

An inspection of youth offending services in

# Walsall

---

HM Inspectorate of Probation

JUNE 2019

---

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Yvonne McGuckian, supported by a team of inspectors, as well as staff from our operations and research teams. The Head of Youth Offending Team Inspections, responsible for this inspection programme, is Alan MacDonald. We would like to thank all those who helped plan and took part in the inspection; without their help and cooperation, the inspection would not have been possible.

© Crown copyright 2019

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence) or email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available for download at:

[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation)

Published by:

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation  
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M3 3FX

# Contents

---

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Overall findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Summary of ratings</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Contextual facts</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 Governance and leadership	12
1.2 Staff	13
1.3 Partnerships and services	14
1.4 Information and facilities	15
<b>2. Court disposals</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Assessment	17
2.2 Planning	18
2.3 Implementation and delivery	18
2.4 Reviewing	19
<b>3. Out-of-court disposals</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 Assessment	21
3.2 Planning	22
3.3 Implementation and delivery	22
3.4 Joint working	23
<b>Annex 1 – Methodology</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Annex 2 – Inspection results</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Annex 3 – Glossary</b>	<b>31</b>

## Foreword

---

This inspection is part of our programme of youth offending service inspections. As planned, we have inspected and rated Walsall Youth Justice Service (YJS) across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery first, and then the quality of court disposals work and out-of-court disposals work.

We have given Walsall YJS an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement'.

Walsall YJS Board has a clear vision for the service, and its aims are shared by the council and partners. We have found evidence of progress, to meet these aims, in some areas. Work to prevent children's reoffending is strong, assisted by good partnership work and children's timely access to a wide range of help and support. Staff, managers and partners are committed to providing an effective service and to improving the lives of children.

However, the work of the service is affected by ongoing budget cuts. The Board is continuing to manage on the lowest budget allocation in the region and a second year of efficiency savings. Attempts have been made to minimise the impact of these savings, but as this report shows, the effects are becoming clear. Key posts and facilities have been lost, including the victim worker and data analyst, and the workforce is operating at, and on occasions beyond, capacity. Case managers have had to take on more work, including that of specialists, with diminished resources. On occasion this has been a conflict of interest. Wider services that can provide purposeful activity and help to reduce anti-social behaviour and some crime have also been cut, including the reduction of youth clubs from thirteen to one.

Work to identify and manage risk of harm to others and the protection of victims needs to improve, as it has lost focus and receives very little attention at strategic or operational level. As the victim worker post was cut and there is no lead for this area of work, it is easy to understand how this has happened, but difficult to see how it will be improved without additional resources.

As we have reported in other areas, work is hampered when children and young people are not able to access education, employment and training, which are key to their futures. Progress in this area has been too slow. The recommendations made in this report are designed to assist the Board in making the necessary improvements.



**Justin Russell**

Chief Inspector of Probation

## Overall findings

Overall, Walsall YJS is rated as: **Requires improvement**. This rating has been determined by inspecting the youth offending service in three domains of its work. The findings in those domains are described below.



### Organisational delivery

Our key findings about organisational delivery are as follows:

- The Board's vision and strategy are clear and understood by the partnership. The focus on preventing children and young people from entering the criminal justice system is driving decisions about service delivery. At times, this has been at the expense of managing risk of harm to others.
- The Management Board does not have sufficient information about the quality of practice, and relies too heavily on the three key performance indicators. As a result, it does not know enough about some important areas of practice, including issues concerning disproportionality, the effect of decisions made to manage budget reductions, and workload capacity.
- Services provided by most partners are good, readily accessible and meet children and young people's needs. Support to access education, training and employment has improved recently, but there have been gaps in this area.
- Caseloads for youth justice workers are variable but can be high. We were concerned that staff have been expected to undertake the work of a victim officer since the post was removed. This is potentially a professional conflict and has undermined services to victims, who may question whether the worker is supporting their views and needs or those of the child or young person.



### Court disposals

Our key findings about court disposals are as follows:

- Desistance work is the strongest area of practice and children receive effective and targeted services and interventions from a range of partners.
- There is good joint work with partner agencies, including children's social care. Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood, and their complementary roles are respected.
- Effective relationships have been built between children, young people, their families and youth justice workers. Staff are tenacious and committed to children and their families.
- The YJS has lost focus on public protection issues, and assessment, planning and review of actual and potential victims need to improve. Case managers hold the dual role of managing the risk and supporting the victim. This is a potential conflict. The lack of a lead worker for victim issues has resulted in an inconsistent service and lack of priority.

- Too many children and young people are not in school, training or employment, which are key factors in promoting desistance. Although there are some recent moves to manage this, resources to support children's access to education and training remain too limited.



### **Out-of-court disposals**

Our key findings about out-of-court disposals are as follows:

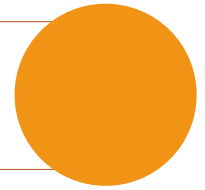
- Staff from the health liaison and diversion scheme attend the out-of-court disposal (OCD) panel and quickly identify potential emotional and mental health needs. This, appropriately, prevents children from entering the criminal justice system and gives them access to assessment and ongoing support.
- There is good delivery of interventions related to desistance and safety and wellbeing. Children access these quickly and their progress was consolidated by case managers.
- Work to protect victims is not good enough. Assessment, planning and reviewing do not focus on keeping them safe. There are some good projects for children to undertake reparation.
- Decision-making for OCDs is not joint or informed by a youth justice services assessment of need and risks. The police compile a detailed research document, and the views of YOS staff are sought, but this is at the panel meeting and not based on an assessment.
- Risk of harm to others is not identified, assessed, planned for or responded to well enough.
- The impact of disproportionality in the OCD scheme needs to be understood and responded to, to better understand why young black boys are more likely to receive a court order than their white peers.

