

Supporting young people

An evaluation of recent reforms to youth support services in 11 local areas

This survey examines the progress made in 11 local authority areas in developing new arrangements to integrate the work of various youth support agencies.

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Executive summary

Since 2007, considerable attention has been given to reforming youth support services in England. As part of a general drive towards greater effectiveness within children's services in local authorities, youth agencies have been expected to work together to adapt their approach to specific local circumstances. Among other services, these include youth offending teams, local authority youth workers and the Connexions service. There is no single model for what has become known as 'integrated youth support'. While local authorities control some elements of youth provision directly, others lie outside them.

The main focus of the reforms was on expanding opportunities for all young people while helping to tackle the range and complexity of the problems faced by a minority. *Aiming high: a ten-year strategy for positive activities*, published in 2007, identified in more detail the improvements sought, including increasing the influence of young people in designing services and reforming the workforce so that it would operate in a more integrated manner.¹ The aim was greater flexibility and coherence across services in each local area, with particular emphasis on:

- supporting the needs of vulnerable young people
- improving the access of all young people to 'positive activities'
- commissioning an increasing range of services through the private, voluntary and community sectors, and from not-for-profit organisations as well as the public sector
- ensuring that young people are involved in developing their own services and in decision-making that affects them.

Her Majesty's Inspectors visited 11 local authorities, selected to represent a mixture of urban and rural areas, to evaluate the progress made in implementing the reforms.

Where progress was greatest, there was a clear strategic vision for implementing the reforms, shared by the local authority, its partners and front-line practitioners. However, the quality of the provision and the speed of improvement in the local areas varied significantly.

Although the work was still evolving, in most of the areas visited the services targeted at young people seen to be at risk were providing them with improved options for support. In terms of performance against national indicators, however, the picture was mixed. Over the two-year period 2007–09, eight of the 11 areas visited reported a drop in the number of first-time entrants to the criminal justice

¹ *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities* (PU214), DCSF, 2007; <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=PU214>.

system and five had made progress in reducing the numbers of young people who were not in education, employment and training. However, progress on other long-term problems, such as substance misuse and teenage conceptions, was less evident.

The local authorities found it difficult to strike a balance between targeting support on specific groups and individuals on the one hand and providing positive activities for the full range of young people on the other. Too many officers and managers expected youth work to focus disproportionately on problems such as anti-social behaviour, rather than on helping all young people to develop good personal skills and positive relationships. In addition, there were few examples where targeted support arrangements for young people beyond the age of 16 were as well advanced as for those below that age.

In the areas visited, slow progress had been made in measuring the impact, take up and value for money of 'positive activities', even when inspectors judged the overall provision to be good. In general, the local authorities were not gathering accurate data from the range of agencies that were involved with young people. In the instances where monitoring was more developed, there was still an undue emphasis on quantitative data at the expense of evaluating the quality of the provision and the experiences of the young people. Even in the better performing areas, progress in commissioning provision from the private, voluntary and public sectors was slow.

The priority given to involving young people in decision-making had broadened their engagement in planning and evaluating the services that local authorities and their partners provided. As a result of this involvement, the young people's organisational and political skills were sharpened and, in the best instances, the services provided were matched better to their needs.

Key findings

- Although still evolving, targeted support was, in most instances, creating more options for vulnerable young people. Agencies were committed to working together and sharing resources but such arrangements were not yet firmly established.
- The priority given to targeted support for a minority of young people seen to be at risk had often undermined the contribution which universal youth services made to the development of young people more generally.
- Within the authorities visited, clear changes were taking place but, because of the wide range of initiatives involved and the speed of their introduction, the reforms had not yet been sufficiently consolidated at a local level.
- The most responsive local areas had ensured that the voluntary and community sectors, often with a good knowledge of the needs of neighbourhoods, were involved in strategic planning.

- In a few instances, local authorities took the lead in developing the capacity of local youth organisations with a view to broadening the range and nature of the work they undertook.
- Overall, however, progress in the external commissioning of youth support provision had been slow.
- In most of the local authorities visited, the targeted support for young people older than 16 was not as good as for those below that age.
- Quality assurance and value for money measures were not secure in any of the local authorities visited. Managers were insufficiently aware of where there was poor practice. In some cases, managers did not apply the same rigour to evaluating directly-provided local authority services as they did to those commissioned from other agencies.
- Front-line practitioners had responded positively to the changes in their roles. However, some were being expected to work in areas beyond their experience, skills and training, such as completing individual assessments.
- The broad scope of 'positive activities' was one of the reasons that authorities had made slow progress in gathering accurate information on take-up by young people.
- There was a growing recognition of the value of involving young people more directly in developing services and decision-making.

Recommendations

Local authorities and their partners should:

- introduce robust monitoring of the impact and value for money of both targeted and universal youth services
- take the lead in ensuring there is increased commissioning of services from the private and voluntary sectors
- review the effectiveness of targeted arrangements for young people over the age of 16 in preventing problems such as young people not involving themselves in education, employment or training or being involved in anti-social behaviour
- keep under review the extent to which they achieve an appropriate balance between the provision of targeted and universal youth support activities
- strengthen the provision of targeted support in order to engage the most vulnerable young people effectively
- review the nature and content of the professional development available in their local area to ensure that it better meets the needs of practitioners who have new, extended or specialist roles
- build on and extend good practice in involving young people in service development and decision-making.

