

Review of Caerphilly Youth Service October – December 2012 Summary

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Outcomes for learners

Young people make progress in learning and in their personal development as a result of their involvement in the youth service. A culture of recognition and celebration of learner achievement is embedded throughout the full time service. Young people accessing the part time service are involved in a good range of learning experiences and opportunities to participate.

In targeted provision through use of individual needs assessment and educational accreditation, young people are able to understand the progress that they have made. In alternative curriculum provision, young people make good progress in terms of their attendance. They also achieve a range of accreditation and demonstrate improvements in their behaviour. Young people at high risk falling into the 'not in education, employment or training' category (NEET), make progress through involvement in targeted youth service provision.

Young parents gain useful qualifications, which enable them to gain confidence in their own abilities and develop key skills. These young people also develop a range of skills appropriate for parenting.

Young people involved in the HIP health promotion project gain confidence and self-esteem. Young people demonstrate progress in terms of their well-being and improvements to their lifestyles.

Young people involved in youth participation activity make excellent progress in learning and personal development. There are examples of young people with Additional Learning Needs making outstanding progress in terms of their skills development and their personal development as a direct result of their involvement in the Youth Forum.

When compared with other local authorities across Wales, levels of young people's participation in Caerphilly Youth Service activities are below the Welsh average. Fewer than 30% of young people living in the authority and aged 11-19 engage with the service.

Overall, young people accessing projects led by the full time service make good progress and learn how to make responsible decisions about their wellbeing. However, it is less clear to what extent young people engaged in the activities of the part time service are achieving and progressing.

The youth service does not have a single comprehensive overview of standards achieved or progress made by young people engaged with youth service staff or activities. This means that the service cannot demonstrate fully the impact of its work. Anecdotal evidence, case studies, project level reports and observations suggest that young people are making progress.

Suitability of provision

The youth service has developed a range of both universal and targeted provision. Targeted work appears to be effective at meeting the needs of groups of young people for whom the services are designed. Generally young people make good progress in targeted provision, and the youth service is effective at making links with specialist services to secure the support needed by the young people. The youth service is proactive in promoting access to both universal and targeted provision with young people with additional learning needs

The youth service has good provision for targeting young people at risk of becoming NEET. The youth service has developed its practice to work in a whole family way. This includes providing more holistic support with a view to enhancing outcomes, and enhancing the personal development of young people. Projects such as the HIP project, the Integrated Family Learning project, Innovate, and the Hub, have all found an important role for youth work in the multiagency targeted and preventative environment. This is a very positive development. This approach is proving effective in enhancing the lifestyles of vulnerable young people living in difficult circumstances. However, much more needs to be done to demonstrate the impact of this work. In addition, the youth service should give careful consideration to the expansion of this targeted work across the county borough. In doing so, it must be able to make the case more effectively. The youth service should be able to demonstrate impact more comprehensively, doing justice to the work being carried out on the ground.

The design and delivery of targeted provision can be improved by better information sharing between services and agencies. Better coordination of youth support services across the county borough would enhance the prospects for more effective and more widespread responses to the needs of young people.

The youth service has worked in partnership with Menter Iaith and the Urdd to develop some Welsh medium provision. There is an aspiration within the youth service to do more in terms of the development of provision through the medium of Welsh, however there is currently not enough up to date information on demand, or a plan to take this forward.

The Young and Expectant Mothers project is located in a well resourced provision. There is a very strong commitment to the young people on behalf of the project staff and a high level of dedication to the project. There is a real effort to tailor the provision to the needs of the young people, and a real focus on personal development and building appropriate skills for parenting. However, the curriculum is narrow. The young people do not have access to vocational learning pathways, or any access to FE pathways. The young people remain on school roll, but links and information sharing with host schools are poor. Project teachers do not have any information from the school regarding the young people's performance,

previous progress, or additional learning needs. The provision falls short of the 25 hours per week recommendation by the Welsh Government.

The Innovate project provides a high level of holistic support for young people who would otherwise be NEET. Young people receive a varied curriculum tailored to their needs. Work is undertaken with the families of the young people in an attempt to overcome difficulties in the home, and to change the family culture for the better. In addition to support, Young people are also included in school holiday programmes where appropriate, as a positive diversionary measure. However, access to vocational learning opportunities is limited. Contact with schools upon whose roll the pupils remain is very limited and opportunities to continue to pursue curriculum options provided by schools are under researched.

The part time clubs provide young people in the authority with recreational activities, in generally suitable buildings. Part time clubs are widespread and numerous, they offer a range of activities which are in keeping with the Youth work Curriculum for Wales. There are examples of good work with young people with additional learning needs. There are numerous opportunities for training and CPD for workers and leaders in charge, and youth worker training is embedded throughout the service. However, there is an over emphasis on the maintenance of the status quo in relation to the part time service. The part time service appears to be immune from intelligence led or finance led criteria in relation to its design and implementation. In the current financial climate, this may be to the detriment of a need to increase more targeted approaches across the county borough. Staffing of part time youth provision is hindered by inflexible employment conditions relating to part time staff. This can have a detrimental impact on the service to young people as workers are often tied to a particular club. Covering staff sickness periods therefore becomes difficult, with clubs sometimes being unable to open as available cover cannot be used flexibly.

The youth service demonstrates that it can cater for the needs of a wide range of young people, specifically those at risk of becoming NEET and socially excluded. However, the fact that the service only attracts fewer than 30% of the available 11-19 population, means that there are improvements needed to target more young people.

