

Cabinet – 12 April 2006

Results of the Government Office for the West Midlands reassessment of the Youth Service

Portfolio: Councillor Eddie Hughes, Children's Services

Service Area: Youth Service

Wards: All

Forward Plan: No

Summary of report

That the main findings of the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) reassessment are that 'Walsall Youth Service is no longer an inadequate service and that excellent progress has been made against all the recommendations in a remarkably short time.' Please see **Appendix 1**.

Recommendations

That Cabinet note the report.

Resource and legal considerations

No specific considerations are contained within this report.

Citizen impact

The significant improvement in the quality of the Youth Service in Walsall will result in a far better service to young people in the borough.

Community safety

The Youth Service contributes to improving the safety of young people in the borough. Some of the positive programmes, such as the Drugs and Peer Education project and the Action against Crime work, provide positive alternatives to young people who may have become involved in anti-social or illegal activities.

Environmental impact

Environmental education is part of the Youth Service Curriculum which is delivered to young people.

Performance and risk management issues

An unsuccessful re-assessment could have resulted in DfES intervention in the running of the service.

A successful Youth Service contributes to the Council's Annual Performance Assessment.

Equality implications

The Youth Service has a major commitment to ensuring that services are accessible to all young people who have need of them.

Consultation

Young people were actively involved in the re-assessment process. 16 acted as peer inspectors in the inspection of youth work practice. A number of young people also met with the GOWM inspectors and contributed their views on the improvement of the Service.

Vision 2008

The successful re-assessment of the Youth Service contributes to the Council's commitment to achieving excellence by 2008.

Background papers

Ofsted Action Plan

Letter from GOWM 6 February 2006.

Contact officer

Andy Driver

Principal Youth Officer

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Signed:



Executive Director David Brown

Date: 3 April 2006

Signed:



Portfolio holder: Councillor Hughes

Date: 3 April 2006

Post Ofsted Review of the Youth Service

1. Walsall's Youth Service was inspected by a team from Ofsted during the first week in December 2004.
2. The main findings of the inspection were that although improvement had been made in aspects of both the management of the service and the involvement of young people, there were underlying problems with the organisation and delivery of the service that resulted in it being at that time unsatisfactory.
3. A verbal feedback was given to the authority on Tuesday 4 January 2005. The official report was published on 6 April 2005.
4. As required by the D.f.E.S Inspection process, an Ofsted Action Plan was produced by the Youth Service and submitted to the Government Office for the West Midlands and the Ofsted Lead Inspector for their agreement in July 2005.
5. Considerable consultation took place prior to the Action Plan being submitted. This included meetings with young people, youth workers, members, the Walsall Federation of Community Organisations and the Voluntary Youth Sector.
6. The Inspection report had identified seven recommendations of areas for improvement which are:
 - a. Raise the standards of achievement of young people
 - b. Improve the overall quality of youth work practice
 - c. Broaden the curriculum
 - d. Increase the proportion of trained staff
 - e. Improve needs analysis and the strategic targeting of resources
 - f. Ensure all young people and workers are guaranteed a safe working environment
 - g. Embed quality assurance arrangements and accountability systems in all aspects of the work of the service.
7. Significant actions have been taken during the last year in all seven areas for improvement.
8. One major criticism made by Ofsted concerned the relationship both in terms of funding and managerial and operational arrangements with Community Associations. The funding arrangements have been radically reviewed with a new system, based on a needs assessment of young people across the borough, incorporating deprivation indices, being introduced for the 2005/06 financial year. The system is both transparently fair and also applies to both the statutory and voluntary/community sectors.

9. A number of Community Associations, which either lacked the skills, experience and capacity to provide high quality youth work or the desire to work with the local authority in partnership with the Youth Service, are no longer delivering youth work. Some, which were willing to adapt to the correct way of working, are now delivering in partnership with the Youth Service and are receiving professional support, advice and guidance to ensure improvement takes place.
10. The local authority Youth Service has had to take responsibility for the delivery of a significant proportion of the youth work in the borough as the voluntary/community sector was unwilling or unable to continue in this role. This has enabled the service to improve quickly and considerably.
11. A number of professionally qualified and skilled full time youth workers have been appointed to take the lead in delivering a high quality service. They will be developing full time youth clubs and projects, responsive to young people's needs and issues, across the borough. Some of these will be in partnership with the voluntary/community sector and some will be local authority direct delivery.
12. Considerable work has been undertaken in training the previously under qualified part time work force. A number of training courses have been run and it is intended to offer all part time staff the opportunity to achieve the nationally recognised level of qualification for part time youth workers within the next two years. This offer is available to those staff employed by Voluntary youth organisations and Community Associations as well as those employed directly by the Youth Service.
13. A Quality Assurance framework has been introduced to both monitor the quality of youth work practice and delivery and also to assist clubs and projects to improve their work. This has been operating over the last year and improvements have been made by most projects over this time.
14. A youth work curriculum has been developed by the service to assist in making the provision both relevant to young people's needs and to meet the national requirements for the Youth Service as contained in 'Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Youth Services'.
15. The Youth Service also contributes significantly to achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes.
16. Capital funding has been made available to the service. This is being used to refurbish and improve the borough's youth clubs and centres. Further work is also being undertaken to ensure buildings are accessible to all young people.
17. As part of the agreed review process, the service conducted a re-inspection of youth clubs and projects across the borough in the week of 5-9 December 2005. Young people were also involved in the inspection, visiting projects along with adult inspectors and commenting on their view of the quality of the practice.
18. A report on the re-inspection formed part of the evidence submitted to the Government Office to demonstrate if progress has been made in the last 12 months. The findings show that there has been significant improvement, especially in projects delivered directly by the local authority.

