

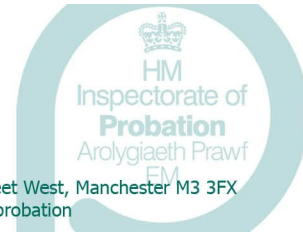


Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuenctid

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<i>To:</i>	Linda Clegg, Chair of Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service Management Board and Director of Children's 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 Blackburn with Darwen

The inspection was conducted from 20-22 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 Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service (YJS). 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 Blackburn with Darwen was 37.4%. This was similar to the England and Wales average of 37.8%.

Overall, we found some impressive staff delivering generally high-quality work. There were, however, a small number of cases where difficulties experienced around implementation of the AssetPlus assessment and planning framework coincided with work that was of a lower standard. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) were good, as was work on custodial cases. Attention was needed to make sure that work to improve safety and well-being fully recognised the breadth of factors that may apply in individual cases. Joint working with partner agencies was good.

Commentary on the inspection in Blackburn with Darwen:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. PSRs provided well argued clear information to assist the court with sentencing. We found positive comments from the court stating how valuable and useful they had found some

¹ 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 – June 2014 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

PSRs to be. Their quality was further enhanced by an expectation that the PSR was explained to, and discussed with, children and young people before it was finalised and submitted to the court. In one example a young person and his parent did not agree with the assessment, but following explanation of the report they changed their attitude and understood what was likely to happen and why. Comments given by managers when providing quality assurance showed they had a clear understanding of how a good PSR should be written.

- 1.2. Sufficient effort had been made in most cases to understand why the child or young person offended and what may help reduce their offending. There were, however, a few cases where the link between vulnerability factors such as family relationships or care arrangements and offending had not been clearly identified. The YJS held a weekly health clinic, attended by physical, mental health and substance misuse practitioners. This made a valuable contribution to the quality of assessments.
- 1.3. Review of assessments of the likelihood of offending was generally strong, although there were a few cases where reviews had not been undertaken following significant changes. In some of these it appeared that difficulties with AssetPlus implementation had contributed to the review being neglected.
- 1.4. Work in custodial cases was strong, with a good level of contact between case managers and children or young people, key workers in the secure estate and others involved in the case. Throughout the custodial phase there was clear planning for work to reduce offending, although in one serious case the required work was being undertaken but this was not reflected in the recorded custodial plan.
- 1.5. Objectives in plans for work to reduce offending were often unclear. They did not explain the change that the child or young person was expected to make and how that would be achieved. On occasions there was insufficient planning to address emotional or mental health needs or care arrangements which were linked to the likelihood of reoffending. In one positive example a case manager recognised that the young person had not offended for a substantial period by the time their sentence started. She therefore focused her plans on helping develop factors that would support continued desistance.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. We were pleased to find that all except one assessment of risk of harm to others met the needs of the case. The exception was a case where not enough consideration had been given to aggravated driving, where this was behaviour related to the circumstances of the offence but not the offence itself. When the risk of serious harm was close to the threshold between classification levels, case managers provided appropriate defensible reasons for their decisions. There was sufficient review of risk of harm to others in all except one case.
- 2.2. Planning for work to address risk of harm to others was good enough in about three-quarters of the cases. It was noticeable that the quality of planning in cases where this had been undertaken using the previous Asset tools was sometimes better than in cases where it had been done in AssetPlus. The YJS should make sure that planning in AssetPlus has sufficient precision and clarity and is comprehensive.
- 2.3. Where there was an identifiable victim or potential victim, the risk of harm to them had been managed well in all except one case. In that case the planning for how the risk would be managed needed to be clearer.

- 2.4. Oversight of risk of harm work by managers was good. The YJS had a multi-agency risk management forum (MARM) at which serious cases were considered. The MARM was well attended and made a positive contribution to the review and oversight of cases.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. PSRs included a thorough explanation of the safeguarding and vulnerability factors that applied in the case, although there was not always such a clear summary of this in the conclusion of the PSR as there was of risk of harm to others and likelihood of reoffending.
- 3.2. Assessment of safeguarding and vulnerability needs was usually strong. There were, however, a few cases where the impact on the child or young person of family relationships, including conviction of family members, and care and living arrangements, had not been recognised and where information available from other agencies had not been taken fully into account. On occasions the assessment had not been reviewed quickly enough when circumstances deteriorated.
- 3.3. The quality of planning for work to reduce the vulnerability of children and young people was variable. Clear planning was required in more cases. This needed to recognise the breadth of vulnerability factors and address emotional or mental health concerns and care arrangements where relevant. In our view this was partly attributable to a lack of clarity among staff about how to produce high quality, precise plans within the integrated AssetPlus plan. There was sufficient planning to address vulnerability during the custodial phase of sentences whenever this was required.
- 3.4. We were pleased to find that, irrespective of the quality of planning, staff worked well to make sure children and young people were safe. In one positive example a young person had suffered a particularly traumatic episode. The YJS worked creatively with a local business to put in place actions that helped them through the crisis.
- 3.5. Relationships and joint working with children's social care services and other partners were positive.
- 3.6. Oversight by managers of safety and well-being work needed to make sure that problems with assessment and planning were identified and addressed in a timely manner.

4. Making sure the sentence is served

- 4.1. Sufficient effort was usually made to identify and understand diversity factors and barriers to engagement, although there were a few cases where more consideration should have been given to the age or maturity of the child or young person. Planning to address identified diversity factors was good enough in most cases. In a positive example, where the young person undertook frequent casual work, the case manager worked with him to understand when he was most likely to be available. His appointments were arranged for a day that best suited this; thereby increasing the likelihood that he would comply with the sentence and engage well with the work of the YJS.
- 4.2. The YJS used a case planning forum chaired by a manager to develop sentence plans. The child or young person and their parent/carer also attended. This seemed a positive approach to developing plans, however, the process often did not result in plans that were meaningful to children and young people. The structure of referral order contract paperwork also did not lend itself to high quality contracts that clearly explained the change that was needed, and how it would be achieved, in a format that was straightforward for children and young people to understand.
- 4.3. Sufficient attention was given to health and well-being outcomes in all except one of the inspected cases.

- 4.4. There were nine cases where the child or young person had not complied fully with the requirements of the sentence. The response to this was sufficient in all but one. In that case not enough effort was made to understand the causes of the non-compliance.
- 4.5. Staff had a clear understanding of the YJS expectations for supporting effective engagement while also responding appropriately to non-compliance.

Operational management

We found that staff worked together well and used each other as sources of support. They generally spoke positively about their managers and the quality of management they provided. They understood local policies and procedures well. Plentiful training opportunities were available to staff in Blackburn with Darwen, although some said they needed more training to help them deliver a range of good quality interventions. There was a general sense that staff felt less involved in helping plan YJS developments than they would like to have been.

Key strengths

- There was a high-quality staff group delivering good day-to-day work with children and young people.
- Reports to courts and youth offender panels were of good quality.
- Engagement with children and young people and parents/carers in the preparation of pre-sentence reports was unusually positive.
- Work during the custodial phase of sentences was consistently strong.
- Managers were knowledgeable and were respected by their staff.
- The YJS took an appropriate approach to supporting engagement and dealing with non-compliance.

Areas requiring improvement

- Plans for work to reduce offending, including referral order contracts, should be meaningful to children and young people and clearly reflect their involvement in the planning.
- Assessment of the child or young person's safety and well-being should recognise the breadth of factors that may apply in individual cases.
- Plans to improve safety and well-being and address risk of harm to others should be clear, precise and comprehensive.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YJS 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 Ian Menary. He can be contacted at ian.menary@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07917 183197.

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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.