Service: Walsall Youth Justice Service

Fieldwork started: April 2019

## Overall rating

Requires improvement



### 1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Partnerships and services

Good



1.4 Information and facilities

Requires improvement



### 2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Requires improvement



2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Good



2.4 Reviewing

Requires improvement



### 3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Inadequate



3.2 Planning

Inadequate



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



3.4 Joint working

Requires improvement



## Recommendations

---

As a result of our inspection findings, we have made four recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of youth offending services in Walsall. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth offending services, and better protect the public.

### **Walsall Council and its partners should:**

1. review the budget allocation to the youth justice service to determine the correct level of resource that allows the service to undertake its key functions well
2. make sure that all children and young people working with the youth justice service receive their full entitlement to education and that provision is tailored to their specific needs.

### **The Walsall Youth Justice Service Board should:**

3. make sure, in the delivery of work, that sufficient attention is given to protecting known victims and others from harm, and to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people
4. understand the reasons for and try and reduce the disproportionate number of black and minority ethnic children and young people in the service.



## Introduction

---

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) supervise 10–18-year-olds who have been sentenced by a court, or who have come to the attention of the police because of their offending behaviour but have not been charged instead, they were dealt with out of court. HMI Probation inspects both these aspects of youth offending services.

YOTs are statutory partnerships, and they are multi-disciplinary, to deal with the needs of the whole child. They are required to have staff from local authority social care and education services, the police, the National Probation Service and local health services.<sup>1</sup> Most YOTs are based within local authorities, however, this can vary.

YOT work is governed and shaped by a range of legislation and guidance specific to the youth justice sector (such as the National Standards for Youth Justice) or else applicable across the criminal justice sector (for example Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements guidance). The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) provides some funding to YOTs. It also monitors their performance and issues guidance to them about how things are to be done.

The work of the YJS is of strategic importance in the council. Preventing young people from entering the criminal justice system is a key priority in the council's corporate plan. The YJS forms part of the overall services for children and families provided by children's services. This alignment with early help, children's social care and education services enables children and families with multiple complex needs to be identified early. It provides more opportunities for targeted work with those at risk of poor outcomes or involved in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Walsall's first-time entrant rate is the same as the national average and it has a lower rate of reoffending, at 33.3 per cent, than the national average of 40.9 per cent. Walsall Youth Justice Service faces changes to its offending profile. Over the last two years, it has seen an increase in child criminal exploitation. The need to respond to and manage gang-related and associated issues has increased, due in part to relocation of children and young people from Birmingham.

The Performance and Partnership Board is responsible for governance of YJS arrangements. The Board is chaired by the superintendent of the local neighbourhood policing unit. The YJS team managers are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the service and supervision and appraisals of practitioners.

### **The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation**

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales. We provide assurance on the effectiveness of work with adults and children who have offended to implement orders of the court, reduce reoffending, protect the public and safeguard the vulnerable. We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice, and use our data and information to encourage good-quality services. We are independent of government, and speak independently.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Crime and Disorder Act 1998* set out the arrangements for local YOTs and partnership working.

## **HM Inspectorate of Probation standards**

The standards against which we inspect are based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. These standards are designed to drive improvements in the quality of work with people who have offended.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> HM Inspectorate's standards are available here:  
<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

## Contextual facts

**First time entrant rate per 100,000**

248

Walsall YOS <sup>3</sup>

248

Average for England and Wales

**Reoffending rates**

33.3%

Walsall YOS <sup>4</sup>

40.9%

Average for England and Wales

### Caseload information <sup>5</sup>

Age	10-14	15-17	
Walsall	22%	78%	
National average	24%	76%	
Race/ethnicity	White	Black and minority ethnic	Not known
Walsall	66%	34%	
National average	71%	26%	3%
Gender	Male	Female	
Walsall	81%	19%	
National average	84%	16%	



### Population information

281,293	Total population of Walsall (2017) <sup>6</sup>
28,145	Total youth population of Walsall <sup>7</sup>
7,835	Total black and minority ethnic youth population (2011 census) <sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2018). *First-time entrants, October 2017 – September 2018*.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2018). *Proven reoffending statistics, April 2016 – March 2017*.

<sup>5</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2019). *Youth justice annual statistics: 2017 - 2018*.

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2012). *UK population estimates mid-2017, based on Census 2011 data*.

<sup>7</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2012). *Census 2011*.

## 1. Organisational delivery



Organisations that are well led and well managed are more likely to achieve their aims. We inspect against four standards.

1.1 Governance and leadership	Requires improvement
The governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people.	

The Board has a clear vision to prevent children from entering the criminal justice system unnecessarily.

The Board's vision and strategy are well known and understood across the partnership. The chair of the Board is well engaged, has provided consistent leadership, and is known and visible to staff in the YJS.

The attendance of the head of the virtual school and magistrates on the Board are a new and positive development. However, Board attendance has been too variable and there are some notable and significant gaps. There has not been a suitable senior, dedicated representative from the education service on the board during the past year.

