



Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuencid

HM Inspectorate of Probation

1st Floor, Manchester Civil Justice Centre, 1 Bridge Street West, Manchester M3 3FX
0161 240 5336 - www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation



<i>To:</i>	Catherine Parry, Chair of West Berkshire Youth Offending Team Management Board
<i>Copy to:</i>	See copy list at end
<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Director (Youth Justice)
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Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in West Berkshire

The inspection was conducted from 23 – 25 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 14 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by West Berkshire 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 West Berkshire was 33.0%. This was better than the previous year and better than the average for England & Wales of 36.1%.

West Berkshire was delivering outstanding work with children and young people. They had taken effective measures to address the recommendations that we made following their positive inspection in 2011. These recommendations were in relation to improving the quality of assessments and subsequent planning to address risk of harm to others and safeguarding.

Commentary on the inspection in West Berkshire:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. Case managers worked hard, in all the cases we inspected, to understand the reasons why children and young people had offended and what they could do to reduce the likelihood of future offending. Disability and diversity needs were always assessed. A speech and language screening was always carried out, and the views of the child or young person, and their parents/carers gathered. Consequently, assessments were comprehensive and well evidenced.

¹ Published January 2015 based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for 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 them. It also sets out the work that needs to be done with the child or young person once sentenced. In West Berkshire, we looked at six reports; each of them was of a good quality.
- 1.3. We looked at reports prepared for a youth offender panel in the case of the five children or young people who received a referral order. They were all timely, and all but one was sufficiently concise.
- 1.4. We found that assessments were always reviewed when required, or in accordance with the YOT's expectations for review. Reviews were of a good standard, and took account of what had changed.
- 1.5. In all cases, including the one custody case, there was sufficient planning in place to ensure that work to reduce reoffending was appropriate to the needs of the child or young person. The child or young person, and their parents/carers where appropriate, were always actively involved in development of the plans. Objectives were outcome focused, appropriate and prioritised. Where required, plans were reviewed in a timely way. In one case, a young person, whilst complying, was struggling to engage with his order. At his review, the case manager linked in work to reduce reoffending with his interest in driving. In helping him prepare for his driving theory test, she got him to think about the wider hazards he faced in relation to his lifestyle. She introduced a link between his desire to get and keep a driving licence with the need for him to control his anger and apply alternative strategies. This was imaginative.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. All six PSRs included a clear assessment and summary of the risk of harm to others posed by the child or young person. This provided the court with the information they needed to decide if it was safe and appropriate for the child or young person to serve their sentence in the community.
- 2.2. In a number of cases, the initial risk of harm screening indicated no requirement for the case manager to undertake a fuller assessment of the risk of harm posed by the child or young person to others. However, in West Berkshire, irrespective of the results of the screening, if the index offence is one that involved violence a full Risk of Serious Harm (RoSH) analysis is undertaken. In every instance, we found the full RoSH screening was undertaken where required. They were always of a good quality, and indicated the case manager had made every effort to understand the risk of harm posed by the child or young person.
- 2.3. There were 12 cases in the inspection where we judged a review of risk of harm was required. It was carried out in each instance. In all but one, it was of a sufficient quality and took account of changes that had taken place since the initial assessment.
- 2.4. In all cases, planning to address the risk of harm was good. Actions were always appropriate and prioritised. In each case where a review of the plan was required, it was undertaken and was of a sufficient quality.
- 2.5. In all seven cases where there was an identifiable victim or potential victim, risk of harm to them was well managed. In those cases that required it, there was appropriate use of victim liaison officers and effective sharing of information by case managers with teachers, social workers, and others to ensure victims and potential victims were safe. Recording of information in relation to risk of harm was good.
- 2.6. Management oversight was good across all strands of the work we inspected, and that equally applied in relation to work to protect the public.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. In each of the six PSRs, there was a clear explanation of the child or young person's vulnerability and any relevant safeguarding factors.
- 3.2. In every case, we found case managers had made a sufficient effort to understand the vulnerability and safeguarding needs of the child or young person. A sufficient review of vulnerability and safeguarding was carried out in every case where required.
- 3.3. In all 12 cases where there were vulnerability and safeguarding concerns, planning was sufficient to address the relevant issues. We were pleased to see that there was good evidence of plans being sufficiently reviewed when there was a significant change in factors that could have an impact on the child or young person's vulnerability or safeguarding.
- 3.4. The YOT uses a child sexual exploitation tool for children and young people aged 10 years or over where a YOT worker has concerns that the child or young person may be being groomed or is subject to child sexual exploitation. It focuses on the specific indicators and determines whether further investigations are needed. Used in supervision, in discussions with parents/carers, other professionals and with the child or young person, we saw a number of cases where the case managers were alert to the possibilities of child sexual exploitation.

