

<i>To:</i>	Darren Martland, Chair of Cumbria 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 Cumbria

The inspection was conducted from 18-20 July 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 34 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Cumbria Youth Offending Service (YOS). Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff. The published reoffending rate¹ for Cumbria was 41.0%. Compared to 37.8% for England and Wales.

Summary

Overall, we found that practice had improved since our last SQS inspection in June 2014. Case managers had gathered information and analysed the vulnerabilities, offending needs and risks that individual children and young people posed to others. We saw effective engagement with children and young people. Cumbria YOS had an excellent range of interventions available through the junior attendance centre but there was a gap in specialist provision to address drug and alcohol misuse. Despite much good quality work, the YOS faced challenges in trying to reduce reoffending. Many of the children and young people had significant welfare needs that the YOS was too often addressing in isolation from other agencies. These complex needs were coupled with entrenched family attitudes to offending in many cases. Children and young people in the YOS needed further support from a range of partner agencies, to enable staff to focus on offending behaviour work.

Commentary on the inspection in Cumbria:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. The quality of pre-sentence reports and referral order panel reports was good, providing a balanced and accurate view of offending, risk of harm to others and vulnerability. There

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

were a number of cases where we expected to see a pre-sentence report presented to the court but this had not been requested by sentencers. This meant that in one-quarter of cases there was not sufficient information provided to the court for sentencing.

- 1.2. As cases progressed, records often showed that case managers were responding to crisis and were involved in work that could have been undertaken by supporting partner agencies, including children's social care, substance misuse services and education. This had the effect of diverting the YOS from work aimed at reducing reoffending.
- 1.3. Written plans were not evident in some cases and this may have been because Cumbria YOS had experienced prolonged issues with its electronic case recording system over the period being inspected. This absence of written plans did not reflect the work that case managers were doing as we saw evidence of effective planning through discussion with case managers in three-quarters of cases. An inspector found that: *"Planning has been fluid and responsive to needs. When the young person was about to be excluded from school the YOS plans were adapted jointly with the school so that the young person could undertake more work placements"*.
- 1.4. We saw that some reviews of work to reduce reoffending were carried out thoroughly and in a timely fashion. In half of the cases where a review should have been triggered in response to a significant change in circumstances this was not undertaken.
- 1.5. Staff across the YOS demonstrated a good understanding of the principles of effective practice and the factors that contribute to a reduction in reoffending.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. There was an accurate assessment of the risk of harm posed by children and young people in all but two cases. This area of work had improved substantially since our last inspection. Case managers actively reflected on risk and there was good management oversight in this area of work. There were some inconsistencies in the classification of risk and some confusion about the definitions of levels of risk of harm to others. Risk of harm to specific victims was well considered and responded to in almost all relevant cases.
- 2.2. Planning to manage the risk of harm to others should be based upon the careful assessment of risk of harm posed by the child or young person. While we saw this link in over three-quarters of cases through our discussion with case managers, written plans did not always address the key risk factors.
- 2.3. The personal circumstances of children and young people can change very quickly and purposeful reviews need to take place in order to make sure that the risk of harm to others is managed effectively. Reviews of risk of harm were completed in just over half of the relevant cases.
- 2.4. All of the case managers we spoke with had a good understanding of policies and procedures in place to manage risk of harm to others, and a number said that they were able to talk to managers and colleagues when they needed advice or support.
- 2.5. Management oversight of work to reduce the risk of harm had led to improvements in the quality of practice in almost two-thirds of cases. Assessments were countersigned and we saw evidence of cases being discussed at staff supervision meetings.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. Case managers understood the factors that made a child or young person vulnerable. Sufficient assessments of safeguarding and vulnerability had been made in over three-quarters of cases in our sample. We saw two cases where a period of weeks had

elapsed without the child or young person being seen by the YOS. Insufficient action had been taken to contact the child or young person and this had left them vulnerable.

