the youth service.