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Ms Janet Tomlinson
Director Children, Young People and
Families
Oxfordshire County Council
Macclesfield House
New Road
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Oxfordshire

Dear Ms Tomlinson

**Ofsted survey inspection programme 2009/10:
The impact of integrated youth support**

Thank you for your co-operation and hospitality, and that of the staff, during our visit to Oxfordshire 23 - 25 June to evaluate the impact of integrated youth support. The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting.

The published report will list the names of the contributing local authorities and we may feature individual case studies. Where this is the case we will consult with the respective local authorities. This letter will not be posted on the Ofsted website.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with officers and staff, visits to various projects, focus groups with partner agencies and scrutiny of documentation.

The impact of integrated arrangements on the range and quality of young people's learning and development through participation in youth work and positive activities in the community is good.

- The integrated youth support service is having a positive impact on young people's learning and development. Through participation in youth work and community based provision, young people enjoy constructive educational and leisure-time activities and have safe places to socialise with friends. Vulnerable young people are well supported to access opportunities through the Positive Activities for Young People programme.

- Integrated youth support arrangements are building effectively on the wide range of opportunities for young people to become volunteers and active citizens. Good support from front-line staff spurs young people to engage in activities and projects, often beyond their initial point of contact with the service.
- Strong and effective partnerships are in place with district councils and voluntary youth organisations. While many of these links pre-date the new service, integration has been a catalyst to review and revise partnership arrangements and service level agreements.
- The 'Oxfordshire Youth Offer' has recently been updated following consultation with young people. Partners recognise the need to continue to improve publicity and promotion, for example through the dedicated website and stronger links with extended schools.
- Access to affordable transport remains a barrier for young people in rural areas. The service continues to pursue discussions with local transport companies and support young people's campaigns for improvement.

The effectiveness of targeted support services, particularly in relation to young people involved in, or at risk of involvement in, crime and anti-social behaviour is good.

- Taken together, targeted services provide good support to young people. Practice is building effectively on previous arrangements. A high priority is given to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour as part of the council's prevention and early intervention work.
- Young people at risk of offending are identified early and individualised packages of support put in place. Offending rates are low and have declined consistently over the last three years. Data show a significant decline in anti-social behaviour in 'hot spot' communities. Very good partnership work with the police has been successful in diverting young people from the youth justice system.
- A new strategic lead for integrated youth support and an area service manager for targeted youth support have been appointed. A multi-agency group has good oversight of county developments. Improved information sharing is enabling risk factors, such as mental health and problematic behaviour in school, to be identified promptly. Electronic information sharing systems are not yet compatible across different agencies.
- Targeted youth support plays a key role in strands of the Success Project. Through the Back on Track Programme which works with targeted secondary schools, the service provides accredited outdoor activities which motivate young people and develop their skills and confidence. Young people are well supported by youth workers,

however, while they are on the programme, support from their schools is mixed.

- Data are used well to target resources.
- The service has been successful in reducing the numbers of young people whose circumstances are not known. However the proportion not in education, employment or training has begun to rise. The contract with Connexions has been revised to ensure a sharper focus on vulnerable groups. Actions to reduce teenage conceptions have not yet had sufficient or sustained impact. A new strategy has been put in place to focus work in the areas of greatest need.
- A recent internal review of targeted youth support has rightly identified the need to ensure evaluation captures broader outcomes for young people beyond measures such as offending, school attendance and unemployment.

The progress made by the local authority and its partners in developing an integrated approach to youth support is satisfactory.

- The new senior management team has a unified leadership 'voice' which reflects its clear and shared ambitions. Senior managers have well defined roles and responsibilities and clear lines of accountability. Good use is made of management information to inform planning.
- A well conceived and well written strategy is in place which recognises the contribution of different professional disciplines within the integrated service. However the strategy has not been communicated fully to staff at operational level. Some workers remain uncertain about the future and concerned about the security of their roles. While many are positive about the new developments, few have had the opportunity to influence strategic decision-making. Area delivery teams and plans for co-location are at a very early stage of development.
- Quality improvement arrangements are insufficiently developed. The service lacks a coherent quality assurance framework which includes systematic feedback from services users.
- The quality of resources is adequate overall. However, a legacy of underinvestment is evident in the poor state of many youth centres. The draft building strategy highlights the significant investment required to achieve standards more in keeping with the service's aspirations. At local level, staff and partners are resourceful in making the most of what is available. However, in some cases, long-term planning is hampered by the uncertainty of future funding.

Young people's active involvement in shaping decisions at a local level is good.

- Comprehensive arrangements to consult young people and engage them in decision making are in place. Good efforts are made to ensure young people from vulnerable groups are well represented. Young people have played an important role in the development of commissioning, for example of Connexions, the Children's Fund and services for young carers. Young people are actively involved at county and local level through district youth forums and shadow town councils, recruitment and selection of staff and regular meetings with elected members and senior officers. There is good support for young people's engagement in local and national campaigns. Links to the council's broader consultative processes, such as Sounding Boards, enable young people's voice to be heard at the highest level.
- Further development of participation has been a key priority for the new service through the appointment of three new posts. The Youth Opportunities Fund has been reviewed and revised to ensure greater transparency and increase young people's active involvement in grant applications and in decision making panels.
- Young people's involvement in quality assurance processes is uneven across the new service as a whole.

The contribution of integrated support arrangements to broader strategic priorities for improving outcomes for young people is satisfactory.

- The development of the service is taking place at a time of significant organisational and cultural change in children's services. Integrated youth support arrangements are making a satisfactory contribution to the council's highest priorities of raising attainment, safeguarding for all and narrowing the gap. However, integrated arrangements are not yet fully embedded and have not been in place long enough for the council and its partners to judge their overall impact on improving outcomes for young people.
- Insufficient attention has been given to workforce development. A new training programme is on offer to staff and partners, however this falls short of a coherent workforce strategy based on a comprehensive analysis of need. Opportunities for staff, for example, to shadow each other and share good practice are insufficiently developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- develop a service-wide quality assurance framework which includes feedback from young people
- ensure targeted youth support plays a central role in strategies to reduce teenage conceptions and increase the number of young people in education, training or employment
- provide opportunities for staff to share good practice and contribute to service planning
- develop and implement a workforce strategy.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop integrated youth support arrangements.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector