



# Stoke-on-Trent Youth Service Report

Stoke-on-Trent Children's Services Authority Area

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**Better  
education  
and care**

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## Introduction

1. Stoke-on-Trent youth services manage a range of provision across the city, including 16 youth centres, a number of detached youth work projects, one shared information and guidance facility with Connexions Staffordshire, a variety of initiatives in secondary schools as well as a number of other projects. There is a training and development unit based at the Willfield Centre, which also acts as a base for a drugs education project. There is a youth services management team of four, 57 full-time staff and a number of part-time and sessional workers bringing the full-time equivalent (fte) total to just over 78 youth workers. Youth services are placed within the Continuing Education Division of the Department for Education and Lifelong Learning. The budget made available to the services in 2004-05 was £1.86 million. It is calculated that 20.5% of young people aged 13-19 were reached by the services in 2004-05.

2. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth services. Inspectors considered the services' self-assessment and met with officers and a cross-section of staff. They reviewed key services documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions. These included a number of youth work centres as well as a number of different projects. There was a tour of one particular neighbourhood within the city, devised and conducted by young people. Meetings with headteachers and representatives of the voluntary sector, which were held as part of the JAR, added to the evidence base.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. This is a good service. Its range of provision has developed well since the last inspection, especially in terms of provision for disadvantaged groups. The council provides increasingly strong support and recognises the contribution it makes. What was a youth service has become Youth Services, reflecting not just growth but greater responsiveness and flexibility. It has very good strategic and operational links with other agencies and providers. It is effectively managed. There is good morale and a sense of purpose. Youth Services provide good value for money.

#### Strengths

- The service places much emphasis on achievement and celebration.
- Youth work is of good quality.
- There is a broad range of provision aimed at including all young people.

- Resources and buildings are good.
- The council provides good strategic support.
- Partnership work is well-developed and effective.

### Areas for development

- Child protection training arrangements require review.
- The *Every Child Matters* curriculum framework needs embedding and developing.
- Young people need more opportunities to become involved in youth services management.
- Data analysis needs improving.

### 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	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. Youth services have developed important strategic links to many other services and make a good contribution to outcomes in a number of areas. The most significant contribution is the provision of enjoyable activities that enable

young people to develop personal qualities, self-esteem and skills. The emphasis within the services on challenging young people and recognising their achievements through accreditation is beneficial to them. Opportunities are growing for young people to develop social and political skills and become involved in decision-making. Youth services are becoming influential across the city in the spread of strategies for the involvement of young people. Much of the detached and outreach work, developed largely in the last three years, helps to reduce anti-social behaviour by providing alternative activities. Many youth centres include health-related activities within their programmes. There are significant projects underway on drugs education and the promotion of sport amongst disadvantaged groups, although the impact of these projects is not yet clear. Although the child protection training arrangements of the services require review, there is an established culture of safeguarding young people.

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

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

5. The standard of young people's achievement in the sample of youth work sessions observed was good. The majority of the work seen was graded good or better. This confirms the service's own view of the quality of its work.

6. There is an effective emphasis on achievement. Although examples were seen of complacency and lack of challenge, within the majority of the work there was evidence of goals being established and worked towards. This can be informal, such as in projects that focus on skills development, a good example being the Studio Q sound recording project. There is growing use, in various types of work, of a good range of formal schemes designed to accredit what young people achieve. The Youth Achievement Award is being used effectively and the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Breakthrough Awards schemes are also used appropriately. A range of celebratory events are established which reinforce this culture of achievement amongst staff as well as young people.

7. Young people show good personal development. At a one-to-one session in a school setting, one young person with particularly challenging family circumstances was being helped not only to cope himself, but to be a support for his family. An international exchange project, through which twenty young people from Russia and Germany had visited Stoke-on-Trent over the summer, had involved a group of local young people who were either in care or had recently left care. The project had been a life-changing experience for them, raising their awareness, self-esteem and aspirations.

8. A well-established youth participation project is increasing opportunities for young people to function socially and politically. Over 6,000 young people took part in City Youth Forum elections in March 2005 and four young people are elected members of the UK Youth Parliament. The service has been instrumental

in developing awareness across the city of the importance of providing opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making. Some foundations have been laid for young people to make a meaningful contribution in the future.

9. The quality of the youth work was good. Planning for the sessions was careful: activities were varied and well-matched to the level and goal of sessions. Workers showed skill, patience, and the ability to develop and sustain good relations. They were also able to challenge young people when it was important to do so, whether regarding language or attitudes.

