

<i>To:</i>	Jill Baker, Chair of North Tyneside YOT Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
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Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in North Tyneside

The inspection was conducted from 27-29 July 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 recent cases of children and young people who had offended and were supervised by North Tyneside Youth Offending Team (YOT). This was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

Summary

The published reoffending rate¹ for North Tyneside was 40.5%. This was considerably better than the previous year and had been improving steadily over a long period, but remained worse than the England and Wales average of 36.6%.

North Tyneside YOT had undergone a substantial restructure in 2014. This was positive for the work of the YOT, although managers acknowledged that there was still some work to do following it. We were pleased that they recognised many of the areas for improvement that arose in this inspection. Overall, we found a motivated and enthusiastic team. Staff were keen to learn and improve practice, and to ensure that those they worked with received the best possible service.

Commentary on the inspection in North Tyneside:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) generally provided the court with a comprehensive assessment of the child or young person's situation together with a recommendation for a suitable sentence. However, on occasion, attention needed to be given to ensuring the reports contained a clear analysis, were more concise, and less descriptive. Presentation of the discussion of alternatives to custody could sometimes be improved. There was good practice in the way that PSRs were developed. A case manager would meet with the child or young person and their parent/carer once the draft PSR was written, go through

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

it with them and ensure they understood it. The child or young person was asked to sign the PSR to confirm that they understood it. An inspector commented on one example of notable practice: *"Having thought about the PSR, the mother emailed the case manager to express her comments on it. As a result, the case manager undertook a further assessment visit, discussed the concerns and addressed them in the PSR that was presented to court. Her willingness to do this was greatly appreciated. The impact was that it enhanced and reinforced a positive working relationship between the YOT, the parents and the young person."*

- 1.2. Work to understand why children and young people had offended was generally of good quality, providing a sound basis to plan and then deliver interventions. Impressively, case managers would often undertake multiple assessment sessions prior to writing a PSR to ensure that they had all the information they required. However, on occasion, insufficient focus was given to previous behaviours and patterns of behaviour when making the current assessment. Assessments were not always reviewed as required post-sentence. Plans for work to reduce reoffending usually addressed the main issues, and were correctly focused on reducing reoffending. Children and young people who completed our electronic survey over the past year reported that they received help to assist them to understand how to stop offending more often than the average across all YOTs. They also reported more frequently than average that this had made them a lot less likely to offend.
- 1.3. In custodial cases there was a good degree of face-to-face contact with children and young people while in custody. In one positive example, the case manager arranged to undertake mediation between a young woman and her mother while the young woman was in custody, because addressing the quality of their relationship was critical to reducing reoffending. This work was continued by a local authority family worker following release. However, planning in custodial cases required improvement. The sentence should be treated as a single sentence, and hence planning should give the child or young person a clear picture of the whole sentence from the beginning. In particular, plans agreed with the custodial institution should be driven by the YOT's assessment of need, and not be limited by the opportunities available in that institution or what can be delivered during the custodial phase. There should be consistency between the plan recorded in the case record and that agreed in the custodial planning meeting.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. The right things had been done to protect known victims and manage the risk of harm to them in each case where this was required. This was very encouraging. There were examples of good consideration being given to the possibility of restorative justice, where this would be helpful to the victim. In the one case where it was particularly required, there was good contact and joint working with the Probation Victim Liaison Officer who had been allocated to the victim's family.
- 2.2. Sufficient effort was not always made to understand and explain the risk of harm to others at the start of the case. Often this was because the decision was made to classify someone as low risk of serious harm before all the relevant factors had been brought together and considered holistically. However, we were pleased to find that this was often recognised and addressed in a later assessment. Plans to manage risk of harm to others often needed improvement. In particular, planned actions should directly address harm-related factors and be clear to all who may need to be aware or act on them. In cases with a raised risk of serious harm to others they should include a contingency plan that can be acted upon quickly and effectively by people other than the case manager. The plan should serve as a means of communicating clearly the case manager's thinking to anyone who may need to know it in the future.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. We were pleased to find that where child sexual exploitation concerns had been identified, this led to a well coordinated multi-agency approach which resulted in improvement in the child or young person's behaviour and a reduction in the related risks.
- 3.2. Assessment and planning to address children and young people's vulnerability suffered from similar concerns to those described above. The opportunity was often not taken to bring together all the vulnerability factors that had been identified within the different sections of the Asset² assessment (e.g. witness to domestic violence, substance misuse, recklessness, emotional health concerns, parents who offend or drink heavily). This would have provided a holistic assessment and greater recognition of the vulnerability that applied. Neither were significant changes in vulnerability that would lead to a review always recognised. In some cases, consideration of vulnerability was limited to assessing the risk of self-harm. As a result, plans were often not put in place to manage and reduce vulnerability; those that were in place were not always sufficient, and PSRs did not always include an accurate assessment of vulnerability. Concerns were sometimes recognised in the review of the assessment and plans improved. Case managers recognised those cases with the highest vulnerability and worked well to manage them, although the quality of the work that had been undertaken was not always apparent from the record.
- 3.3. There were examples of positive multi-agency working, but there were also cases where the YOT was too willing to trust that other agencies were doing what they needed to, rather than ensure that this was the case and escalate matters if it was not.

