

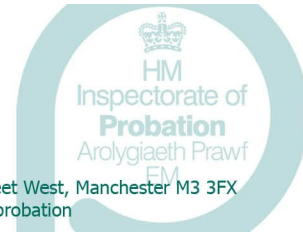


Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuencid

HM Inspectorate of Probation

1st Floor, Manchester Civil Justice Centre, 1 Bridge Street West, Manchester M3 3FX
0161 240 5336 - www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation



<i>To:</i>	Alison Walton, Chair of Northumberland Youth Offending Team Management Board
<i>Copy to:</i>	See copy list at end
<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 Northumberland

The inspection was conducted from 06-08 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 14 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Northumberland Youth Offending Team (YOT). In each case, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

Summary

The published reoffending rate¹ for Northumberland was 38.4%. This was worse than the previous year and slightly worse than the England and Wales average of 37.8%. Initial outcomes in the cases that we inspected, however, showed that almost two-thirds of children or young people had not reoffended since being supervised by the YOT.

Northumberland YOT was doing exceptional work with children and young people. All case managers were skilled, knowledgeable and committed to helping children and young people to make positive changes in their lives. They took pride in their work and were ambitious for the children and young people they worked with. We saw many examples of creative and innovative ways of working and an approach that celebrated the progress of children and young people. Work with parents/carers was well developed and Northumberland YOT's approach of delivering its work entirely in the community, rather than from an office, had a positive significant impact on the quality of assessment and engagement. Management oversight was effective. The co-location of adolescent services with the YOT strengthened the effective case management approach.

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

Commentary on the inspection in Northumberland

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) advise the court about the reasons for the child or young person's offending and the work required to address it. The YOT produced PSRs that were of a consistently high standard and effectively advised the court. In every PSR that we saw the work that needed to be done to reduce reoffending was clearly set out.
- 1.2. Case managers understood the reasons why children and young people had offended. Assessments were comprehensive and analytical. In all cases, assessments drew on relevant sources of information and involved children and young people and their parents/carers in the assessment. Case managers were clear about the factors linked to offending and had a sophisticated understanding of what could be done to reduce the likelihood of future offending.
- 1.3. In all cases, there was sufficient planning in place to make sure that work to reduce reoffending was appropriate to individual need. The child or young person, and their parents/carers were actively involved in the development of all of the plans that we saw. Objectives were outcome focused, appropriate and informed by the views of the child or young person. Plans were well sequenced and reviewed in a timely way.
- 1.4. Custodial planning was done very well. Intervention plans addressed resettlement needs right from the start of the sentence in all relevant cases and strong links had been made with a number of secure establishments. We saw cases of two children accessing a mentoring service while in custody. The YOT had made arrangements to enable this relationship to continue upon release for up to three years.
- 1.5. We saw some creative examples of children and young people's training and employment opportunities being developed. One young person was supported to attend a mock interview with a local hairdressing salon which resulted in a Saturday job and a college application. Another young person had secured voluntary employment with a family member upon his release from custody. The YOT were working with the family member to turn the job into a paid apprenticeship to enable the young person to secure formal training and qualifications.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. We expect PSRs to contain an accurate analysis of the risk of harm to others posed by the child or young person. We found that all PSRs contained a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis. An inspector commented that: "*The pre-sentence report in this case was detailed, well written and reflected the very high standard of assessment practice that we saw in all cases.*"
- 2.2. Case managers had an excellent understanding of risk of harm factors and risk of harm management, and this was demonstrated through their assessments and plans. Risk of harm was regularly reviewed, both at the required stages of an order and in response to a change in circumstances. There was evidence of professional challenge and management oversight in risk of harm work. We saw a number of cases assessed as medium risk, however, that would have been more appropriately designated as low and we saw one where we felt that the risk of harm was higher than had been categorised.
- 2.3. In seven cases there was an identified victim or potential victim. In all but one of these cases there was evidence that sufficient steps had been taken to protect the victim.
- 2.4. We saw some very good work with the police, which included information sharing and the delivery of interventions. In one case, the YOT briefed the police about the release of a

serious but first time offender by informing them of the detail of the work that had been done with the young person, his revised risk levels and the YOT plans for work with him in the community. This resulted in a consistent and effective approach to managing the young person upon release. This was done alongside a piece of work with the young person to address the significant anxiety he felt in relation to the police.

