

<i>To:</i>	Ronke Martins-Taylor, Chair of the Youth Offending Team Management Board
<i>Copy to:</i>	See copy list at end
<i>From:</i>	Julie Fox, HM Assistant Chief Inspector
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Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS), of youth offending work in the London Borough of Redbridge.

The inspection was conducted from 2nd – 4th February 2015 as part of our programme of inspection of youth offending work. This report is published on the HMI Probation website. A copy will be provided to partner inspectorates to inform their inspections, and to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

Context

The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people. Good quality assessment and planning at the start of a sentence is critical to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. We examined 33 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Redbridge Youth Offending Team (YOT). Wherever possible this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

Summary

The published reoffending rate¹ for Redbridge was 43.6%. This was better than the previous year but worse than the England and Wales average of 36.1%.

We were pleased to find that Redbridge YOT had maintained, and indeed improved on, the high standard of work we found during our previous inspection in 2011. This was particularly impressive given the diverse and complex offending needs of the children and young people with whom they work.

Commentary on the inspection in Redbridge:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. To help reduce the risk of future offending, it is vital that those working with children and young people who offend understand the factors that underlie the offending behaviour. In all but two cases, we were satisfied that the case manager understood why the child or young person had offended and what needed to be done to help them stop offending.

¹ Published January 2015 based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the April 2012 – March 2013 cohort.
Source: Ministry of Justice

- 1.2. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) advise the court about the reasons for the child or young person's offending and the work required to address it. The document also outlines the work to be done with the child or young person once they are sentenced. In Redbridge we looked at 22 reports and were pleased to find that every one was of a good quality. One inspector said: *"In writing the PSR, the case manager met with Raz's family to understand not only why he had offended but what the family could do to help him desist from reoffending. This was not easy as most members of the family had a poor understanding of English. The case manager was accompanied by an interpreter. The PSR contained information from this meeting which helped the sentencers and enabled the case manager to build a good relationship with Raz's parents from the start, which helped Raz comply with his sentence."*
- 1.3. The YOT encouraged its case managers to use their professional judgement when an assessment or plan to reduce reoffending needed to be formally reviewed. We found in almost all cases that professional judgements were used sufficiently, particularly when there was a significant change in the circumstances of the child or young person or other factors linked to the case.
- 1.4. Redbridge YOT used an integrated action plan (IAP) template as a bridge between assessment and planning to reduce reoffending, manage risk of harm and reduce vulnerability. The template encouraged the setting of outcome focused objectives, and linking together different elements of planning. In almost all cases, we found the IAP was used well, leading to good plans that included appropriate and clear interventions. We were impressed to see the level of involvement of the child or young person in the development of the IAP. One inspector commented: *"There was clear evidence that the young person had been actively involved in developing the plan – in all the cases I inspected, the plan had been developed with the young person, not to them."*
- 1.5. In referral order cases, we often find a delay between the order being made to the panel meeting and work starting with the child or young person. In Redbridge, every child or young person sentenced to a referral order was seen by their case manager following the sentence to involve them in planning for the panel meeting. This seemed to encourage compliance and engagement right from the start of the sentence.
- 1.6. In all cases, there was sufficient planning in place to ensure that work to reduce reoffending was appropriate to the needs of the child or young person. This was also true of the four custody cases we inspected. In those cases, the YOT case manager and all others involved had attended sentence planning meetings while the child or young person was in custody. Plans were clear about the work to be done while they were in custody and on their release. From the start, sentence plans focused on ensuring effective resettlement. To this end, the YOT did all it could to involve not only parents and carers but also teachers and other professionals who would be involved with the child or young person on their release back into their community.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. We were very pleased to find that all PSRs included a clear assessment and summary of the risk of harm to others that applied in the case. This provided the court with the information they needed to decide if the child or young person could safely serve their sentence in the community.

- 2.2. In all cases where the child or young person poses a threat of harm to the general public or others known to them, including other children and young people, it is vital that those working with them understand and can explain that threat. In all but one of the cases, we judged that the case manager had made every effort to understand the risk of harm posed by the child or young person.
- 2.3. As with work to reduce the risk of reoffending, case managers were expected to use their professional judgement when deciding if they needed to review their assessment of the risk of harm posed by the child or young person. Risk of harm is a dynamic factor, in that it can change rapidly as a result of significant changes in the child or young person's life, such as becoming homeless, exclusion from school or simply mixing with other violent children and young people. It is, therefore, important that case managers keep risk of harm, and in particular, risk of serious harm assessments, under review. There were 20 cases in the inspection where we judged that a review was necessary. In all but three cases a review had been undertaken.
- 2.4. Planning to address the risk of harm was of a good quality in almost all cases, with actions in place that not only focused on the interventions required, but also anticipated and prepared for any changed factors that were likely to reduce or raise the child or young person's risk of harm to the public. Sufficient reviews of risk of harm plans were undertaken at a similar level to the reviewing of assessments.
- 2.5. In all but three cases where there was an identifiable victim, we found evidence that risk of harm to them had been well managed. In most cases that required it, there was good use of victim liaison officers and effective sharing of information between the YOT seconded police officers and case managers to ensure that victims and potential victims were kept safe.
- 2.6. Overall, we found good evidence of quality assurance and management oversight throughout all cases. In relation to public protection, in all but three cases, managers had been effective in ensuring that work to reduce risk of harm was of a good quality.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. As with risk of harm, we were pleased to find that PSRs included a clear assessment and summary of the child or young person's vulnerability and any relevant safeguarding factors.
- 3.2. In almost all cases, we found that case managers had made a sufficient effort to understand the vulnerability and safeguarding needs of the child or young person. This was of particular importance in Redbridge where there was evidence that, within some communities, children and young people were being involved by members of their extended family in criminal activities including shoplifting and transporting illegal drugs.
- 3.3. In most cases, there was a sufficient review of the child or young person's assessed vulnerability or safeguarding needs. Commenting on one such case, one of our inspectors reported: *"Following a review of Joe's vulnerability, the case manager used swift breach action as the young person had absconded and his whereabouts were unknown. There was also good evidence of multi-agency working to manage risk and identify alternative accommodation for his return."*