10. Workers demonstrated great commitment to their work and to young people. There is a strong sense of their dedication to the principles of inclusion. They take opportunities to involve young people in the planning and evaluation of the programmes, although this aspect of their work needs some further development. Workers express conviction that the *Every Child Matters* outcomes, which now form the framework for their planning, has given them a clearer purpose for their work; however, their capacity to review and evaluate their work against the outcomes for young people lacks rigour.

## Key aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. Youth work programmes operate from a wide range of settings and provide a good selection of activities based on young people's needs and interests. To complement this fixed site activity there has been a significant growth in detached and outreach work in the last two years in response to community cohesion initiatives. Many of the city's high schools commission youth services of various kinds, often targeted at those at risk of exclusion. Various projects meet the needs of other priority groups, such as the Closing the Gap project aimed at promoting sport and physical activity for young people in care. Specific clubs exist for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, although this provision is in need of review, many of the users being adults. There is a Drugs Education Project which delivers a high volume of training and education sessions each year. Information technology is not integrated effectively into plans and activities. The service has had to exercise priorities: currently there is little provision either for minority ethnic groups or for young people of gay or lesbian sexual orientation.

12. The service has recently established the five outcomes of Every Child Matters as its curriculum rationale and framework. This commitment is evident in planning at all levels and in training documentation. Staff have welcomed the adoption of the outcomes, as giving their work even more relevance and purpose. At this stage, the move has had limited impact on the provision.

13. Staffing levels are good. Vacancy and turnover levels are reasonable. There has been a significant growth in the number of youth workers in the last two years. An excellent Young Workers Traineeship Scheme is providing places for 12 trainees, many of whom are from minority ethnic communities. A clear strategy is

in place for the deployment of staff and resources across the disparate communities of the city.

14. Accommodation is very good. Youth centres offering a range of programmes are spread across the agglomeration of townships that make up this city. Although not always in the best places for young people, on the whole access to provision is good. Some excellent new facilities complement older buildings, which have been recently refurbished to a high standard using external funds. Mobile provision is fit for purpose. Resources for youth work are good; an annual Curriculum Resource Evening promotes awareness and sharing of resources across the service. Information technology equipment is available at many centres although a lack of technical support tends to undermine its usefulness. A review of buildings has been carried out to meet Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) requirements. Access for young people of limited mobility is good and is improving.

### Key aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Since the last inspection, the council has significantly strengthened its support for the youth services. What was the Youth Service has now become Youth Services, marking an important change of emphasis towards providing a range of projects and programmes in collaboration with partner agencies. The services are well-regarded and are playing an increasingly influential role. Key strategic links are firmly established, such as within the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Youth workers are part of Area Implementation Teams across the city, whose focus is on urban regeneration initiatives. Youth service representatives at various levels have had a positive influence on the tone of debate and direction of policy on issues affecting young people. The total youth service budget rose from £1.36 million in 2002-03 to £1.86 million in 2004-05, enabling a substantial increase in staffing and important developments in provision. In 2004-05 approximately 21% of the 13-19 age range were reached by the provision, a substantial rise from the last inspection.

16. Partnership work is a real strength. Besides the range of strategic links, there is very good operational collaboration. For example, the work with schools has become more varied, and shows flexibility and innovation in its support for vulnerable young people. There is well-established and effective joint working with the local Connexions partnership. Links with the voluntary sector are excellent. The annual grants scheme operated by youth services uses criteria to target the money at disadvantaged young people, and is regarded as a model of its kind by the council for its transparency and accountability. Other operational links exist with youth offending services, community groups, and the police.

17. Prominence has been given to youth participation initiatives in recent years. A structure of youth forums has been put in place, with highly visible support from the council. There are other areas of work in which young people are involved and a small group was well-prepared to join the inspectors on visits during this

inspection. It cannot be said, however, that young people are significantly involved in the planning and evaluation of youth services, either strategically or indeed operationally.

18. Management of the service is good in many respects. Inspection judgements have largely concurred with the services' self-assessment. Planning at area and local level is recently established. Communications are good. Quality assurance systems, including a coherent system of internal inspection, are in place. Training and development systems are coherent and well-organised. Mandatory training in areas such as equalities and disability training is in place. Morale is high. There are, however, serious weaknesses in the arrangements for child protection training. The child protection policy and the associated procedures are sound, but the services' own targets regarding child protection training are not being met; there are no monitoring mechanisms and too many staff are without appropriate training for too long. The service has worked hard to embed data systems; at present, a great deal of data goes into the system, but not much comes out that is of great use in terms of review and evaluation. The services' management team is aware of this and is moving to develop more useable systems. This should enable judgements on cost effectiveness, which do need to improve, to do so.