



Birmingham Youth Service Report

Birmingham Children's Services Authority Area

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Introduction

1. Birmingham youth service delivers youth work primarily through six area teams. Since October 2002, the Youth Service has been part of the Directorate of Children, Young People and Families. Within the new structure for this Directorate, it is part of the Core Services Division. The Head of Service is supported by two Principal Youth Officers, who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the service. There are close working relationships with those responsible for the delivery of other local services
2. In 2006-2007 the core budget is £6,272,565. The service attracted additional external funding of £2,585,789 in 2005/06. Approximately £750,000 of grants is allocated to the voluntary sector. The full-time equivalent staffing complement is 151 of whom 96 are full time and 425 part time. There are 52 support staff. The service reports that it reaches 29,485 of the 101,953 young people aged 13-19, approximately 29% of the total. 48% per cent of these young people are estimated to be from black and minority ethnic groups two thirds of whom are young men.
3. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self-assessment and met officers and a cross-section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

4. Birmingham has an adequate youth service. Young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice are both adequate. Relationships between workers and young people are nearly always good and Area Youth Officers provide effective leadership. Efforts to increase the involvement of young people are proving successful. The curriculum is broad though more work needs to be undertaken with some of the key target groups the local authority has identified as priorities. The service has a particularly strong provision for promoting cultural diversity. In several areas, such as partnership working, management is not sufficiently strategic. Useful management information is now being generated but is not always used well. While the service knows where its most and least effective work is located it does not measure its cost effectiveness rigorously. Overall the service provides satisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- The service is making a positive difference to the lives and aspirations of some of the city's most vulnerable and hard to reach young people.

- The service has particularly strong provision to promote cultural diversity.
- There is consistently good involvement of young people.
- The service knows where its most and least effective work is located.
- Area managers show effective leadership.

Areas for development

- Increase the number of accreditations.
- Improve the quality of session planning by focusing on the progress young people are making.
- Manage the service more strategically.
- Develop more accountable and productive partnerships.
- Make better use of the management information the service is now collecting.
- Measure the impact of the work more effectively.

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 at least an adequate contribution to all Every Child Matters outcomes and a particularly strong contribution to being healthy and making a positive contribution. Through its many projects and activities it is

providing young people with enjoyable opportunities to develop personal qualities, self-esteem and useful skills. Provision to promote sexual health is strong and the involvement of young people is improving rapidly. Outreach work helps to reduce anti-social behaviour by providing alternative activities. All youth centres include effective health-related activities within their programmes. There are significant projects underway on the promotion of arts, outdoor pursuits, information technology and motor vehicle skills. 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

6. The service's self assessment accurately judges the standard of young people's achievement and the quality of youth work practice as adequate. Those who participate generally make good progress in their social and personal development but only a small minority gain any form of recognised or accredited outcome. Strenuous efforts are being made to increase the number from the present low baseline but with only limited success to date.

7. At the Lozells Recreation Group, young people, mainly from the Muslim community, were able to outline their involvement in a film project that has paid big dividends. They achieved third place in a national film competition and in the process gained qualifications in filming and editing. Many were keen to explain how their involvement had also led them into peer leadership roles in the project and within their own community. This work contrasted with the unsatisfactory progress made in a few sessions which consisted of little more than supervised recreational activity.

8. The quality of youth work practice is adequate. Workers are committed and enthusiastic and develop good relationships with young people. This energy and drive is responsible for motivating many young people to engage with work that they would not otherwise have opted for. For example at the Shard End Youth Club 'Linking Up' disabilities group there was an excellent response to the good leadership shown by workers. All had made useful starts to their ASDAN programme and several had shown the confidence to participate in city wide forums to make the case for more and better provision for those with disabilities.