- 2.5. Work to transition young people to adult probation services was exemplary. In all relevant cases this was carried out based on an assessment of the needs of the young person and a plan as to how and by whom these needs would be best met. For example, one young person was remanded in custody and turned 18 years old a number of months previously. The YOT had continued to work with him and he was likely to receive a long custodial sentence. The YOT made it clear to the young person that he would need to transfer to adult probation services at some point and was working with probation to do this at his pace, making sure that he had access to the most appropriate services.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. Children and young people who have offended are also often vulnerable themselves, and we expect to see that this has been taken into account in the work done with them. In every case, we found case managers had made sufficient effort to assess the safeguarding and vulnerability needs of the child or young person.
- 3.2. Case managers had an excellent understanding of the factors that make a child or young person vulnerable and applied this understanding to the development of robust vulnerability plans in all relevant cases. These plans were always reviewed as circumstances changed. Vulnerability levels were classified appropriately and this work was subject to rigorous management oversight.
- 3.3. We saw good links to a range of other agencies, including substance misuse and mental health services. This meant that children and young people were able to access a range of resources to meet their individual needs. Effective case management in brokering the relevant provision was aided by the co-location of relevant services. An inspector commented that: *"A team approach to the delivery of services featured strongly in this case by involving a male colleague in engaging with the young person and a female specialist worker with the young person's mother. This approach increased the family capacity to manage their volatile relationships in an improved way."*
- 3.4. We saw thoughtful and cohesive exit planning for children and young people approaching the end of an order. This is vital to sustaining progress and achieving long-term positive outcomes.

4. Making sure the sentence is served

- 4.1. The lives of children and young people can change quickly, and we expect that assessments and plans are reviewed to account for these changes. In Northumberland, assessments and plans were reviewed as required in every case inspected. This promoted effective engagement with children and young people as the work with them was timely and pertinent.
- 4.2. Given the large rural area covered by the service, achieving a good level of compliance was a challenge and Northumberland YOT met this in every case. The YOT did all of its work in the community as opposed to being office based and this approach aided engagement.
- 4.3. We saw excellent engagement with parents/carers. Case managers demonstrated tenacity and creativity in their approach to working with parents/carers and consequently, we saw

a number of cases where parents/carers were reinforcing the work of the YOT. In one case, there was daily work with parents by the YOT in the run up to their son's court appearance to address their concerns about a likely custodial sentence. This resulted in a relationship of trust developing between the YOT and the young person's parents which became a significant protective factor on release.

- 4.4. Case managers were sensitive to a range of diversity issues and potential barriers to compliance. Sufficient effort to understand and respond appropriately to diversity factors and barriers to engagement had been made in all cases.
- 4.5. In the two cases where the child or young person had not complied, the response of the YOT was appropriate. There was an effective and appropriate use of breach backed up by clear policy guidance.

Operational management

Case managers felt supported in their work. All had a sufficient knowledge of YOT policies and procedures and an understanding of how to work effectively with children and young people who had offended. There was a learning culture in the organisation and a number of staff had recently been supported to complete formal university training.

Management oversight was effective in all of the cases we looked at. Managers oversaw the completion of key tasks and made a positive impact on the quality of work that was being delivered. Supervision of case managers was regular and involved management monitoring of all cases. PSRs were countersigned as part of an effective quality assurance process. Line managers regularly reviewed the work of their staff and made comments in case records on the quality of work. There were some inconsistencies in the classification of risk of harm which had been subject to management checking.

Key strengths

- The YOT had skilled and motivated staff, who did the right things, in the right way, at the right time.
- The YOT had developed creative and individual ways of engaging children and young people and parents/carers.
- Transfer arrangements to adult probation services for young people who had reached 18 years old were timely and based on individual needs.
- Resettlement practice was exceptional and demonstrated whole sentence planning across both the custodial and community elements of a sentence.
- The co-location of adolescent services was a factor in facilitating excellent shared working practices.
- There was effective management oversight of work.

Areas requiring improvement

- The classification of risk of harm should be reviewed to achieve more consistent judgements.

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 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 Helen Mercer. She can be contacted at helen.mercer@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07825 420104.

Copy to:	
YOT Manager	<i>Mary Connor</i>
Local Authority Chief Executive	<i>Steven Mason</i>
Director of Children's Services	<i>Daljit Lally</i>
Lead Elected Member for Children's Services	<i>Robert Arkless</i>
Lead Elected Member for Crime	<i>Elizabeth Simpson</i>
Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria	<i>Vera Baird</i>
Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board	<i>Paula Mead</i>
Chair of Youth Court Bench	<i>David Littlefield</i>
YJB Business Area Manager	<i>Gary Oscroft</i>
Ofsted – Further Education and Skills	<i>Paul Joyce, Stephen Miller</i>
Ofsted – Social Care	<i>Mary Candlin, Carolyn Adcock</i>
Ofsted – Links	<i>Caroline Prandas, Lynn Radley</i>
Care Quality Commission	<i>Jan Fooks-Bale</i>
YJB link staff	<i>Lisa Harvey-Messina, Paula Williams, Linda Paris, Rowena Finnegan</i>
YJB Communications	<i>Ali Lewis, Rachel Brown, Summer Nisar, Adrian Stretch</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.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.