Introduction

1. In recent years, considerable emphasis has been placed on reforming young people's services.^{2,3} The effect of these measures, set out in legislation and guidance, has been to highlight the need to:
 - integrate more effectively the work of the various youth agencies in a local area and make greater use of the voluntary and community sectors and private or not-for-profit providers
 - focus support on the needs of vulnerable young people
 - improve all young people's access to 'positive activities' such as sport, volunteering, cultural pursuits, youth work and extended school provision
 - consult young people widely and involve them in decisions about provision for them.
2. The detailed policies of the new government are currently being developed. A clear indication of its priorities, however, was given in *The Coalition: our programme for government*. This set out the intention to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action:

We will take action to support and encourage social responsibility, volunteering and philanthropy, and make it easier for people to come together to improve their communities and help one another.⁴
3. A speech given in London on 9 June 2010 by Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office, 'Leading your charity through a time of change', also provided further pointers in relation to the function of public services. These include the need to 'develop more focused integrated local services [that] can unlock the potential of communities and frontline workers to design and deliver a genuinely joined up approach to multiple challenges'.
4. Local authorities have a key role in achieving these objectives, working in partnership with other services in local areas. These include, in particular, youth offending teams, youth services, the Connexions service, the voluntary and community sectors, educational welfare officers, social care services, extended schools services, substance misuse teams, primary care trusts, and support services for schools and families.

² The Education and Inspections Act 2006;
www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060040_en_1

³ For further information on targeted youth support, see:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/Youth/targetedyouth/targetedyouthsupport/.

⁴ *The Coalition: our programme for government* (401238/0510), The Cabinet Office, 2010;
<http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/>.

5. In many instances in the areas visited, these developments had led to new cross-agency teams being established. They covered an area or neighbourhood and comprised a wide range of children's services, including youth support. In other cases, they had resulted in various young people's services being brought together into a unified, integrated youth support service.
6. The 'targeted support' element of the reforms aims to ensure that the needs of vulnerable young people are identified early and met. The former Department for Children, Schools and Families identified a number of factors that might support this work, including:
 - the Common Assessment Framework, designed to help professional staff, across a range of services, to record and, where appropriate, to share with others their assessments, plans and recommendations for support for a child or young person⁵
 - the appointment of a 'lead professional' – a teacher, educational welfare officer, Connexions personal adviser or other practitioner with detailed knowledge of a young person's needs – who provides a consistent link with other agencies to ensure that support is coordinated, effective and efficient
 - the organisation of 'the team around the child', or similar, bringing together practitioners from different services to develop and provide support specifically adapted to a young person's needs.
7. In addition to providing specific support for particular needs, recent legislation indicates that, where 'reasonably practical', local authorities should ensure that all the young people in an area have access to 'positive activities' to promote their 'well-being'.⁶ To help reduce anti-social behaviour, local authorities have been required to increase the number of such activities available on Friday and Saturday nights.
8. Authorities are expected to draw up local plans in consultation with young people. They are also expected to take a lead role in commissioning a greater range of targeted support and positive activities, through local authority, voluntary, community and private agencies.

⁵ For further information on the Common Assessment Framework, see:

www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/deliveringservices1/caf/cafframework/.

⁶ Statutory guidance on section 507b education act 1996;

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/documents/laestatutoryguidancesection507boftheeducationact/>.

9. The reforms are intended to help:
 - increase participation in positive activities
 - reduce substance misuse by young people
 - reduce the number of young people who enter the criminal justice system for the first time
 - reduce the rate of conception for under-18s
 - reduce the proportion of 16–18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training.⁷
10. This survey focused on the progress made, within the local areas visited, on:
 - integrating support services for young people
 - providing targeted youth support
 - securing young people's access to positive activities
 - involving young people as partners.

Integrating support services for young people

11. The priority given to youth support has encouraged change and has often led to better collaboration across services. Although this work is still evolving, the needs of more vulnerable young people are being tackled more effectively and more options to support them are being provided. Set against national indicators, however, the picture is mixed. Over the two-year period 2007–09, eight of the areas visited for this survey reported a fall in the number of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system and five areas had made progress in reducing the local figures for young people who were not in education, employment and training. However, the progress against other long-term problems such as substance misuse and teenage conceptions was less evident.
12. The volume of new guidance and policies, and the rate at which they were introduced, had not allowed sufficient opportunity for consolidation at a local level. The capacity of the youth sector to respond was limited. Too many competing priorities, over-optimistic expectations that effective commissioning could be introduced on a short timescale, and challenges in keeping front-line staff updated were the result.
13. The pace of change had also been tempered by authorities' understandable concern to ensure that aspects of their provision that had already proved to be

⁷ PSA Delivery Agreement 14: Increase the number of children and young people on the path to success, 2008; www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr_csr07_psa14.pdf.

effective were not eroded. In the main, however, senior managers showed a readiness to reconsider their established approaches to youth support.

