

<i>To:</i>	Nick Jarman, Chair of Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Interventions Service Management Board and Chair of Western Bay Local Children Safeguarding Board
<i>Copy to:</i>	See copy list at end
<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
<i>Publication date:</i>	02 December 2015

## **Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Western Bay; Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Local Authority Areas**

The inspection was conducted from 26-28 October 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 the Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service (YJ&EIS). Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

### **Summary**

Western Bay was recently formed through an amalgamation of Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Youth Offending Teams and consolidated reoffending data for the area is not yet published. The most recent published<sup>1</sup> reoffending data across the individual areas varied, from 34.5% in Neath Port Talbot, which was better than the average for England and Wales, to 44.1% in Swansea, which was worse than the England and Wales average of 37.9%.

Overall, we found that the performance of Western Bay was positive, but improvements in some important areas of practice were needed. Staff engaged well with children and young people and partner organisations. There was scope for improving the quality of the work by ensuring that reviews of risk management plans reflected any significant changes in the circumstances of the cases, and mapped out all the work that should be undertaken. Achieving consistency between staff, across the area, would help to improve the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> Published October 2015 based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the January 2013 – December 2013 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

## Commentary on the inspection in Western Bay

### 1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. We found that sufficient advice had been given to courts, to assist with sentencing, in 12 of the 14 relevant cases. This positive finding was undermined by some practitioners writing their reports before completing the case assessment.
- 1.2. Assessments and plans form the bedrock of service delivery. In all but one of the cases, the assessment of what was likely to make a child or young person offend was of a good enough quality. We noted that Crown Prosecution Service documents were not available in all cases and this made the task of assessing reoffending issues more difficult.
- 1.3. The family and personal circumstances of children and young people can change quickly and may require a change in the focus of supervision. As a result, assessments and plans need to be reviewed to keep pace with case developments. The majority of assessments had done this satisfactorily. This was mirrored in the reviews of the associated plans.
- 1.4. Plans that address potential reoffending are central to ensuring appropriate work is undertaken. In 17 of the 20 cases, we judged that the plans were sufficient. While positive, this finding was tempered by the results of our e-survey<sup>2</sup> which showed that, of 15 respondents, only 7 of the children and young people felt they had had enough of a say in the production of the plan for supervision. In one case an inspector said: *"The sentence plan was poorly constructed and was composed of short sentences which just restated the requirements of the court order. There was a lack of detail regarding what was expected of the young person, other than keeping to a curfew. More details were required on the focus of supervision, the activity requirements and what work needed to be completed in what order"*.

### 2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. A good quality assessment of risk of harm to others was seen in 18 of the 20 cases we reviewed. Where a potential risk of harm to others is identified, we expect to see a plan to minimise the likelihood of this happening. In over three-quarters of the 17 relevant cases this was evident and we could see how the risk of harm would be managed. Such planning was also satisfactory for four out of the five relevant custodial cases. In the custody case where this was not adequate, the plan to address victim issues was insufficient.
- 2.2. Reviews of risk management plans are important as they ensure the work continues to minimise the risk of harm posed to others. In only 10 of the 16 relevant cases, plans to address the risk of harm to others had been reviewed satisfactorily. Insufficient attention being given to the changes in the circumstances of the children or young people was the factor that most often undermined the quality of these reviews.
- 2.3. In one case it was noted that: *"A 15 year old young person had been made subject to a 9 month Youth Rehabilitation Order for assaulting a police officer. The factors contributing to his offending were substance misuse, family relationships, lifestyle and thinking and behaviour. The young person had become a Looked After Child and accommodated with a foster carer due to him assaulting his mother. There had been problems in securing his compliance with supervision and the case manager had a strategy to address this. Initial outcomes after four weeks of the order were positive and had secured the engagement of the young person in purposeful work, for example. he had undertaken anger*

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<sup>2</sup> Our e-survey takes in the views of a wider cohort of children and young people than those included in the sample for this inspection. On that basis it provides contextual information only.

*management sessions. The case manager accompanied the young person to education, training and employment provision, in order to spend time with him and to build a positive relationship. This worked and risks of reoffending, of causing harm to others and of vulnerability had all been well managed in this case".*

- 2.4. Where there was an identifiable or potential victim, we noted that the risk of harm they faced had been effectively managed in only 11 of the 15 relevant cases.
- 2.5. Effective management oversight of risk of harm work was evident in only three-quarters of the case records. Deficiencies in the quality of some assessments and plans had not been addressed through line manager oversight.

