



Her Majesty's  
Inspectorate of  
Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

# Croydon

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HM Inspectorate of Probation

DECEMBER 2019

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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. HMI Probation was joined by colleague inspectors from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), Care Quality Commission (CQC), social care and education. 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.

Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

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# Contents

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|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Foreword</b> .....                     | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Overall findings</b> .....             | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Summary of ratings</b> .....           | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Recommendations</b> .....              | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b> .....                 | <b>10</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 .....                           | 15        |
| 1.3 Partnerships and services .....       | 16        |
| 1.4 Information and facilities.....       | 20        |
| <b>2. Court disposals</b> .....           | <b>23</b> |
| 2.1 Assessment .....                      | 23        |
| 2.2 Planning.....                         | 24        |
| 2.3 Implementation and delivery .....     | 26        |
| 2.4 Reviewing .....                       | 28        |
| <b>3. Out-of-court disposals</b> .....    | <b>30</b> |
| 3.1 Assessment .....                      | 30        |
| 3.2 Planning.....                         | 31        |
| 3.3 Implementation and delivery .....     | 32        |
| 3.4 Joint working.....                    | 33        |
| <b>Annex 1 – Methodology</b> .....        | <b>35</b> |
| <b>Annex 2 – Inspection results</b> ..... | <b>36</b> |
| <b>Annex 3 – Glossary</b> .....           | <b>42</b> |

## Foreword

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This inspection is part of our programme of youth offending service (YOS) inspections, and is one of six inspections in the past year conducted jointly with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMCFRS) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). We have inspected and rated Croydon YOS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery, and the quality of court disposals work and out-of-court disposals work. We have rated Croydon YOS as 'Requires improvement'.

Croydon YOS has worked well with partners to try to keep children and young people and the public safe from serious youth violence and the effects of gang violence. This inspection highlighted some very good aspects of practice, including the consistently high quality of assessments. The YOS offers a wide range of interventions to reduce reoffending and keep people safe, including effective links with schools, health providers and, importantly, community organisations.

Managers and staff in the YOS know the needs of children and young people well, working in a flexible way to meet their needs. The staff team is stable, well trained and committed.

The work of the YOS, and our subsequent ratings, have been affected however by two key issues.

First, although senior leaders recognise the need for effective joint work between the YOS and Croydon Children's Social Care (CSC) to keep children safe, the practice at an operational level is mixed. At its best, joint work provides children and young people with an effective safety net, with professionals taking timely actions to mitigate the identified risks to children and young people. However, in other cases we found that inadequate practice in children's social care left the YOS in a difficult position in trying to keep them and the public safe, with the YOS having to manage these risks by itself. A range of improvements to children's social care in Croydon are being taken forward. These need to embed and mature, and this should lead to better service provision.

Second, we noted that children and young people known to the YOS are much more likely than others in the borough not to have education, training or employment opportunities once they turn 16. It is well known that being in education, training or employment is critical in supporting desistance.

The new chair of the Management Board is focused on these issues, and has a clear understanding and commitment to support existing good YOS practice and rectify the issues identified during this inspection. I am confident that a 'Good' rating is well within its grasp in the future.



**Justin Russell**  
Chief Inspector of Probation

## Overall findings

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Overall, Croydon Youth Offending Service (YOS) is rated as: **Requires improvement**. This rating has been determined by inspecting the youth offending services in three domains of their work. The findings in those domains are described below.



### Organisational delivery

We undertook this inspection over a two-week period in July 2019. The first week consisted of detailed assessments of 71 cases and interviews with the case managers. During the second week we were joined by inspectors from HMICFRS, CQC and specialists in social care and education, training and employment. We interviewed the YJS service manager and chair of the Management Board, and held focus groups with other members of the Board and other key stakeholders.

Based on this evidence, our key findings about organisational delivery are:

#### Strengths:

- The service has a stable, committed, skilled and well-trained staff group. Most partnerships are effective and provide services to support desistance
- There is a wide range of interventions to reduce risk and reoffending, and most are certified by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA)
- The partnership with the police supports the management and reduction of serious youth violence and knife crime
- Children and young people are supported to remain in school; if they need to move, this is done quickly
- There are good links with community organisations to support children and young people to lead crime-free lives in the long term.

But:

- The work of the partnership to keep children safe is affected by the inadequacies of children's social care, and the full extent of this is not recognised. Children's social care is a critical partner, given the nature of serious youth violence, criminal exploitation and the known vulnerabilities of this cohort of children and young people
- A third of children and young people known to the YOS are not in post-16 education, employment or training. This is a much higher percentage than in the general population. Data gathering is undertaken too late to be of practical use.



## Court disposals

We took a detailed look at the cases of 43 children and young people managed by the YOS who had received a court disposal six to nine months before we visited. Based on an analysis of these case files and interviews with the relevant case managers, our key findings about court disposals are:

### Strengths:

- We found consistently good work in the assessment and management of children and young people on court orders. Work to support children and young people to stop offending was the strongest area of practice. Reoffending rates are still high, but are showing signs of improvement
- Case management starts well, with accurate, well-informed and analytical assessments. Planning follows need, and personalised services are then delivered
- Children and young people benefit from a wide range of universal, targeted and specialist services and interventions
- The children and young people we spoke to were positive about the support they received and were able to give examples of how they had been helped
- There is good joint work between the specialist workers and case managers
- There is good use of community support groups as part of ongoing work which forms the basis of exit planning
- There is a good understanding of the individual needs of children and young people, and work is adapted to meet these needs.

But:

- Planning to manage risk of harm is good but is the lowest performing area of practice
- There is inconsistent support from children's social care, with a lack of effective escalation processes.



## Out-of-court disposals

We reviewed the cases of 28 children and young people managed by the YOS who had received an out-of-court resolution at least three to five months before we visited. Based on an analysis of these case files and interviews with the relevant case managers and, where necessary, others significantly involved in the case, our key findings about out-of-court disposals are:

### Strengths:

- There are clear processes to administer the out-of-court disposal scheme, with timely information sharing with the police
- Assessment, planning and interventions are reviewed by an operational manager and practice supervisor

- All cases are assessed for appropriate intervention
- The new format for assessment is detailed and covers all key areas of desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of serious harm
- The YOS and partners provide a wide range of services and interventions for children and young people.

But:

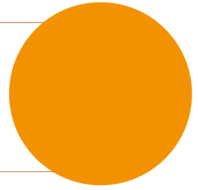
- The quality of assessment and planning, using a new assessment and planning format, needs to be embedded
- The information given to children and young people and their parents/carers is inaccurate and does not specify the voluntary nature of interventions
- Communication and joint work with children's social care needs to improve to safeguard children and young people better
- Assessments and interventions should be timely and recorded.

Service: Croydon Youth Justice Service

Fieldwork started: July 2019

Overall rating

Requires improvement



### 1. Organisational delivery

|     |                            |                      |  |
|-----|----------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1.1 | Governance and leadership  | Requires improvement |  |
| 1.2 | Staff                      | Good                 |  |
| 1.3 | Partnerships and services  | Requires improvement |  |
| 1.4 | Information and facilities | Requires improvement |  |

### 2. Court disposals

|     |                             |              |  |
|-----|-----------------------------|--------------|--|
| 2.1 | Assessment                  | Outstanding* |  |
| 2.2 | Planning                    | Good         |  |
| 2.3 | Implementation and delivery | Good         |  |
| 2.4 | Reviewing                   | Good         |  |

### 3. Out-of-court disposals

|     |                             |            |  |
|-----|-----------------------------|------------|--|
| 3.1 | Assessment                  | Inadequate |  |
| 3.2 | Planning                    | Inadequate |  |
| 3.3 | Implementation and delivery | Inadequate |  |
| 3.4 | Joint working               | Good       |  |



## Recommendations

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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 Croydon. This will improve the lives of the children and young people in contact with youth offending services, and better protect the public.