Key success factors

14. In all the areas visited, the directors of children's services were strongly committed to improving opportunities for young people. They had made it clear to all their services that they should work much more collaboratively and flexibly than in the past. In the best instances, the factors that contributed to the success of local strategies included:

- an objective and lead role taken by the local authority in, for example, ensuring that, in addition to its own services, the voluntary, community and private sectors helped to shape provision
- clear leadership in developing a commissioning policy and the nurturing by the local authority of new and different providers who were well-placed to provide different approaches
- a clear recognition of the need to balance targeted services with a range of more universal constructive activities which young people could choose to pursue in their leisure time
- positive relationships with district or borough councils which promoted close working links between youth support practitioners and departments for leisure, sport, culture and community safety
- clarity about how resources could be deployed realistically
- the establishment of cross-agency posts, for example a health service manager, within the senior leadership team of children's services
- the inclusion of the manager of young people's services within the senior management team of children's services
- clarity among the various youth agencies about their respective specialist roles
- strong links across youth support, social care, schools and 14–19 developments in education and training
- the involvement of young people in reviewing and designing the services provided for them
- the development of the workforce to enhance the specialist roles and skills of practitioners working in integrated settings.

15. Among the factors that detracted from the effectiveness of local strategies were:

- insufficient focus on monitoring the quality of provision and on determining the value for money provided by new approaches

- over-concentration on targeted provision without sufficiently considering the relative value of universal services in supporting the needs of vulnerable young people
- limitations to integration on some services, for example youth offending, as a result of their statutory duties to apply particular assessments and report against specific national targets
- given the rate of reform, the difficulty for staff in keeping abreast of developments
- insufficient focus on the needs of young people above the age of 16
- limited understanding among youth service staff in the statutory and voluntary sectors about the nature and potential of each other's work
- poorly developed detailed plans and guidance to help front-line staff understand the practical implications of integrated working at a local level
- insufficient consultation with and engagement of staff in decision-making and planning
- lack of understanding among managers about how to support a very disparate workforce through change.

Working across service boundaries

16. Inspectors found that when local areas were determining for themselves how youth support should be provided, this resulted in a variety of approaches across the country.
17. In the sample of local authorities visited, operational models were evolving. Broadly, the first model comprised multi-agency teams. These included representatives from the full range of children's services, working together in a particular locality. The second model was more of an integrated youth support division for the whole local authority area, bringing together many aspects of youth support provision.

Multi-agency team model

18. Arrangements were at an early stage but eight of the 11 areas visited had recently introduced, or were in the process of introducing, multi-agency teams. These were usually managed by a single locality manager, although in some cases members retained a formal link to an employing body, such as the primary care trust. This multi-agency arrangement was intended to ensure a joined-up local approach to supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families and to tackle inter-related problems such as housing, school attendance and health. The possible advantage of such an approach is illustrated in the following examples.

A unitary authority had established 'locality networks' at which the needs of vulnerable children and young people were discussed. Each network

consisted of a core of key professionals from across all local agencies, including adult and children's services, who used the Common Assessment Framework as the key tool to share information and guide decisions. The common assessment provided a basis for discussion, a structured framework and a link between universal and specialist services. The network enabled an appropriate lead professional to be identified and facilitated earlier intervention. Young people had benefited in a variety of ways from these arrangements. For example, they had been helped to:

- make a smooth transition from primary to secondary school
- engage in more positive activities
- establish better relationships with their peers and teachers
- adopt a more positive attitude, which led to improved behaviour in school and in the community.

Families had also been given practical support through parenting programmes and children's centres. In some cases, they had been helped to move to new accommodation that suited their needs better.

One borough had established five multi-agency teams, each of which included members from the substance misuse team, adolescent resource team, extended services, youth service, youth offending team, the Connexions service, the voluntary sector, children's centres, the police, housing and schools. Monthly meetings focused on sharing information, identifying local needs and prioritising early intervention with specific young people. Practitioners forged better working relationships across services and became more knowledgeable about the range of options for support that already existed in the area. Successes included the improved engagement of young Travellers in positive activities, a reduction in incidents of anti-social behaviour in targeted 'hot spots' and improved support for families of young people who were in danger of offending.

In partnership with the primary care trust, a metropolitan borough had established a high-quality 'health and well-being centre' where young people aged 13 to 25 could receive confidential information, advice and counselling on sexual health matters. The fact that the service shared staff with a health facility for adults in the same building ensured effective transition at appropriate points. Nursing services offered drop-in sessions during the day and referral sessions in the evening. Outreach clinics had also been established in schools in the areas of highest need, as well as in all the local colleges. Midwives for pregnant teenagers provided a weekly session to help reduce second unplanned conceptions and to help young

parents return to education, training or employment. The project was an integral part of the area's response to teenage pregnancy and had been instrumental in reducing the conception rates for teenagers.