19. The GOWM re-assessment took place on Tuesday 24 January. A team of four people visited Walsall and interviewed staff, members, young people and representatives from the voluntary/community sector. They also examined evidence to demonstrate the action the service has taken to improve the quality of the youth work since the last inspection.
20. The result of the re-assessment is contained in the attached letter from John Robertson of GOWM.
21. The Youth Service is taking further action to meet the suggestions for further progress as follows.
22. The Management Information data for the 2005/06 year will be used as a baseline to plan future delivery. A new Management Information system is being trialled to improve collection and analysis of the data.
23. The service will use data from the local authorities which are 'statistical neighbours' to benchmark its performance and improvement.
24. The contracts with Community Associations and voluntary youth organisations have been reviewed and consultation is taking place over the revisions. Adjustments to the funding formula have been made based on the experience of operating the system over the last year and changes in costs, such as fuel prices.
25. The recruitment of qualified and skilled full time youth work staff continues. Attention is also being given to the support and valuing of these staff to ensure that retention is kept as high as possible.
26. A further round of training for part time youth workers has taken place and the number of qualified staff has increased. This will continue with further training in the next year. The 'essential training' programme for all full and part time staff will continue. Young people are also being trained as part of the people development programme.

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13 February 2006

Dear David

**MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF WALSALL YOUTH SERVICE FOLLOWING
THE OFSTED INSPECTION IN DECEMBER 2004.**

Many thanks to you, Andy Driver and others who arranged for Government Office to make an assessment of Walsall Youth Service on 24th January 2006. This letter summarises our assessment and makes some recommendations for further or continued action.

Firstly, please pass our thanks to all the people who gave their time to organise the day, and to those who were interviewed. We are very grateful.

The purpose of the assessment was to give an independent appraisal of the progress made against the recommendations in the Ofsted report of March 2005. We deemed this a necessary substitute for an Ofsted re-inspection following their decision not to make a follow up visit to their inspection.

The team who were involved in the assessment were not Ofsted inspectors and the assessment was not made against Ofsted's framework. However, the team consisted of four people, all of whom have considerable experience in youth policy, and youth service management and delivery. Together we looked at the Action Plan progress report and many accompanying documents. We interviewed the youth service managers, senior managers in the Council, two Councillors, community organisations and young people, and took into account information we had gleaned from partners over the past few months. Altogether, we spent in excess of 70 person hours on the inspection.

Our overall assessment is that Walsall Youth Service is no longer an inadequate service and that excellent progress has been made against all the recommendations in a remarkably short time.

We offer the following suggestions for further progress:

- It is important to ensure accurate collection and analysis of Management Information data as indicated on the youth base system in order to make judgements of an improving service. This data enables the youth service to have accurate performance management and monitoring of the service and to gauge improvements. Data from this year should be used as a baseline to plan future delivery.
- To ensure that the youth service maintains its monitoring of external indicators in service delivery and uses external comparative data to support its continuous development programme.
- Continue to replace SLAs with contracts for Community Associations (and any other contractors) which stipulate outcomes. While developing contracts, we endorse the continued involvement of Community Associations;
- The Service has been very successful in recruiting trained and qualified staff, to lead the development of youth work in Walsall. This success needs to be maintained alongside a strategy that will ensure that staff retention is maximised.
- The training of central youth work staff, staff in partner organisations and young people needs to continue in a rolling programme of people development.

If the service continues to develop, we should be confident that the youth service will have a very positive assessment in the JAR of 2007/08.

We were pleased to hear that the Youth Service is well placed to help guide the Children's Trust and Local Area Agreement in Walsall, especially on the development of integrated youth support services.

Our congratulations for the enormous progress that the service has made since the Ofsted inspection.

Yours sincerely

JOHN ROBERTSON

Cc Andy Driver, Principal Youth Officer, Walsall MBC
Roger Crouch, Director of Children and Learning, GOWM