### **The Youth Crime Board should:**

1. monitor the performance of current partnerships to develop well-informed learning programmes that reduce the number of children and young people who are not in education, employment and training.

### **The Youth Offending Team Manager should:**

2. provide clear information to parents/carers and children and young people on the voluntary nature of out-of-court disposals and the consequences of non-compliance
3. monitor and evaluate the quality of assessment, planning and delivery of interventions to children and young people on out-of-court disposals.

### **The Director of Children's Services should:**

4. ensure that children and young people known to the YOS are protected through accurate assessment of their needs, thorough effective joint working with Croydon Children's Social Care and the provision of effective interventions by that service.

## Introduction

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Youth offending services (YOSs) 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, being dealt with out of court. HMI Probation inspects both these aspects of YOSs.

YOSs are statutory multidisciplinary partnerships that deal with the needs of the whole child. They are required to include staff from local authority social care and education, the police, the National Probation Service and local health services.<sup>1</sup> Most YOSs are based within local authorities, although this can vary.

YOS 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, MAPPAs, guidance). The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) provides some funding to YOSs. It also monitors their performance, and issues guidance to them about how things are to be done.

Croydon Youth Offending Service (YOS) is the largest service in London by throughput, with 544 children and young people in the borough cautioned or sentenced in 2018 – over 10 per cent of the total for London. Croydon is a complex, diverse and busy London borough. It has the largest population in London of children aged 10–17 years old (39,334), of who 54 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Approximately a fifth of children come from low-income families. There are high levels of vulnerability for adolescents, including child exploitation, domestic abuse and those who go missing from home, care and education. Croydon has established a service specifically for adolescents, as a means to safeguard children and young people who are at risk from people outside the family home. These risks are not easily managed by traditional child protection systems. At the time of the inspection, the YOS was supervising 141 children on statutory court orders, 60 on an out-of-court disposal and 10 young people who were in youth custody.

### **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 high-quality services. We are independent of government, and speak independently.

### **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>

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

<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)

394

Croydon <sup>3</sup>

236

England and  
Wales <sup>3</sup>

**Reoffending rates**

48.6%

Croydon <sup>4</sup>

39.2%

England and  
Wales <sup>4</sup>

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

#### Age (years)

#### 10-14

#### 15-17

Croydon

19%

81%

National average

24%

76%

#### Race/ethnicity

#### White

#### Black and minority ethnic

#### Unknown

Croydon

22%

69%

9%

National average

71%

26%

4%

#### Gender

#### Male

#### Female

Croydon

88%

12%

National average

84%

16%



### Population information

**385,346**

Total population of Croydon <sup>6</sup>

**39,334**

Total youth population of Croydon <sup>6</sup>

**20,687**

Total black and minority ethnic youth population of Croydon <sup>7</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Youth Justice Board. (2019). *First-time entrants, January to December 2018*.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice. (2019). *Proven reoffending statistics, October 2016 to September 2017*.

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

<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2019). *UK population estimates mid-2018*.

<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. |                      |

Croydon aspires to be a safe place for all children and young people, especially those who are known to the YOS. There is a clear local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children and young people in contact with the YOS. This is driven and supported by senior leaders and lead members. The YOS has a strong service manager who is well regarded by the Management Board and is an effective advocate for the service. However, effective YOS delivery is held back by a legacy of problems with Croydon Children’s Social Care (CSC), rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted in 2017.<sup>8</sup> This means that escalation and challenge to social care are not always effective, leading to blurred roles and responsibilities, and confusion. As a result, we judge that this aspect of organisational delivery still requires improvement.

In the main, the governance and leadership of the YOS ensures that children and young people receive good support to help them desist from crime. The Management Board is aware of the difficulties faced by CSC and its work to support the YOS, knowing it is only part-way through a significant improvement programme.

The Youth Crime Board (YCB) governs the work of the YOS and is linked effectively to other key Boards, including the crime reduction partnership and the Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Board (CSCB). The CSCB commissioned a vulnerable adolescents thematic review,<sup>9</sup> which has aided the development of services and given the partnership a shared objective. This is being monitored through the vulnerable adolescents priority group. The Youth Justice Plan includes actions to reduce the risk of children and young people becoming involved in crime and serious youth violence, and provides access to support and help at the earliest possible stage as a prevention strategy. Work with the police on the gangs unit and the youth Integrated Offender Management (IOM) scheme are good examples of joint work to protect children and young people.

The YOS team is located in the adolescence services structure and is an example of trying to meet the safeguarding needs of this group of young people.

The newly appointed YCB chair has reviewed the role and function of the Board. He has recently tried to strengthen membership of key partners, including health service

<sup>8</sup> London Borough of Croydon, Ofsted, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> The *Vulnerable Adolescents Review*, published in February 2019, was commissioned following serious case reviews into the deaths of three teenage boys in 2017. It is based on the experiences of 60 young people involved with the YOS.

providers, at an appropriate level. Education representatives on the Board do not currently have sufficient seniority.

We found several examples of effective partnership arrangements in Croydon, where Board membership has resulted in a positive contribution to the work of the YOS. These include partnerships with representatives from the local community sector. Many of those involved with the YOS have witnessed and experienced deaths, including friends and family who have been murdered.

Support for children and young people to remain in mainstream schools is very good. Unlike our findings from some other inspections of London boroughs, we found that children and young people in Croydon did not necessarily lose their school place if they were found in possession of a knife. Instead, we saw effective work to transfer pupils to other schools quickly, to minimise disruption and understand the reasons behind the possession of knives. Effective working with schools and alternative education providers has ensured that the large majority of children aged 10–16 years receive their full education entitlement. This has helped them make good progress in improving their personal development, behaviours and attitudes, with many (60 per cent) continuing their education in mainstream schools.

Health providers also provide effective services to children and young people. The YOS manager applied for and secured funding to employ speech and language therapists, who undertake excellent assessments of children and young people's levels of understanding and communication and are able to make links to how these affect reoffending. This is particularly helpful in identifying when the individual's use of violence is due to their inability to express themselves or talk themselves out of situations. Off The Record, a registered charity that is part of the youth counselling service in Croydon, offers free confidential sessions to those who have lost someone through serious youth violence or sudden death. Children and young people can access this service independently and receive a range of ongoing support.

#### Good practice example

Children and young people benefit from a thorough initial assessment, which includes a speech and language assessment and an assessment of their understanding of 'time' and time management. Individualised activities support children and young people to develop their communication and time management skills well. As a result, those who have previously breached their order by arriving late for appointments have changed their attitudes and behaviours and are now compliant.

There is a well-established response to the issues of gangs and serious youth violence. Joint YOS-police strategies are having a positive impact. Rates of knife crime and serious youth violence are decreasing.<sup>10</sup> The work of the gangs partnership is having good results, helping to divert those at risk of gang involvement from such activities. The youth IOM scheme is focused on children and young people who commit violent crime and drug offences. The scheme provides additional oversight and support to manage and address the risk of serious harm.

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<sup>10</sup> Information provided by the YOS.

The YOS manager is well regarded by the Board, and is a strong advocate for the service. He has provided good reports to the Board and worked with it to retain services, including maintaining the YOS budget.

Team managers have attended, and given presentations to, the Board about key areas of practice. The wider staff team are not well sighted on the work of the Board, but are aware that their annual appraisals are linked to meeting its priorities.

The respective roles and responsibilities of the YOS and CSC have been defined at a strategic level, although service delivery remains inconsistent. Escalation and challenge to social care are not always effective.

The development of strategy and services in the YOS is heavily influenced by the service improvement of CSC, which was rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted in 2017. The CSC is following an extensive improvement plan.

The redesign of children's services has brought several opportunities to improve and develop the partnership approach to meeting the needs of this group of children and young people; however, when this inspection took place many of these improvements were newly implemented and it was too soon to see their impact. The development of the adolescents service is one such example.