19. Discussions with staff showed that they were most positive about a multi-agency approach when the team in which they worked included the full range of statutory children's services, as well as the voluntary and community sectors, extended schools, health visitors and school nurses. It meant that staff could have a more comprehensive understanding of the needs of vulnerable young people and their families. Support for teenage parents, for example, could encompass post-natal health care, housing and, where appropriate, guidance for the parents to get them back to training or employment. However, there was some concern that a multi-agency approach could lead to the loss of the expertise available within single agencies and that a focus on shared goals could detract from the specific duties and targets against which statutory services would be measured.
20. Partnership working across agencies has been in place for some years but national policies on multi-agency working had significantly accelerated change. For some areas, for example, introducing multi-agency teams represented a considerable change in direction, a potential shift in how resources were deployed and the introduction of new management structures. There was evidence that not all local areas had sufficiently reviewed the effectiveness of current arrangements, nor the risks to delivering existing services, before introducing changes

Divisional integrated youth support arrangements

21. Three of the 11 areas visited were developing divisional arrangements for integrated youth support, in effect building on and refining what they considered to be the effective partnerships that were already in place. Given their specific statutory and legal obligations, managers from services such as the youth offending service or the Connexions service often retained their responsibilities for these services while also acting as full members of the division. Inspectors found that this divisional arrangement encouraged a collective approach, with specialist knowledge – for example of juvenile justice, drugs education or information, advice and guidance – strengthening provision for young people. There was also an increasing willingness and confidence on the part of managers not simply to represent publicly the position of their former specialist area, but also to communicate the importance of a broader, more integrated response.
22. Senior and middle managers in these services cooperated well with one another and had succeeded in retaining a focus on their specific service areas while contributing well to wider youth developments.

23. Incorporating representatives from the voluntary and community sectors into the management teams broadened the scope of these integrated services further. Within this approach, the awareness of the contribution that universal provision makes to young people's learning and development was high.
24. The disadvantages of the approach included, on a few occasions, middle managers, by default or design, seeking to strengthen the role of their particular part of the service rather than focusing on the integrated service as a whole.

Commissioning of services

25. As a way of improving efficiency and securing greater value for money, local authorities are being encouraged not to provide all the services themselves but to commission them from a range of agencies, including those in the voluntary and community sectors as well as private or not-for-profit providers.
26. With a few exceptions, such as the Connexions service and elements of information, advice and guidance, commissioning within the youth sector has traditionally been limited. Progress, therefore, in commissioning youth support was slow, even in the areas where services were well structured and managed and where policy and governance arrangements were reasonably well developed.
27. In the authorities visited, further factors contributing to slow progress in developing commissioning arrangements included:
 - concerns about the future level and stability of funding for youth support, leading to an unwillingness to enter contracts
 - instability, created by the frequent structural re-organisations in councils' children's services
 - the need to ensure that youth support formed part of the overall commissioning framework for the local area
 - concern to ensure that well-established arrangements, based on good local knowledge and effective networks, were not eroded
 - a limited range of organisations from which authorities felt they could commission services.
28. In the areas visited where commissioning was more advanced, strategic managers were even-handed, objective and alert to the need to maintain support for youth provision that was well rooted in neighbourhoods. They had consulted the voluntary and community sectors at key points. These local authorities recognised their role in developing the capacity of existing and potential local providers, in particular those with limited experience in negotiating large contracts and employing staff. In these instances, discussions were taking place about how to establish consortia that, without undue

bureaucracy, would fund small local organisations. The structures ensured that potential service providers were not involved in decisions about procurement.

29. The more advanced local areas already had experience not only of commissioning work but also of decommissioning services that were no longer necessary or of the appropriate quality, as in the example below.

Commissioning arrangements in one authority visited had been the focus of considerable discussion between the council and its partners, particularly the voluntary and community sectors. The authority was seeking to change the practice of repeatedly commissioning the same organisations. It had learnt from previous mistakes and was seeking to develop a transparent process and to provide its partners with support to prepare them for a business environment. A particularly good toolkit had been produced to help organisations take stock of their preparedness to tender for services.

30. The prospect of increased commissioning had often been helpful in prompting managers to revisit their previous assessments of needs, particularly with a view to sharpening responses to the more intractable problems, such as teenage pregnancies or the low take-up by young people of education, employment or training. In the best instances, as the move towards commissioning gathered pace, authorities were learning from their experiences. This is illustrated in the following example.

A well-established club for disabled young people provided activities on three evenings a week. It included a purposeful mix of games, music, sport, and support and training to enable the young people to develop confidence, independence and better social skills. It also involved able-bodied young people and provided support for parents. It was a community-led organisation, operated by volunteers and one part-time, paid member of staff. The local authority supported the club with training, advice and a contribution to annual operating costs. The range of expertise available provided the project with access to specialist support and advice on finding grants, training on safeguarding, and marketing. The club was thriving and continued to grow, even though the local authority had reduced the role it played in financing and directing the initiative.