The YJS Management Board does not have sufficient information about practice or the evidence base that supports effective work. This hinders it from setting the direction of the service. As a result, resources are not targeted efficiently and some key areas of statutory work are not delivered effectively, including public protection work.

Provision of services has been adversely affected by budget reductions, and the YJS has, historically, received the lowest level of funding in the region. Improvements to service delivery have been too slow, and their full impact has not been fully assessed, including the transfer of services for victims to case managers.

The Board has taken steps to understand the needs of children and young people known to the YJS, including by participating on a research project and learning from a review of girls in custody. The Board has also secured funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to deliver diversion work.

Partnership arrangements are being reconfigured as part of the local authority transformation plan. The current arrangements did not take account of the YJS's youth justice responsibilities, including assessment and planning to manage the risk of harm to others.

Most partners show strong commitment to delivering services that support desistance and keep children safe. Community integration is supported by good working relationships, including those with voluntary services, for example My Place, Catch 22 and Young Walsall.

The head of service provides performance reports to the Board, but these reports are limited, in part due to a lack of performance data and not having a specialist performance officer.

Some risks to the service are understood and there are some mitigations in place. The YJS identifies new and emerging issues through police data and responds to these. Recent examples include the rise in knife crime and criminal exploitation. However, this inspection highlighted risks that the Board was unaware of, including workforce capacity, services to victims and an underestimation of risk of harm to others.

The head of service post has been an interim appointment for two years, to cover a secondment. There is a lack of contingency planning for this post, which is due to end in August 2019.

1.2 Staff	Requires improvement
Staff within the YOT are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people.	

Staff are skilled and engage effectively with young people. They are committed and they care. All staff were motivated to deliver good services to children and young people.

Workloads were variable, at times ranging from 8 to 18 cases, but some had been higher and the level of complexity has resulted in some staff having unmanageable workloads. Workloads are actively managed, but key roles have been removed because of budget reductions. These include management posts, the victim worker, data performance officer, education worker and a further youth justice worker post.

We are concerned that the Board and managers expected staff to undertake the work of a specialist victim worker as part of their role. This is a potential professional conflict and has undermined the services to victims, who may question whether the worker supports their views and needs or those of the child or young person. No analysis or consultation have been undertaken of work with victims to ascertain whether their needs and wishes are met. The Board did not know whether victims' safety had been affected. These inspection results are the first indication the Board will have about the impact of this decision.

The Board's Chair and Head of Service told us that staff are working to full capacity and, on occasions, beyond this. We agree with their assessment, but the Board has not sufficiently understood the impact of this on service delivery.

Our survey of staff showed that they felt that they had the skills needed and were equipped for their role. However, some staff did not fully understand or fulfil their role and responsibilities, principally in risk management.

Staff have regular supervision and managers are available for informal consultation. Team meetings are an effective way of supporting staff and are used to recognise good and outstanding practice. The appraisal system links the work of staff to the YJS's key objectives. Most staff who had received an appraisal found it to be valuable.

Poor performance is managed effectively, and recognition of good and exceptional work is a strength of the service. Each team meeting has a 'Songs of Praise' section, where managers and staff give praise and feedback to colleagues. Staff appreciate this approach.

All staff have received training and development in Abuse, Loss, Trauma, Attachment and Resilience (ALTAR) and their impact on children. The underpinning research and theory are being used to redesign services. For many staff, this training has provided a context for children's behaviours that they have been dealing with for many years. It has also given them a common understanding of needs across the partnership.

A number of youth justice workers are training in Assessment, Intervention and Moving On (AIM2), working with a virtual sexually harmful behaviour team. Services are available to children with these behaviours.

A training plan is in place, including access to training provided by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. At operational level, we found staff keen to learn. There was a commitment to improvement across the service. There are good training and progression opportunities for staff, despite there being no dedicated training budget.

1.3 Partnerships and services	Good
A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children and young people.	

A recent research project by the Combined West Midlands Authorities has given the Board and local authority a much clearer understanding of the profile and needs of children and young people who are in contact with the YJS. This has given the YJS and partners a detailed understanding of the abuse, trauma and loss experienced by children and young people. Services are now being reformed to meet these needs.

The YJS's focus on diversion and prevention has, at times, deflected resources and attention from public protection and victim work. We found that work to help children desist from offending was often undertaken very well, and we have seen examples of exceptional work. However, work to reduce risk of harm to others, including serious risks, is not given equal attention. This was not understood by the Board or managers, despite this being a key part of the YJS statutory work. It also means that desistance work undertaken by the YJS and partners is missing this important element.


Children and young people have access to a wide range of quality services and interventions. These include interventions to support desistance from offending, safety and wellbeing and risk of harm. There is creative and thoughtful engagement with children and young people, including examples of good joint work between the YJS and children's social care, the virtual school, sexually harmful behaviour services and the voluntary sector. Services are designed to build on existing strengths and support protective factors. They include restorative approaches, parenting support, and a new intervention for children involved in gangs and knife crime.

Children and young people access a range of mainstream and specialist services. Pathways to access these services are clear and access is swift.

The youth court said there is a good range of services to support sentencing. Custody rates are low and compare favourably with similar youth offending services.