YOS staff are trying to fill the gap of an inadequate children's social care service to meet the needs of the children and young people, but this sometimes leads to confusion. The YOS has developed numerous 'work-arounds' to cover elements of ineffective practice in CSC. Roles and responsibilities are blurred, and there is insufficient knowledge in the YOS of statutory processes to provide effective challenge. This situation had developed over time and the YOS has learned that there is little point in escalating issues to social care, despite attempts to do so. The following is an example.

*Inspectors sat in on the YOS-led multi-agency risk management panel for a 15-year-old boy on a referral order. He was on a child protection plan, for neglect and emotional abuse, and was known to be depressed. He had taken on the responsibility for caring for his mum, who had mental health problems, and his seven-year-old brother. The boy's social worker was expected at the meeting but did not attend. The multi-agency panel discussed mum's recent disclosure of domestic abuse from the boy's father, who no longer lived in the family home but had daily contact with the children. All professionals were aware of the disclosure.*

*The discussion in the panel focused on additional actions that the YOS caseworker could take – but, in accordance with Croydon safeguarding processes, a child protection strategy meeting should have taken place to assess the new risk to both children. The YOS had the best intentions, to try to put in place additional services for the 15-year-old; however, this could and should not have replaced a statutory responsibility of children's social care. The YOS's process of escalation was to phone the relevant social care manager and follow up in an email, and to send the minutes of the discussion to the social worker's manager. This could have taken time, however, and as both boys had started the school holidays, they did not have a critical aspect of their safety plan in place. A strategy meeting was arranged following intervention by the inspector.*

Case managers and social workers do not demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the key themes from local serious case reviews. This means the YOS and CSC cannot be confident that learning from reviews informs workers practice. Some of the weaknesses in joint working reported in this inspection reflected some of the themes identified in local reviews – such as missed opportunities for intervention, absence of professional challenge, and lack of a consistent understanding and application of thresholds and challenges during transfers between services/teams.

The proportion of children and young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) was too high, and substantially above that for Croydon and for London overall. The NEET rate in Croydon generally is 2.8 per cent; for children in the YOS, it is around 30 per cent. The Board was aware of some of this information, but not in sufficient detail. This figure was calculated by a specialist education, training and employment (ETE) HMI Probation inspector, as NEET rates for children and young people are not monitored by the Director of Education or senior leaders. Education was a youth justice priority action for the Board and the Safer Croydon partnership.

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

The management team recognises that the relationships between staff and service users are critical to effective work. Croydon YOS has invested in its staff, providing them with training and support that allows them to work well with children and young people and partner agencies.

Staffing of the YOS is a strength. Unusually for London, Croydon YOS has been able to recruit and retain a stable and experienced staff team. The YOS manager recently undertook a review of pay and conditions. Wages are comparable with those at other London YOTs but the better training and development opportunities in Croydon are attractive to staff.

Workloads for YOS and partnership staff are reasonable, given the nature of the cases that staff hold, and have reduced over the previous 12 months. Workloads are actively managed, and work can be allocated between the pre- and post-court teams to manage any increase in caseload and cover for leave and absence. The Board is updated on caseloads at each meeting. In our staff survey, 92 per cent of staff said that they were comfortable with their workloads.

Staff are motivated and committed to improving the lives of children and young people, helping them to desist from offending and keeping them safe. During interviews, staff displayed good knowledge of the children and young people – much better than was evident from the case recording.

Practitioners do not have to hold a social work qualification. All had relevant experience of working with children and young people, and some had been youth workers, police officers or teachers. Having at least one qualified and experienced social worker in a social work post would assist the YOS's understanding of social work practice. Several YOS workers had worked at other youth offending services, so brought that knowledge with them.

Resourcing from the police is good and covers a range of policing activity, including gangs, IOM and the provision of YOS police officers. This is in response to the levels of serious youth violence. Partners provide a range of specialist workers to support the work of the YOS. These workers are well regarded and fully integrated into the service.

All staff have access to a wide range of generic and specialist training, including recent training in trauma and adverse childhood experiences. Joint training across the partners is available and used, including that provided by the Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Board (CSCB). The service makes an active contribution to the London in-service training (INSET) programme, and can influence the training agenda.


The skills and diversity of the staff team meet the needs of children and young people well, and the team is representative of the community. There are several career progression opportunities. A senior practitioner role has been created to give staff the management and professional development experience not easily available in a stable staff team.

Although management oversight of work is frequent and detailed, this does not always lead to the requested actions being undertaken, particularly in the out-of-court disposal cases. Managers do not always follow up on the actions they ask to be taken. Staff feel well supported, however, and comment that they always have access to managers.

Good work is recognised and celebrated by YOS managers, including nominating staff for the Butler Trust<sup>11</sup> awards. Staff have various opportunities to share practice, including through team and service-wide meetings.

Learning needs are identified for staff via appraisals, supervision and staff requests. Role-specific training is available, including training for volunteers and sessional staff.

Case managers report receiving regular supervision, and the case files we saw reflected management oversight of work. Workers said they have opportunities to reflect on practice through case supervision and workshops, some of which are multi-agency.

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

We found some very good partnerships and services, although the ability of the YOS to keep children and young people safe has been adversely affected by the inadequacies in CSC practice. Actions taken by the Youth Crime Board, as part of the extensive improvement plan, should improve this over time. However, some YOS casework is hindered by CSC’s underestimation of the safeguarding needs of some children.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.butlertrust.org.uk>



The profile and desistance needs of children and young people are well known, and used to inform the provision of an extensive range of targeted, specialist and mainstream services. Notable exceptions are access to post-16 ETE and the inconsistent provision of safeguarding services.

Data collection and analysis arrangements are strengthening, but there is limited analysis of post-16 ETE provision. There is also limited analysis of current health needs, so the needs of this group of children and young people is not known.

The partnership is well sighted on the impact of disproportionality, and has a range of responses to offset the impact of this. This includes reviewing all cases when a young person has been sent to custody to identify if all relevant alternatives have been proposed. The YOS and Management Board benefit from the insight provided by Ment4, a specialist mentoring group for 12 to 17 year olds in Croydon, which can give an accurate picture of the effect of discrimination and disproportionality. The Board and YOS managers try to adapt to new and emerging issues, including the needs of children and young people who are alone and seeking asylum.

There is a wide range of provision to meet local need, including specialist services for those at risk of criminal exploitation. Croydon YOS has used the findings from the local authorities joint strategic needs analysis to inform the commissioning of services.

Some changes that are part of the CSC improvement plan, including the review of Early Help,<sup>12</sup> are still in the early stages of planning and implementation, and it is too soon to assess their impact.

There is inconsistent communication across the YOS and CSC in the joint management of risk. Although case managers and social workers demonstrate persistence in their work with children and young people, this does not always result in a coordinated response to meeting their needs, including for protection. The importance of ensuring that children and young people are managed at the right statutory level is not always demonstrated. For example, a young person's refusal to cooperate had resulted in the case being closed to CSC inappropriately and no services were provided. The history and vulnerability of the family were not sufficiently considered in the management of risk, which was a missed opportunity.

Croydon YOS's thresholds for accessing interventions should provide a shared understanding across the partnership in responding to need and risk, but these are not consistently understood or applied across the YOS and CSC. Case managers report that the CSC single point of contact responds to referrals appropriately. In the cases we saw, however, there was little evidence that the YOS made referrals to the single point of contact; this would be required if the case was not already open to CSC. Workers report that they are invited to strategy discussions, child protection conferences, core groups and 'child in need' meetings.

The YOS and CSC have access to multi-agency panels chaired and attended by senior managers across the partnership. Workers and managers spoke highly of this provision in supporting them to access specialist services and jointly manage complex cases. Inspectors observation of the complex adolescent panel indicated a limited opportunity to discuss cases. The panel's capacity to meet demand appeared stretched, and this hindered purposeful discussion and decision-making.

