



# Bristol Youth Service Report

Bristol Children's Services Authority Area

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**Better  
education  
and care**

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## Introduction

1. The Bristol youth service, together with a play service, form Young People's Services, part of the Bristol City Council Department of Culture and Leisure Services. Youth work teams operate from nine fixed centres in the most deprived areas of the city, offering a range of provision in partnership with voluntary sector bodies. Outside these areas, senior workers coordinate services provided by a small team of staff and the voluntary sector. There are three teams focussed on social inclusion supporting specific work across the city for black and minority ethnic young people, disabled young people, and lesbian, gay and bi-sexual young people. There is a youth participation team, an outdoor education centre and a resources centre at Brentry Lodge. The Head of Young people's Services is head of the youth service, working with one deputy head of service and four service managers. The fulltime staffing equivalent (fte) is 64.5 fte. The budget made available to the youth service in 2005-06 was £3,266,572. Data indicates that between April and December 2005 the percentage of the 13-19 cohort of the city (35,730) that was reached by the youth service was 31%.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the service's self assessment and met with officers and focus groups of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions across the range of provision. Inspectors attended a large youth participation conference. There was a tour of one particular neighbourhood within the city. Meetings were held with headteachers and representatives from the voluntary sector and there were further telephone conversations with senior managers from a number of other schools.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. This is now an adequate service with many good features. The service was found to be unsatisfactory by Ofsted in 2000. Monitoring visits, the second of which was in July 2003, found the service to be making good progress in addressing previous weaknesses. This progress has been sustained. A bold strategy to focus the work at areas of the city where young people are most at risk of social exclusion has been put in place effectively. Standards of achievement and the quality of youth work practice are variable but satisfactory overall. Young People's Services have grown in influence, leading the work of increasing the voice and influence of young people on behalf of the council. The service is well resourced and is now better staffed. Quality assurance systems are in place but need to be strengthened with respect to standards of work and achievement. The service knows its own strengths and weaknesses well. Although the service is comparatively well funded, it is effective in reaching high numbers of

young people, numbers which are well above national targets. Most of these young people live in the more disadvantaged areas of the city. The service therefore provides satisfactory value for money. The capacity for further improvement is good.

## Strengths

- The service has effectively promoted the voice and influence of young people across the city.
- Principles of inclusion, equality and diversity strongly underpin the strategy and work of the service.
- There is an effective emphasis on performance and outcomes for young people.
- There is a good range of activities.
- Resources are good.

## Areas for development

- The quality of youth work practice needs to improve and be more consistent.
- Curriculum management needs to be stronger and more coherent.
- Staff at various levels need more opportunities to meet and share good practice particularly to support their planning and evaluation.
- Processes that link the service to the voluntary sector need to be more inclusive, transparent and accountable.

## 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	3
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:** 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. Young People's Services are making an important and effective contribution to the Every Child Matters developments in the city, one that belies their size as a service. Good strategic links are in place, with health for instance, through the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board. Links such as this have influenced the work of the youth service which has placed a high priority on health-related activities over the last twelve months especially. There are good links relating to other outcomes, through the Area Child Protection Committee and the Connexions partnership. However, by far the most significant contributions to the actual outcomes for young people come in two other areas. Young People's Services have been the lead body within the council for developing the voice and influence of young people across the city; they have been very effective in this role and substantial numbers of young people have had opportunities to develop socially and politically. Furthermore, the youth service itself, albeit concentrating its resources in to the most disadvantaged areas of the city, provides opportunities for achievement and enjoyment to a proportion of the 13-19 year old cohort (31%) that is well above national benchmarks. It should also be said that the developing work of the service with schools, although lacking a framework or strategic umbrella, and dependent on local initiative, is nevertheless highly valued by schools for its impact on the lives of some of the young people most at risk of social exclusion.

## **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 varied a great deal. The standard observed was as the service itself expected for those particular sessions. In its self assessment, the service has graded the standard of young people's achievement overall as satisfactory and the inspection supports this assessment.

6. An effective priority has been given to increasing the accreditation of young people's learning. There has been widespread staff training and the numbers of young people benefiting has grown and is now satisfactory. Various types of award are being used. At some centres, such as The Crypt at Barton Hill, young people are involved in developing their own kind of awards. Well-established schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award are leading to increasing numbers. Moreover, there is a culture of achievement and celebration being established, with large-scale events such as the Big Up Bristol (November 2005) presenting a positive image of young people to the city.

7. In targeted project work, such as personal safety projects for young women or the work with disaffected pupils in schools, the achievement is at least good. Young people were also achieving good standards at some of the open youth settings visited. Where young people had not been involved in planning the activities or negotiating the aims and targets, their achievement was poor. The same is true of personal development: at the best sessions it could be remarkable. For example, at one session organised at an indoor climbing wall for highly challenging young boys, one boy was heard talking about the need for trust in others. However, at other sessions where young people were not motivated or engaged, there were no gains being made.

8. The youth service has been very effective in its role across the council in developing the voice and influence of children and young people. There has been a great deal of activity, from local involvement of youth groups in redevelopment projects, such as skateboard parks and recreational spaces, to large scale conferences. A plethora of initiatives is underway across the city to which the service is seeking to bring coherence: local forums, elections to the UK Youth Parliament, the creation of a Select Committee of young people who will have the power to take evidence from council officers on matters of concern to young people in the city and make recommendations. Although the quality of their engagement can vary, the number of young people involved in all this activity is high.