The Board was aware of the importance of education, training and employment in desistance. However, work to address ongoing and longstanding problems was making slow progress. At the time of the inspection, too many children were not

receiving their statutory entitlement to education<sup>8</sup> and were not in education, employment or training (NEET). Recent developments included the virtual school managing children and young people as a vulnerable group, and dedicated pre- and post-16 education and training workers being employed to improve outcomes.

1.4 Information and facilities	Requires improvement
Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children and young people.	

Staff know how to access services from partners and effectively advocate on behalf of children. A range of up-to-date policies and procedures are in place. Staff and seconded workers understand these and use escalation processes effectively. Good working relationships between youth justice workers and partnership workers demonstrate that there is an appropriate understanding of roles and responsibilities, which aids effective communication and information-sharing.

Staff must be flexible in where they meet children, young people, parents and carers. Due to budget cuts and service realignment, the YJS does not have a dedicated base from which to deliver services to children. Delivery of services has been aligned with the authority's locality-based model. The use of four area-based locality venues supports this, although some staff report difficulties in finding private space to discuss confidential issues.

Some children and young people are seen at a community venue called My Place. Until 2016, there were 13 youth centres in Walsall, but due to cuts, My Place is the only remaining provision. The link with this service provides valuable additional support for children and their families.

The specific needs of children and young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are not analysed or understood well enough. We found several areas where these children and young people were over-represented, including on intensive supervision and support bail and in statutory orders. The reasons for this had not been explored. While we found a focus on meeting individual needs, opportunities to learn from research and a wider national evidence base could provide the Board with some insights. None of the partner agencies could demonstrate how disproportionality was identified or responded to.

Staff safety is not fully considered, which is important given the risks posed by some young people. There are systems in place to check in with managers, but we saw several cases where high-risk gang members had been placed in Walsall from Birmingham. There were no additional safety precautions for staff working with those who faced retaliation from gangs and who were being seen in a variety of community bases.

Information technology facilities used by the YJS were reliable, allowing staff to access information on a range of systems.

Despite the use of some good external analysis, the data and performance post in the YJS was cut two years ago. A team manager now undertakes some of this work

<sup>8</sup> Data provided by the YJS for April 2019: of 53 children on court orders, 21 were NEET, 1 was not on roll, and 31 were in suitable education, training or verified employment.

in addition to his role. After several requests, the Board has secured support from the local authority performance team to undertake performance and data analysis, to drive service improvement. The Board relies too much on three key performance indicators as its measures of quality.

## Summary

---

### **Strengths:**

- There is a clear ambition to reduce the number of children entering the criminal justice system.
- There are some examples of innovation to better understand the needs of children and young people and to deliver the Board's priorities.
- There is a committed workforce, who engage well with children and young people.
- New and emerging issues for service delivery, including criminal exploitation and knife crime, are known about and responded to.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The Board has not fully understood the impact of budget cuts on operational practice.
- Workforce capacity is at its limit. Staff are expected to take on wider and specialist roles, which may be in conflict with the principles of good case management.
- Too many children and young people are not in education, training or employment. Progress to address this longstanding issue has been slow.
- Walsall needs to better understand and respond to the effect of disproportionality in the court ordered caseload and the impact of criminal justice on black and minority ethnic children and young people.
- The availability and use of specific youth justice data and performance information are limited.



## 2. Court disposals



Work with children and young people sentenced by the courts will be more effective if it is well targeted, planned and implemented. In our inspections we look at a sample of cases. In each of those cases we inspect against four standards.

2.1 Assessment	Requires improvement
Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	A solid orange circle, indicating a 'Requires improvement' rating.

Assessments of factors that contribute to offending were completed quickly and to a very good standard. Staff routinely built on individual strengths and those elements of the child's or young person's life that might lead to offending. This is line with recent ALTAR training undertaken by staff. Staff we interviewed had a detailed understanding of the children they supervised and it was clear that they had developed good relationships with them to build trust.

Safety and wellbeing were also assessed well. Staff carefully considered how identified risks impacted on the child's safety. Information gained from a wide range of sources, including schools, the police, and the child and their parents or carers, was used to understand if, and how, these vulnerabilities contributed to offending. Staff have direct access to Mosaic, the children's social care system. This is part of effective information exchange with allocated social workers.

As part of the assessment, the level of safety and wellbeing concerns were classified. Classifications were mostly accurate; however, in the four cases where the classification was incorrect, the vulnerabilities were all underestimated.

The assessment of victims' needs and wishes and the risk of harm posed by the child was not given the same focus as desistance and safety and wellbeing. The assessment was appropriate in 10 of the 24 relevant cases. Due to budget reductions, the specialist victim worker role was cut three years ago. This critical aspect of work was given to youth justice workers. This inspection has found that work to identify, analyse and protect victims is not given sufficient attention. There is a potential conflict of interest for staff, and there has been no assessment of the impact of this decision on victims' confidence in the services they receive.

We expect youth justice services to assess any risk that a child poses to others. Although these assessments were completed, the quality was insufficient. Just half of the assessments we reviewed sufficiently analysed how to keep other people safe. Problems with the assessments included not using all available information, not understanding past behaviours and underestimating the nature and extent of risk. When levels of risk were ascribed, we disagreed with 46 per cent of them, as they were set too low.

2.2 Planning	Requires improvement
Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	

Planning to support desistance was done well in almost all cases. Staff identified the most appropriate interventions and support for the child. They carefully considered the sequencing of interventions that could be completed within the life of the order.


