



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

Speech

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Association of Youth Offending Team Managers

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It's a real privilege to have been appointed as Chief Inspector of Probation to succeed Glenys Stacey and I've already learnt a lot in my first four months in post.

Although we are called Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, we do of course also inspect youth offending teams and I'm keen to raise the profile and impact of the work we do in this area.

Having been in at the birth of the Youth Justice Board and Youth Offending Teams in the late 1990s when working at the Home Office as a policy adviser to Jack Straw, I'm very pleased to see that the YOT model is still going strong after 20 years and several changes of government.

But that shouldn't be a surprise. After all, common sense tells us that an effective response to youth offending has to involve a multi-agency partnership that brings together every service with an interest in the behaviour and well-being of this challenging and often vulnerable group of children.

And our inspections show that effective work by YOTs can make a real difference. Research we published last Friday based on over 4,000 cases from our last cycle of inspections, clearly shows that for cases where there has been effective YOT planning, reductions in risk of harm were significantly greater than for cases where this hadn't been the case – even allowing for variations in caseload and levels of deprivation in an area.

If anything, that need for quality YOT assessment and planning has become even more essential, as YOT caseloads have shrunk and the children that do remain on your books show an ever more concentrated set of needs.

Annual review of YOT performance

Over the past year we been assessing the quality of that work against a new set of inspection standards and overall ratings. By the end of September, we had published 26 local inspection reports based on these new standards. In the course of those inspections we examined over 1200 cases and interviewed over 1,000 YOT case managers.

Each of these inspections looks at performance against 12 quality standards, developed after extensive consultation with those working in the field, with these standards falling under these three key headings – or what we call ‘domains’.

The quality of organisational delivery – leadership, staffing, premises, services

And the quality of case supervision for both cases processed through the courts and for those dealt with as out of court disposals.

Yesterday, we published a summary of what these reports have shown so far.

So, what have been the key messages?

In terms of overall ratings, we found a wide spread of performance, with just over half of the YOTs we have inspected rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and the remainder as ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’. Particular congratulations to East Riding YOT who scored outstanding ratings across board on all 12 of our quality standards.

Digging beneath these headlines we find a variation in performance across the different standards we look at.

We rated almost two thirds of YOTs, for example, as good or outstanding on leadership and on staffing with my inspectors finding many staff deeply committed to their work and skilled at engaging with the young people in their caseload. In sharp contrast to adult probation services, all of the staff that we spoke to said that their caseloads were manageable.

We were also impressed with the range of services on offer at many YOTs - particularly in relation to healthcare, with embedded CAMHS workers, for example, generally helping to ensure that young people on the YOT caseload can get rapid access to mental health support – though delays remain in some areas. A number of YOTS are also now employing speech and language therapists as they come to realise the links between challenging behaviours and the difficulties some young people have in communicating their needs or understanding the terms of their sentence plans.

Some areas, however, were of more concern.

We were disappointed, in particular, at the lack of effective education or training provision for a significant number of children – some of whom were receiving only a few hours of education a week or even none at all. In one area, we found YOT staff had even resorted to trying to teach children, who had been excluded from school, themselves – which wasn’t ideal.

And attempts by local YOTs to lobby for better provision have been hampered by the lack of senior education representatives on your management boards. Eight of the YOTs we’ve inspected in the last year had no education representative on their board and attendance at others can be sporadic.

Resettlement from YOIs

We have also been very disappointed at the support and services provided to young people leaving custody and at the lack of progress in this area since the last time we looked at resettlement from YOIs four years ago.

In a separate report published last week, we summarised the results of a detailed inspection conducted with colleagues from HMI Prisons, of outcomes for 50 young people released

from all five YOIs at the end of last year and beginning of this, particularly during their first three months back in the community.

The quality of support offered to some of this cohort was shameful.

Time and again this difficult but also vulnerable and traumatised group of boys is being let down. Let down by case supervisors in custody and their local council's children's social care departments.

But let down by YOTs too.

Pre-release planning was happening too little, too late in custody. YOT workers were failing to advocate for the young people in their care. Key outside agencies like social work, health and education providers weren't turning up for planning meetings in custody. And neither were families.

Only 11 out of the 50 children we followed had education provision to go into after release; less than half of the children who needed continuing drug or alcohol services got it in the community and of the 37 cases we judged needed input from children's social care but only six got it.

Worst of all was the position for looked after children – the 18 out of our sample of 50 who couldn't return to their family home, who often received little outside contact in custody and all too often didn't know where they would be living until 10 days before release.

For some of these children, the reality of resettlement planning was a mad scramble by their local authority, just days before release, to find an out of area placement, often many miles from their home town.

That made it difficult not just for their family but for their home town YOT case manager, who would also have to travel many miles to see the young person for whom they retained responsibility.

Delays in arranging accommodation, meant delays in other services too – most of which cannot be organised until a new home address is finalised.

This case study was typical:

“Liam was 16 years old when he was sentenced to 14 months in custody.

During his life, he had been in and out of local authority care, and before custody had been in supported accommodation. He wanted to return to his home area, as he had been committed to his education there and wanted to be near his family and his community.

Liam was one of the children we saw whose accommodation was not found until just weeks before he was released. At the point where it seemed likely that he would be kept in custody past his early release date, entirely due to a lack of accommodation, the YOI involved an advocate (from the charity Barnardo's).

The accommodation found for him however was in a different region of the country, miles away from his family, where he knew no one. There were no visits by the accommodation provider to meet him before his release.