- 3.4. Vulnerability management planning formed part of the YOT's IAP. In almost all cases, there was evidence that plans were in place and sufficient to manage vulnerability and safeguarding factors. However, inspectors felt that planning to protect children and young people needed to be better embedded in the IAP. This could be facilitated by providing clear guidance to case managers on capturing action points and recording concerns in a way that would make sense to the child or young person. One inspector commented: "*In one IAP, the case manager had included safeguarding concerns by writing in the words of the young person e.g. 'My case manager is concerned that my parents may need help...'. In this way, the plan contained a clear explanation of the vulnerability concerns that could be shared with the young person and their parents/carers.*"
- 3.5. We were pleased to see that there was good evidence in most cases of plans being sufficiently reviewed when there was a significant change in factors that could impact on the child or young person's vulnerability or safeguarding.

4. Ensuring that the sentence is served

- 4.1. In all but one case, there was sufficient understanding of the diversity factors and barriers to engagement that could impact on the child or young person's ability to comply with their sentence, or fully engage in work to reduce their risk of reoffending.
- 4.2. We have already commented on the high level of engagement of children and young people in the assessment and planning to address offending behaviour. This was true of children and young people and their parents/carers throughout sentences, who had helped case managers understand barriers to engagement and factors that could help them desist from further offending.
- 4.3. The YOT had done a good deal of work to understand and meet the needs of their service users and parents/carers. This not only included understanding ethnic and cultural factors, but also those relating to the child or young person's mental health or learning disabilities. The YOT had been successful in winning funding to support its Joint Engagement Project (JEP) to improve the engagement of vulnerable children and young people who were mainly in education other than at mainstream school. As part of the project, the YOT had employed a part-time speech and language therapist to help children and young people with communication difficulties. Case managers also used 'Rapid English' screening and intervention tools to improve the literacy and communication skills of hard to reach children and young people, with the aim of improving their engagement in formal education, and reducing reoffending. The introduction of JEP was too recent to have impacted on this inspection but staff were enthusiastic about the project and it appeared to be a positive step towards reducing reoffending.
- 4.4. Not only did we find evidence that diversity factors and barriers to engagement were understood and well assessed, but in every case, we found plans were in place to address those factors and barriers. Plans were also sufficiently reviewed when required, including after changes in levels of compliance and engagement.
- 4.5. Service users' compliance was generally good. Where the child or young person did not comply, the response of the case manager was appropriate in all but one case. In seven cases there was a speedy return to court. We also found that breach was used successfully to re-establish contact with the child or young person.

Operational management

We found good quality management oversight throughout the orders and case managers valued the advice and support they got from their line managers. One inspector commented: *"In one case, where the young person posed a medium risk of harm to the public, the senior practitioner had quality assured the case completing the QA form. The senior practitioner made comments around quality, what further evidence was needed to clarify the case manager's assessment, and useful comments and suggestions on working with the young person's diversity. The senior practitioner summarised their findings, highlighting any gaps and what actions were needed."*

Key strengths

- Work during the custodial phase of sentences was consistently of a very high standard and the YOT ensured that parents/carers and other professionals attended planning meetings in custody.
- Assessment of diversity factors was strong and the YOT had introduced an innovative project to address barriers to engagement.
- The YOT delivered a quality service to children and young people from within Redbridge, and also Looked After Children placed in the borough by other local authorities.
- Enforcement and compliance procedures were in place to ensure that the child or young person abided by the sentence, or there was speedy action to return them to court.
- Case managers were clearly committed to achieving positive outcomes for the children and young people they worked with.

Areas requiring improvement

- In too many cases, local authorities placing children and young people in Redbridge, and their home YOT, did not fulfil their responsibilities in terms of providing assessments, information and support for their own children and young people. As a matter of urgency, senior management within Redbridge YOT and the local authority should raise this issue with the Youth Justice Board.

We are grateful for the support we received from staff in the YOT to facilitate and engage with this inspection. Please pass on our thanks, and ensure that they are made fully aware of these inspection findings.

If you have any further questions about the inspection, please contact the lead inspector, Les Smith. He can be contacted at les.smith@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07798 607828.

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Lead Elected Member for Crime	<i>Ross Hatfull</i>
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Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board	<i>John Goldup</i>
Chair of Youth Court Bench	<i>Sue Johnson</i>
YJB Business Area Manager	<i>Adam Mooney, Liz Westlund</i>
YJB link staff	<i>Malcolm Potter, Paula Williams, Linda Paris, Lisa Harvey-Messina</i>
Ofsted – Further Education and Learning	<i>Sheila Willis</i>
Ofsted – Social Care	<i>Simon Rushall, Carolyn Adcock</i>
Care Quality Commission	<i>Fergus Currie</i>
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Note 1: As an independent inspectorate, HMI Probation provides assurance to Ministers and the public on the effectiveness of work with those who have offended or are likely to offend, promotes continuous improvement by the organisations that we inspect and contributes to the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Note 2: We gather evidence against the SQS criteria, which are available on the HMI Probation website - <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation>.

Note 3: To request a paper copy of this report, please contact HMI Probation Communications at communications@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 0161 240 5336.