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<sup>12</sup> Early Help, also known as early intervention, is support given as soon as a problem emerges, at any time in a child or young person's life. Early Help services can be delivered to parents, children or whole families, but their main focus is outcomes for children. DfE 2018.

The police support the work of the YOS effectively, and the YOS has good links with the school police officers. Although there is limited direct contact with local neighbourhood policing teams, intelligence is shared daily, and bulletins are produced to inform the various policing section staff when necessary.

The Metropolitan Police Operation Divan has been in place in Croydon since March 2019. In this early intervention scheme, school police officers or neighbourhood policing teams visit children and young people identified as being on the cusp of committing crimes. For example, if they have been seen with someone who has previously been found with a knife but are not carrying one themselves, the police speak to them about the potential consequences and risks associated with this. The College of Policing is due to complete its evaluation of this scheme by March 2020.

The youth IOM provides additional oversight and management for children and young people aged 10–17 years who are responsible for committing a large volume of crime but who do not meet the criteria for the Gangs Team or adult IOM. Partners meet every two months to discuss, provide enhanced risk management and identify opportunities for enforcement and wider interventions. Partners view this as positive.

Since the scheme's inception in January 2017 to the time of the inspection:<sup>13</sup>

- 32 young people have been on the scheme
- 13 of the 19 who have left the scheme had reduced their rates of offending
- only 2 of the 19 increased their offending after coming off the scheme, and were both moved to other management schemes (gangs partnership and adult IOM).

The gangs partnership, is overseen by the YOS and includes the probation service and the police, has the objective to divert, disrupt and use enforcement against gang-related activity. Currently, the team is working with or monitoring 78 individuals, of who 27 are under 18 years of age. In the last quarter, 14 individuals were removed from the gangs matrix – 11 were no longer active in a gang and 3 were transferred to other boroughs for management.

The gangs partnership team has worked with 31 prevention cases in the current year and, in a positive sign, none of these has been added to the gangs matrix. A data analyst undertakes intelligence gathering, including social media research, to provide a clear picture of gang activity and promote early engagement and intervention.

There are joint visits to children and young people and diversion includes employment and education placements out of the borough. The team works hard to identify and build relationships with providers and offers innovative diversions, including 'Gloves not Guns' (a boxing initiative), a music studio tour and a motorbike mechanics course. The incentive for children and young people is to take part in the activity, and they benefit from listening to the team speak about the consequences of gang-related crime.

The gangs partnership provides training to partners and community groups, including three of the main colleges in the area. Crime prevention workshops were delivered to over 1,200 pupils during the 2018-19 academic year.

Although there is no dedicated YOS child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) team, the 'Getting Support with Risk' team provides children and young

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<sup>13</sup> Information provided by the Metropolitan Police Service.

people with regular access to CAMHS practitioners and supports effective relationship building.

CAMHS offers a weekly consultation, and this is well regarded by case managers. YOS children and young people have a lower threshold than usually required to access services and are also given priority; there was no waiting list at the time of the inspection. However, once a referral is received, it can take up to six weeks before a planning meeting is held. However, if a mental health assessment is clearly needed, this is carried out immediately.

All children and young people are screened by a speech and language therapist, which is excellent. In the first three months of the current year, there had been 55 referrals, of which 20 had needed full assessments; 18 of these had required some intervention, which showed the high level of need. The speech and language therapists produce reports following an assessment, which are shared with relevant people, but not currently with the child or young person's general practitioner.

There are two YOS-based substance misuse workers, and staff speak highly of the service provided. The practitioners take a holistic approach to working with the children and young people, and carry out work on sleep, hygiene, healthy eating, mindfulness, meditation, hypnotherapy and acupuncture. These staff believe that the health and wellbeing of a child or young person has an impact on their substance misuse, and use creative ways to work with them. In one example, the substance user enjoyed art and graffiti so, following a session about the harms of drug use, the substance misuse workers took him to a dedicated (and legal) graffiti wall where he sprayed a harm minimisation message.

The majority of health staff have attended sexual health training, and the substance misuse providers carry out educational work on sexual health. If needed, children and young people are supported to access mainstream services, one of which is based in the same building as the YOS.

There is good health representation at various YOS panels, such as the new case panel, which helps to ensure that the health needs of children and young people are considered. A CAMHS worker stated that the information at one panel was 'thick and rich', that there were 'good conversations' and that these facilitated multi-perspective approaches to work.

Children and young people are supported to maintain their placements in schools, and the YOS education worker has effective relationships with schools. Relevant information is shared between schools and the YOS so that risk can be managed and, when needed, suitable alternative placements can be found quickly. This is in the best interests of the child or young person.

Information for children and young people about youth justice and their involvement with the YOS has been sensitively rewritten to ensure that the content is accessible and user-friendly. As a result, individuals involved with the YOS have developed a better understanding about their responsibilities.

Children and young people are encouraged to identify and celebrate the personal and social skills they are gaining through the Assessment and Qualification Alliance (AQA)<sup>14</sup> awarding body certificate programme and the ASDAN units they undertake. Children and young people are extremely proud of their achievements. However,

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<sup>14</sup> AQA – The Assessment and Qualification Alliance is an awarding body


they do not have access to lower-level (entry and level 1) accredited qualifications to support fully their future education and employment aspirations.

The proportion of children and young people who are NEET is too high, and substantially above that for Croydon and London overall.<sup>15</sup> Education and information, advice and guidance practitioners have not worked effectively enough with partners to develop sufficient appropriate post-16 opportunities to meet the needs of the young people they are supporting. A small number have access to short-term training, such as traineeships or courses to gain a construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card, but there are limited opportunities to gain qualifications or progress into an apprenticeship or meaningful employment.

The YOS and partners provide an extensive range of services and interventions, which are based on principles of best practice and evidence. Most interventions are accredited, so that children and young people can gain an AQA certificate for undertaking offending behaviour interventions. These include weapons awareness and victim restorative awareness programmes.

There is a wide range of offending behaviour interventions and services to prevent children and young people from entering gangs. All schools are involved in work to reduce knife crime and serious youth violence.

Children and young people who receive an out-of-court disposal can access tailor-made interventions, and this extends to those for whom there is a 'no further action' decision.

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| 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. |  |

We have rated this standard as 'Requires improvement' due to ongoing confusion within the YOS of the role and responsibilities of children's social care. This means that some children and young people are not effectively protected by the policies and processes designed to do so. When this happens, escalation processes are not fully effective. The YOS was trying to make amends for the deficits in CSC and, in doing so, the safeguarding needs of children and young people were not fully met.

Over the last few years, the YOS has had a mixed response from CSC and social workers following information exchange and after raising concerns. In the cases we inspected, we found some examples of good joint work with social workers. However, there are systemic issues to address, including a lack of effective escalation processes and frequently ineffective relationships with social workers.

Case managers said that policies and procedures were appropriate. However, case managers and social workers do not have a shared understanding of the service delivery model or the referral pathway to the adolescent support services.

With the exception of CSC, staff are effective in accessing the right services from partners and providers. There are no written pathways for some services, although the relationships that staff have developed with partners enable them to request

<sup>15</sup> The NEET figure is 30 per cent for the YOS, 2.8 per cent for Croydon and 2 per cent for London overall.

services for children and young people as needed. Access to services is helped by a database of interventions and providers, which is kept up to date and is easy to use.

Children and young people are positive about the use of the Turnaround Centre, in which key partnership services are co-located. The building is safe for children and young people, and has unobtrusive security. There is careful consideration of the safety of delivery sites for staff and children and young people, including issues of gang territory.

