

<i>To:</i>	Tina McElligott, Chair of Hackney Youth Justice Service 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 Hackney

The inspection was conducted from 25-27 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 20 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Hackney Youth Justice Service (YJS). Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff. The cases inspected did not include any involving AssetPlus, a new electronic assessment and planning framework, which Hackney YJS has been using since 22 June 2016. The YJS is anticipating that the use of AssetPlus will improve the quality of reviews.

The published reoffending rate¹ was 44.1% for Hackney, compared to 37.8% for all England and Wales.

Summary

Overall, we found that Hackney YJS was performing well in most areas of practice. Insightful and committed case managers were working hard to engage children and young people and their parents/carers. Assessment, including the recognition of diversity, was a strength. Where necessary, enforcement work was also carried out satisfactorily. The quality of pre-sentence reports needed to improve; some were overlong and lacked focus. Planning to manage both the risk of harm posed by children and young people and their vulnerability was not of sufficient quality in enough cases, and the review of assessment and planning also needed to improve.

Commentary on the inspection in Hackney:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. The assessment of factors leading children and young people to offend was carried out well in Hackney. Case managers had made an effort to understand the reasons for reoffending in 15 out of 20 cases. In discussion, case managers demonstrated good

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 and June 2014 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice.

understanding of how various factors impacted on offending behaviour although analysis of the information was not always clear in the formal assessment. There was evidence in most cases of the involvement of speech and language assessment. Reviews of the reasons for offending were carried out well enough in five out of eight relevant cases.

- 1.2. We looked at 17 pre-sentence reports and judged 10 to be of sufficient quality. Of those ten, a number were of high quality with clear analysis of the risks and strong and appropriate arguments for community sentences. All reports paid attention to diversity needs and in all but two cases, the sentencing court had been provided with sufficient information. Not all reports were sufficiently analytical, however, and too often the assessment of the risk of harm posed to others lacked clarity, stating the risk category but failing to describe the *nature* of the risk posed. Too many reports were overlong and repetitive and failed to provide a convincing argument for the proposal, thereby losing impact.
- 1.3. Planning for offending behaviour work in the community, and during the custodial phase of orders, was carried out well enough in the majority of cases, although this proportion was higher in the community. The results of speech and language assessments were evident in planning. The YJS had adopted an integrated action plan, using one document to plan for actions to reduce reoffending, protect the public and safeguard the child or young person. In half of relevant cases, the reviews of plans were carried out well enough.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. The majority of the children and young people in the inspection were aged 16 years and above and all were assessed as posing a medium, or higher, risk of harm to others. The assessment of risk was carried out well enough in a high proportion of cases. Where this was not the case, it was because relevant behaviour had been ignored; contingency planning also needed to improve. Subsequent reviews were judged to be sufficient in five out of nine relevant cases.
- 2.2. Planning to manage the risk of harm the child or young person posed to others was carried out sufficiently well in almost two-thirds of cases in the community, and in a smaller proportion of the cases in custody. Inclusion of specific actions to protect others was not always evident and, in some plans, the response to the risks identified was unclear. The review of planning was carried out well enough in four out of seven relevant cases.
- 2.3. Where there was an identifiable victim or potential victim, the management of the risk of harm posed to them had been effectively managed in six out of the nine relevant cases.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. The assessment of safeguarding and vulnerability needs was carried out well in most cases; 17 out of 20 vulnerability screenings were judged to be sufficient. Many of the children and young people were contributing to their own vulnerability through their lifestyles, increasing the complexity of the interventions required. The proportion of reviews judged to be sufficient was six out of the nine relevant cases.
- 3.2. Planning to safeguard children and young people, in both the community and custody, was carried out satisfactorily in two-thirds of cases. Plans were reviewed sufficiently in five out of seven relevant cases.
- 3.3. Case managers paid attention to the health and well-being of children and young people in all the cases we inspected. In particular, we saw a substantial number of cases where

Looked After Children were placed outside of the local authority and the decision had been taken to keep the supervision of the case in Hackney to make sure that engagement was not disrupted. We also saw substantial, continued involvement where the cases were being supervised by other YOTs. Similarly, where sentences continued after children or young people had reached the age of 18 years, decisions had been taken, where appropriate, to continue to supervise the case.

4. Making sure the sentence is served

- 4.1. The YJS had a thoughtful 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 pre-sentence reports.
- 4.2. Plans paid sufficient attention to diversity factors in most cases, however, more children and young people and their parents/carers needed to be involved in planning.
- 4.3. Where a child or young person had not fully complied with the order, the response of the YJS was judged to be sufficient in most cases. This was also true where the child or young person had been arrested for, 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. There was evidence that staff supervision and/or quality assurance had made a positive contribution to case management. Staff had full confidence in managers and felt well supported. Managers were accessible and described as engaged and active in case management. Not all YJS staff were receiving regular, formal supervision however and it was felt that the unit meetings, a process designed to aid case management, needed to be reviewed to make them more useful. Management oversight was largely effective in assuring the quality of the work to protect others from the risk of harm posed by children and young people, and the work to address safeguarding and vulnerability.

Key strengths

- Assessment.
- Efforts to understand and work with diversity needs.
- Enforcement and compliance.
- Committed staff who engaged well with both children and young people and their parents/carers.

Areas requiring improvement

- The quality of pre-sentence reports.
- Planning for managing the risk of harm posed to others and addressing safeguarding needs.
- Reviews of assessment and planning.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in Hackney 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 Jane Attwood. She can be contacted at 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 or on 0161 240 5336.