



# Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuencid

## HM Inspectorate of Probation

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<i>To:</i>	Gillian Halden, Head of Looked After Children and Aven Gardiner, Assistant Chief Officer, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, London Community Rehabilitation Company, Co-Chairs of the Waltham Forest Youth Offending Service Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Assistant Chief Inspector
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## Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in the London Borough of Waltham Forest

The inspection was conducted from 09-11 March 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 20 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Waltham Forest 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 rate<sup>1</sup> for Waltham Forest was 41.1%. This was better than the previous year by 4.9 percentage points and worse than the England and Wales average of 36.1%. Waltham Forest is the sixth most deprived borough in London<sup>2</sup>.

Waltham Forest YOS is part of an 'Early Help' Division which brings together different voluntary and statutory partners to tackle youth offending in a comprehensive way within the borough. During this inspection we found that this approach is working very well despite the challenging local environment which included significant issues of gang affiliation and serious offending. We saw clear evidence of partners such as the police, children's services, child and adolescent mental health services and education collaborating to deliver effective interventions. Overall, we found the performance of the YOS to be very creditable.

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

<sup>2</sup> LBWF Strategic Partnership Youth Justice Plan 2014-2016

## **Commentary on the inspection in Waltham Forest:**

### **1. Reducing reoffending**

- 1.1. Case managers had worked hard to ensure that they had a good understanding of the child or young person they were responsible for. They drew on all relevant sources of information and involved the children and young people and their parents/carers in the assessment appropriately in all but one case. They were clear about the factors linked to their offending and had a good awareness of what could be done to reduce the likelihood of future offending.
- 1.2. Waltham Forest has a very ethnically diverse population. Overall, 62%<sup>3</sup> of the population of youths in the borough are said to be from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. In our sample 69% were from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Case managers identified any diversity issues linked to offending or engagement with the YOS and incorporated these into their assessments in all but one case. Overall, we felt that assessments were thorough and well evidenced.
- 1.3. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) are written to assist sentencers in coming to an appropriate decision based on the nature of the offence and the circumstances of the child or young person. We saw 11 PSRs on cases in our sample and judged that 10 were of good quality, providing the court with an accurate analysis of the offending behaviour. Management oversight of PSRs was generally effective.
- 1.4. We found some examples where the communication between the court and the YOS were not as effective as we would have expected. Systems to collect information when Waltham Forest staff were not in court were not as robust as they could be.
- 1.5. All cases inspected had a good quality plan in place to manage the likelihood of the child or young person reoffending in the community. Four of the sample of cases involved children and young people who had received custodial sentences, all of whom had been released. We judged that three of the four custodial cases also had good planning to prepare them for release.
- 1.6. We expect to see a good quality review of the assessment of the reasons for the child or young person's offending behaviour if there are significant changes in their circumstances. We judged that at the time of the inspection seven cases should have been subject to a review; in six of these there had been a good quality review.

### **2. Protecting the public**

- 2.1. We expect all PSRs to contain an accurate analysis of the risk of harm to others posed by the child or young person. We found that all but one had such an assessment.
- 2.2. We assessed that only four of the cases inspected presented a low risk of harm. A further 12 presented a medium risk of serious harm and 4 presented a high risk of serious harm. There had been a thorough assessment of the risk of harm in all but one case.
- 2.3. Although only four cases were assessed as presenting a high risk of serious harm, several of those assessed as presenting a medium risk of serious harm were correctly identified as having the potential to cause serious harm. These cases were appropriately managed to reduce the level of risk.

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<sup>3</sup> Published 2013 Population Demographics. Source: Office for National Statistics Census 2011

- 2.4. We judged that the risk of harm presented by the child or young person should have been reviewed in seven cases, of these there had been a good quality review in six.
- 2.5. In every case in the sample assessed as presenting a medium or high risk of serious harm, there was a good quality plan in place to manage the risk from the beginning of the contact with the YOS. These plans identified dynamic factors that would increase the level of risk and set out contingency plans. Where necessary, plans had been reviewed.
- 2.6. In four inspected cases there was an identified victim or potential victim. In all of these cases there was evidence that sufficient steps had been taken to protect any victim.
- 2.7. In all of the relevant cases there had been sufficient management oversight of the work to manage the risk of harm presented by the child or young person.