A dedicated healthcare room, where children and young people can be seen, is comfortable and welcoming. It offers a range of information and health promotion, and child-appropriate material for various health-related interventions. However, the room contained used and new acupuncture needles that were not locked away, and therefore presented a potential risk. We were told that children and young people would never be in the room unaccompanied; however, the YOS took immediate action to rectify this situation and ensure the safety of the staff and children and young people.

The YOS uses the Core Plus case management system. The quality of recording is variable, and often does not reflect all the work completed. This is a relatively new system and staff are still adjusting to it. Management reports are easily extracted. There is a wide range of IT systems across the partnership, but information is still shared appropriately. However, there is some confusion about whether CSC could access the YOS information and communications technology (ICT) system.

Police officers have ready access to police ICT within the YOS premises. They check intelligence held on local police systems daily, and share this with case managers when appropriate. This includes overnight arrests, voluntary interviews, intelligence and incidents of relevance. YOS staff felt well supported and informed.

Leaders and managers have not sufficiently evaluated the impact of the learning and employment programmes they provide for children and young people. Managers have not identified the data needed to help them understand the impact of the ETE opportunities they provide.

Learning from the nine serious case reviews in the last two years, in which critical learning about partnership working is highlighted, is not embedded. Staff need to understand the impact of this on practice; it is not enough that some YOS staff were content that their service 'came out well' from the reviews. Case managers and social workers do not demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the key themes from local serious case reviews. This means that neither the YOS nor CSC can be confident that learning from reviews informs workers' practice. Some of the weaknesses in joint working identified in this inspection reflected some of the themes identified in local reviews. These included missed opportunities, absence of professional challenge, lack of a consistent understanding and application of thresholds, and challenges at the point of transfer between services/teams.

As part of the vulnerable adolescents review, the 'lived experiences' of children and young people are fully considered. Senior managers acknowledge that case file audit of YOS practice is underdeveloped.

There has been effective action in response to issues noted in the last HMI Probation inspection, and work on the shortfalls noted there (see the following section).

## Summary

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### **Strengths:**

- The service has a stable, committed and well-trained staff group. Most partnerships are effective and provide services to support desistance.
- There is a wide range of interventions to reduce risk and reoffending, most of which are certified by the AQA.
- The partnership with the police supports the management and reduction of serious youth violence and knife crime.
- Children and young people are supported to remain in school; if they need to move, this is done quickly.
- There are good links with community organisations to support children and young people to lead crime-free lives in the long term.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- The work of the partnership to keep children safe is affected by the inadequacies of children's social care, and the full extent of this has not been recognised. Children's social care is a critical partner, given the nature of serious youth violence, criminal exploitation and the known vulnerabilities of this cohort of children and young people.
- Too many children and young people are not in post-16 education, training or employment. Data is gathered too late to be of practical use.

## 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 this inspection, we looked at a sample of 43 cases sentenced by the courts 6 to 9 months before the inspection team visited in July 2019. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards - assessment, planning, implementation and case review.

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| 2.1 Assessment   | Outstanding  |
| Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers. | A green outline star icon, indicating a high rating. |

The assessments of children and young people were the strongest area of work. These were done well in most cases, providing a clear understanding of the factors that contribute to offending, risk of harm and safety and wellbeing. Good use is made of information from other sources, including from the police and health services. Overall, we judged assessments of statutory court cases to be 'Outstanding'.

Staff understand AssetPlus well, and complete it with skill. In over 90 per cent of cases assessed, there was careful consideration of strengths and protective factors, diversity issues, the child or young person's family, and their attitudes to offending and motivation to change.

Assessment of the victim's needs and wishes was undertaken in 29 of the 35 relevant cases. This is a higher proportion of cases than we have generally found nationally

Information gathered from other agencies was used not only to assess desistance needs, but also to support the child and young person in other areas of their life. One inspector noted:

*"There was a full and comprehensive assessment completed, including a full SALT [speech and language therapist] assessment. This identified specific learning needs, which were then fed back to the school where the young person attended. This assessment was used to enable the school to understand and manage his behaviour in the classroom. It also led to an assessment from an educational psychologist and a full education, health and care plan being undertaken".*

The views of the child or young person and their parents/carers were incorporated and influenced the assessment in all but one case.

There was sufficient analysis of safety and wellbeing factors in 35 of the 43 cases assessed. These cases demonstrated the levels of vulnerability of the children and young people. Of the 42 cases that the YOS had classified, none had been categorised as low, seven as medium, thirty-three as high and two as very high, and we agreed with each of these classifications.

Assessments and analysis used the information from other agencies, and clearly outlined the effects of childhood trauma. Existing controls and potential interventions to help safeguard the individual were identified.

In one case, the inspector noted:

*“There was a good assessment of the young person, evidenced via pre-sentence report, AssetPlus and case records. The assessment of safety and wellbeing was well informed by a number of sources, including the young person, their parent, YOS records and police information. Key factors which contributed to the young person's safety and wellbeing, such as health, emotional wellbeing, missing episodes and vulnerability to county lines, is clearly identified and explored”.*

Assessments of risk of serious harm were accurate, analytical and timely in the large majority of cases. We found correct classifications of the levels of risk of serious harm in the large majority of cases.

Cases that met the threshold for Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) were correctly identified, and notifications were made in time to plan for release from custody.

Risk assessments were supplemented at the new cases panel, held after three weeks, and the risk and vulnerability management panels. We saw good joint assessment with the police for those who were involved in the gangs partnership or IOM scheme.

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

Effective planning should outline what actions are needed to prevent further offending and how to keep victims and the child or young person safe. Planning should be tailored to the needs of each case, and everyone involved in the case should understand their contribution. Croydon did this well. Planning to reduce reoffending was strong, and better than that for safety and wellbeing and risk of serious harm. We found examples of case managers producing child-friendly and easy-to-understand plans for children and young people, often following the advice of the speech and language therapists. There was joint planning with the gangs unit and the IOM police. As a result, planning practice was rated as 'Good'.

Planning to meet desistance needs was clear. Staff used a wide range of services and interventions to occupy children and young people and encourage them to develop thinking and decision-making skills. Consideration was given to the timing of interventions, so that they could be completed and learning consolidated before the order finished.

In all but three cases, planning sought to reinforce strengths and protective factors. We saw good use of external controls to help reduce offending, including exclusion zones and non-association conditions.



Some children and young people were given criminal behaviour orders, which were used to promote and support positive behaviour while giving clear boundaries of unacceptable behaviour. In one case, a child was told that this order would be returned to court for revocation if his behaviour in the community improved. This motivated him to return home at a reasonable time and control his temper in the family home. The YOS worked closely with the police to monitor these orders, as a method to identify changes in behaviour.

Victim awareness and restorative justice were considered and incorporated into most plans. The individual needs and wishes of victims had been included in 26 of the 34 relevant cases.

Planning to keep children and young people safe was insufficient in 12 cases (just over a quarter of the sample).

Planning frequently included referrals to other agencies, including counselling and mentoring services, the National Referral Mechanism, where criminal exploitation was suspected, and substance misuse services. When other agencies were involved, we did not always find effective joint planning. In 11 of the 38 relevant cases, joint planning was insufficient. This was in the main with CSC, but planning by the gangs unit was often separate to that of the YOS, and children and young people were subject to more than one plan, and these were not fully integrated. Despite communication between agencies, this did not always result in joint planning.

One issue that affected some planning with CSC was the incorrect or underestimated classification of needs by children's services. The following example demonstrates this:

In one case, a 15-year-old boy with autism was being exploited as part of a county lines operation. He told his mum and social worker what was happening to him. He was regularly picked up from home by older men late at night. He would then be missing for a few days, and when he came home would have train tickets to Birmingham and Southampton. He had been stabbed twice, the second time because he was refusing to sell drugs. On that occasion, the knife had cut an artery, and the prompt response from the emergency services saved his life. The YOS recognised his vulnerability and a senior manager applied to have him placed in a secure unit for his own protection. He eventually moved out of the area, with support from the YOS. Throughout this time, Children's Social Care had assessed him as a child in need, when in our view he had met the threshold of child protection. Planning to keep him and his four-year-old sister (whose safety and wellbeing were never fully considered) safe was hampered by this incorrect application of his need for protection, as the necessary level of service priority was not given.