31. Where progress with commissioning was slowest, inspectors found that:
- planning was poorly informed and the authorities had yet to reach a view on which aspects of service provision to retain and where new providers might be sought
 - middle managers did not take a sufficiently ambitious approach to commissioning and struggled to see beyond the immediate needs of what they perceived to be their specific service brief

- local authority managers and officers in the voluntary sector had not established the constructive relationships that were necessary for effective collaboration.
32. Further problems relating to commissioning services were as follows.
- Centrally managed council commissioners had only a partial knowledge and understanding of the broad scope and reach of integrated and targeted youth support, in particular the role of universal, community-based youth provision.
 - Commissioners set inappropriate targets, as in the case of a youth information advice agency whose effectiveness was measured in terms of the referrals received, resulting in other agencies being expected to refer young people whose needs they could have met in other ways.
 - Plans for commissioning were influenced unduly by managers' previous experiences in particular services, such as health, juvenile justice or extended schools.
 - There was a lack of suitable arrangements to:
 - support and represent the diversity of the voluntary and community sectors
 - accommodate new providers
 - support long-term planning and the responsibilities entailed in employing staff.
 - There was an over-reliance on monitoring through poorly presented data – for example, numbers attending occasional events – as opposed to critically examining trends and patterns and gathering information about non-users. Qualitative indicators were given insufficient attention.
 - Managers did not apply the same rigour to evaluating directly provided local authority services as they did to those commissioned from other agencies.

The youth support workforce

33. Whatever the structure in which they were working, the youth support practitioners interviewed during the survey were generally positive about developments and saw collaboration as a natural extension of what they already did. They often welcomed the chance to broaden the scope of their work. However, in most instances they were unclear about the extent to which their established work matched the new integrated approach and whether it would need to change.
34. A legitimate debate was taking place in local authority areas about the extent to which services should retain distinct specialisms while 'adding value' through greater integration. Practitioners often expressed well-founded concerns about

working in areas outside their professional training, knowledge and experience. Examples of this included:

- workers providing sexual health drop-in sessions where they had insufficient understanding of how to meet the needs and interests of the group and where the approach they adopted did not accord with appropriate guidelines
 - youth participation workers organising elections for young people but failing to demonstrate a sufficient understanding and knowledge of democratic processes
 - some practitioners having insufficient knowledge and skills to produce common assessments on young people
 - practitioners lacking the skills necessary to lead school-based health sessions
 - specialist advice workers in one-to-one settings taking a predetermined and rigid approach to advising young people.
35. All the local areas visited had identified the need for further development of the skills of managers and front-line staff to support the implementation of the reforms. Training programmes focused increasingly on the more complex needs of the workforce and on extending opportunities for staff from the voluntary and community sectors. In the best instances, such developments had helped teams to be more cohesive and to tackle issues more effectively.
36. Staff varied considerably in their views on the quality of the training they had received. Secondments and work shadowing opportunities were seen, particularly by experienced practitioners, as valuable in improving integrated working. Workforce development forums had also helped to develop a shared language and understanding across services. However, staff criticised training that was too general to enable them to relate it to their practice, and training providers who took insufficient account of their areas of expertise.

Ensuring quality

37. Most of the agencies that contribute to integrated youth support have statutory duties to fulfil, specific assessment processes to implement and individual targets to meet. These existing obligations create difficulties in developing a unified quality assurance framework that encompasses the full range of work in integrated youth support. There was limited progress on this in the local authorities visited.

38. In the areas visited, overall progress was being assessed primarily in terms of:
- national public service agreement indicators
 - quantitative indicators in Children and Young People's plans
 - targets for individual services, such as youth services or the Connexions service.
39. Most of the local authorities visited had developed, or were in the process of developing, a management system which enabled practitioners across the sector to share information about individual young people and to produce regular reports on progress towards local targets. None, however, was giving sufficient attention to evaluating the quality of the provision. Approaches to determining value for money were also underdeveloped.
40. The weaknesses in services, both provided directly by the authorities and in those that they commissioned, included:
- examples of poor front-line practice of which managers were unaware
 - ill-informed staff deployment
 - too much acceptance by managers of second-hand quality assurance
 - insufficiently incisive self-evaluation.
41. In general, monitoring arrangements were inadequate in most of the areas visited. However, there were some individual examples of good practice, including:
- the use of peer observation to help staff reflect on their own and others' practice and to improve their performance
 - 'mystery shopping' by young people to establish how effectively the aims of a service were being translated into practice
 - the development of local indicators to enable practitioners to identify what impact their collective action was having, for example in lowering the number of new entrants into the criminal justice system.

Providing targeted youth support

42. The targeted youth support element of the reforms aims to ensure that the needs of vulnerable young people are identified early and met through effective collaboration between relevant local agencies.
43. In the areas visited, agencies and practitioners were clearly committed to working together. Resources were increasingly shared or pooled and vulnerable young people were beginning to gain more timely access to services. However, targeted support was far from secure at the time of the survey visits, and those beyond the age of 16 were less well served than younger ones.