4. Ensuring that the sentence is served

- 4.1. Case managers were conscientious in seeking to identify and understand diversity factors and barriers to engagement in relation to the children and young people they supervised. They used diversity and speech and language tools at the start of sentence, and then sought to incorporate the findings into the assessments, plans and work undertaken. One referral panel report said: *'Mary will be in education during her order, so I will ensure that YOT sessions are planned around this. I will ensure that activities in sessions fit with her kinaesthetic learning preference. I will take into consideration the fact that she is a female within the CJ [Criminal Justice] system, and ensure that the support that she is given reflects this.'*
- 4.2. Disability, whatever the nature, was assessed. In every case, there was good engagement with the child or young person, their parents/carers or significant others in order to help to understand the individual factors in the case and inform the plan and methods of working.
- 4.3. One young person had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. He could not tell the time, and had been frustrated with the length of time supervision sessions had taken on previous orders. The case manager introduced a large egg timer into sessions. This had allowed him to see how much of the session remained. This approach had helped with his engagement, and was gradually enabling the length of sessions to be increased.
- 4.4. In-house YOT resources ably supported case managers, including a speech and language therapist, teacher, education welfare officer, health worker, Connexions worker, education support mentoring coordinator, and literacy and numeracy mentors. We evidenced their active involvement in the cases we inspected.
- 4.5. We saw many examples where case managers and others working with them fully engaged with the diversity issues of the children and young people. One young person with learning difficulties, with whom the YOT was already working, had pleaded guilty to a historic serious sexual offence shortly before he was due to go to court for trial. The case manager and a specialist worker in the YOT carried out an assessment of the likelihood of this young person carrying out a future sexual offence with the objective of

including the assessment within the court report that was being prepared. To take account of the young person's learning difficulties, the assessment was undertaken over five sessions and was completed prior to the court date.

- 4.6. Some of the children or young people whose cases we inspected were being transferred to the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) as they were becoming too old to continue to be supervised by the YOT. The preparation for transfer was impressive, with a number of meetings held between the YOT case manager, the CRC supervising officer, and the child or young person in advance of the transfer. This ensured the child or young person was fully prepared. In addition, case managers included in supervision an understanding of how things would be different for the child or young person when they were supervised as an adult and what they would need to do so as not to breach their order.
- 4.7. Only two of the children and young people whose cases we inspected did not comply with their order. One subsequently showed some improvement without the need to return him to court. The other was breached; the order was allowed to continue and the YOT was working hard to maintain this young person's motivation at the time of our inspection.

Operational management

Management oversight was effective. In all the case files we inspected, we found Asset gatekeeping forms. Where a court report had been written, we found PSR gatekeeping forms. These forms showed managers were appropriately reviewing work and giving good advice on improvements needed. The positive findings from this inspection, in relation to the quality of work undertaken in all 14 cases, demonstrate improvement in management oversight since the inspection four years ago. Case managers told Inspectors they were confident in the skills and knowledge of their managers. They were also positive about supervision and training, and the opportunities for development. They described West Berkshire YOT as an organisation that positively promotes learning and development.

Key strengths

West Berkshire Youth Offending Team:

- has committed and enthusiastic staff, who do the right things, in the right way, at the right time
- engages meaningfully with children and young people, and their parents/carers
- undertakes comprehensive and accurate assessments that inform outcome focused and prioritised plans
- fully assesses diversity issues and barriers to engagement, and ensures they are incorporated into plans and interventions for the children and young people
- produces plans of a good quality that address children and young people's likelihood of future offending, risk of harm to others, and vulnerability and safeguarding issues
- prepares children and young people thoroughly for transfer to adult supervision
- delivers effective management oversight of the work of its staff.

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 they are made fully aware of these inspection findings.

If you have any further questions about the inspection, please contact the lead inspector, Tony Rolley. He can be contacted at tony.rolley@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07792 631866.

Copy to:

YOT Manager	<i>Dave Wraight</i>
Local Authority Chief Executive	<i>Nick Carter</i>
Director of Communities	<i>Rachel Wardell</i>
Lead Elected Member for Children's Services	<i>Irene Neill</i>
Lead Elected Member for Community Safety	<i>Graham Pask</i>
Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley	<i>Anthony Stansfield</i>
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Chair of Youth Court Bench	<i>Shabana Glynn</i>
YJB Business Area Manager	<i>Shelley Greene</i>
YJB link staff	<i>Malcolm Potter, Paula Williams, Linda Paris</i>
YJB Press Office	<i>Zena Fernandes, Adrian Stretch</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>
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary	<i>Paul Eveleigh</i>

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.