Youth justice workers paid very good attention to the child or young person's strengths and protective factors. This was supported by their training on the ALTAR model. The individual and their parents/carers were consistently involved in planning. We saw numerous examples where efforts were made to make the planning understandable to the child or young person.

One parent told us: "They have helped my child recognise what is right and wrong and guided him the right way".

In one case, we noted that a case manager was aware of previous aggression and violent behaviour exhibited by a child in school when he had been faced with difficult situations, including being bullied, and had been unable to control his anger. The case manager planned to undertake one-to-one work with the child on anger management and emotional control. This aimed to minimise the risk of further inappropriate retaliation should the child become the target of bullying in his new school. The targets set included "not to hit out at anyone when I've lost my temper," "not to damage any property" and to "learn to think first". These were meaningful for the child considering their age, maturity and level of understanding.

Planning was focused on keeping children and young people safe in two-thirds of cases. We saw some very good joint work with children's social care. Each understood their respective roles and responsibilities. Youth justice workers knew about the work of both agencies, although they did not always include this in recorded plans. Contingency planning needed to improve and specify the actions that had to be taken in predictable situations. This was particularly evident for children and young people involved in gangs.

As with assessments, planning to keep victims safe was an area that required improvement. It was good to see that other agencies were involved in planning, but some key actions were missed, including risks to siblings and contingency planning. Planning to keep victims safe was sufficient in two-thirds of cases.

2.3 Implementation and delivery	Good
High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child or young person.	

In all but one case, we saw very good work to implement the order and support desistance from offending. The development of trusting relationships between youth justice staff, children and young people and families was key to this. Staff had a very good understanding of the children and young people and the best ways to engage

them. In the third of cases where children did not comply, staff made good attempts to encourage and support them.

Children benefited from a wide range of interventions, and there were no delays in accessing support, including access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAHMS), speech and language support, offending behaviour work and sports-based interventions designed to engage and motivate children and young people.

Education, training and employment, which are key factors for desistance, remained problematic. Some children were not in education or were on very reduced timetables. The Board has recognised this, and has developed a partnership with the virtual school. It is positive that these children are clearly identified as being a vulnerable group and work is taking place to improve their outcomes. However, there is no full-time dedicated education worker in the YJS to support them. Despite the best efforts of already stretched youth justice workers, too many children remain NEET. It is disappointing that the Board has not been able to hold education providers to account for these children.

Work to keep children and young people safe was good, including joint work with partnership agencies. Children's social care recognised the elements of offending behaviour that increased the risk to children, and worked well with the YJS to try and protect them. Where the YJS and children's social care needed to work on a case together, we found good attendance and joint planning at core groups and child protection conferences.

The service used a wide range of methods to keep children safe, including the National Referral Mechanism for children subject to modern slavery and trafficking, close work with the child sexual exploitation (CSE) team and community and voluntary groups. Staff were tireless in their efforts to protect children and were prepared to challenge partners when needed. The challenges faced by the Walsall YJS are complex. We found staff managing cases of children subject to all types of abuse and neglect, including modern slavery, gangs, knife crime and exploitation. Of the 24 cases we assessed, one child was classified as low risk of safety and wellbeing, 11 as medium, 10 as high and two as very high. It is a strength of the service that these vulnerabilities were identified and then addressed as well as they were.

Services to victims were undermined because of the unrealistic expectation that youth justice workers should carry out the specialist role of victim worker as well as supervising the child or young person with the court order. While interventions were delivered to children to try and reduce their risk to others, direct action to protect victims was not routinely planned. Partners were not involved in protecting and supporting victims in all cases.

2.4 Reviewing	Requires improvement
Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	

Reviews of children and young people's progress in desisting from offending were timely and consistent but did not always lead to changes in planning where they should have done and reviews of the risk of harm posed to others didn't receive enough attention.

Reviews of children and young people's progress in desisting from offending were timely and consistent. Reviews carried out in response to changes, routinely involved the views and perceptions of children and young people, and their parents and carers, and considered their motivation to change. Staff ensured that work was undertaken to protect them and reinforce strengths. Of note was the use of reviews from other specialists to inform the nature and extent of progress. Where other workers were involved in the case, the reviews were used effectively, as the following comments from an inspector show:

*"The case manager utilised the relationship with the new edge of care worker who, as a black male, was able to engage in a different way with the young person. The young person started to take more of an interest in education and has now attended a few college open days to explore options".*

Reviews to consider the child's safety and wellbeing were routinely completed, but did not lead to necessary changes in planning in six of the 15 cases where they should have done. Reviews identified changes in safety in just two-thirds of the cases where changes were evident. It was very positive to see that the views of statutory and voluntary partner agencies were used to inform reviews. Overall, we assessed that reviews focused on keeping the child safe in two-thirds of the cases.

As we identified in other areas of work, reviews of the risk of harm that children pose to others did not receive sufficient attention. We found 17 cases where there was an identifiable change in risk factors. We found that these had been responded to in 9 cases, but not in the remaining eight. We found that risk to siblings was often missed. Those children on orders were rarely assessed as a risk to children, despite them often offending against peers.