- 3.2. Case managers told us what actions they were taking to protect children and young people. We saw effective planning to safeguard children and young people in two-thirds of cases. Where this was insufficient it was usually because information sharing arrangements were unclear.
- 3.3. Work within the YOS with children and young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation included information sharing and risk management. This did not link effectively to local authority wide mapping however, and coordination with partner agencies was underdeveloped. In three cases, the YOS did not ask for information from probation when either a parent or their partner was known to have committed a serious offence. The impact of this was that risks to children and young people were not always known and acted upon.
- 3.4. We saw a small number of cases where children's social care should have been actively involved and were not. The escalation of concerns from the YOS to children's social care services was not always effective and we saw two cases where this left children and young people in situations where they were not safeguarded.
- 3.5. When children and young people are vulnerable, reviews are an important way of identifying changes and of adapting plans to respond to any new issues. Case managers were able to tell us what action they had taken in response to changes in children and young people's circumstances. This demonstrated both a good awareness of what was happening in their lives and a rapid response to changes in order to keep them safe. Written plans and planning forums did not always reflect these changes however; neither did they identify clear actions for other agencies.

4. Making sure that the sentence is served

- 4.1. We expect to see that children and young people are given support to complete their sentences. Case managers were tenacious and creative in engaging children and young people in most cases. The delivery of work was usually proportionate and we saw good examples of the sequencing of work. An inspector commented that: *"The young person's college placement has been maintained and the YOS had a key role in this by encouraging his goals and ambitions, as well as providing practical support by helping with transport"*.
- 4.2. In almost three-quarters of cases, efforts were made at the start of the sentence to understand and identify the individual needs of the child or young person. This resulted in case managers adapting how they worked to suit learning styles, communication difficulties and differing levels of maturity.
- 4.3. When children or young people did not comply with their order, the YOS held compliance panel meetings to reinforce the court order, offer support and plan for the remainder of the sentence. This was working well, and contributed to just over three-quarters of cases of children and young people complying with their sentence. The YOS had achieved a good balance between working with the individual needs of children and young people at the same time as meeting its statutory duties in supervising court orders. There was an appropriate use of professional discretion.

Operational management

Case managers understood the principles of effective practice and could apply them, knew about local policies and procedures and how their work contributed to the strategic aims of the YOS. All case managers felt that the person who supervised their work supported them effectively and provided appropriate and effective supervision. We found that management oversight was

supportive of staff where practice was good but was less effective where there were deficiencies in practice. We saw different levels of management oversight across the three area teams and this led to some inconsistencies in practice. Where oversight worked well this was because case managers were challenged to reflect on practice and progress in individual cases. We saw some examples of effective joint work with partners but this was not universal. The YOS would benefit from strengthening partnerships with children's social care, substance misuse services and education.

Key strengths

- The junior attendance centre offered an excellent range of provision. Children and young people were motivated to attend and their participation was accredited with an entry level qualification.
- In the south of the county there was one case manager assigned to work with the primary residential care home. This single point of contact approach enabled effective working relationships and information sharing and an understanding of the influence of peer groups.

Areas requiring improvement

- The Management Board should consider how partner agencies can support the complex needs of children and young people and their families to enable the YOS to have better focus on activity to reduce reoffending and keep children and young people safe.
- Work to strengthen recording practice should be undertaken so that planning and reviews become more cohesive and accurately reflect the work that is done by case managers.
- The YOS's approach to working with children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation should be developed into a multi-agency approach that links into wider local authority and police strategies.
- Quality assurance arrangements, including the countersigning of documents, need to be reviewed.

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

Copy to:

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Lead Elected Member for Children's Services and Crime	<i>Ann Burns</i>
Police and Crime Commissioner for Cumbria	<i>Peter McCall</i>
Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board	<i>Gill Rigg</i>
Chair of Youth Court Bench	<i>Peter Pickthall</i>
YJB Business Area Manager	<i>Liza Durkin</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.justiceinspectorates.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.