

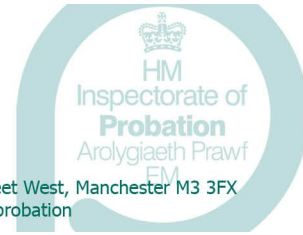


Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuenctid

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<i>To:</i>	Stan Gilmour, Chair of Reading Youth Offending Service Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Alan MacDonald, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
<i>Publication date:</i>	18 May 2016

Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Reading

The inspection was conducted from 18-20 April 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 14 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Reading 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 rate¹ for Reading was 49.5%. This was worse than the previous year and also worse than the England and Wales average of 38.0%.

Overall, we found a competent and committed workforce who knew their children and young people well. Court reports were good and the courts had confidence in the service. Assessment and planning was good and assessments reflected the views of both children and young people and their parents/carers effectively. The process for reviewing and updating assessments and plans was less effective and management oversight was inconsistent. The YOS had good access to some particularly helpful specialist educational and health services. There were good working relations with both education and children's services. Reading YOS had successfully implemented the new youth justice assessment tool, AssetPlus, shortly before the inspection fieldwork commenced.

¹ The reoffending rate that was available during the fieldwork was published January 2016, and was based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the April 2013 – March 2014 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

Commentary on the inspection in Reading

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. Overall, case managers had a good understanding of why children and young people offended. Initial assessments were good in most cases and the case managers had adapted quickly to the AssetPlus assessment tool that had been implemented in January 2016. Almost all pre-sentence reports (PSRs) were of a good quality and effective management oversight of reports was evident on files. Case files also contained feedback forms from courts which indicated that magistrates had a high degree of confidence in YOS reports.
- 1.2. Almost all intervention plans were good, they identified desired outcomes and reflected the views of children and young people and their parents/carers. Plans were informed by assessments and in all of the plans examined we found that barriers to engagement had been identified and addressed.
- 1.3. Of the cases requiring a review of the assessment and plan less than two-thirds had been completed well. Reasons for reviews not being done well included the review being overdue or not taking sufficient account of changes in children or young people's circumstances.
- 1.4. Case managers had access to a good range of resources. The young people's substance misuse service was co-located with the YOS and take up of referrals was good. There were education specialists in the YOS who provided a range of services including literacy programmes and assessment and intervention with children or young people on the autistic spectrum.
- 1.5. The seconded police officer undertook frequent intelligence checks and kept their colleagues up to date with any further incidents of offending by children and young people under supervision.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. Case managers identified the risk of harm at the initial assessment stage in almost all cases inspected. In just under half of the cases inspected, however, risk of harm was not reviewed and updated. Where there was an identifiable victim, risk of harm to them was managed effectively in less than three-quarters of cases.
- 2.2. We found a good example of effective sequencing where the victim awareness work was undertaken early in the order to address risk of harm. A case manager described to an inspector how with one young person: "*victim awareness work had been prioritised due to his attitudes towards the victim and his propensity to justify the impact on the victim which raised concerns about his future attitudes and beliefs*".
- 2.3. Management oversight of risk of harm was effective in over three-quarters of cases inspected. Where it was not effective this was often because the case manager had not followed up actions to manage risk of harm agreed in supervision.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. Almost all assessments identified the safeguarding and vulnerability needs of the child or young person. Plans also included tasks to reduce vulnerability. Review of safeguarding and vulnerability, however, was less effective and we found that in less than half of the cases requiring review had safeguarding needs been properly updated.

- 3.2. The YOS had developed an impressive child sexual exploitation self-assessment toolkit which engaged children and young people in an interactive exercise to identify their vulnerability to child sexual exploitation. We saw good evidence of the toolkit being used on case files.
- 3.3. Working relations with children's services were good. Staff had direct access to the children's social care case management system and used it to make sure they were fully up to date with developments in their cases. Children's services were responsive to the YOS, and when a case required escalation the YOS manager intervened to make sure that children's services acted on a referral.
- 3.4. Staff had a good understanding of the needs of children and young people and an inspector observed that: *"the case manager demonstrated that the young person has been linked in with relevant agencies to make sure both attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia were being managed and supported. The case manager had a good level of awareness of what obstacles and barriers may effect his engagement and has made sure other agencies continued to provide support."*
- 3.5. Management oversight of the quality of work to address vulnerability was sufficient in most inspected cases.

4. Making sure the sentence is served

- 4.1. Case managers made good efforts at the start of orders to identify how the individual needs of the child or young person might impact on their engagement and we were impressed to find that in all cases inspected intervention plans took sufficient account of diversity factors and potential barriers to engagement.
- 4.2. When children or young people failed to comply the YOS used engagement panels in order to ensure the child or young person was aware of the consequences and to explore ways of improving their cooperation with the court order. Where necessary the YOS took appropriate breach actions through the court.
- 4.3. YOS staff were creative in seeking compliance and in one case an inspector observed that: *"from the start of the order the case manager identified that Reece² was involved in few activities, had not much close family support and consequently recognised that constructive use of time would be a protective factor. They took sufficient steps to ensure there was regular contact with Reece and that he was suitably engaged with a range of activities to keep him busy. This has worked in a positive way and resulted in a good level of engagement and compliance with the order."*

Operational management

We found that the staff we interviewed had a good level of confidence in their managers, received regular supervision and were well-trained to do their jobs. Some staff were relatively new to youth justice and were clearly still acquiring knowledge and developing their confidence, however, it was clear they had a high degree of personal commitment to children and young people. Management oversight was mostly effective, although inspectors did identify a small number of actions on case files and supervision records that had not been followed through. Quality assurance systems were effective and we were pleased to see that case files evidenced the management oversight of PSRs. Implementation of AssetPlus had been a major focus of attention for the management team in the months prior to the inspection and we were impressed by how quickly case managers had adapted to the new ways of working required.

² Please note – throughout this report all names referred to in the practice examples have been amended to protect the individual's identity

Key strengths

- Assessments and plans demonstrated that case managers knew their children and young people well and wanted to achieve positive change in their lives.
- The YOS worked effectively to make sure parents/carers were appropriately involved in the interventions undertaken with children and young people.
- The YOS had direct access to a number of very helpful specialist resources and also had good working relationships with agencies across the local authority area.
- Reports to court were good and it was clear that sentencers had a high degree of confidence in the work of the YOS.

Areas requiring improvement

- Review of assessment and plans should be completed particularly where there have been significant developments in a case in order that the intervention remains relevant.
- The YOS should make sure that those staff who are less experienced are fully trained and supported to manage the wide range of risks and level of complexity presented by children and young people under supervision.
- Management oversight should be better targeted to make sure that key tasks are not missed, particularly where there is a high risk of harm.

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 make sure 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 Bob Smith. He can be contacted at robert.smith1@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07920 703142.

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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.justiceinspectrates.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.