9. The quality of the youth work seen during observations varied. It matched the expectations of the service. The service's self assessment indicates that the quality is now satisfactory overall and the inspection supports this assessment. The best work was innovative, highly-focussed and stretched the capacity of the young people. Some very good leadership was seen: senior workers driving through major partnership-based regeneration projects; managers sustaining youth projects in difficult circumstances; detached workers acting as advocates for young people in their "patch". Youth workers guide and support young people well.

10. The quality of youth work, amongst both full and part time staff, is inconsistent. Planning was at times weak, sessions could lack focus and direction, and, at times, an unstructured range of activities was being provided, leading to aimless drifting. There was little evidence of effective evaluation, either at the end of sessions or over longer periods of time.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of curriculum and resources is good. There is a clear rationale for the curriculum that is based on meeting the development needs of the most disadvantaged young people. Each of the nine youth projects with a fixed site centre in the disadvantaged areas of the city provides a range of activities based on an agreed menu of services. These activities are enhanced and supported by the cross-city inclusion teams and by central curriculum development initiatives. The service demonstrates a very strong commitment to the principles of inclusion,

equality and diversity. The menu of services underlines the commitment to the most marginalised young people. In operational terms this becomes evident through the provision of detached work, of work with schools for excluded and vulnerable pupils, and specific projects for marginalised groups. The Bristol Activities Centre, an outdoor education centre, is committed to using outdoor learning as a vehicle for personal development and delivers the majority of its sessions to disadvantaged young people. This strategy to withdraw direct services from large parts of the city and rely on voluntary sector provision does inevitably mean, however, that the needs of young people in those areas are not being fully met.

12. Curriculum development has improved since the last visit. A series of initiatives have helped local areas with their programmes. Sexual health has been strong recent focus with a touring theatre company and good quality materials organised to support local programmes. Drugs misuse has been a similar, albeit lesser, recent priority for staff training and information. Staff have welcomed the development of useful materials for events such as Black History Month and World Health Day. However, the management of the curriculum remains an area for further consideration: there are inconsistencies in the quality of local planning, there is insufficient sharing of good practice across the city, and curriculum development operates in too much of a vacuum. There are, for example, no effective links between the inclusion teams and curriculum development processes.

13. Since the last monitoring visit, the situation regarding vacancies for part-time youth workers has improved and staffing is now satisfactory. The structure envisaged by the new strategy for the service is now largely in place. Although many staff are relatively new and some vacancies at higher levels remain, the staffing required for consistent delivery is satisfactory. The training and development of staff within the service is good although central record-keeping needs improvement. The service supports the national qualifications structure effectively.

14. Accommodation is good. Some facilities are excellent, such as the newly developed Hareclive Centre, and the refurbished Crypt. Several centres have good features, such as fitness rooms, and even a boxing ring. The closing of, or withdrawal from, buildings across the lower priority areas of the city has freed resources for some very good refurbishment work. The provision of IT equipment, and the support to keep it working, is more variable. Central resource systems are satisfactory, with staff able to use equipment based at Brentry Lodge. A review of buildings has been carried out to meet Special Educational Needs and Disability Act requirements. Access for young people of limited mobility is good.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Strategic and operational leadership and management are satisfactory. In many respects, the strategic leadership of the service is good. There is a very clearly understood direction and role for the service. Resources for the service

have increased significantly to enable the service to fulfil the role set out for it: the total youth budget has increased by £625,000 from 2002-03 to 2005-06. The service is now funded at levels above statistical neighbours and national averages. Although relatively expensive, the service is delivering: the numbers of young people benefiting is well above national figures; the number of sessions delivered has increased substantially; and the service has been given an important role to play across the council in developing the voice and influence of young people, which it does very well. Its improved reputation has been earned.

16. In other respects, strategic level leadership is good. Additional resources are consistently secured and are well targeted. There is a very clear commitment to equality and inclusion. The service sets high standards with respect to the participation of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds and monitors the issue carefully. Diversity is celebrated through events such as the Bristol Mela, a collaboration with the voluntary sector which celebrates Asian culture and was visited last summer by 14,000 people. However, there is very little involvement of young people at present at the strategic level of service planning and management.

17. Partnership work is crucial to the adopted strategy for this service. The strategy relies on the very well-established voluntary sector to provide opportunities for young people in areas of the city where the youth service itself does no direct delivery. The council, through the youth service, invests over £500,000 each year to support them. Data indicates that 4,000 young people were directly involved between April and December 2005. However, the system has distinct weaknesses: funding is essentially historical; there is no effective forum and no strategy for the analysis of need; the grant system is bureaucratic and lacks transparency; and the quality assurance mechanisms that have been established are ineffective.

18. At operational level, leadership and management overall are satisfactory. Senior youth workers demonstrate real commitment to their projects. The quality of local planning has improved but remains variable. There are inconsistencies in needs analysis and there is still insufficient focus on the planned outcomes for young people. There are more opportunities for young people to be involved with the service at local level, although this tends to be in specific projects rather than in the broader planning and evaluation.

19. Systems for quality assurance are in place but do not address sufficiently the key issues of the quality of youth work and the standards of achievement. There is a clear emphasis through the periodic reports on outputs and performance. Supervision happens consistently and effectively. The corporate appraisal system is well-established across the service. Communication mechanisms such as a bi-monthly newsletter are good quality. Forms for session planning and evaluating systems are in place and are completed. Data is efficiently collected and used to analyse and monitor performance. Cost effectiveness is particularly well assessed by these means.