## Summary

---

### **Strengths:**

- Desistance work was the strongest area of practice, with staff showing persistence and creativity when working with children and young people.
- Delivery of interventions was strong. Children received services from a range of partners.
- There was good joint work with partner agencies, including children's social care, with roles and responsibilities clearly understood.
- Good relationships were built between children, young people, their families and youth justice workers.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The YJS had lost focus on public protection issues, and assessment, planning and review of actual and potential victims needed to improve.
- Too many children and young people were not in school, training or employment, which are key factors for desistance.
- Assessment and reviewing of risk of harm to others were weak, leaving some victims potentially at risk.
- New and emerging risk to others was not identified or responded to well or often enough.
- Staff were expected to undertake work with victims as part of their role. This is a potential professional conflict.

### 3. Out-of-court disposals

Work with children and young people receiving out-of-court disposals will be more effective if it is well targeted, planned and implemented. In our inspections, we look at a sample of cases. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards.

3.1 Assessment	Inadequate
Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	

Assessments of children and young people were taken only after the OOC decision was made. Children who received youth cautions were assessed using AssetPlus, and children who received a community resolution were assessed using an assessment tool designed by the service. Youth justice workers could choose to use the AssetPlus tool for complex cases.

The community resolution assessment covered all key areas, but did not specify a classification for safety and wellbeing or risk of serious harm to others.

Assessments contained a range of information, including an in-depth research document completed by the police for the OOC panel. Desistance factors were clearly identified, and the assessment analysed behaviours, attitudes and acceptance of responsibility of the young person for the offence. Strengths and protective factors were clear.

Key structural barriers, including access to education, training and employment, were fully considered in only half of the relevant cases. Despite the diverse caseload, the young person's diversity and any experiences of discrimination were assessed in only nine of the 14 cases.

Assessment of the victim's needs and wishes, and exploring opportunities for restorative justice, were sufficient in just three of the 11 cases where this was relevant.

Assessments of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others were inadequate. We assessed that these were good enough in only a third of cases.

Half of the safety and wellbeing assessments were undertaken too late. In part, this was because the youth justice workers usually met the child or young person at the panel. Assessments could not then take place in the short time that the OOC case was open.

Identification of safety and wellbeing issues began at the police research stage, where information was gathered from children's social care. At times, these checks were duplicated by the case manager. While most assessments drew on information from other agencies, risks to children were underestimated. In one case, an inspector noted that:

*"Not enough attention is given to keeping the young person safe. The initial referral identified CSE concerns, including episodes where they were missing from home and living with an older partner who was known to the criminal justice system. However, there was no joined-up analysis of how these things could increase risk and levels of vulnerability".*

Classification of safety and wellbeing had been undertaken in seven of the 14 cases we assessed. The correct level was identified in five of these. Although classification is not the only element of assessment, it is important, as it should provide the service and partners with a clear understanding of which work to prioritise and the level of service needed.

Assessment of the exact nature of risk of harm posed by children and young people on OOCs was good enough in only three of the 13 cases where risk was evident. Importantly, as the assessment was completed after the decision, the assessment of risk did not inform the type of OOC given or any conditions imposed.

The significance of some risky behaviours was not fully identified, including an example of a child taking a knife into school. The reason for this was not assessed, so any risk to other children, staff or the child was not identified.


3.2 Planning	Inadequate
Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	

Plans given to the YJS from the OOC are generic, so workers have to spend time understanding the needs and risks of the child and the intentions of the panel. Case managers then develop intervention plans.

Planning was sufficiently focused on desistance needs in all cases, being well sequenced and targeted. It was proportionate to the desistance needs of those with OOCs. Careful consideration was given to familial and wider social influences, and built on existing strengths. The views and wishes of the individual and their family were taken into consideration in a meaningful way in over 80 per cent of the cases we assessed.

Plans contained actions to promote the safety and wellbeing of children in most cases, including involving other agencies when needed. However, there was very little contingency planning. We found this in only one of the ten cases where it was needed. This was critical, given the short time the YJS was involved with the child or young person.

Keeping actual and potential victims safe was not well planned. Specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims were addressed in only three of the nine cases where this was needed. We found very few plans that included contingency arrangements, even when the child was living with or had daily contact with the victim.

3.3 Implementation and delivery	Inadequate
High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child or young person.	

Despite some very good implementation and delivery of services to prevent future offending and keep children safe, this section has been assessed as inadequate because work to manage risk of harm to others is poor.

In all cases, services were delivered to meet the desistance needs of children and young people. Staff gave very good attention to developing a relationship with the



child or young person and their family. Children were given the right levels of encouragement and support to comply with interventions.

We saw some good use of one-to-one interventions by youth justice workers, including those that consider the impact of anti-social behaviour and crime on individuals and the wider community. Partner agencies, including the Beacon drug and alcohol service, were delivering services effectively. In one case, the youth justice worker and the local police community service officer worked with a young person to break down their negative view of authority.

Similarly, we found good work to keep children safe, where, in all relevant cases, services promoted the wellbeing of children and young people. We found numerous examples of good joint work with partner agencies, including children's social care, schools, and drug and alcohol services, and ongoing communication with parents and carers. In several OOC cases, referrals were made due to concerns that children were being criminally exploited. The YJS often led this work, which was done well.

We saw some very sensitive joint work with health partners for girls who were pregnant.

It was disappointing, but not surprising, to find that the delivery of effective support did not meet the needs of victims. We found very little direct work or actions taken to keep actual and potential victims safe. This work was carried out in only three of the nine cases where it was needed, and sufficient thought was given in only two of these.