Assessment of need

44. The Common Assessment Framework is intended to provide an accurate picture of a vulnerable young person's needs, so that an effective plan can be devised to tackle the needs identified. In the areas visited, the speed at which the Common Assessment Framework was being implemented, and the effectiveness, varied considerably.
45. Where it was being introduced more effectively, the contributory factors included:
- the good-quality support and training practitioners had received, often from other more experienced professionals
 - the enthusiasm and flexibility of individual practitioners in applying an approach that they valued.
46. Examples of effective practice included the use of common assessment at the end of a young person's statutory engagement with the youth offending team. This ensured that appropriate agencies identified and met continuing needs and that the young person was also guided towards purposeful leisure activities. The process encouraged agencies to keep a watchful eye on specific individuals, so that they could receive further support if they needed it.

In one local authority, attempts to encourage a broad range of practitioners to initiate the Common Assessment Framework were proving fruitful. Having established that a 17-year-old was homeless and vulnerable, a youth worker took the lead in initiating the common assessment process. In doing so, she was able to draw agencies together to determine the full picture of the housing problem and take action accordingly. The approach adopted by the youth worker was based on knowing what the needs of the young man were – and those of others in a similar situation. As a result, he felt he had support in sorting out his housing and other related problems and was able to take an active part in making decisions that concerned him.

47. In another example, the common assessment process was instrumental in initiating multi-agency intervention.

Youth inclusion and support panels, based in each district of a large rural council, worked with young people and their families to provide early assessments and interventions to keep young people out of trouble. The panels also put families in touch with appropriate services.

A 16-year-old was referred to a panel because of concerns about his anti-social behaviour and his difficulty in making and sustaining friendships. Health concerns within his family were having a negative impact on his behaviour. He had previously received a reprimand for common assault.

After the Common Assessment Framework was used, a plan for integrated support was put together, in consultation with the young person and his family. The plan focused on tackling his offending behaviour, improving his relationships with his peers and helping him to gain a college place. It included actions to support the family about health and housing needs. The support spanned nine months and involved a wide range of partners, including a worker from the youth inclusion and support panel, police community support officers, the school, an education social worker, housing services and a local college. The young man was helped to focus more effectively on his future, he gained a college place and was linked to the youth service for continuing support. At the time of the visits, the family was also receiving support from social care services.

48. The more responsive local areas visited had already reviewed how effectively the Common Assessment Framework process was being implemented. They had been quick to make the changes needed and to improve guidance. For example, a local area had identified a specialist worker who could advise less-experienced colleagues on how and when to initiate formal assessment procedures. This responsive approach significantly reassured staff that managers were listening to their concerns.
49. The areas visited had experienced significant challenges in introducing the Common Assessment Framework across a diverse range of statutory and voluntary agencies. In part, the difficulties stemmed from the fact that some agencies, such as the Connexions service, youth offending teams and social care services, had their own well-established and required forms of assessment. Even among experienced practitioners, there were also uncertainties about who would take responsibility for initiating a common assessment.
50. Although most of those surveyed were generally refining their practice to support common assessment and joint working, a lack of understanding about the relationship between existing processes and the new Common Assessment Framework often led to duplication. However, there were good examples of local areas investing resources in developing assessment tools which combined the statutory requirements of individual services with the broader Common Assessment Framework.
51. The extent to which schools were engaged in the common assessment process varied considerably. Where the system was working successfully, they saw it as an improved mechanism for gaining additional support quickly and appreciated the lead role that the local authority took in ensuring that relevant agencies contributed as they should. The most engaged schools tended to be located in areas of high deprivation where they already had good links with other services.
52. All the areas visited had provided training in the Common Assessment Framework. However, the trainers rarely had sufficient understanding of how

various youth support services worked to be able to identify and meet the needs of practitioners.

The lead professional

53. The role of the 'lead professional' is to provide a link between a young person and other agencies and to ensure that support is coordinated well. The role may be taken by any professional who has a detailed knowledge of the young person's needs. The consent of the young person is needed for the arrangements to be made.
54. At the time of the survey visits, there were no examples where the role of the lead professional had become sufficiently established across a local area. Where progress had been made, the contributory factors included:
 - the motivation of individual practitioners
 - the preparedness of practitioners to work beyond traditional service boundaries
 - effective structures for professional support.
55. Those who had taken on the role of lead professional were generally confident about its purpose and the underlying principles and had quickly developed relevant skills for doing the job. However, many of the practitioners were reluctant to take on the role because they saw it as being beyond their current responsibilities and, in some cases, outside their level of skill.
56. The following example of successful practice shows the contribution that lead professionals can make to improving support for vulnerable individuals.

The manager of the support centre in a secondary school had volunteered to attend training for lead professionals to improve the support available for students. The impact was seen in the case of a 15-year-old who had a previously good record of school attendance and a passion for sports but whose behaviour was beginning to be disruptive in and outside the classroom. His attainment and progress were also deteriorating.

Through the common assessment process, the student was helped to clarify the reasons for the deterioration. With the lead professional, he was also able to gain the support of a team including the Connexions service, a learning mentor, the special educational needs coordinator, an education welfare officer and a youth worker. He received support from this team over an eight-month period, at the end of which he gained good results in his GCSE examinations and achieved his goal of going on to study for A levels.