Contingency planning did not match the level of concerns that the staff held about another young person. The inspector noted that:

*“There was a full plan regarding the restrictions on the case. There was not enough alignment with the looked-after child plan, however, and there was a very generic contingency plan. In this case, where there were significant safety and wellbeing concerns around this child leaving his placement and going missing, the case manager explained that there was regularly a ‘crisis management’ approach. The*


*lack of a robust contingency plan in this case, for the YOS and partners all to follow in such crisis moments.”*

Planning gave full consideration to the suitability of home visits and the use of meeting locations where children and young people felt safe to travel to.

Planning to reduce and manage risk of serious harm to others was sufficient in 66 per cent of cases. There was effective planning for children and young people to complete interventions designed to reduce risk of serious harm, including an intensive weapons awareness programme, a young men’s programme (to reduce gang association), healthy relationships and problem-solving approach to an offending behaviour group work programme.

Again, we saw good use of controls, including enforceable conditions, such as exclusions and a restriction on associations with rival gang members. These conditions were agreed with the gangs partnership when there was co-working.

In just over a third of cases, there was a lack of contingency planning, and the specific concerns and risks to victims were not planned for satisfactorily.

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

The implementation and delivery of interventions and services were well targeted and adapted to meet individual needs. These are most likely to support desistance, and be well sequenced and delivered quickly when the child or young person’s motivation is at its best. Services were routinely delivered as planned. As a result we judged implementation and delivery as ‘Good’.

In all but two cases, staff prioritised relationship and trust building. This was an appropriate approach, given the high levels of abuse that children and young people had suffered and the fact that many of them had difficulties in trusting adults. Relationships with parents/carers were also fostered.

We spoke to three young people who told us about their experiences of the YOS. This is a selection of their comments:

*“I would rate the YOS 9/10. They have helped me find a new hobby. I do boxing now. My mum has a disability and they put us in touch with social, and now we have an OT [occupational therapist], who is helping with a stairlift in the house – that would not have happened without the YOS. They are really nice, you can talk to them about anything”.*

*“I would rate the YOS 10/10, they are the best YOS in London. I have been on intensive support and supervision and I have to come every day, but I like coming. They have helped me get my CSCS card and helped me get into college. I have also got my college certificate, and I didn't like school. I had to do rep [reparation], but that was OK; I did it at the allotments with a member of staff, and she really helped,*

*talking and chatting. We do it in groups. I also see the drugs worker, who has told me all about cannabis”.*

*“I would rate the YOS 9/10. I did the weapons awareness course, found it interesting. So I learnt that if you carry a knife you are more likely to be stabbed, and 14 per cent of stabbings are with your own knife, so it’s not worth carrying. I also did the good lives course and I learn about the eight pillars of a good life”.*

All the boys said that they were unlikely to offend again.

Attention was paid to helping children and young people comply with the requirements of their orders. This included helping them with keeping to time and tailoring work to meet individual needs.

#### Good practice example

Desistance factors changed slightly during the sentence – for example, his placement changed and this was well managed by the YOS, which supported the child's wish to secure him a better placement. This child assumed that all black boys who grew up here [Croydon] would eventually be arrested and get into trouble. The case manager made sure that YOS staff who were working with him had also grown up in the same area. The staff were able to show this child that his destiny was not inevitable. By tailoring the staffing to this child's individual needs, they provided an ideal opportunity to mentor him, providing strong, pro-social male role models from the same cultural background that he had lacked earlier in his life. This worked extremely well, both in terms of lifestyle and also decision-making, as there was an ongoing focus on different perspectives. There was good delivery of the WAP [weapons awareness programme]. The best element of the delivery was the way in which the case manager tailored their delivery style to this individual child, taking into account his complex diversity needs and managing to foster a trusting and collaborative relationship.

The delivery of services effectively supported the safety of children and young people in the majority of cases. We found some of the best work with CSC in this area, with examples of effective joint work, and the persistence of YOS staff to involve social workers and ensure that they were invited to key meetings. Staff made good use of the specialist workers in the service to help children and young people engage with and get the most from their contact with services and interventions. This included the use of community organisations that could support the child or young person once their orders had ended.

Coordination action to manage the risk of harm posed by children and young people was appropriate in 70 per cent of cases, and interventions were delivered to reduce risks in just over three-quarters of cases. Fewer services were focused on the direct protection of victims, which was delivered in 24 of the 35 relevant cases.

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

Reviewing work is an integral part of case management, providing an opportunity to reflect on what is working well and progress made. It is especially important in managing risk and should enable partnership workers to respond to changes quickly. This was the ethos in Croydon and the continual reviewing contributed to the rating of 'Good'. However there was a risk that the number of meetings used to review a case could become confusing, and it was hard to identify which meeting took priority.

There were various ways in which reviewing took place, including a wide range of multi-agency meetings. Children and young people's cases could be discussed at the new cases panel, risk and vulnerability management panel, complex adolescents panel, looked-after children's reviews, child protection planning meetings, resettlement and pre-release planning meetings, gangs and IOM meetings, among others.

The purpose of some of these meetings was unclear, and they often duplicated each other. This structure was confusing to staff, and it was not clear which meeting took priority. When we observed three of these meetings, a common action was to discuss the case again at another type of meeting.

We found that staff had the skills to review what was happening, and they generally responded well to changes. Reviewing of progress was undertaken frequently, often in response to new intelligence or incidents. Changes in desistance factors were identified quickly, and planning and work were adapted to reflect these.

The views of the children or young people and their parents/carers were routinely sought to identify what was working well and anything that needed to change. We saw examples of action taken to respond to changes, including referrals to the single point of contact to access housing providers and the adolescent support team, if a family relationship began to breakdown and the young person was at risk of homelessness. Parenting support was also requested and then provided if a child was at risk of going into care.

Reviews of safety and wellbeing were strengthened by information from other agencies. Given the number of meetings to discuss new and emerging safety and wellbeing issues, we were surprised to find an insufficient response in seven cases for which new information was indicative of new or increased safety and wellbeing issues.

## Summary

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### **Strengths:**

- Case management starts well, with accurate, well-informed and analytical assessments. Planning follows need and personalised services are then delivered.
- Children and young people benefit from a wide range of universal, targeted and specialist services and interventions.
- Children and young people we spoke to were positive about the support they received, and were able to give examples of how they had been helped.
- There is good joint work between the specialist workers and case managers.
- There is good use of community support groups as part of ongoing work and to form the basis of exit planning.
- There is a good understanding of the individual needs of children and young people, and work that is adapted to meet these needs.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- There is inconsistent support from Children's Social Care, with a lack of effective escalation processes.
- The range of meetings and panels to review different aspects of case management can overlap, and there is a lack of clarity over which takes priority.

### 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 this inspection, we looked at a sample of 28 cases that received an out-of-court disposal three to five months before we visited in July 2019. In each of these cases, we inspected against four standards - assessment, planning, implementation, and the quality of joint working with police and other agencies.

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| <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. |  |

The YOS and its partners have invested resources to reduce the number of children and young people coming into the criminal justice service. There are weaknesses with this area of work, however, including the quality of some initial assessments, the nature of engagement with children and young people, and some processes that do not allow for a clear and consistent approach to individual situations. In some cases the quality of the assessment tool used was not good enough, and some assessments did not consider risk of harm or safety and wellbeing at all. Some assessments took too long to complete. As a result of these issues, we rated this area as 'Inadequate'.

Work to deliver improved out-of-court disposals is in the early stages of development. A manager appointed six months previously has been developing new processes and a new staff team, and we found evidence of some initial improvements. These include changes to the way assessments of children and young people are completed, and to formalising joint decision-making. A review is being carried out by an operational manager and practice supervisor.