Service delivery did not focus on reducing harm, including in one case where a young person's mother had been identified as a direct victim of their violent behaviour, often in front of younger siblings. The ongoing risk to her and the significant potential effect on the other children witnessing and living with domestic abuse was completely overlooked.

3.4 Joint working	Requires improvement
Joint working with the police supports the delivery of high-quality, personalised and coordinated services.	

The partnership has a clear ambition to divert children from the criminal justice system, to improve their outcomes. West Midlands Police make an active contribution to this, but decision-making is not undertaken jointly.

The OOC scheme is well supported by the police, YJS and health services. It is administered by the police, who prepare a thorough research document for the panel. The YJS attends the panel and can offer opinions. However, the youth justice worker is not able to inform decision-making as they have not undertaken an assessment, usually only having met the child or young person at the panel. This is a missed opportunity to use the skills of the YJS to advise on the outcome for children and propose suitable interventions.

An assessment undertaken before the decision-making panel would also give children, young people and their parents/carers the opportunity to discuss any issues with an independent professional. We were not assured that parents and children

had sufficient information or time to understand the potential long-term implications of accepting an OOCd.

The panel would benefit from including a representative from children's social care or the early help service, given the partnership's ambition to keep children out of the criminal justice system. This could provide an opportunity for early identification of children and young people's offending-related welfare needs.

It is positive that the mental health liaison and diversion scheme attends the panel. This results in quick referrals to CAHMS and, in some cases, an immediate assessment. This means that children with emotional and mental health issues get the help and support they need.

Issues of disproportionality and equality of decision-making have not been explored, so, for example, the YJS does not know why boys who are black or from a minority ethnic background are less likely to receive an OOCd than their white peers.

## Summary

---

### **Strengths:**

- Staff from the health liaison and diversion scheme attend the OOCd panel to identify potential emotional and mental health needs and provide a pathway to appropriate services.
- There is good delivery of interventions for desistance and safety and wellbeing. These are delivered quickly by skilled staff.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- Work to protect victims did not have a strong enough focus. Assessment, planning and reviewing failed to concentrate on keeping them safe.
- Decision-making for OOCds is not a joint process or informed by an assessment of need and risks.
- Risk of harm to others is not sufficiently identified, assessed, planned for or responded to.
- The potential disproportionality in the OOCd scheme needs to be understood better and for identified issues to be addressed.



## Annex 1 – Methodology

---

The inspection methodology is summarised below, linked to the three domains within our standards framework. Our focus was upon obtaining evidence against the standards, key questions and prompts within the framework.

### **Domain One: Organisational delivery**

The youth offending service submitted evidence in advance and the Chair of the Partnership and Performance Board delivered a presentation covering the following areas:

- How do organisational delivery arrangements in this area make sure that the work of your YOS is as effective as it can be, and that the life chances of children and young people who have offended are improved?
- What are your priorities for further improving these arrangements?

During the main fieldwork phase, we surveyed 11 individual case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. Various meetings and focus groups were then held, allowing us to triangulate evidence and information.

### **Domain two: court disposals**

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. Sixty per cent of the cases selected were those of children and young people who had received court disposals six to nine months earlier, enabling us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place.

We examined 24 post-court cases. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

### **Domain three: out-of-court disposals**

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. Forty per cent of cases selected were those of children and young people who had received OOCs three to five months earlier. This enabled us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and joint working. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place.

We examined 14 OOCs. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

## Annex 2 – Inspection results

---

### 1. Organisational delivery

Standards and key questions	Rating
<p><b>1.1. Governance and leadership</b></p> <p>The governance and leadership of the YOS supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people.</p> <p>1.1.1. Is there a clear local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people?</p> <p>1.1.2. Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?</p> <p>1.1.3. Does the leadership of the YOS support effective service delivery?</p>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
<p><b>1.2. Staff</b></p> <p>Staff within the YOS are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people.</p> <p>1.2.1. Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people?</p> <p>1.2.2. Do the skills of YOS staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people?</p> <p>1.2.3. Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?</p> <p>1.2.4. Are arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?</p>	<b>Requires improvement</b>

---

<p><b>1.3. Partnerships and services</b></p> <p>A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children and young people.</p>	<p><b>Good</b></p>
<p>1.3.1. Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children and young people, to ensure that the YOS can deliver well-targeted services?</p> <p>1.3.2. Does the YOS partnership have access to the volume, range and quality of services and interventions to meet the needs of all children and young people?</p> <p>1.3.3. Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?</p>	
<p><b>1.4. Information and facilities</b></p> <p>Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children and young people.</p>	<p><b>Requires improvement</b></p>
<p>1.4.1. Are the necessary policies and guidance in place to enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all children and young people?</p> <p>1.4.2. Does the YOS's delivery environment(s) meet the needs of all children and young people and enable staff to deliver a quality service?</p> <p>1.4.3. Do the information and communication technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all children and young people?</p> <p>1.4.4. Is analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?</p>	

## 2. Court disposals

Standards and key questions	Rating and % yes
<b>2.1. Assessment</b> Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	<b>Requires improvement</b>
2.1.1. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child or young person's desistance?	88%
2.1.2. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child or young person safe?	71%
2.1.3. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	50%
<b>2.2. Planning</b> Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	<b>Requires improvement</b>
2.2.1. Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child or young person's desistance?	87%
2.2.2. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?	64%
2.2.3. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%
<b>2.3. Implementation and delivery</b> High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child or young person.	<b>Good</b>
2.3.1. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child or young person's desistance?	95%
2.3.2. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child or young person?	86%
2.3.3. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	75%