Teams working in localities

57. All the areas visited were developing groups variously described as 'the team around the child', 'the team around the school' or 'the team around the family'. These were very local arrangements, often focusing on a school catchment area and differing from the other multi-agency teams, which had a broader function and remit over a wider area. The common assessment process often acted as the focus for their work. The 'team around the child' enabled a range of professionals, such as social workers, the police, health workers and representatives of the voluntary and community sectors, to develop plans together for selected children and young people. Membership was flexible, depending on the specific needs of the young people being supported at a particular time but often included the designated lead professional.
58. The teams seen by inspectors were at a relatively early stage in their development. The most successful ones shared a number of common characteristics including:
- a focus on working together to source or broker services and on putting the young person's needs before those of the agencies
 - a high level of commitment on the part of team members
 - the ability to capitalise on the collective knowledge about a young person's background, educational attainment, family situation and other factors
 - recognition of the importance of gaining the consent of young people and their families and involving them in the process
 - a high degree of clarity about the difference between high- and low-level needs and the varying thresholds for gaining access to specific services
 - a focus on providing collective support for the lead professional or other staff working directly with the young person
 - the active engagement and commitment of the school attended by the young person.
59. Although these types of arrangements used these resources intensively, there was little evidence of the authorities having established ways to determine the extent to which they provided value for money.
60. There were few examples where the support arrangements for young people beyond 16 were as well advanced as for those below that age. The work of the Connexions service contributed strongly in all the areas visited but, on too many occasions, the structures for the 'team around the child' linked better with schools than with further education or employer-based training and support services. While some local authorities held the view that alternative structures for young people over the age of 16 were in place, the evidence to support this was often insecure.

Securing young people's access to positive activities

61. A key element of the reforms to youth support is the focus on promoting and developing 'positive activities' and, since 2009, on making more of these available to young people on Friday and Saturday nights. Local authorities are required to take a lead role in this by providing such services themselves through, for example, council sports and leisure departments, or by commissioning them from other sources. However, because of other pressing youth-related developments, the areas visited had decided not to give high priority to this aspect of their work.
62. All the local authorities visited had included the provision of a greater range of positive activities as an aim within their Children and Young People's plans, often under the heading of 'Things to do and places to go'. Most had conducted a simple audit of activities available locally, and had published this information on a website. However, young people were consulted upon whether they would actually make use of the preferred website only to a limited extent.
63. There was also a lack of clarity about how authorities were measuring the take-up of provision. A self-reporting survey known as 'Tellus' had provided a benchmark for the number of young people engaged in positive activities in each local area.⁸ Despite this, and despite take-up being one of the five public service indicators, accurate data on young people's participation in positive activities were lacking.
64. The very broad definition of what constitutes 'positive activities' was raising questions among senior officers and practitioners about the role and validity of youth work as a means of engaging young people and helping them learn. There were also tensions in seeking a balance between targeted and universal youth work. Even in the better authorities, too many managers expected youth work to focus solely on problems such as anti-social behaviour rather than on helping young people to develop a wide range of personal skills and relationships.
65. Young people, parents and some practitioners told inspectors that an increased use of titles for projects such as 'self-esteem course', 'NEET drop-in' or 'inclusion project' had negative connotations.
66. However, in the 30 youth work projects visited, inspectors found instances where youth centres were providing a broad curriculum that included sport, music, opportunities to develop personal, vocational and social skills, and a place to meet friends. Workers had clear, relevant competencies. They often had long-standing relationships with young people, knew about an individual's

⁸ Local authority measures for national indicators supported by the TellUs4 survey; www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000908/index.shtml.

situation, including any risk-taking behaviour, and were able to encourage young people to assume new responsibilities and learn from them. Youth work of this sort had a direct impact on young people's learning and enjoyment and contributed well, if subtly, to youth support. The following illustrates the kind of work seen.

A music project located in an inner-city estate was effective in engaging young people, particularly older teenage boys. Those it attracted would not usually attend a youth club and were not directly involved with other agencies. The majority of the group did not work or attend college and had low aspirations in relation to seeking further education, training or employment. Most had had a poor experience of school and were, or had been, involved in drugs and gang culture.

One young man was having extreme difficulties at home. He was very aggressive and in constant conflict with his mother. This sometimes resulted in threatening behaviour and violence. His mother came to see the youth worker in a very distressed state. Her son was not attending school regularly and becoming increasingly involved in anti-social behaviour in the community. Over the summer, he often attended the music project and developed good relationships with youth workers and with other young people. The boy's mother had refused permission for him to attend a residential event but, after a meeting with the youth worker, agreed to his taking part. By the end of the summer, his attitude became much more positive. He was much calmer and more cooperative with others. In September, he settled well when he went back to school.