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

- 3.1. In all but 1 of the cases, safeguarding and vulnerability needs had been sufficiently assessed at the initial stage, but only 12 of the 16 relevant cases could show that the assessments had been reviewed in the light of changing circumstances. We also found three cases where insufficient attention had been given to assessing and addressing potential vulnerability issues for young people who were in relationships with the children and young people subject to supervision.
- 3.2. The case of Caroline<sup>3</sup>, aged 15 years, provided an example of work geared at protecting children and young people. Caroline was an out of area Looked After Child who had been placed in a secure unit on welfare grounds, following episodes of significant self-harm. Caroline did not settle there and she presented challenging behaviour. This resulted in police involvement for offences committed at the unit. In her first month, restraint techniques were used on Caroline on many occasions. The case manager was concerned that Caroline's vulnerability remained high and urged a review of the approach being taken. Key personnel agreed a plan to engage and manage Caroline differently. Over time this helped Caroline to form and maintain positive working relationships in the unit. By the time of the inspection Caroline had achieved the highest standard of resident behaviour. She was also actively engaging with professionals with a view to finding a more suitable therapeutic placement, to enable her long terms needs to be met.
- 3.3. In over three-quarters of the relevant cases, planning for work to manage and reduce safeguarding and vulnerability was of a good quality. In those that were not, insufficient contingency planning, insufficient information exchanges with other agencies and not addressing engagement issues had undermined the quality of the work.
- 3.4. In 12 of the 14 relevant cases, we found adequate reviews, throughout the sentence, to address safeguarding and vulnerability needs.
- 3.5. In almost all of the cases, sufficient attention had been given to addressing the health and well-being needs of the child or young person.
- 3.6. There was evidence of effective management oversight of work to address safeguarding and vulnerability in 12 of 15 cases.

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

- 4.1. Effective engagement with children and young people helps them to form constructive working relationships with their case managers. The majority of assessments of diversity factors, and of barriers to engagement, were sufficient. Appropriate attention had been given to these issues in almost all of the cases. These findings were supported by the

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<sup>3</sup> The name has been changed to help protect the anonymity of the young person.

service user responses to our e-survey, 92% of whom said they were treated fairly by staff all or most of the time (26 respondents).

- 4.2. The child or young person and/or their parents/carers were involved in the preparation of the majority of pre-sentence reports. We found attention was being paid in most plans to diversity factors and to potential barriers to engagement, but they did not always adequately consider Looked After Child factors, age and maturity, and issues for girls. In some cases, missing these issues limited the ability of the YJ&IES to work towards achieving positive change with the child or young person.
- 4.3. In most cases, contact levels reflected staff efforts to achieve a balance between promoting compliance, helping to achieve positive change and holding individuals to account. Only five of the children or young people, however, fully met the requirements of their sentence. Twelve needed work by the case manager to secure their compliance. In five cases where compliance was not at the required level, the response by staff was insufficient. This included not recognising or responding to unacceptable absences or behaviour. In addition, an inspector noted: *"For those who were on the threshold of being transferred to adult probations services, the approach to compliance adopted by the YJ&IES did not always help the children or young people to prepare for the more structured approach to enforcement they would encounter in the adult setting"*.

## **Operational management**

The Western Bay YJ&IES had embarked on a considerable change programme, following the recent amalgamation of three Youth Offending Teams. Changes to the organisational structure, and its processes, presented a number of challenges. These were made more difficult by having three separate information systems. The new management team had been in post since June 2015. Managers had embarked on a programme to enhance the quality of practice across the area. This included work to consolidate the differing approaches to managing the quality of practice across the area. This was timely as management oversight, and other quality assurance mechanisms, had made a positive impact in an insufficient number of the cases we inspected. Other examples of developmental work in the organisation included; consolidating antisocial behaviour responses across the area and improving the early intervention and prevention services. The YJ&IES had also enabled children and young people to access services on an area wide basis, for example, the Bridgend Building Skills Programme. Practitioners saw this as positive.

In general, staff said their line managers had the skills and knowledge to help them to improve the quality of their work, although one worker said: *"Overall supervision is helpful, but there are times when it could be more challenging"*. Most staff had received recent training to enable them to do their current job, but several said they had not had enough training in delivering interventions. They valued the recent training in speech, language and communication needs. We found that most practitioners, but not all, could demonstrate an awareness of the principles of effective practice and local procedures to address compliance, vulnerability and risk of harm issues.

## **Key strengths**

- Assessing factors linked to the offending of children and young people.
- Assessing the vulnerability issues of children and young people.
- Efforts to secure the engagement with children and young people and their parents/carers.

## **Areas requiring improvement**

- Reviews of risk management plans reflect significant changes in the circumstances of children and young people when relevant.
- Evidence of the impact of management oversight on the quality of work needs to be clear.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YJ&EIS 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 Joseph Simpson. He can be contacted at [joe.simpson@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:joe.simpson@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk) or on 07917 084764.

Copy to:

Head of Service	<i>Caroline Dyer</i>
Local Authority Chief Executives (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea respectively)	<i>Darren Mepham, Steven Phillips, Jack Straw</i>
Heads of Children's Services (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea respectively)	<i>Deborah McMillan, Andrew Jarrett, David Howes</i>
Lead Elected Members for Children's Services, and crime (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea respectively)	<i>Cllr Hailey Townsend, Cllr Peter Richards, Cllr Christine Richards</i>
Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales	<i>Alun Michael</i>
Chair of Youth Court Benches (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot & Swansea respectively)	<i>Jonathan Vafidis, Jo Jenkins</i>
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YJB Communications	<i>Ali Lewis, Rachel Brown, Summer Nisar, Adrian Stretch</i>
Estyn	<i>Alun Connick, Jassa Scott</i>
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales	<i>Nigel Brown, Bobbie Jones</i>
Healthcare Inspectorate Wales	<i>Robin Bradfield</i>
Welsh Audit Office	<i>Huw Rees</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.justiceinspectors.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.