### **3. Protecting the child or young person**

- 3.1. In each of the 11 PSRs there was a clear explanation of the child or young person's vulnerability and any relevant safeguarding factors.
- 3.2. We found that in all cases inspected, case managers had made a sufficient effort to assess and understand the vulnerability and safeguarding needs of the child or young person. We judged that there should have been a review of this initial assessment in eight cases; there had been a review in six.
- 3.3. For all of the cases in the sample where we assessed it as necessary, there was a plan in place to manage vulnerability and safeguarding issues. These plans were usually updated as circumstances changed.
- 3.4. Seven out of the twenty cases in the sample involved children or young people who had been Looked After Children at some point during the short period of work we inspected. We found there to be very strong links between children's services and the YOS, with both services working collaboratively to protect children and young people.
- 3.5. Several children and young people had been accommodated in various types of provision suitable to their specific needs, including secure accommodation. This approach protected the children and young people and also allowed for intensive work to be undertaken to achieve other objectives such as protecting the public and preventing future offending. Liaison between the YOS and children's services at practitioner and management levels was effective.
- 3.6. Case managers showed a good understanding of child sexual exploitation issues particularly in relation to girls with involvement in gangs. We saw good work to build girls' self-esteem and confidence as part of a strategy to increase the protective factors in their lives.
- 3.7. Where children and young people were assessed as having complex needs, the YOS was able to access a wide range of partnership services to help and support them and their family. Several cases had been assisted by various local 'family support' teams.
- 3.8. As part of the plan to protect children and young people, we saw local police deployed to staff a 'knife arch' mobile metal scanning device at the YOS. The random deployment of this technology ensured that weapons were not brought on to YOS premises.

### **4. Ensuring that the sentence is served**

- 4.1. Ensuring the sentence is served as imposed by the court requires the YOS to engage with the child or young person to understand what barriers there may be to compliance. We

found that in nearly every case this work had been successfully completed by the case manager.

- 4.2. There was strong evidence that case managers listened to children and young people and their parents/carers where appropriate. Good work was done to engage them in a constructive plan to complete their court orders and bring about change.
- 4.3. There were some difficulties in achieving compliance with the order in 11 cases, these difficulties were dealt with appropriately in 10.
- 4.4. We assessed that generally children and young people were given clear boundaries and fair warnings and that every reasonable effort was made to help them comply. Three children or young people were appropriately returned to court when these efforts failed.
- 4.5. A number of cases in the sample had extensive previous convictions and entrenched patterns of problematic behaviour. Despite the best efforts of the YOS six of the sample had been convicted of further offences since the start of their order. We saw that the YOS worked very closely with the police to share intelligence and manage the risk of future offending.

### **Operational management**

We found that the YOS was well managed. PSRs were generally countersigned as part of an effective quality assurance process. Line managers regularly reviewed the work of their staff and made comments on the quality of the work in case records. This meant that staff were given accessible detailed feedback to help them improve service delivery.

Staff commented that their managers had the necessary skills to help them do their job effectively and improve their practice. All staff interviewed thought they had the necessary skills to do their job and felt confident that they understood the organisation's priorities. We judged that all ten staff we interviewed had a sufficient understanding of how to work effectively with children and young people who had offended and YOS policies and procedures.

### **Key strengths**

- Waltham Forest YOS is an effective part of a wider strategic partnership to work with children and young people in the borough to maximize their potential.
- The YOS orchestrates the contributions of other statutory and non statutory partners to prevent offending in the Borough.
- Staff understand the need to protect the public from the risk of serious harm from children and young people and works hard to minimise these risks.
- Staff recognise that many of the children and young people known to them are vulnerable to harm themselves and work in partnership to safeguard them.
- Case Managers engage effectively with the diverse needs of children and young people and their parents/carers.
- Staff are confident and committed and understand the priorities of the YOS.
- Managers are effective in delivering oversight of the work of their staff.

### **Areas requiring improvement**

- Systems to collect information from court when Waltham Forest staff are not present should be improved.

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 Mark Boother. He can be contacted at [Mark.boother@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Mark.boother@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk) or on 07771 527326.

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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](mailto:communications@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0161 240 5336.