

<i>To:</i>	Judith Finlay, Chair of Ealing YJS Management Group and Director of Children's Services
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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 London Borough of Ealing

The inspection was conducted from 21-23 September 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 Ealing Youth Justice Service (YJS). 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 Ealing was 39.6%. This was worse than the previous year and slightly worse than the England and Wales average of 37.4%. Although this is disappointing, the binary rate of reoffending is subject to fluctuation and the performance of the YJS must be seen in the context of the characteristics of the children and young people worked with.

Ealing YJS is part of the Children and Families Department and is situated alongside other service providers such as the youth and Connexions services. This was a relatively recent change which has had a positive effect on communication between YJS staff and those of other co-located partners, leading to well-integrated service provision. A further decision had also been taken to change the case recording and management system used by the YJS to integrate all relevant children and young people's case records on a single system. Although this change had only just been implemented, staff and managers had prepared well and were able to use the new system competently.

Overall, we found that the YJS was performing well with enthusiastic and experienced staff. Most work within the YJS was of a good quality, and partnerships were in place to help and support children and young people while holding them to account for their behaviour. Managers had established routine quality assurance processes which were generally effective.

<sup>1</sup> Published July 2015 based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the month October 2012 to September 2013 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

## Commentary on the inspection in Ealing:

### 1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. Case managers worked effectively 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. 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 15 PSRs on cases in our sample and judged that 14 were of good quality, providing the court with an accurate analysis of the offending behaviour. Management oversight of PSRs was generally effective.
- 1.3. Ealing has a very ethnically diverse population. Overall, 63.6%<sup>2</sup> of the population of youths in the Borough are said to be from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. In our sample 65% were from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Case managers identified any diversity issues linked to offending or engagement with the YJS and incorporated these into their assessments in all cases. Overall, we felt that assessments were thorough and well evidenced.
- 1.4. In 18 of the 20 cases inspected there was a good quality plan in place to manage the likelihood of the child or young person reoffending in the community. Five of our sample involved children and young people who had received custodial sentences. We judged that the planning to prepare these children and young people for release was of a high quality in all cases.
- 1.5. Where appropriate, case managers were able to call on services offered by partnership agencies and incorporate these activities in the plan to reduce reoffending. We saw particularly strong links with the police, Connexions and education which were used to gain intelligence and ensure that children and young people were able to access services and re-engage with learning opportunities.
- 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 13 cases should have been subject to a review; in 11 of these there had been a good quality review.

### 2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. Each PSR we inspected had an accurate analysis of the risk of harm to others posed by the child or young person. We assessed that only two of the cases inspected presented a low risk of harm. A further 16 presented a medium risk of serious harm and 2 presented a high risk of serious harm. There had been a thorough assessment of the risk of harm in all but one case.
- 2.2. Although only two 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. Generally, these cases were appropriately managed to reduce the level of risk they posed.

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<sup>2</sup> Published 2013 Population Demographics. Source: Office for National Statistics Census 2011

- 2.3. Although most cases were appropriately assessed and managed, we did find two cases with significant risk of harm issues that had not been sufficiently engaged with. Levels of contact at the start of the sentence were insufficient to meet the assessed level of risk.
- 2.4. We judged that the risk of harm presented by the child or young person should have been reviewed in 11 cases, of these there had been a good quality review in 8. Plans to manage the risk of harm nearly always incorporated the findings of the reviewed assessment.
- 2.5. There was a good quality plan in place to manage the risk of harm presented by the child or young person from the beginning of the contact with the YJS in 16 of the 20 cases. Nearly all of these plans identified dynamic factors that would increase the level of risk of harm and identified actions that could be taken in the event of changed circumstances.
- 2.6. In nearly all cases where there was an identifiable victim, there was evidence that sufficient work had been undertaken to manage the risk posed by the child or young person.

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

- 3.1. In each of the 15 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 18 of the 20 cases inspected, case managers had made a sufficient effort to assess and understand the safeguarding and vulnerability needs of the child or young person.
- 3.3. We judged that there should have been a review of the initial assessment in 12 cases; there had been a review in 8. We found one case where there had been previous suicidal thoughts where further exploration was required to establish what the circumstances had been previously and whether any relevant risk factors were still present for the child or young person.
- 3.4. For three-quarters of the cases in the sample where we assessed it as necessary, there was a plan in place to manage safeguarding and vulnerability issues. These plans were usually updated as necessary.
- 3.5. Six of the cases we inspected were Looked After Children during the period of their contact with the YJS. In each of these cases there was good liaison between the YJS and children's services, with strong evidence of collaborative working to protect and safeguard the child or young person.

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

- 4.1. Ensuring the sentence is served as imposed by the court requires the YJS to engage with the child or young person to understand what barriers there may be to compliance, and to consider any diversity factors relevant to the individual child or young person. We found that in all but one case this work had been successfully completed by the case manager.
- 4.2. There was strong evidence that case managers took account of the views of children and young people and their parents/carers where appropriate. Parents/carers were involved in the preparation of the PSR in every case that we inspected. Good work was done to engage families constructively in the plan to bring about the necessary change in behaviour by the child or young person and complete their court orders.
- 4.3. We assessed that in five cases there had been some issues in ensuring that the order of the court was adhered to. In each of these cases the response of the YJS was sufficient

with four cases being warned about their behaviour, leading to a positive response. One further case had been enforced appropriately through the court, leading to compliance.

- 4.4. In seven cases the child or young person had come to the attention of the police since the start of their current order. In each case the response of the YJS was appropriate.

### **Operational management**

We found that the YJS was well managed with sound processes to ensure the quality of service delivery at every stage. Case managers were required to present their plans for the child or young person at the start of the order, and where risk of harm or safeguarding and vulnerability issues were raised, these were further discussed at a weekly 'Risk and Safeguarding panel'. In most cases we inspected, the quality assurance processes had made a positive contribution to managing the case. In two cases we judged that managers had overseen the case in accordance with local policy, but in spite of this, significant factors had been missed.

Staff reported that their managers had the skills and knowledge to assist them in their work and actively help them to improve. They viewed their managers and the YJS overall as supportive and concerned to help them learn and develop. We assessed that nearly all staff were able to articulate a good understanding of the principles of effective practice and understood the policies and procedures of the YJS.

### **Key strengths**

- The YJS was well-integrated with other partners and service providers in the Borough ensuring the children and young people had access to a full range of services.
- Case managers had a good understanding of the children and young people they were responsible for and made appropriate efforts to ensure that the services they offered met their diverse needs to effectively challenge and change their behaviour.
- Staff had a realistic view of the levels of harm that the children and young people posed and were able to put in place effective plans to mitigate these risks.
- All reports considered the level of vulnerability of the child or young person and clearly explained this to sentencers.
- Where children and young people initially failed to comply with their sentences, the YJS took appropriate enforcement action which usually led to a positive response without the need to return them to court.
- There were routine procedures to improve the quality of work which were viewed positively by staff who felt valued by the YJS.

### **Areas requiring improvement**

- Case managers should ensure that planned contact levels with all offenders are maintained, particularly at the commencement of sentence or on release from custody.
- Management oversight should focus more effectively on cases that are assessed to present a high risk of harm or vulnerability to ensure that services are delivered to manage the risk of harm and protect the child or young person.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YJS 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.