Leadership and management

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The youth service senior management have a good overview of provision, and staff in both the full and part time services are well supported. However, the collation and use of data to evaluate and to inform service design and delivery is underdeveloped. More emphasis should be placed on measuring the impact of youth service delivery in relation to young people and the community. The development of suitable processes to measure impact is a priority, and must reflect the breadth and diversity of the work being undertaken by the service.

Senior managers in the local authority and elected members have a good level of awareness of much of the work that is undertaken by the youth service. Elected members have a good level of awareness of the issues relating to young people. However, there appears to be a lack of clarity as to the strategic direction of the youth service. The service appears to have been allowed to set its own direction of travel without explicit regard to any of the existing strategic processes, or priorities.

The youth service works well in partnership with a range of key services and agencies. There is evidence of effective partnership working with the police and fire services to target some periods characterised by an upsurge in anti social behaviour. However, more comprehensive and consistent use of intelligence and information on unmet need is required to guide service design and delivery more generally. An expansion of targeted initiatives over other key

periods which correlate with youth crime and anti social behaviour, such as the summer holiday period is also recommended.

Managers have an overview of both targeted and universal provision. Support for both the full time and part time service is strong, and every effort is made to maximise the links between the two for the benefit of individual young people.

Planning for improvement

The service has worked hard in recent years to develop the SAR system for its own provision and for other youth support services. The service uses considerable resources reporting on specific projects, mainly for funding purposes. Unfortunately, these reports differ in focus, and do not contribute to an overall picture of the service's successes and areas for improvement. Self evaluation and evaluation of delivery is under developed. The service has not shared effective practice consistently across projects and this has led to a lack of strategic overview.

The youth service undertakes a useful observation programme of its face to face work to monitor quality. However, as it is not used in all projects on an ongoing basis, there is therefore not always a full picture of quality on an annual basis. It is unclear what action is taken to tackle underperformance and underachievement.

The youth service has access to a lot of information about the progress and achievements of young people. It has begun to collate accredited achievements in informal and non formal settings. The authority does not know how well it compares with similar authorities in relation to outcomes for young people. However, its information is not complete and has not captured effectively the service wide impact of outcomes for learners.

Resources

The service has successfully attracted funding to accompany the core funding it receives. However, an over reliance on grant funding in the full time service in particular, risks compromising a longer term strategic view for the youth service. There is also a risk that reliance on external funding drives the focus of projects, rather than locally defined need. Core Youth Service budget as a percentage of local government revenue settlement had increased from 41% to 74% over the last three years but has now fallen to 71%. This means that the service has lost nearly £600,000 this year.

The way core funding is allocated and used and its impact on outcomes is less clear than in instances of grant funded projects. The service does not have an overview of the value for money provided in general, or on a project by project basis. This means that it cannot prioritise effectively the way resources are allocated or spent. Overall, the projects with apparently good outcomes for young people are externally funded and cost effective. However, the part time provision, which is mainly club based is costly and the impact is unclear. The geographical location of the provision is not based on need or analysis of population in the target range, but on previous decades of work. In addition, significant support is required from the full time service to sustain and guide the provision which adds an additional unqualified cost to the overall resources.

There is generally recognition of the financial challenges faced going forward in relation to the potential impact on resources. However, not enough is being done to harness the existing youth support services within the county borough. A strong strategic steer for the role and future direction of youth support services is required. Opportunities to make better

use of the resources available amongst existing youth support services in enhancing the breadth of support to young people are being missed.

Conclusion

Caerphilly Youth Service has a strong, skilled and committed workforce. The full time service in particular delivers a high standard of provision and support, and young people are making good progress through their involvement with the youth service. There is a high standard of support for vulnerable young people through targeted provision, and the service is being proactive in tackling the issue of young people not in education, employment or training. This is illustrated by their preventative work as well as direct work with young people who are currently NEET. Participation work is outstanding and is recognised as such well beyond the boundaries of the local authority.

There is a clear opportunity to build upon the good practice highlighted in this report, however it is essential that there is effective strategic and collaborative planning allied to appropriate allocation and coordination of resources. The local authority is not yet in a position to identify the most appropriate delivery model for the youth service. This is because the groundwork in terms of the mapping and coordinating of youth support services is incomplete. Without a comprehensive analysis of existing youth service impact and the unmet needs of young people, advocating a model for reconfiguration would be premature.

Development opportunities & recommendations

- As a priority establish a strategic vision for Youth Support Services in Caerphilly, with a clear role for the youth service.
- Establish a strategic group for YSS to build upon the mapping exercise and to articulate a vision for YSS in line with strategic objectives and the needs of young people.
- Re-examine the current configuration of the part time service in line with community needs, the existing spread of youth support services, and gaps in provision e.g. in Caerphilly town centre.
- Implement a robust and comprehensive system of data collation and interrogation for the service.
- Develop a comprehensive means of reflecting the impact of youth work on young people and communities.
- Establish robust information sharing systems with other key targeted support services.
- Develop and implement a more outcome driven system of performance management to aid service evaluation and future planning, and increase accountability.
- Rationalise performance management systems in line with the priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan/Single Plan
- Improve communication and information sharing with schools, in particularly regarding EOTAS provision run by the Youth Service.
- Ensure access to vocational learning pathways for young people on EOTAS provision.
- Ensure that funding allocated for individual pupils who then transfer to EOTAS provision follows the child.
- Ensure that all youth provision is accessible to young people with additional learning needs.
- Make better use of existing intelligence on need, youth crime, anti-social behaviour, school attainment and attendance, and deprivation indices relating to young people, in order to plan, deliver and evaluate youth service provision.