9. Most workers record the attendance and content of sessions regularly but are unclear as to how to measure the impact of what they are doing. Few use the information they are asked to record to improve their own practice. Even fewer plan sessions to meet individual needs. Session evaluations rarely track young people's progress.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The self assessment accurately judges the quality of curriculum and resources as adequate. A broad curriculum is provided with a good balance between general club activities and targeted work. However a more strategic lead is needed to ensure the overall programme accurately reflects service wide priorities. Currently the service is working with nearly twice as many young men as young women (63% male to 37% female). If this situation has arisen unintentionally rather than as a planned response to a service wide needs analysis then the imbalance needs either redressing or explaining.

11. Curriculum management is adequate. In June 2006 a new service wide curriculum framework was launched. Most staff use this and the previous curriculum planning guidelines as a useful checklist rather than as an essential planning tool. Some are still unclear as to how it can help them plan, record, review and evaluate their work.

12. The service has a committed and experienced workforce. While most are appropriately qualified not all are effectively deployed. Some projects are overstaffed in relation to the number of young people participating or the attendant risks. The well judged professional development programme is making a good contribution to the updating of essential skills. In general, full time staff make better use of the opportunities than part time staff.

13. Resources are adequate and effective use is made of specialist facilities. Workers and young people have tried hard to make best use of the accommodation available to them although strategies to eliminate graffiti have been unsuccessful at some sites.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

14. Strategic and operational leadership and management are adequate. The service self assesses this aspect as being good. There is much to commend in the leadership and management of the service but also some significant shortcomings to be addressed. While the service is making a positive difference to the lives and aspirations of some of the city's most vulnerable and hard to reach young people too few gain accreditation for their work. Too much provision is developed to meet local rather than city wide needs and staff deployment is not always appropriate.

15. The local authority provides effective support for the development plan. There are sufficient resources to deliver the remit although the core funding is low. The precise contribution the youth service is expected to make to the authority's objectives is not clearly stated and the service is not represented on some important forums such as the 14-19 group where its voice needs to be heard. The authority recognises these problems and has commissioned a Scrutiny Review due to report in November 2006.

16. There are some examples of highly effective partnership working. For example Base KS where workers negotiated direct access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for young people with acute mental ill health. The partnership with the Connexions service is now on a more secure and mutually beneficial footing. However many partnerships are not working effectively and do not make good use of the youth service's contribution. Communications with the voluntary sector are uneven and the monitoring of grants allocated is insufficiently rigorous. The approach to partnership working is insufficiently strategic.

17. Good progress has been made towards involving young people in matters that most concern them. The service has adopted the Hear by Right standards, and is developing a city wide service plan. At a Youth 4 Change session young people who had joined the forum spoke convincingly of the way their work was proving influential in bringing about a wider recognition of both local and city wide needs. Young people's involvement in the planning, management and evaluation of provision is also frequently good.

18. The promotion of equality, inclusiveness and diversity is good. At several projects there was strong evidence that young people are acting within their local communities to help their peers to access community services and behave responsibly. Good progress is being made towards meeting requirements in respect of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). Generally, the Service provides a healthy and safe working environment. Child protection issues were handled appropriately in the centres visited and the service wide policies applied effectively. All staff are reportedly regularly checked to minimise the risk to children and young people. The service complies with the requirements of the Race Relations Act.

19. Area Youth Officers provide effective leadership; they know their areas well and have a vision for how they would like to develop the work locally; for example the development of a Youth Start Project at the Concord Youth Centre. However links between local ambitions and service wide priorities are often unclear.

20. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The service knows where the best and least effective work is to be found though it has struggled on occasions to find the means to share good practice consistently. Management information is much improved and by national standards is good. This improvement is setting new challenges for managers to use the information generated to inform service wide planning and to convince workers that there is a two way flow of information. Peer observations are undertaken widely but there is less evidence that the issues raised are addressed systematically.

21. Spending is not yet driven sufficiently by a service wide curriculum strategy and while most projects are well judged funds are not always well used. The service has started to measure its cost effectiveness and is working towards providing more specific evidence of its cost effectiveness and value for money.