4. Ensuring that the sentence is served

- 4.1. The approach to recognising, planning and dealing with diversity was consistently positive. This meant that factors that may affect the opportunity for the child or young person to engage with the sentence and achieve positive outcomes were addressed. Some plans included a section titled 'Methodology', in which the case manager described how to work with the child or young person and any arrangements that needed to be put in place. In one example of positive practice, the case manager recognised the importance of rugby training to a young person's desistance. When he was promoted to a different group, the regular appointments were changed to facilitate this. The population from a black and minority ethnic heritage was low, yet case managers were confident and able to describe how they would adapt their approach to different ethnicities when required.
- 4.2. In view of positive comments made elsewhere in this report about engagement of children and young people and parents/carers, it was disappointing to sometimes find insufficient engagement with them when developing the plan of work. This finding was supported by our electronic survey. The opportunity was not always taken to ensure that children and young people understood their plan, and ensure it reflected their concerns or ambitions and those of their parent/carer. Too many plans were not presented in language that explained clearly the change that needed to be made and the role of the child or young person in achieving that. They often focused on the process followed, for example, "*undertake offence-focused work*" or "*complete programme*". The value of better engagement was illustrated by an example where a young woman and parent were not well engaged in development of the initial plan, but were fully involved in the review. Their engagement with the work became good, when previously it was poor.

² ASSET is the YJB approved assessment tool used by YOTs.

- 4.3. Good attention was given to health and well-being factors that may apply in the case, in particular as these were relevant to the work of the YOT.
- 4.4. Overall, the YOT took a positive and appropriate approach to enforcement of the sentence and supporting compliance. This included use of a compliance panel, following which we saw examples of improved attendance. When the child or young person did not comply with the sentence, appropriate action was taken. In one example of positive practice, the case manager and other agencies all arranged to undertake work at the child or young person's care home. This was in acknowledgement of the importance of completing work to reduce reoffending in the context of a history of poor compliance.

Operational management

We were pleased to find evidence of frequent management involvement in cases. However, the frequency of involvement meant that insufficient focus was sometimes given to its quality and impact. For example, inadequate assessments and plans were sometimes accepted when closer inspection of the case would have quickly identified that these were not sufficient. Staff were overwhelmingly positive about their managers, making comments such as *"we will have an open discussion"*, *"I am confident in my manager"* and *"knowledgeable, supportive, caring"*. They considered that attitudes in the team were positive, particularly given the scale of management and organisational change that had taken place. Most said that the changes had been for the better and that both the YOT and the local authority tried to keep staff involved in their priorities.

Key strengths

- Case managers had a very good understanding of the children and young people with whom they worked and on a day-to-day basis were doing some good work with them.
- The YOT approach to involving children and young people and their parents/carers in assessments and PSRs was positive. PSRs provided useful information to the court.
- Case managers' response to non-compliance was good. It struck an appropriate balance between enforcement and supporting engagement with work to reduce reoffending.
- The YOT approach to diversity ensured that barriers to effective engagement with its work were identified and addressed.
- Priority was given to victims in individual cases.

Areas requiring improvement

- Assessment and planning for work to reduce vulnerability should be holistic and of good quality, reflecting the breadth of factors that may apply in individual cases.
- Similarly, assessment and planning for work to reduce risk of harm to others should be of good quality.
- Plans should act as an effective means of communication to all who need to know them.
- Management oversight should be better targeted so that it ensures the quality of work to manage risk of harm to others and reduce vulnerability.
- Planning in custodial cases should reflect the YOT assessment and the whole sentence.

We are grateful for the support that 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, who was Ian Menary. He can be contacted at ian.menary@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07917 183197.

Copy to:

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Elected Mayor	<i>Norma Redfearn</i>
Local Authority Chief Executive	<i>Patrick Melia</i>
Director of Children's Services	<i>Jean Griffiths</i>
Lead Elected Member for Children's Services	<i>Cllr Ian Grayson</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.