



<i>To:</i>	Jim Nicolson, Chair of YOS Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
<i>Publication date:</i>	20 May 2015

Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Thurrock

The inspection was conducted from 27-29 April 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 Thurrock Youth Offending Service (YOS). 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 Thurrock was 39.6% against the England and Wales average of 36.1%.

Overall, we found that the quality of the work carried out with children and young people and their parents/carers, in particular safeguarding and public protection, was excellent in Thurrock. All key processes were in place to enable case managers to concentrate on a holistic approach to their work. There was real understanding of how the different aspects of a child or young person's life interacted with each other. We saw effective support provided alongside the imposition and enforcement of necessary boundaries.

Commentary on the inspection in Thurrock:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. There was good use of information and liaison with partner agencies to assess and review the likelihood of reoffending. It was clear that case managers had analysed the information and understood the children and young people with whom they were

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

working. The analysis was not always evident in the record of assessment (Asset) however.

- 1.2. The quality of pre-sentence reports was judged to be good in all those inspected.
- 1.3. Although planning was adequate in most cases, it was process driven and did not properly involve children and young people or their parents/carers. The plans themselves were not effective tools; the language used was not accessible and there were often far too many objectives with no priority attached.
- 1.4. In custodial cases, the plans were focused on the custodial element and contained standardised objectives based on what was available in the institution. They belied the work that was often being carried out by the case managers in preparation for release, which was based on individual need. The time in custody was not always used as productively as it could have been.
- 1.5. Work to address offending behaviour was carried out in all of the cases inspected. Victim awareness work was accorded particular significance.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. We judged that the assessment of the risk of harm posed by children and young people was carried out well in all of the cases we inspected. There was evidence of a thoughtful approach to the use of information other than convictions, such as behaviour or allegations which were not pursued.
- 2.2. Planning to protect the public was also judged to be thorough. There were plans in place in all necessary cases and we were pleased to see that these often included actions for parents/carers.
- 2.3. There was some misunderstanding of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements processes within the team although this had not affected those cases that needed to be referred.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. Factors contributing to a child or young person's vulnerability were generally identified, monitored and reviewed.
- 3.2. Where needs were identified, there were plans in place to meet them.
- 3.3. In two cases, emotional and mental health needs had not been recognised.
- 3.4. It was evident that case managers took a holistic approach to the work with children and young people so that they were able to see that some could be, at the same time, both in need of protection as well as posing a risk of harm to others.

4. Ensuring that the sentence is served

- 4.1. Diversity factors were identified in most cases. We saw some excellent work in the cases of children and young people who were Looked After, although the impact on them of being moved around was not always fully recognised.
- 4.2. Engagement with children and young people and their parents/carers was key to understanding their individual needs and was good, including the use of home visits. There was good understanding and recognition of the wider experience of children and young people within their families and how this related to their offending behaviour. We saw more than one example of work to support parents/carers with their own needs where these were impacting on children and young people.

- 4.3. While formal planning did not record the way that individual needs and diversity factors would be taken into account when delivering interventions, it was clear that this had taken place in the work.
- 4.4. Where necessary, enforcement action was taken promptly.

Operational management

We found that, where necessary, appropriate management oversight of work was evident. Case managers were overwhelmingly positive about the support and challenge they received from managers and were entirely confident about their level of knowledge and experience. Staff were also happy with their own training and development.

Key strengths

- The genuinely holistic work by case managers integrated safeguarding, public protection and offending behaviour interventions.
- There was effective liaison and joint work with other agencies.
- It was apparent that there was excellent staff commitment to children and young people and their parents/carers resulting in more effective interactions.

Areas requiring improvement

- Intervention planning should genuinely involve children and young people and their parents/carers. The plans should be constructed in such a way that they are effective tools to drive successful interventions.
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements need to be fully understood by all staff and managers.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YOS 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, who was Jane Attwood. She can be contacted at jane.attwood@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07973 614573.

Copy to:	
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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.