Three different assessment tools had been used during the period from which we selected cases to assess, with each improving on the previous one. The first two assessment tools were very basic and did not require the assessment of safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm. As a result, 15 of the 28 cases for which these assessment tools had been used did not meet our standards. The newest assessment tool was more thorough and will provide the basis for effective assessment in the future. The AssetPlus assessment tool has always been completed for youth conditional cautions and second youth cautions.

Overall, assessments to understand the reasons for offending were sufficient in just under two-thirds of cases. The motivation and attitudes to offending were assessed well, and the views of children and young people and their parents/carers were obtained and informed the assessment. The impact of the offence on victims, however, was rarely assessed. Timeliness was a problem; in 10 of the 28 cases, we judged that there had been a delay in undertaking the assessment, and in seven cases no assessment at all was recorded.

Only half the assessments of safety and wellbeing were sufficient. There were several reasons for this, including the fact that one of the assessment tools did not cover this issue at all. Others failed to identify safety issues, and almost half of assessments did not use information held by other agencies, including CSC. Half the

assessments had been delayed, and the same proportion had no record of safety and wellbeing issues. In 15 of the 28 cases, there was no classification of the level of safety and wellbeing.

Relevant risk of harm issues were identified in only 21 per cent of cases, information from other agencies was not used, and half the cases did not have a classification of risk of harm. In half the cases, the assessment had been delayed, and in one case it had taken four months, by which time the young person had been unable to recall what had happened. There was a sufficient assessment of risk of harm in just under half the cases.

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| <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. |  |

We rated this standard as 'Inadequate' due to the lack of planning in some cases, and insufficient focus on safety and wellbeing and risk of harm. Planning was good for desistance (71 per cent of cases were satisfactory), but poor for both risk of harm (50 per cent satisfactory) and safety and wellbeing (only 35 per cent satisfactory). Planning was limited, owing to the deficiencies in the assessments and no obvious format for planning in the screening assessment.

Planning focused on desistance in 71 per cent of cases; it was proportionate to the disposal, and set out the interventions most likely to support desistance. In about two-thirds of cases, the views of children and young people and parents/carers formed part of planning, supported existing strengths, and analysed the social and family context of the child's life and considered their motivation to change.

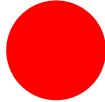
The expressed wishes of victims were considered in 6 of the 11 relevant cases.

The safety and wellbeing of the child or young person was promoted in only a third of cases, and planning failed to involve other agencies, including schools, or include contingency plans.

In one case, there was no explicit assessment of safety and wellbeing for a young person, even though it had been noted that he had serious mental health issues, had self-harmed and heard voices. He had been prescribed antipsychotic medication but did not take this, preferring to self-medicate, which explained his possession of cannabis.

Plans to manage or reduce any actual or potential risk of harm to others were satisfactory in half the cases. The impact of the event on the victim and views of other agencies were considered only in cases that used the newest assessment tool.

In one case, the child had been assessed as high risk because of many assaults on teachers at school; there had been no contact with the school and there was no risk management to protect actual victims or reduce the potential for further assaults.

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

We rated this standard as 'Inadequate' as many children and young people had not been able to access the support and interventions they needed. Interventions and services were delivered in too few cases, particularly for safety and wellbeing. Parents/carers and children and young people were also not given clear information on the legal status of out-of-court disposals and therefore were not able to give informed consent to participate.

This has improved recently, and the YOS has developed specific interventions for children and young people who receive a community resolution, youth caution or youth conditional caution. These include sessions on substance misuse and awareness of the dangers of carrying a knife. Children and young people have been able to access these resources in recent months, but few had accessed these in the early cases we assessed.

Interventions to support desistance were delivered, and within a suitable timescale, in 59 per cent of cases. We found good attention to trying to engage children and young people, but this was hampered by delays in making contact with them.

Children and young people and parents/carers were not given accurate information about the voluntary nature of interventions. In the YOS, the police expect the child or young person to attend the assessment, but there is no expectation or condition that an intervention is completed. Some caseworkers had told children and young people that the interventions are compulsory; this was well intentioned, but inaccurate.

The work to keep children and young people safe was poor, and suitable in only 37 per cent of cases. A common theme was poor communication with CSC. In some instances, children were on child-in-need or child protection plans but there was little or no joint work with CSC.


In one case, there was a child-in-need plan because of violence/aggression within the family and neglect - the parents were refusing to take the young person to health appointments and give consent to CAMHS. When the family refused interventions, however, the case was closed. This was not challenged by the YOS, even though the child's needs were not met.

In another case, the young person moved in with their mother's friend because of concerns in the home. Little was known about this placement, however, and whether it was appropriate for the young person. The case manager had made many attempts to contact children's services, without success and this was not escalated. There was a lack of communication between the YOS and children's services. During the community resolution the young person was made subject to a child protection plan. CSC did not inform the YOS, and the case manager was unaware that this had taken place.

In a third case, the YOS case manager had assumed that the social worker was keeping the child safe, without checking that this was the case.



The implementation and delivery of work to support the safety of other people was effective in 7 of the 14 cases where this was needed. In the cases where risk of harm had not been assessed, there had been no further work.

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

There are processes to manage the out-of-court disposal process, and these are known and agreed between the YOS and the police. We saw clear policies and guidance explaining the out-of-court disposal process to frontline officers and staff. The operation of the out-of-court disposal scheme is effective in keeping children and young people out of the criminal justice system, and they are given opportunities to have support and move on from the initial incident. The YOS monitors the effectiveness of the scheme, and its data shows that only around 8 per cent of children and young people go on to be involved with a further offence.

Cases are referred to the YOS for an out-of-court disposal, and one of three YOS staff gathers initial information. The police and YOS out-of-court disposal team are co-located, so discussions about cases are held quickly and informally. Decisions on suitable disposals are agreed for ratification at the weekly meeting. Some cases are held for a fuller discussion at this meeting.

The police officers are an integral part of the decision-making and attend the weekly out-of-court disposal panel to triage cases. We observed a panel during the inspection, and saw a good working knowledge of the cases from the YOS practitioners and the police, and a good understanding of complexities. It was evident that the panel recognised individual needs and underlying factors – including the potential for child criminal exploitation. Victim engagement was good, with individual needs and wishes established and discussed.

If a child or young person has an allocated social worker, they are invited to the panel, although, given the issues highlighted in this report, there may be merit to having a representative from the Early Help service on the panel to provide information and aid decision-making.

## Summary

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### Strengths:

- There are clear processes to administer the out-of-court disposal scheme, with timely information sharing with the police.
- The YOS and partners provide a wide range of services and interventions for children and young people.

### Areas for improvement:

- The quality of assessment and planning using the newest assessment tool needs to be embedded.
- The information given to children and young people and their parents/carers is inaccurate and does not specify the voluntary nature of interventions.

- Communication and joint work with children's social care needs to improve to better safeguard children and young people.
- Assessments and interventions should be timely and recorded.

## Annex 1 – Methodology

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

### **Domain one: organisational delivery**

The YOS submitted evidence in advance, and the Executive Director of Children's Services 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 conducted 65 interviews with case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. In the second fieldwork week, which was the joint element of the inspection, HMI Probation was joined by colleague inspectors from the police, and health, social care and education providers. We explored the lines of enquiry that emerged from the case inspections. We then held various meetings and focus groups, 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 closely involved in the case also took place. In some individual cases, further enquiries were made during the second fieldwork week by colleague inspectors from the police, and health, social care and education providers.

We examined 43 post-court cases. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of 5), 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 out-of-court disposals 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 closely involved in the case also took place. In some individual cases, further enquiries were made during the second fieldwork week by colleague inspectors from the police, and health, social care and education providers.