Involving young people as partners

67. There is a growing recognition by local and central government of the value of involving young people in developing services and decision-making. In part, this is a result of the priority given to it by senior officers and policy-makers, but it also reflects some very good practice by workers. Eight of the areas visited had mature structures, including youth forums and councils. These gave young people from a range of backgrounds regular access to officers and elected council members, and the opportunity to campaign on their own issues and to act as advocates for their peers. The following is a typical example:

Vox provided an extensive, county-wide structure for securing young people's views and advocating for them. The core group included members of the youth parliament and representatives from local young people's forums. Members had led successful campaigns on a wide range of issues including, for example, persuading the local authority to invest in a study of the costs involved in subsidising transport for young people. Vox was also active in promoting healthy and positive lifestyles through supporting anti-smoking and 'respect' campaigns and presenting a programme on children's rights. It had designed a leaflet aimed at young

people explaining the Common Assessment Framework, been active on interview panels for staff and developed guidelines for council services on consulting young people.

68. In some projects, there were subtle examples of responsive and meaningful participation by young people. For instance, a few young people on a mobile youth project rallied their peers to make a case to their village hall committee for a permanent youth facility.
69. In the best instances, young people's views formed part of area-wide needs assessment alongside the use of data and demographic information. In the most advanced models, young people were part of the process for recruiting and selecting staff and, in some instances, providing services for other young people. However, their involvement in commissioning activities was limited.
70. Young people involved in the variety of projects seen by inspectors often gained a useful insight into the workings of local authorities. Their organisational and political skills were sharpened, as was their understanding of others, often those from different backgrounds from themselves.
71. There were occasions when the impetus created by youth participation had beneficial effects within other council departments and services. Examples were seen where young people had influenced the development of sexual health services, and where architects and planners looked to youth forums for their opinions on, for instance, play spaces. In each case, officers were very receptive to young people's views and noted that consultation of this nature supported their own work well, as illustrated below.

A group of young people, frustrated about a lack of facilities, identified the need for a local skate-park. With the support of detached youth workers, a planning group was formed. An application for financial support was made to the youth opportunities fund for equipment and visits were made to other skate parks in the region. Working with the council's landscape architect team and community services, the young people identified opportunities to pool funding so that the skate-park would become part of proposed wider developments of local facilities.

At the time of the survey visit, over 40 young people had been involved in discussions, planning meetings and two public consultation meetings. Young people articulated their needs and aspirations to residents and council officials, including the mayor and elected members. They were thoughtful and mature in their dealings with the community and with those who opposed the park. The group worked closely with the landscape architect team in finalising the design criteria for prospective tenders and clarifying their role in the procurement process. One council architect had patiently worked with the young people to ensure that they helped shape the project. Council departments had worked hard to

develop and maintain good relationships with young people through direct contact, using text messaging and via email. As a result, plans for the skate-park were well advanced.

72. The best work in this area was led by able practitioners. They had skills in group work and in building the confidence of young people; they were able to chart a young person's development and were alert to the need to promote this further. Progression may have been in relation to being part of a local, regional or national event which was new to the young person. More commonly, it was simply through the learning gained by taking on new and more responsible tasks within the group. The more advanced local areas recognised the need to extend involvement to new young people rather than focusing attention entirely on those who were already contributing.
73. Despite this positive picture, important weaknesses remained. Young people were not always sufficiently involved at the beginning of new initiatives and councils were slow in providing feedback to them on their questions and ideas. Furthermore, when councils had to take difficult and potentially controversial decisions, such as closing or replacing existing provision, they sometimes failed to consult the young people who were directly affected.

Notes

The survey was conducted in three stages. The first involved an initial scoping exercise to devise key survey questions. This took place during April and May 2009 and entailed meetings in two regions attended by local authority officers. The findings helped to identify the questions that inspectors pursued. These were designed to reflect the breadth of activity across integrated youth support services. The second stage took place between June and December 2009 and involved visits to a sample of seven local authorities and their partners, selected to represent a mixture of urban and rural settings. The final stage involved visits to four additional local authorities to collect evidence on particular issues which had emerged earlier. These took place between January and March 2010. In each instance, a team of two or three inspectors spent two days in the local area. They gathered evidence through visits to between 10 and 15 activities which the local area considered illustrative of an integrated response; focus groups with partners, managers and front-line practitioners; and a review of documentation. In five areas, inspectors conducted a round-table meeting with the local authorities and their partners.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Engaging young people: local authority youth work 2005–08 (080141), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080141.

Moving through the system – information advice and guidance (080273), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273.

Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why (090236), Ofsted 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236.

Other publications

Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities (PU214), DCSF, 2007; <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=PU214>.

Targeted youth support pathfinders evaluation – final report (DCSF-RR078), DCSF, 2009; <http://www.education.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectId=14880&type=5&resultspage=1>.

Targeted youth support: next steps (DCSF-00639-2009), DCSF, 2009; <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00639-2009>.

Websites

Information on youth support services can be found at:

www.education.gov.uk
www.nya.org.uk
www.commissioningsupport.org.uk
www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/young-peoples-workforce.

Annex A. Local authorities visited for this survey

Local authorities visited

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Council
Brighton and Hove City Council
Dorset County Council
Hartlepool Borough Council
Newcastle City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council
South Gloucestershire Council
Stockport Council
Warwickshire County Council
West Berkshire Council

Local authorities where inspectors conducted a single round-table meeting with officers

Greenwich Council
Norfolk County Council
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council
Sheffield City Council
Trafford Council