

<i>To:</i>	John Gregg, Chair of Coventry Youth Offending Service Management Board
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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 Coventry

The inspection was conducted from 28-30 June 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 20 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Coventry Youth Offending Service (YOS). Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff. Coventry YOS had only recently moved premises, changed to the use of a new database and implemented AssetPlus.

### Summary

The published reoffending rate<sup>1</sup> for Coventry was 36.0%. This was slightly better than the previous year and better than the England and Wales average of 37.8%.

Overall, we found that Coventry YOS was performing well in most areas of practice. Case managers were engaging children and young people from the outset of their supervision, as well as their parents/carers. Where it was necessary, they were also enforcing orders. The assessment of factors contributing to offending behaviour was a strength, as was the understanding of diversity issues. Improvement was required in the assessment of vulnerability and the planning for safeguarding work, and in the effectiveness of management oversight.

### Commentary on the inspection in Coventry:

#### 1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. The assessment of factors leading children and young people to offend was carried out well in Coventry. Case managers had made an effort to understand the reasons for reoffending in 18 out of 20 cases. Reviews of the reasons for offending were carried out well enough in all relevant cases.

<sup>1</sup> The reoffending rate that was available during the fieldwork was published April 2016 and was based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the July 2013 and June 2014 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice.

- 1.2. We looked at 12 pre-sentence reports (PSRs) and judged 9 to be of sufficient quality, although we found that some contained information about the impact on victims which should not have been included. In two reports, which were considered to be of insufficient quality, we judged that local management arrangements had failed to identify or rectify deficiencies. In all but one relevant case, we found that the courts had been provided with sufficient information to carry out sentencing. Reports provided to referral order panels were judged sufficient in three out of four relevant cases.
- 1.3. Planning in the community and during the custodial phase was carried out well enough in the majority of cases, although the YOS was not helped by the format for plans under the new database which was a barrier to engaging children and young people. One hard copy of a plan ran to 11 pages. In 8 out of 11 relevant cases, the reviews of plans were carried out well enough.

## **2. Protecting the public**

- 2.1. The assessment of the risk of harm that children and young people posed to others, and the subsequent reviews, were carried out well enough in a high proportion of cases.
- 2.2. Custodial planning to manage the risk of harm the child or young person posed to others was carried out sufficiently well in all but one case. The proportion was slightly lower in the community but was still judged to have been carried out well enough in 16 out of 19 cases. The plans were reviewed sufficiently in most cases, although two had not been reviewed at all.
- 2.3. Where there was an identifiable victim or potential victim, the management of the risk of harm posed to them had not been effectively managed well in four out of ten cases.

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

- 3.1. The assessment of safeguarding and vulnerability needs was not carried out well in enough cases; 7 out of 19 vulnerability screenings were judged to be insufficient. Where this was the case, it was generally because the offending behaviour of children and young people had not been recognised as posing a potential risk to themselves. Reviews were judged to be sufficient in the same proportion; 4 out of 11 were judged insufficient.
- 3.2. Planning to safeguard children and young people was not carried out satisfactorily in enough cases; 5 out of 16 plans were considered to be of insufficient quality. Plans were not reviewed sufficiently in half of the cases and two plans had not been reviewed at all.
- 3.3. Case managers paid attention to the health and well-being of children and young people. In cases where there were indicators of child sexual exploitation, the YOS was not always as included in the work by other agencies as it should have been.

## **4. Making sure the sentence is served**

- 4.1. The YOS had an experienced and committed group of staff who made considerable efforts to understand, and work with, the individual needs of the children and young people they supervised and their parents/carers. Engagement of both groups in the assessment process was good, which started with their inclusion in the preparation of PSRs. Efforts were made to identify and understand diversity factors and, where relevant, these had been incorporated sufficiently into PSRs.
- 4.2. Plans did not pay sufficient attention to diversity factors in enough cases. Less than two-thirds of children and young people and their parents/carers were involved sufficiently in planning.

- 4.3. Where a child or young person had not fully complied with the order, the response of the YOS was judged to be sufficient in all but one of the cases. This was also true where the child or young person had been arrested, or convicted of, new offences.

### **Operational management**

We found that case managers understood the principles of effective practice and the policies and procedures that they were working to. The management oversight of the work to safeguard children and young people, and to protect others from the risk of harm they posed, was not effective. Where there were deficiencies in assessment and/or planning, these had not always been addressed. Not all staff were confident in the countersigning arrangements.

### **Key strengths**

- Committed and experienced staff.
- Assessment and review of factors contributing to reoffending.
- Efforts to understand and work with diversity needs.
- Enforcement and compliance.

### **Areas requiring improvement**

- Assessment of vulnerability and planning for safeguarding work.
- Management oversight of public protection and safeguarding work.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in Coventry YOS to facilitate and engage with this inspection, particularly in view of the difficulties caused by the recent move and change of database. 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 Jane Attwood. She can be contacted at [jane.attwood@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jane.attwood@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk) or on 07973 614573.

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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](mailto:communications@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0161 240 5336.