<b>2.4. Reviewing</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	
2.4.1. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child or young person's desistance?	79%
2.4.2. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?	67%
2.4.3. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	59%

### 3. Out-of-court disposals

Standards and key questions	Rating and % yes
<b>3.1. Assessment</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	
3.1.1. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child or young person's desistance?	86%
3.1.2. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child or young person safe?	36%
3.1.3. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	36%
<b>3.2. Planning</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.	
3.2.1. Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child or young person's desistance?	100%
3.2.2. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?	60%
3.2.3. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	44%

<b>3.3. Implementation and delivery</b> High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child or young person.	<b>Inadequate</b>
3.3.1. Does service delivery support the child or young person's desistance?	93%
3.3.2. Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child or young person?	100%
3.3.3. Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	44%
<b>3.4. Joint working</b> Joint working with the police supports the delivery of high-quality, personalised and coordinated services.	<b>Requires improvement</b>
3.4.1. Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child or young person, supporting joint decision-making?	50%
3.4.2. Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal?	75%

## Annex 3 – Glossary

<b>AssetPlus Asset+</b>	Assessment and planning framework tool developed by the Youth Justice Board for work with children and young people who have offended, or are at risk of offending, that reflects current research and understanding of what works with children.
<b>ALTAR™</b>	Abuse, Loss, Trauma, Attachment and Resilience research commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority to inform regional reform of the youth justice system.
<b>Community resolution</b>	Used in low-level, often first-time, offences where there is informal agreement, often also involving the victim, about how the offence should be resolved. Community resolution is a generic term. In practice, many different local terms are used to mean the same thing.
<b>Court disposals</b>	The sentence imposed by the court. Examples of youth court disposals are referral orders, youth rehabilitation orders and detention and training orders.
<b>CSE</b>	Child sexual exploitation, is a type of child abuse, occurring when a child or young person is encouraged, forced or manipulated to take part in sexual activity for something in return, for example presents, drugs, alcohol or emotional attention. Criminal exploitation occurs when children and young people are exploited, forced or coerced into committing crimes.
<b>Desistance</b>	The cessation of offending or other antisocial behaviour.
<b>Enforcement</b>	Action taken by a case manager in response to a child or young person's failure to comply with the actions specified as part of a community sentence or licence. Enforcement can be punitive or motivational.
<b>LA</b>	Local authority: YOTs are often a team within a specific local authority.
<b>NEET</b>	Children or young people not in any form of full or part-time education, training or employment.
<b>Out-of-Court Disposal (O OCD)</b>	The resolution of a normally low-level offence, where it is not in the public interest to prosecute, through a community resolution, youth caution or youth conditional caution.

<b>Personalised</b>	A personalised approach is one in which services are tailored to meet the needs of individuals, giving people as much choice and control as possible over the support they receive. We use this term to include diversity factors.
<b>Risk of Serious Harm</b>	Risk of Serious Harm (ROSH) is a term used in AssetPlus. All cases are classified as presenting either a low, medium, high or very high risk of serious harm to others. HMI Probation uses this term when referring to the classification system, but uses the broader term risk of harm when referring to the analysis that should take place in order to determine the classification level. This helps to clarify the distinction between the probability of an event occurring and the impact/severity of the event. The term Risk of Serious Harm only incorporates 'serious' impact, whereas using 'risk of harm' enables the necessary attention to be given to those young offenders for whom lower impact/severity harmful behaviour is probable.
<b>RO</b>	Referral order: a restorative court order that can be imposed when the child or young person appearing before the court pleads guilty, and whereby the threshold for a youth rehabilitation order is not met.
<b>Virtual school</b>	<p>In Walsall, the virtual schools are responsible for liaising and working in partnership with agencies to support the education of looked after/vulnerable children.</p> <p>The virtual school for looked after children is not a teaching institution. It is a model by which the local authority provides services and support for the education of looked after children. In Walsall, the education for children and young people known to the YJS has been added to this model.</p>
<b>Safeguarding</b>	Safeguarding is a wider term than child protection. It involves promoting a child or young person's health and development and ensuring that their overall welfare needs are met.
<b>Safety and Well-being</b>	AssetPlus replaced the assessment of vulnerability with a holistic outlook of a child or young person's safety and well-being concerns. It is defined as "...those outcomes where the young person's safety and well-being may be compromised through their own behaviour, personal circumstances or because of the acts/omissions of others" ( <i>AssetPlus Guidance</i> , 2016).
<b>YOT/YOS</b>	Youth Offending Team is the term used in the <i>Crime and Disorder Act 1998</i> to describe a multi-



	agency team that aims to reduce youth offending. YOTs are known locally by many titles, such as youth justice service (YJS), youth offending service (YOS), and other generic titles that may illustrate their wider role in the local area in delivering services for children.
<b>YOT Management Board</b>	The YOT Management Board holds the YOT to account to ensure it achieves the primary aim of preventing offending by children and young people.
<b>YJS</b>	Walsall Youth Justice Service.



HM Inspectorate of Probation  
1 Bridge Street West  
Civil Justice Centre  
Manchester  
M3 3FX

ISBN: 978-1-84099-878-8