Liam had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome following a car accident and had entered custody with a broken leg. He had struggled with his mental health for some time and had tied a ligature around his neck in his cell

previously. When we met him in custody, however, he told us that he had started to feel much calmer. The YOI internal mental health services had been involved with Liam, and he felt that they had really helped him. He was seen weekly by them and this work was actively supported by his YOI case manager and the external YOT.

Unfortunately, no arrangements were in place to continue this work on release. At the time of our inspection Liam had been missing for some time, was in breach of his licence and, accordingly, the court had issued a warrant for his arrest”.

Liam’s story is not untypical. Only one of the looked after children we followed returned to the same accommodation they were in before custody and none of the children going into new accommodation met anyone from their new home before they were released.

The net result of all this in terms of outcomes for these young people were no surprise. Within 3 months of release, half of the sample of 50 were already in further trouble with the police; 10 had a further conviction and 6 had gone missing altogether.

This simply isn’t good enough. You and your colleagues in children’s services and the NHS are under a statutory obligation to provide support to these young people coming out of YOIs and too often the service provided falls well short of what’s needed.

Out of court disposals

Our third area of concern, was at the opposite end of the spectrum, in relation to the out of court disposal cases.

This year, for the first time, we have been inspecting the quality of supervision of these cases as well as those coming to YOTs through the courts. That’s important because they are making up an increasing proportion of your workload – a majority in fact for at least 14 of the services we’ve reported on in the past year.

Over the last 12 months we’ve looked at the quality of supervision of over 500 out of court cases, taking a detailed look at the case files but also interviewing relevant case managers.

Whilst we did find some areas of good practice, with 17 services scoring good or outstanding on their joint working arrangements with police and other agencies, in general, scores for this cohort were lower than for court cases.

So, for example, we rated ten services as ‘inadequate’ on the quality of assessment of out of court disposals and 17 as ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ on planning.

Within this out of court disposal cohort, there was also a clear distinction between the quality of work undertaken with young people given a youth conditional caution and those dealt with entirely informally through a community resolution approach.

We found, for example, that the quality of planning to manage the risk of harm to others, was sufficient for 80% of the YCC cases, but only 43% of the community resolution cases.

Within the overall sample of out of court cases we inspected, drawn at random within each YOT, we found two fifths had been dealt with by a YCC and the same proportion by community resolution. These proportions however varied significantly between YOTs. Some had no community resolution cases in the sample we looked at, and some were entirely made up of these types of case.

This variation in turn reflects the wide variation in how local areas have chosen to apply their out of court disposal process, which has resulted in big variations in the way that local police deal with low level youth offending.

While some areas we felt were too punitive, others appeared to set no limit on the number of times a young person could be diverted from a formal caution or prosecution or there seemed to be confusion between YOTs and police as to how many out of court disposals were appropriate.

We are aiming to produce our own effective practice guide on what good quality assessment, planning and supervision looks like in relation to these types of case, but it is not the Inspectorate's role to set policy in this area and there appears to be a critical lack of national guidance.

If local YOTs do decide to work with non-statutory community resolution cases, then we would expect that work to be of sufficient quality to make a difference. Although we have been clear that, the application of full AssetPlus assessments to these community resolution cases is not essential, there does nevertheless need to be a thorough approach to assessing their needs and risks.

Though the offences this group have committed may be minor, that doesn't mean they don't have significant needs or don't present risks to themselves or others, which may need to be addressed. So, for example, our inspectors assessed almost 40% of the sample of community resolution cases we looked at to be medium or high risk; almost half had a substance abuse issue; almost a quarter had a mental health need and 1 in 10 had been subject to a Child Protection Plan or section 47 enquiry during the sentence period we were inspecting.

Having said all that, I do recognise that there is a debate to had about how best to inspect community resolution cases and the standards we should apply.

So, with the first year of a four-year inspection cycle complete, it feels like an appropriate time to review how the framework is working – not just in relation to out of court cases but our other standards too.

The scope of that review will include the standards we apply, the methodology and ratings we use and our approach to recommendations and effective practice.

We will be launching an external consultation early next year once a revised set of standards has been developed and we will be asking Andy if the AYM would coordinate your views for us.

We also want to look at the joint inspections we undertake with colleagues from other inspectorates and the approach we take to inspections of small YOTs following the pilots we will be running this Autumn.

FTE rates and working with 18 year olds

Finally, a couple of thoughts on some other issues raised by our YOT inspections.

First, I was surprised to see that we could find no correlation at all between our overall ratings for the quality of YOT services and the first-time entry rate data for each area. Two of the YOTs with the lowest FTE rates also came out with our lowest overall rating of 'inadequate'. Which raises for me the question of whether FTE rates are really the best way of measuring the work that local areas are doing to prevent youth crime. Should we be thinking of a wider basket of measures which captures a broader range of risks and

outcomes for young people? How about NHS admissions for assault or drug related harms to under 18s, for example, or the proportion of YOT caseloads who are not in education or training?

My second observation is about the extreme cliff edge in supervision and support that young people in your caseload can face as they transition to adult probation services. We found some appalling examples of this in our resettlement study for children turning 18 in custody, but it applies to community cases as well. Where a young person is handed over to CRC probation supervision, for example, they may be moving from a case manager with a caseload of 13 or 14 to a PSO with a caseload of over 70. There may be a parallel loss of access to specialist services as well as they lose access to embedded CAMHs or speech and language support and join the queues for adult services along with everyone else. If there is capacity available within YOTs to take on new types of work – as the move into out of court disposal work suggests there may be – could this include working with 18 or 19 year olds as well as your current age group?

I look forward to your thoughts and questions. Thanks again for the work that you and your teams do – you play a hugely important role in turning around the lives of some very vulnerable young people.