We examined 28 out-of-court disposals. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of 5), 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

In this inspection, we conducted a detailed examination of a sample of 43 post-court cases and 28 out-of-court disposals. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards: assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing. Within each standard, inspectors answered a number of key questions about different aspects of quality, including: whether there was sufficient analysis of the factors related to offending; the extent to which young offenders were involved in assessment and planning; and whether enough was done to assess the level of risk of harm posed – and to manage that risk.

To score an 'Outstanding' rating for the sections on court disposals or out-of-court disposals, 80 per cent or more of the cases we analyse have to be assessed as sufficient. If between 65 per cent and 79 per cent are judged to be sufficient, then the rating is 'Good' and if between 50 per cent and 64 per cent are judged to be sufficient, then a rating of 'Requires improvement' is applied. Finally, if less than 50 per cent are sufficient, then we rate this as 'Inadequate'.

The rating at the standard level is aligned to the lowest banding at the key question level, recognising that each key question is an integral part of the standard. Therefore, if we rate three key questions as 'Good' and one as 'Inadequate', the overall rating for that standard is 'Inadequate'.

| Lowest banding (key question level) | Rating (standard)    |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Minority: <50%                      | Inadequate           |
| Too few: 50-64%                     | Requires improvement |
| Reasonable majority: 65-79%         | Good                 |
| Large majority: 80%+                | Outstanding          |

Additional scoring rules are used to generate the overall YOT rating. Each of the 12 standards are scored on a 0–3 scale in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; and 'Outstanding' = 3. Adding these scores produces a total score ranging from 0-36, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows:

- 0-6 = 'Inadequate'
- 7-18 = 'Requires improvement'
- 19-30 = 'Good'
- 31-36 = 'Outstanding'.

# 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>Good</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>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>  | <b>Requires improvement</b> |

- 1.3.3. Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?

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|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>1.4. Information and facilities</b><br>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. | <b>Requires improvement</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|

- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 1.4.4. Is analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

## 2. Court disposals

| Standards and key questions  | Rating and % yes   |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>2.1. Assessment</b><br>Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers. | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| 2.1.1. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child or young person's desistance?   | 93%                |
| 2.1.2. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child or young person safe?  | 84%                |
| 2.1.3. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?   | 79%                |

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| <b>2.2. Planning</b>  | <b>Good</b> |
| Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.                |             |
| 2.2.1. Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child or young person's desistance?   | 84%         |
| 2.2.2. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?  | 72%         |
| 2.2.3. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?   | 66%         |
| <b>2.3. Implementation and delivery</b>   | <b>Good</b> |
| High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child or young person.          |             |
| 2.3.1. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child or young person's desistance?                         | 88%         |
| 2.3.2. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child or young person?                        | 79%         |
| 2.3.3. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?                                     | 75%         |
| <b>2.4. Reviewing</b>   | <b>Good</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?  | 86%         |
| 2.4.2. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?   | 79%         |
| 2.4.3. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?  | 70%         |

### 3. Out-of-court disposals

| Standards and key questions  | Rating and % yes  |
|--|-------------------|
| <p><b>3.1. Assessment</b></p> <p>Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.</p>                    | <b>Inadequate</b> |
| <p>3.1.1. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child or young person's desistance?</p>  | 61%               |
| <p>3.1.2. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child or young person safe?</p>   | 50%               |
| <p>3.1.3. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?</p>  | 46%               |
| <p><b>3.2. Planning</b></p> <p>Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child or young person and their parents/carers.</p>                          | <b>Inadequate</b> |
| <p>3.2.1. Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child or young person's desistance?</p>   | 71%               |
| <p>3.2.2. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?</p>  | 35%               |
| <p>3.2.3. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?</p>   | 50%               |
| <p><b>3.3. Implementation and delivery</b></p> <p>High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child or young person.</p> | <b>Inadequate</b> |
| <p>3.3.1. Does service delivery support the child or young person's desistance?</p>  | 59%               |
| <p>3.3.2. Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child or young person?</p>   | 37%               |
| <p>3.3.3. Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?</p>  | 54%               |



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| <b>3.4. Joint working</b>  | <b>Good</b> |
| Joint working with the police supports the delivery of high-quality, personalised and coordinated services.  |             |
| 3.4.1. Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child or young person, supporting joint decision-making? | 73%         |
| 3.4.2. Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal?  | 75%         |

## Annex 3 – Glossary

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| <b>AQA</b>  | Assessment and Qualification Alliance.   |
| <b>AssetPlus</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>CAMHS</b>  | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.   |
| <b>Child protection</b>   | Work to make sure that that all reasonable action has been taken to keep to a minimum the risk of a child experiencing serious harm.   |
| <b>Community resolution, known in the Croydon YOS as 'triage'</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, and 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>CQC</b>  | Care Quality Commission.   |
| <b>Criminal exploitation</b>                                      | This occurs when children and young people are exploited, forced or coerced into committing crimes.  |
| <b>CSC</b>  | Children's Social Care.  |
| <b>CSCB</b>   | The Croydon Safeguarding Children's Board.   |
| <b>CSCS</b>   | Construction Skills Certification Scheme.  |
| <b>Desistance</b>   | The cessation of offending or other antisocial behaviour.  |
| <b>Detention and training order</b>                               | A prison sentence for a child or young person. The length is specified by the court. The child or young person is placed in either a secure children's home, secure training centre or young offenders institution. The placement is dependent on age and vulnerability. The detention and training order will have both custodial and community elements, when the child or young person will be released on licence. |
| <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  |

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|  | licence. Enforcement can be punitive or motivational.   |
| <b>ETE</b>   | Education, training and employment: work to improve learning, and to increase future employment prospects.  |
| <b>First-time entrant</b>                          | A child or young person who receives a statutory criminal justice outcome (youth caution, youth conditional caution or conviction) for the first time.  |
| <b>HMICFRS</b>                                     | Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.  |
| <b>HMIP</b>  | Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.  |
| <b>HMPPS</b>                                       | Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service: a government department responsible for carrying out sentences given by the courts, in custody and the community.   |
| <b>IOM</b>   | Integrated offender management.   |
| <b>Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements</b> | Where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose the highest risk of harm to others. Level 1 is single agency management, where the risks posed by the offender can be managed by the agency responsible for the supervision or case management of the offender. Levels 2 and 3 require active multi-agency management.  |
| <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</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>Referral order</b>                              | A restorative court order which can be imposed when the child or young person appearing before the court pleads guilty, and whereby the threshold does not meet a youth rehabilitation order.   |
| <b>Risk of serious harm</b>                        | 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 which should take place in order to determine the classification level. This helps |

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|                                   | 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>Safeguarding</b>               | 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 wellbeing</b>       | AssetPlus replaced the assessment of vulnerability with a holistic outlook of a child or young person's safety and wellbeing concerns. It is defined as '...those outcomes where the young person's safety and wellbeing may be compromised through their own behaviour, personal circumstances or because of the acts/omissions of others' (AssetPlus Guidance, 2016). |
| <b>SALT</b>                       | Speech and language therapist.  |
| <b>YCB</b>                        | Youth Crime Board.  |
| <b>YJS</b>                        | Youth Justice Service.  |
| <b>YOT/YOS</b>                    | Youth offending team (YOT) 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 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>Youth caution</b>              | A caution accepted by a child following admission to an offence where it is not considered to be in the public interest to prosecute the offender.  |
| <b>Youth conditional caution</b>  | As for a youth caution, but with conditions attached that the child is required to comply with for up to the next three months. Non-compliance may result in the child being prosecuted for the original offence.   |
| <b>YJB</b>                        | Youth Justice Board: Government body responsible for monitoring and advising ministers on the effectiveness of the youth justice system. Providers of grants and guidance to the youth offending teams.   |
| <b>Youth rehabilitation order</b> | Overarching community sentence to which the court applies requirements (such as a supervision requirement or unpaid work).  |



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