

<i>To:</i>	Gani Martins, Chair of Bradford YOT Management Group and Assistant Director Children's Specialist Services
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<i>From:</i>	Alan MacDonald, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
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## Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Bradford

The inspection was conducted from 04 - 06 January 2016 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 33 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Bradford Youth Offending Team (YOT). 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 Bradford was 34.0%. This was slightly better than the previous year and considerably better than the England and Wales average of 37.9%. Although most work was delivered from a central location, some services were delivered in satellite offices to increase accessibility to children and young people and their parents/carers.

Overall, we found that Bradford was a well performing YOT with experienced staff and managers who were enthusiastic and committed to delivering high quality services. Nearly all children and young people had a good quality assessment at the start of their contact with the YOT which led to appropriate plans to manage the likelihood of reoffending, safeguarding and vulnerability, and any issues relating to harm that they may cause to others. Where circumstances had changed, these changes were usually reflected in updated assessments and revised plans.

The YOT worked with a diverse range of voluntary and statutory service providers to meet the needs of local children and young people. Communication between these organisations and the YOT was good with joint plans developed and acted upon to meet shared objectives. Where it was required, levels of contact with both the YOT and statutory partners could be delivered at an intensive level. Work with those sentenced to custody was consistently good, with significant efforts made to reintegrate children and young people on release.

<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 Bradford:**

### **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 by considering all the available evidence. It was clear that they used the information from the children and young people's self-assessments to tailor interventions that were more likely to be effective. In nearly all cases a tool had been used to determine the child or young person's preferred learning style, with interventions delivered to match that style. There was also good engagement with parents/carers where appropriate.
- 1.2. Case managers were clear about the factors linked to children and young people's offending and had a good awareness of what could be done to reduce the likelihood of future offending.
- 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 they were all of good quality, providing the court with an accurate analysis of the offending behaviour. Management oversight of PSRs was effective. Reports written for referral order panels were not consistently of a high quality, often lacking sufficient analysis and a clear conclusion.
- 1.4. In 28 of the 33 cases inspected there was a good quality plan in place to manage the likelihood of the child or young person reoffending in the community. Nine 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 but one case.
- 1.5. We expect to see a 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 there were 19 cases that should have been subject to a review; in all of these there had been a review of good quality.
- 1.6. In many cases, case managers were able to call on services offered by partnership and voluntary agencies and incorporate these in the plan to reduce reoffending. We saw particularly strong links with education providers. Where educational provision had been disrupted, these links were used to ensure that children and young people were able to access services and re-engage with learning opportunities. We saw examples of good work to ensure that progress on educational targets started during custodial sentences were followed through on release.
- 1.7. Where patterns of offending were entrenched, the YOT was able identify intensive interventions, including daily contact with the child or young person to both challenge their behaviour and constructively occupy their time. The YOT also offered additional help after statutory contact had ended where there were outstanding issues to be resolved.

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

- 2.1. Each of the 11 PSRs we inspected had an accurate analysis of the risk of harm to others posed by the child or young person. In all cases in the sample, appropriate plans were put in place to manage any risk of harm posed; however, we did find that there were inconsistencies in the level of risk of harm recorded. We judged that the level of risk of harm had been overstated in several cases, but understated in others.

- 2.2. There was evidence that there were good working relationships with the police. In one case the YOT consistently updated the police with intelligence relating to a child or young person who had failed to surrender to bail and who presented a high risk of serious harm.
- 2.3. We determined that the risk of harm presented by the child or young person should have been reviewed in 18 cases. In all of these there had been a good quality review. Plans to manage the risk of harm nearly always incorporated the findings of the reviewed assessment.
- 2.4. 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 YOT in 28 of the 31 cases where it was necessary. Nearly all of these plans were clear about the factors that would increase the level of risk of harm and identified contingencies that could be enacted in the event of changed circumstances.
- 2.5. In nearly all cases where there was an identifiable victim, there was evidence that sufficient work had been undertaken to effectively manage the risk of harm posed 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 27 of the 32 relevant cases, case managers had made a sufficient effort to assess and understand the safeguarding and vulnerability needs of the child or young person.
- 3.3. Where a review of safeguarding and vulnerability needs was required, this had been undertaken in every case.
- 3.4. In 25 of the 29 cases in the sample where we assessed that it was necessary to put in place a plan to manage safeguarding and vulnerability issues, such a plan had been developed. Work on safeguarding and vulnerability for those in custodial settings was always commenced promptly and of a good quality. Nearly all cases were reviewed appropriately.

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

- 4.1. Ensuring the sentence is served as imposed by the court requires the YOT 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. A speech and language therapist was available to help with assessments where this was necessary.
- 4.2. Careful consideration was also given to the most appropriate form of intervention and the method of delivery. Where reparation was part of the sentence, the YOT was mindful of the type of work that the child or young person would be asked to undertake in order to ensure that the sentence was delivered, and that the child or young person had the maximum opportunity to complete the sentence successfully.
- 4.3. It was clear 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.
- 4.4. We assessed that in 15 cases there had been some issue in ensuring that the order of the court was adhered to. In each of these cases the response of the YOT was sufficient, with practical actions taken swiftly to underline the importance of the order. Six children and

young people were warned about their behaviour, leading to a positive response. Of the remaining cases, six had been enforced appropriately through the court.

- 4.5. Where children and young people had outstanding matters in court or were charged with new offences, the response of the YOT was appropriate in each case.

### **Operational management**

We found that the YOT was generally well managed with an experienced staff group. Managers regularly undertook quality assurance work, making detailed comments on case records to help staff improve their practice.

Nearly all staff reported that their managers had the skills and knowledge to assist them in their work and actively help them to improve. Most staff viewed their managers and the YOT overall as supportive and concerned to help them learn and develop. There was a level of frustration among some staff that the certificate of effective practice that they had studied for had not helped them to advance in their careers within the YOT.

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 YOT with regard to safeguarding, public protection and enforcement.

### **Key strengths**

- The YOT provided high quality assessments of the needs of children and young people. The YOT arranged for the delivery of a wide range of interventions in partnership with the statutory and voluntary sector to meet the identified needs of children and young people.
- Case managers carefully considered the methods and interventions that would ensure that the services they offered met the diverse needs of the children and young people to effectively challenge and change their behaviour.
- Pre-sentence reports were of a high quality, providing sentencers with accurate assessments and clear and appropriate proposals.
- Where intensive interventions were required, they were delivered at an appropriate level.
- Required actions to protect the child or young person and others from harm were clearly identified in risk and vulnerability management plans.
- Where children and young people initially failed to comply with their sentences appropriate enforcement action was taken, often leading to a positive response. Where necessary, cases were returned to court.

### **Areas requiring improvement**

- The quality of reports for referral order panels was often insufficient.
- The assessed level of risk of harm presented by children and young people across the YOT lacked consistency despite the fact that cases had often been quality assured by managers.

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 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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Police and Crime Commissioner	<i>Mark Burns-Williamson</i>
Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board	<i>David Niven</i>
Chair of Youth Court Bench	<i>Martin Nolan</i>
YJB Business Area Manager	<i>Gary Oscroft</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.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.